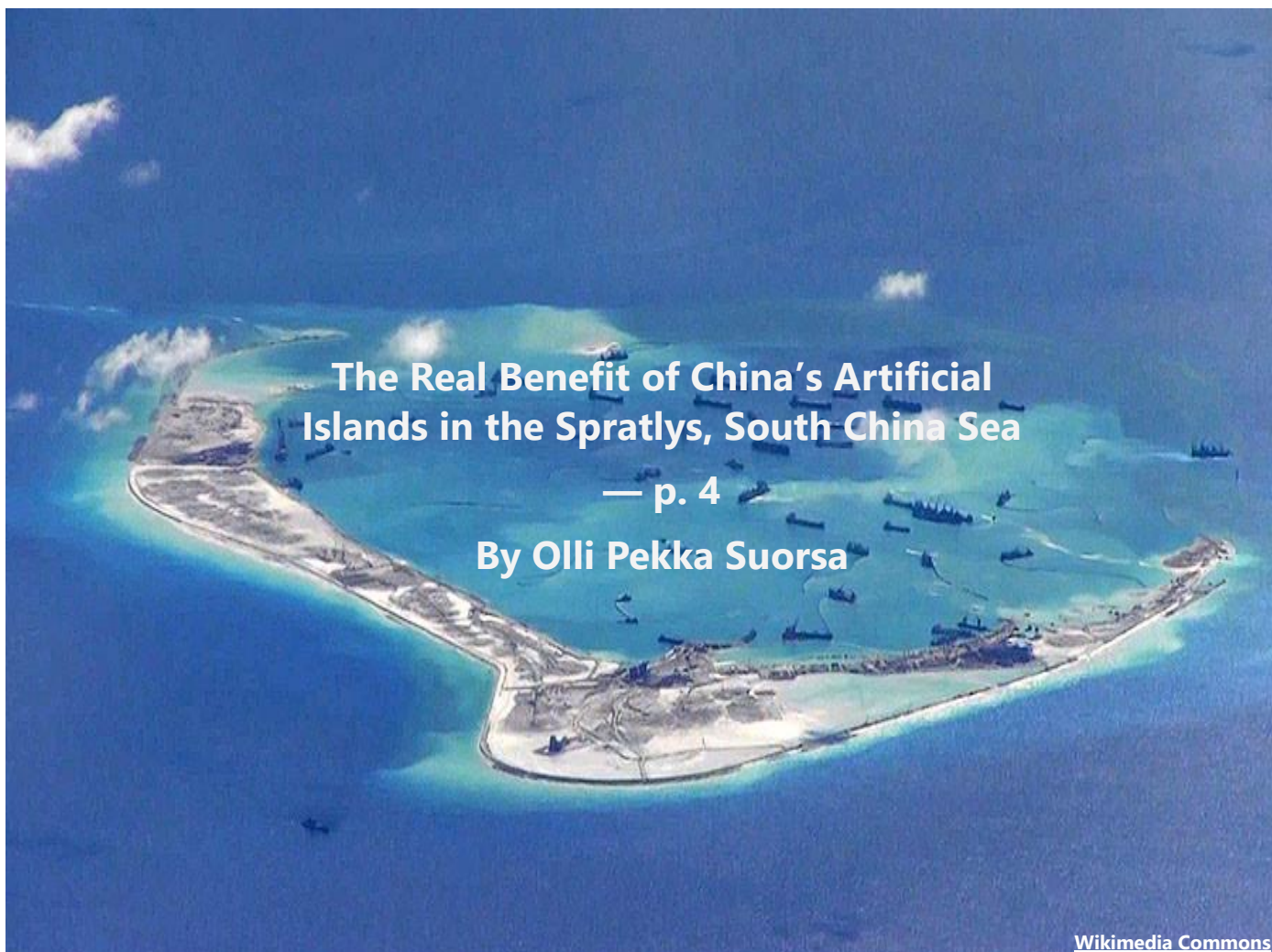


**Featured *MSP Perspectives*:**



**The Real Benefit of China's Artificial  
Islands in the Spratlys, South China Sea**

— p. 4

**By Olli Pekka Suorsa**

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— p. 4

**Naval Development and Policy:**

Indonesia's Submarine Capabilities In the Headlines With New Sea Trials  
— p. 5

**Maritime Safety and Security:**

Parliament: Maritime Security Task Force plans to restructure amid rise in piracy in Singapore Strait  
— p. 7

**Shipping, Ports, and the Maritime Economy:**

Patimban port slated to begin operation in September  
— p. 9

# Table of Contents

<b>MSP PERSPECTIVES</b>	<b>4</b>
The Real Benefit of China's Artificial Islands in the Spratlys, South China Sea	4
<b>NAVAL DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY</b>	<b>5</b>
Indonesia's Submarine Capabilities In the Headlines With New Sea Trial	5
New Navy Chief Wants 'Modern Systems, Mindset' as New Assets Replace Ailing Ships	5
US Approves Nearly \$1 Bil Anti-Ship Missile Sale To Australia	5
RMAF To Convert 2 Planes To MPA	5
US Navy Looks To Hire Thousands More Sailors As Service Finds Itself 9,000 Sailors Short At Sea	5
Australia Accepts 3 <sup>rd</sup> And Final Hobart-Class Air Warfare Destroyer	6
Austal Launches 12 <sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Fast Transport For The U.S. Navy	6
US Navy To Arm <i>Virginia</i> -Class Attack Subs With New Hypersonic Weapon	6
UK Navy Vessel Visit Highlights Defence Cooperation	6
China's Navy Keeps Getting Bigger, And The US Is Stockpiling Ship-Killer Missiles	6
Navy Patrol Vessels To Get Weapons Upgrade	6
Chinese Destroyer's Laser Targeted US Plane	6
<b>MARITIME SAFETY AND SECURITY</b>	<b>7</b>
Parliament: Maritime Security Task Force plans to restructure amid rise in piracy in Singapore Strait	7
US freedom of navigation patrols in South China Sea hit record high in 2019	7
ICS urges action in fight against piracy	7
Philippines gives formal notice to scrap US troop agreement	7
Israeli, US surveillance firms set sights on Southeast Asia as piracy, maritime tensions spike	7
Oman sees biggest Gulf clash risk in Strait of Hormuz	8
Malaysia wants agreement with Vietnam to address encroachment of foreign fishermen	8
BAE Systems' Solar-Powered Maritime Surveillance Drone Makes First Flight	8
Malaysia, China and Vietnam in 'dangerous, ongoing game of chicken' in South China Sea	8
Indonesia's Bakamla to command security of Natuna waters	8
Coast Guard Taps Spatial Integrated Systems for Maritime Domain Awareness Pilot Study; Sam Lewis Quoted	8
Japan to upgrade new missile to target aircraft carriers, as it steps up East China Sea island defences	8
France declares Strait of Hormuz military mission fully operational	8
<b>SHIPPING, PORTS, AND THE MARITIME ECONOMY</b>	<b>9</b>
Patimban port slated to begin operation in September	9
EU Okays CMA CGM-CIMC Joint Venture	9
France hardens   EU, France insist on fishing rights in post-Brexit talks with UK	9
Japan takes second complaint to WTO over South Korean shipbuilding	9
Centre clears Major Ports Authority Bill	9
China's Shipping Nears a Standstill Amid Coronavirus Disruption	10
Coronavirus: Major cruise lines pull out of Asia for rest of season	10
Hyundai plans \$540m investment in Russian Far East port	10
SLPA to conduct feasibility study for Colombo North Port Project	10
Great Australian Bight: Equinor abandons plans to drill for oil	10
Maersk credit facility linked to environmental performance	10
Canadian Arctic sealift could be exempt from HFO ban until 2029 under IMO proposal	10
Nine Companies Sign Up for Global Shipping Business Network	10

## **NOTES**

Please click on the links for the full report. All links and news reports are correct at the time of publication. Through this bulletin, you will be linked to external websites. We have no control over the nature, content, and availability of those sites. The inclusion of any links does not necessarily imply a recommendation or endorsement of the views expressed within them.

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## **Maritime Security Programme, RSIS**

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The real benefit to Beijing of the seven artificial islands China erected in the Spratlys, in the South China Sea, between 2014 and 2017 is a hotly debated topic. Particular attention has been shed on the military value of the outposts in case of armed confrontation between China and the United States.

Some experts have argued that these “unsinkable aircraft carriers” can potentially prevent American forces’ access to the strategic waterway or, at least, significantly increase the costs of that access in wartime. Others, argue that the islets constitute but vulnerable bases that can be relatively easily cut off from the mainland and taken out with precision long-range fire. The real benefit of the artificial islands to China, however, lays in their peacetime uses in asserting China’s claimed rights and sovereignty within the so-called “nine-dash line”.

The construction of, especially, the three largest man-made islands—the Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef, and the Mischief Reef—has helped Chinese maritime law-enforcement agency, the China Coast Guard, or CCG, extend its patrols further into other claimant’s EEZs and sustain that presence for months at a time. It is well recorded that CCG and other vessels, including hydrocarbon exploration, search and rescue, and maritime militia vessels have utilized the

Spratly outposts as forward bases of operations, conducting resupply and refuel runs to the islets. Before, Chinese ships operating from the Hainan Island could only sustain short missions near the Spratlys. The artificial islands have thus greatly boosted China’s presence and reach in the South China Sea, allowing weeks and months-long operations in the disputed waters.

In addition, China has placed an array of advanced surface, sub-surface, and air-search radar and other sensors on its Spratly outposts giving it almost unparalleled intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability in the South China Sea. With these sensors in place, China can track all surface and air movement—both civilian and military—in and out of the South China Sea. If needed, it can also use its extensive electronic warfare capabilities on the outposts to prevent an adversary from generating a complete situational awareness picture of its own.

The value China gets from its Spratly outposts and unparallel situational awareness in that maritime space therefore lies not in their potential military uses in war, but in their peacetime uses in asserting Chinese sovereign rights over the hotly contested South China Sea and its living and non-living resources.



INDONESIA | 01 FEB | THE DIPLOMAT

## Indonesia's Submarine Capabilities In the Headlines With New Sea Trials

Jakarta's conducting of trials with respect to its first indigenously-assembled submarine put the focus on a key aspect of its capabilities.

[Full report](#)

PHILIPPINES | 3 FEB | RAPPLER

## New Navy Chief Wants 'Modern Systems, Mindset' as New Assets Replace Ailing Ships

For the Philippine Navy's new Flag Officer-in-Command, Rear Admiral Giovanni Carlo Bacordo, it's out with the old, in with the new in all aspects of naval operations, from phasing out vintage vessels to upgrading the mindsets of sailors and marines.

[Full report](#)

AUSTRALIA | 8 FEB | DEFENCE TALK

## US Approves Nearly \$1 Bil Anti-Ship Missile Sale To Australia

The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to Australia of up to two hundred (200) AGM-158C,

Long Range Anti-Ship Missiles (LRASMs) and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$990 million.

[Full report](#)

MALAYSIA | 5 FEB | NEW STRAITS TIMES

## RMAF To Convert 2 Planes To MPA

The plan to convert two of the Royal Malaysian Air Force's (RMAF) seven CN-235 transport planes into maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) is part of an elaborate exercise to complement the armed forces.

[Full report](#)

USA | 10 FEB | NAVY TIMES

## US Navy Looks To Hire Thousands More Sailors As Service Finds Itself 9,000 Sailors Short At Sea

*Continue on page 6*

The Navy is pouring money into its manpower budget as the number of unfilled billets on ships has swollen to 9,000 — up 2,750 from last year — the Navy's top personnel official told Defense News. In total, the Navy wants to add 7,300 sailors to the service's total authorized active duty end strength to fill empty racks and ease manning troubles that have bedeviled officials trying to implement the Navy's force generation plan.

[Full report](#)

AUSTRALIA | 20 FEB | NAVAL NEWS

### **Australia Accepts 3<sup>rd</sup> And Final Hobart-Class Air Warfare Destroyer**

The third and last Hobart-class Air Warfare Destroyer (AWD), was provisionally accepted by the Commonwealth of Australia on Friday, February 14, 2020. This milestone occurs 13 years after the start of the project. The program has been delivered under an Alliance-based contract arrangement (the AWD Alliance) between the Commonwealth of Australia (represented by the Department of Defence) as owner-participant, and industry partners, ASC and Raytheon Australia, supported by ship designers Navantia.

[Full report](#)



USA | 21 FEB | NAVAL NEWS

### **Austal Launches 12<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Fast Transport For The U.S. Navy**

Austal USA in Mobile, Ala., launched the future USNS Newport (EPF 12) into the Mobile River on February 20. This is the first Navy ship that Austal has launched in 2020.

[Full report](#)

USA | 21 FEB | THE DIPLOMAT

### **US Navy To Arm Virginia-Class Attack Subs With New Hypersonic Weapon**

The U.S. Navy intends to deploy its conventional prompt strike (CPS) hypersonic weapon on Virginia-class nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN), according to the Navy's Fiscal Year 2021 budget overview.

[Full report](#)

VIETNAM-UNITED KINGDOM | 21 FEB | THE DIPLOMAT

### **UK Navy Vessel Visit Highlights Defence Cooperation**

The courtesy visit spotlighted the ongoing development of security ties between the two countries.

[Full report](#)

USA | 21 FEB | BUSSINESS INSIDER

### **China's Navy Keeps Getting Bigger, And The US Is Stockpiling Ship-Killer Missiles**

The stunning [growth of the Chinese fleet](#) over the past decade has prompted the US Navy to plan a full-on buying spree of [ship-killing missiles](#) over the next five years, according to projections in the sea service's Fiscal Year 2021 budget documents.

[Full report](#)

PHILIPPINES | 22 FEB | PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

### **Navy Patrol Vessels To Get Weapons Upgrade**

Plans to install heavier weapons on the three Gregorio del Pilar-class offshore patrol vessels of the Philippine Navy (PN) are in place, its chief said Friday.

[Full report](#)

CHINA-USA | 27 FEB | NAVY TIMES

### **Chinese Destroyer's Laser Targeted US Plane**

A Chinese warship targeted a U.S. naval patrol aircraft with a laser in international airspace earlier this month, Pacific Fleet announced Thursday. Navy officials in Hawaii blasted the Chinese actions as "unsafe and unprofessional."

[Full report](#)



SINGAPORE | 4 FEB | THE STRAITS TIMES

## **Parliament: Maritime Security Task Force plans to restructure amid rise in piracy in Singapore Strait**

The Maritime Security Task Force (MSTF) plans to restructure to deal with piracy at sea, including beefing up its assets, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said on Monday (Feb 3).

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 5 FEB | SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

## **US freedom of navigation patrols in South China Sea hit record high in 2019**

US Navy patrols near disputed features claimed by Beijing in the South China Sea hit a record high last year, newly released figures show, as the Trump administration ramped up its efforts to challenge China's territorial claims in the contested waterway.

[Full Report](#)

GLOBAL | 6 FEB | PORT TECHNOLOGY

## **ICS urges action in fight against piracy**

The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) has called upon the international community to support Nigeria in its fight against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

THE PHILIPPINES-UNITED STATES | 11 FEB | SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

## **Philippines gives formal notice to scrap US troop agreement**

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has given formal notice to the United States of his decision to scrap a bilateral Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), officials said on Tuesday, following through on a repeated threat to downgrade the defence alliance.

[Full Report](#)

SOUTHEAST ASIA | 14 FEB | SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

## **Israeli, US surveillance firms set sights on Southeast Asia as piracy, maritime tensions spike**

*Continue on page 8*

Continued from page 7

A spike in armed sea robberies in Southeast Asian waters and heightened maritime tensions have opened new doors for surveillance firms as nations with borders or claims in the region shore up homeland and coastal defences.

[Full Report](#)

STRAIT OF HORMUZ | 16 FEB | REUTERS

### **Oman sees biggest Gulf clash risk in Strait of Hormuz**

The risk of a military confrontation is higher in the Strait of Hormuz than anywhere else in the Gulf region, Oman's foreign minister said, due in part to the growing number of military vessels from different countries that are guarding it.

[Full Report](#)



MALAYSIA-VIETNAM | 16 FEB | MALAY MAIL

### **Malaysia wants agreement with Vietnam to address encroachment of foreign fishermen**

Malaysia intends to enter into an agreement with the Vietnamese government to overcome encroachment of deep-sea fishermen from the republic into the country's territorial waters, said Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah.

[Full Report](#)

AUSTRALIA-UNITED KINGDOM | 17 FEB | DEFENSE WORLD

### **BAE Systems' Solar-Powered Maritime Surveillance Drone Makes First Flight**

BAE Systems' new PHASA-35 solar-electric aircraft that can be used for maritime surveillance from the Earth's stratosphere, has completed its first flight.

[Full Report](#)

SOUTH CHINA SEA | 22 FEB | SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

### **Malaysia, China and Vietnam in 'dangerous, ongoing game of chicken' in South China Sea**

A fresh stand-off over energy exploration in the disputed South China Sea that involves Malaysia, China and Vietnam has been brewing for weeks out of the public eye, a Washington-based think tank said on Saturday, as it questioned why the two smaller countries were confronting each instead of putting up a united front against Beijing.

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA | 22 FEB | JAKARTA POST

### **Indonesia's Bakamla to command security of Natuna waters**

Indonesia has assigned the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) to be in charge of security in the North Natuna Sea, in which skirmishes with foreign fishing boats often occur.

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 25 FEB | GOV CON WIRE

### **Coast Guard Taps Spatial Integrated Systems for Maritime Domain Awareness Pilot Study; Sam Lewis Quoted**

Spatial Integrated Systems Inc. (SIS) has been awarded a contract with the US Coast Guard (USCG) to develop an autonomous Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) System to examine the feasibility of improving Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the remote Pacific Ocean.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN | 26 FEB | SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

### **Japan to upgrade new missile to target aircraft carriers, as it steps up East China Sea island defences**

The Japanese military is planning to upgrade a next-generation missile to give it the ability to target an aircraft carrier, an enhancement that would be a clear shot across China's bow in the ongoing dispute over islands in the East China Sea.

[Full Report](#)

FRANCE | 27 FEB | THE DEFENSE POST

### **France declares Strait of Hormuz military mission fully operational**

France this week declared the military component to its maritime surveillance and security mission in the strategic Strait of Hormuz fully operational.

[Full Report](#)





INDONESIA | 17 FEB | THE JAKARTA POST

## **Patimban port slated to begin operation in September**

Patimban port in Subang West Java, a strategic project expected to ease logistics in the busy industrial neighborhood, has been scheduled for partial operation in September, according to the Transportation Ministry.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-FRANCE | 3 FEB | WORLD MARITIME NEWS

## **EU Okays CMA CGM-CIMC Joint Venture**

The European Commission has approved the formation of a new joint venture between French shipping major CMA CGM and Chinese logistics company China International Marine Containers Neocontainer (CIMC Neocontainer), part of CIMC Group.

[Full Report](#)

EUROPE | 4 FEB | FISH INFORMATION AND SERVICES

## **France hardens | EU, France insist on fishing rights in post-Brexit talks with UK**

Top officials in France and the European Union have insisted that any future trade deal with Britain must hinge upon equal access to fishing

waters, underlining the symbolic importance of an industry crucial on both sides of the English Channel.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN-KOREA | 11 FEB | THE JAPAN TIMES

## **Japan takes second complaint to WTO over South Korean shipbuilding**

Japan launched a second complaint at the World Trade Organization on Monday over support South Korea gives its shipbuilding industry, intensifying a wider dispute between the two Asian countries.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA | 12 FEB | THE HINDU

## **Centre clears Major Ports Authority Bill**

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Major Ports Authority Bill 2020, which will be introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament, Shipping Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 14 FEB | THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### **China's Shipping Nears a Standstill Amid Coronavirus Disruption**

Shipping volumes out of China are plummeting as the impact of the coronavirus outbreak takes a deeper toll on industrial production, and ocean carriers are bracing for financial blows from the diminished output.

[Full Report](#)

ASIA | 14 FEB | THE STRAITS TIMES

### **Coronavirus: Major cruise lines pull out of Asia for rest of season**

Major cruise lines are cancelling their sailings from Singapore or pulling out of Asia entirely for the remainder of the season, putting the brakes on one of the region's fastest-growing tourism sectors.

[Full Report](#)

RUSSIA-KOREA | 24 FEB | HELLENIC SHIPPING NEWS

### **Hyundai plans \$540m investment in Russian Far East port**

Korean engineer Hyundai E&C is planning to invest up to \$540m in the expansion of the Slavyanka port in the Russian Far East, the Russian Far East Investment Promotion Agency (IPA) has announced.

[Full Report](#)

SRI LANKA | 25 FEB | CEYLON DAILY NEWS

### **SLPA to conduct feasibility study for Colombo North Port Project**

Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) has planned to do a feasibility study for the Colombo North Port Development Project focused on expanding capacity of container handling while serving all other port services expected from industry.

[Full Report](#)

AUSTRALIA | 25 FEB | THE GUARDIAN

### **Great Australian Bight: Equinor abandons plans to drill for oil**

Norwegian oil giant Equinor has abandoned plans to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight, declaring the controversial project did not make commercial sense.

[Full Report](#)

DENMARK | 25 FEB | LLOYD'S LIST

### **Maersk credit facility linked to environmental performance**

MAERSK has made an environmental rod for its own back by attaching sustainability-related terms to a new \$5bn revolving credit facility, as it seeks to put incentives behind its moves toward decarbonisation of shipping.

[Full Report](#)

CANADA | 26 FEB | NUNATSIAQ NEWS

### **Canadian Arctic sealift could be exempt from HFO ban until 2029 under IMO proposal**

A subcommittee of the International Maritime Organization, after a meeting in London last week, is proposing a ban on heavy fuel oils in Arctic waters—with a proposed provision that could exempt Canadian Arctic sealift vessels from the new rules until July 1, 2029.

[Full Report](#)



GLOBAL | 28 FEB | MARITIME EXECUTIVE

### **Nine Companies Sign Up for Global Shipping Business Network**

Nine ocean carriers and terminal operators, CMA CGM, COSCO Shipping Lines, COSCO Shipping Ports, Hapag-Lloyd, Hutchison Ports, OOCL, Port of Qingdao, PSA International and Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG), have signed an agreement indicating their intention to become shareholders of the proposed Global Shipping Business Network (GSBN) being established by logistics technology provider CargoSmart Limited.

[Full Report](#)