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## Sea Power in South-East Asia

### Abstract

*At the beginning of the 21st Century, South-East Asia is gradually becoming one of the major hubs for international tensions and conflict on a global scale. With surge of People Republic of China capabilities connected with Soft and Hard Power, and re-igniting interest of remaining global players, this region is witnessing adaptation of new strategies and tools not only for war, but also for political and economic expansion. The main aim of this paper is to examine development of tools and strategies associated with sea power, which were developed to manage and exploit during standoff and potential conflict in the region. New quality of international environment is introducing change and evolution to the classical concept associated with classical understanding of sea power – how it is produced, measured, and exploited in contemporary situation. Main hypothesis of this paper will state, that with surge in cost and sophistication of sea power platforms, the primary users are devising new avenues to project their influence in disputed areas of South-East Asia. However, its final usefulness still needs to be tested in real-space entanglements. The paper will be subdivided on four separate parts. First will be devoted to original concepts of Sea Power, according to its founders, such as Alfred Thayer Mahan, Julian Corbett and John Fisher, whose created foundations of what is contemporary known as a Sea Power. Second will embrace the specifics of South-East Asia as a particular region for deployment of Sea Power. It will investigate its political, economic, social, and cultural landscapes and their ties to Sea Power. Third will investigate the potential change in the nature, strategies and tools associated with Sea Power. And fourth part will encompass possible scenarios for Sea Power implementation in the South-East Asia conflict zone.*

**Keywords:** *Sea Power, South China Sea, aircraft carrier, People Republic of China, United States*

## 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of human history seas, oceans and large bodies of water played tremendous role for humanity in many various roles, stretching from inspiration of human mind, through avenue for traffic and trade to source of wealth and Power. It was second part of geopolitical space to be tapped and conquered by human political entities. First evidence of those activities may be first recorded naval engagement was Battle of Delta in 1175 BC, when Egyptian navy under command of pharaoh Ramesses III decimated attacking ships of unrecognized coalition labeled as a Sea People (Emmanuel, 2013, pp. 14–27). Since then, there could be observed rising surge of importance of sea for political processes and following that process were theoretical recollections (Warming, 2019, pp. 99–124) only recently framed in the schematics of science.

Since that time there could be observed three particular and supplementing each other patterns of development. First is the growing dependency on technological megatrend in producing more effective and bigger however much more costly and demanding platforms. Second is the extension of range in which Sea Power can be effectively projected. From the offshore platforms used in Ancient Times to the open ocean's battleships and nuclear propelled aircraft carriers. From surface combatants to submersibles, which developed various and specialized platforms stemming from common ancestor which were ancient galleys (Pryor, 1995, pp. 101–116). Third is changes within the mechanics of display of Sea Power which basically is becoming much more indirect, mainly due to extension of range of engagement and change in attitude toward platform which become more directed toward preserve those assets.

What need to be mentioned is that this evolution is far from concluded. Moreover, what has to be emphasized, evolution of Sea Power is accelerated by particular events in International Relations associated with conflicts and crises. Recently, the situation which may direct this process emerged in the South East Asia region, with the standoff between US and China and few minor powers.<sup>1</sup> The main objective of this paper is to assess the changes within the Sea Power, which were caused by the crisis within this region of world. The main research question of this paper is the question on effectiveness of Sea Power in late-Westphalian

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis could be given to Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malesia, Phillipines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, which articulated naval national interests.

International Environment, based on case study of South East Asia. How much of the content and context of this phenomena changed under the influence of environment which creates framework for its application? What are modern advantages and vulnerabilities of Sea Power and Actors which wield it? And above anything else: what are contemporary conditions for obtaining success in international relations based on contemporary Sea Power? These procedures will be guided by two hypotheses. First points out that whole process of Sea Power evolution is part of a cycle of developments in International Relations. Changes within the disposition of Power, particularly in a dimension of Sea Power are causing International Relations conflicts and tension up to a level of breaking points of International System. And subsequently, this context affects distribution of Power. It is nearly impossible to distinguish those two elements of evolution. Second hypothesis states, that in general, development of Sea Power resembles general tenets of evolution of Power, which became softer, more indirect and transnationalized. This reflects shift within the international environment from its Westphalian iteration toward post-Westphalian one. Second one assumes that despite its specifics, Sea Power is following the major developments of Power itself, which could be understood as a dematerialization, subjectification and transnationalization of it.

The structure of this paper will be composed of three parts, representing the past, contemporaneity, and future development of Sea Power. Those notions will be supplemented with examples provided by emerging conflict point located within South China Sea, when due to geographical constrains confrontation between major and minor Powers need to be conducted predominantly basing on Sea Power tools.

## **2. Sea Power as a classical concept**

Sea Power as a concept to was formed predominantly in 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the first genuine warships emerged. Before that, despite occurrence of various naval battles and navies funded and equipped by various political entities, the division between merchant vessels and military vessels were not clearly defined. Single platforms could play both of those roles without meaningful loss of efficiency, which was proven during battle of Oliwa in 1627, when Swedish Navy was defeated by hastily assembled squadron of merchantmen assembled on behalf of Commonwealth (Krwawicz, 1995).

Since 17<sup>th</sup> century, there could be observed a rise of genuine warships, where cargo space was sacrificed for additional weapon systems, armor and drive systems.<sup>2</sup> These developments, coupled with growth of knowledge-demanded for operating those vessels effectively demanded creating new principles and models, which could be labeled as a Sea Power.<sup>3</sup>

Extended operating range, new offensive and defensive capabilities and growing specialization within the branch of warships, stretching from frigates to ships of the line in 18<sup>th</sup> century to various strains of corvettes, frigates, destroyers, cruisers, aircraft carriers and submarines – included nuclear-powered in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, there are numerous examples of various hybrid and experimental forms of warships to which there are clear misconception within contemporary academic and military community.<sup>4</sup>

Within the Westphalian international environment there were created few strains and conceptions how to apply Sea Power. They were diversifying on three separate levels. First is the dependence on development of technological megatrend, which could be understood as capabilities to construct bigger, more effective, and sophisticated naval vessels, technical capabilities of crews to operate those platforms efficiently and accumulated strategic experience, insight and analytical skills. Second is the range of operation in relation to shoreline. And third is the relation to other tools of military Power, such as Land Power and Air Power. Therefore, there could be labeled at least three major patterns of navy construction: brown-water navy, green-water navy and blue-water navy.

First and foremost is the so-called brown-water navies, which are essentially ancient lore supplemented with cutting edge technologies. Vessels applied within this organization are low-cost platforms, ill-fitted for conducting operations far from coastline. In fact, most navies constructed along this pattern are used in bodies of fresh water, such as lakes and rivers. Furthermore, those platforms are dedicated predominantly to serve as a subservience system for army and air components. In fact, even most

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2 In this case Sea Power was based on the natural forces to propel combatant, such as maritime current and winds.

3 Referred also as command of the sea, control of the sea control.

4 Particular emphasis should be given to mainstay of blue-navy vessels – the aircraft carriers. Ships with similar capabilities are labeled as fleet carriers, amphibious assault ship, helicopter destroyer, multi-purpose destroyer, landing platform dock, landing helicopter dock. Those cognomens are assigned to vessels which main armament are aerial manned vehicles.

of the crews were soldiers (Rankov, 1995, pp. 78–80), which resembles idea of Roman navy, dedicated to transport legions to battlefield, and in certain conditions: to create battlefield for legions (Cassons, 1995, p. 121). Moreover, this iteration of navies do not possess individual tactics and strategies, as they are subservient to other branches of armed forces, and constrain to relatively small bodies of water and in most cases landlocked. Therefore, there is not much to be given about the strategy and tactics of their development and deployment.

Second tier of Sea Power is associated with construction of so called green-water navies. With this notion, there could be associated name of Sir Julian Stanford Corbett (1852–1922) (Handel, 2000, pp. 106–124). His life and work were associated with opposition toward his American counterpart – Alfred Thayer Mahan – which was pronounced mainly in principles of acquiring so called naval control. According to this resolution, crucible of it is the accessibility of coastline, which meant that navy need to be constructed to efficiently operate in shallow basins adjunct to the shores in order to secure vital national interest and prevent / enable conducting amphibious operations aimed at reaching the vital national areas located still on land. Therefore, main aim of the navy is to project power through numerous armadas of light to medium sized vessels (cruisers). Their main assets were multi-purposes, which could be applied in offensive and defensive operations, speed of deployment, and capacity to efficiently cooperate with other branches of armed forces, especially with air forces and artillery, or recently missile forces, as could be seen in case of China ballistic missiles dedicated to ship-killing missions (Chang, 2021). However, there could be pointed out that size of those platforms made those navies vulnerable for two challenges: operative range and vulnerability. When it comes to the former, there need to be pointed out, that those vessels relative size may cause major challenges for traversing large bodies of water to project Sea Power in different parts of world. Furthermore, idea behind those vessels do not require application of cutting-edge technologies,<sup>5</sup> which could extend their usefulness. Especially that smaller size means less cargo space for commodities and munitions, and that means tremendous reliance on network of supply depots and bases. It was proven by troublesome cruise of Iranian navy detachment on Atlantic Ocean (Dura, 2016). When it comes to the latter, there could

5 Predominantly in scope of Command and Control Capabilities, nuclear propulsion and redundant systems.

be also mentioned that those vessels are particularly vulnerable within the hostiles littoral spaces subjected to A2/AD activities (Johnson, 2017, pp. 271–288).

Third tier of Sea Power is composed of the blue-water navies. This notion is associated with the name of Alfred Thayer Mahan, which is allegedly more skilled in PR skills than naval history (Crowl, 1986, pp. 444–480), but he became an anchor for those ideas. The focus of this idea is naval control understood as control over major sea lanes and choke points, such as straits, passages, and recently channels. This objective is achieved primarily with major weapon platforms, created with extensive investments of national resources and cutting-edge technologies. This presence is utilized into physically removing enemy presence from the areas of global ocean designated as strategically vital and denying further access to them. The primary platforms used for this purpose were the biggest and most powerful available, labeled as battleships, dreadnoughts, and superdreadnoughts, recently also aircraft carriers and nuclear propelled fleet carriers. Those vessels could be described within three major parameters. First among them is nearly unlimited range, especially in times of fission power. In most cases their performance relies on extensive network of logistic support composed of naval bases, depots, and support of allies, which provides constant flow of required commodities, but their internal volume could provide space for large quantities of fuel, food, munition, and fresh water to extend their range beyond the limits of green-sea navies. Second is demand of resources which need to be taken from national economy to produce this navy, in form of commodities and material, and production capacities, but also particularly skilled manpower (sailors), which beyond knowledge requires also an experience of merchant navy. Therefore, creation and maintenance of blue-water navy are available to dwindling number of global Powers. And third is that despite their tremendous survivalability there could be destroyed. And this loss is devastating in terms of loss of resources, as well as in terms of prestige. Hence, with blue sea navies could be observed a certain paradox: the more sophisticated and efficient those vessels became, governments tend to remove them from harms way. No major surface combatant was lost in battle since 1982, which saw standoff between Royal Navy and Argentinian Navy.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Royal Navy lost two destroyers and two frigates. Argentina lost one cruiser.

With those challenges, there were adopted two supplemental ideas. First of all there is idea of admiral John Fisher (1841–1920) (Lambert, 1999), who is responsible for Royal Navy modernization program which produced famous fast battleship HMS *Dreadnought*. Second idea is notion of *fleet in being* (Hattendorf, 2014, pp. 42–60), which coined in late 17<sup>th</sup> century, were honed and applied during Second World War. When it comes to former, the major invention of that idea is to diversify structure of navy to perform given functions cost effectively. In this context the new strain of battleships were designed and constructed in order to deploy concentrated Sea Power in distant regions, which were described as a fast battleship and battle cruisers. This branch of Royal Navy was tasked with offensive and aggressive missions. It was particularly visible during missions called *gunboat diplomacy* (Cable, 2016). Other example may be engagement of battle line in hunting for hostile surface vessels around world. The defensive was conceded to more numerous, smaller vessels operating in flocks and cooperating with air forces, coast artillery and submarines, which main task was to bury hostiles crossing the Channel with numerical superiority. This reform was never completed before demise of admiral Fisher but gained tremendous momentum in International Environment (Horowitz, 2010, pp. 134–165). One of the most important one was the resetting naval arms race – already won by Royal Navy, which was one of the major albeit indirect reason to ignite First World War.

Second idea which could be considered as a response to resource consumption of contemporary navies is creating particularly designated forces which need to meet certain conditions. Firstly, the relatively smaller forces need to contain warships which are identified as a major combatant, thus which could be perceived as a genuine threat to national interest. Secondly, the fleet need to be located in relative vicinity of national vital interests of a hostile power. In the times on Second World War for Germany Navy it was Norway, which was located in vicinity of a convoy route between United Kingdom and Soviet Union (Mann, 2012, pp. 12–35). Thirdly, fleet need to be stationed in a so called “stronghold” or “guerilla bases” (McCormick, 1999, p. 27). Sanctuary is an area of space which is strategically remote and controlled by entity applying strategy of *fleet in being* which limits capacity of hostile powers of deploying weapon system able to destroy those vessels. It is very paradoxically, that battleships like *Tirpitz* were secured by layers of anti-aircraft and anti-ship defenses which were not penetrated by Allied forces before fateful operation *Catechism* on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1944, when giant ship capsized (Forsgren, 2014). The

main purpose of application of this strategy is to create strategic imbalance in order to divert resources of opponent to neutralizing challenges. Since that moment, there could be observed growing popularity of this term.

Wrapping up this part of section, there is a need to underline that development of Sea Power was in most cases dependent on technological megatrend, which offered better quality of Sea Power projecting vessels at expense of their growing specialization and interdependence with other areas of quantum field of Power projection,<sup>7</sup> such as economic performance and prestige, which magnified their level of fragility and vulnerability. Therefore, new models of Sea Power application need to be coined and tested. One of the most important test beds for them are hubs of tensions and conflicts. Among the most prominent is crisis within the South China Sea.

### **3. Sea Power in South East Asia – application and evolution**

Southeast Asia is a region centered around large body of water which is labeled as a South China Sea, which encompass surface over 3.500.000,00 km<sup>2</sup> and average depth of 1.024,00 m. Sea is located between Asian Mainland and first chain of islands, stretching from Taiwan in the north, through Philippines Archipelago to Borneo and Sumatra in the south (LaFond, 2021). This composition creates interesting on a field of international law (Zhao Suisheng, 2018, pp. 1–15). There are two sets of valuable commodities located within those boundaries. First is the international trade, which is serviced by sea lanes passing through Malacca, Lombok and Sunda Straits in and out major ports of China and Japan. This trade appeases hunger of those economies for energetic resources and is the fastest routes toward secondary markets in Europe and Africa. Through South China Sea passes around half of global merchandise, and half of that (around 94.000,00 vessels annually) passes through Malacca Strait, which in the narrowest place has width around 3,00 km and 25,00 m of depth. That makes biggest Asian economic extremely vulnerable to any disturbances in the region like surge in piracy activity. Second are the energetic resources in a form of natural oil deposits (estimated between 11 and 28 billion of

7 This is major element of theory of Dynamics of Power in late-Westphalian International Environment.



barrels) (Shu-yuan & Wang, 2013), natural gas deposits (estimated 29,60 trillion m<sup>3</sup>) (Shu-yuan & Wang, 2013) and methane hydrates, which China claims to possess technology to efficiently extract from sea floor (China claims breakthrough in mining 'flammable ice', 2017). This situation is supplemented with nutrient waters which supports large population of fish.

The political and geopolitical situation began to deteriorate since 2011, when People Republic of China started adopting more aggressive stance toward territorial disputes with ASEAN concerning possession of Natuna, Spratly and Paracel Islands and Scarborough Reef (McDorman, 2010, pp. 507–535). However main axis of conflict is legal interpretation of so-called nine-dash line (Gao & Jia, 2013, pp. 98–123). The crucial part of this argument is possession of those uninhabited islands, which were used to redraw national waters and exclusive economic zones which will allow to exploit seabed and fisheries. There are two major coalitions involved. On the one hand, there is a People Republic of China, which claims that nine dash line need to be interpret as a national border and thus, People Republic of China is to be considered a sovereign of South China Sea (Fravel, 2011, pp. 292–319). On the other hand, the other coalition constructed on basis on ASEAN nations, which is supported by United States and United Kingdom claims that freedom of navigation needs to be observed in South China Sea which means that nine-dash line is insignificant and need to be redrawn according to principles of international law (Brands & Cooper, 2018, pp. 12–32).

The tensions between both coalitions can be seen on three different fields of international relations, to some extent related to Sea Power. What is more important there could be observed acceleration of evolution of Sea Power, which is stemming from rivalry between China and US with naval assets, with China attempting to construct contemporary blue-sea navy with crucial element of developing carrier warfare capabilities (Horowitz, 2010, pp. 65–97) and US attempts to keep edge over remaining naval forces, which is key element for their hegemony. Within those fields they are: naval arms race between US and China; international law and international tribunals coupled with declaration of intentions; and finally there are development of A2/AD capabilities by both coalitions with application of various military branches and alliances networks.

First of all, there could be observed that People Liberation Navy is entering into final stages of development of aircraft carrier program, which begun with laying keel of first nuclear propelled fleet carrier of indigenous

construction, similar in parameter to *Ford* class (Sutton, 2021). However, there need to be pointed out having a carrier (as it is in case of nations like Brazil, France, Italy, Spain, Russia or Thailand) is not equal in developing knowledge – stretching from maintenance, through tactical and strategical guidelines for their deployment to manual of conducting complex flight operations – which could be labeled as a carrier warfare, requires serious investments of time and resources which United States made since late 30. of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when first vessels were constructed. And albeit at that time, at least three powers displayed similar capabilities: Great Britain, Japan and United States, only US was able to continuously develop this line of vessels over other challengers. Even construction and equipment of those vessels consume more resources, that was for backbone of blue-water navy before Second World War – superdreadnought strain of battleship cost between 250.000.897 JPY (approximately 35.000.000,00 USD) (Kwiatkowska & Skwiot, 2006, pp. 74–81) of *Yamato*-class and 100.000.000,00 USD for unit of *Iowa*-class (Newhart, 2007, p. 92). Compared to that, the current top fleet carriers of *Nimitz* and *Ford* classes costs 6.200.000.000,00 USD (Aircraft Carrier Named the USS George H.W. Bush Commissioned 2009) and 12.998.000.000,00 USD (O'Rourke, 2017). Which means that on average, nuclear fleet carriers are almost 143 times more expensive than biggest of battleships. And that do not include manpower cost, technologies consumed and prestige. Furthermore, USS *Nimitz* was commissioned in 1975, which means that it was before People Republic of China acquired her first carrier which was decommissioned Australian HMAS *Melbourne* (1985). That is priceless advantage in knowledge and information in effective operating those vessels.

Having said that, the People Republic of China manage to acquire vessels from different sources, and through education system and espionage (Nakashima & Sonne, 2018) accumulated enough knowledge and information not only to refurbish older carriers such as *Liaoning* (former *Kuznetsov* class *Varyag*, a conventional carrier) and construct new ones (*Shandong*, enlarged version of *Liaoning*) and carriers Type 003 and 004, which should resemble *Nimitz* class in size, nuclear propulsion system and EMALS.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the supplement for those vessels there

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8 Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System, which applies to launching carrier based aircrafts with linear induction motor instead of steam pistons. System employed by United States in 2017.

is also programs for support vessels, naval aviation and more. Summing up, the start of assertive expansion within the region. However, creating so demanding in terms of material and information state of art warfare technology severely limits its usefulness at battlefield as loss of a warship of this magnitude would be destructive to general Power potential of engaged nations. Therefore, Sea Power evolution will be guided toward *fleet in being* principles, which assumes, that the most precious combatant will be kept in relatively safety of controlled waters. This means, that naval engagements even in times of war, as those vessels will be placed under close supervision and in mostly friendly waters.

That will be applied to Chinese as well as American carriers. Those vessels will be considered as a symbolic value, and thus will not be engaged into events which may result in their destruction. At least deliberately. It is mainly due to huge consumption of national resources in the process of their construction as well as time needed to replace them after destruction. This could be visualized by fire which consumed USS *Bonhomme Richard*, *Wasp*-class amphibious assault ship (aircraft carrier in all but name) between July 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (USS *Bonhomme Richard* fire: Suspect identified as 20-year-old Navy sailor 2020). As a result, ship was assessed damaged beyond repair as reconstruction would cost between 2.5 and 3.2 billion USD and last between 5 and 7 years (Browne, 2020) and decommissioned. Thus, security of those vessels is crucial, and it compromises vast strategies, in countering them – as Chinese program to develop ship killing ballistic missiles (Gertz, 2010) – as well as move them out of harms way – as American program to extend range of naval aviation<sup>9</sup> or replace air group with UAVs (Pawlyk, 2021). Both are designed to move carriers beyond effective range of countermeasures with little to no loss in their own effectiveness.

Second issue which could be observed during standoff on South China Sea is the issue of international law which is strictly observed by parties engaged in tensions. One of the most important examples is arbitration between People Republic of China and Republic of Philippines in front of Permanent Court of Arbitration, which was held between 2013 and 2016 (Korkut & Kang, 2017, pp. 425–463). In this case more important than actual ruling of the court, indicative for development of Sea Power might be three other factors. First, legal dimension is becoming gradually more important factor in strategic value of certain

9 Introducing of Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II into naval aviation.

points in geopolitical space. This could be seen in particular choice of places to install military facilities, not only to secure new capabilities along particularly important sea lanes but also legal justification to achieving objectives without compromising international law principles. Therefore Sea Power becomes translated into domain of soft Power when naval activities serves purposes outside their original utilities. Second, whenever Sea Power is applied the legal justification is required in order to create safe havens by cooperation with smaller entities such as smaller nations<sup>10</sup> and international organizations.<sup>11</sup> In most cases, due to their privileged position as a hyperpower (Nossal, 1999), United States usually applied freedom of navigation as a dominant reason for projection of Sea Power in international environment. In opposition to that, counterparts of United States are affixed to the notion of sovereignty understood as a uncompromised control over designated geopolitical space. Therefore, Sea Power were designated purely into fulfilling these functions. However, with the advent of deterioration of geopolitical *status quo* in South China Sea, there is a shift in legal standing within international law. People Republic of China started to dispute role of protector of freedom of navigation aiming at replacing United States in regional dimension, and to this end, new capabilities, stretching from development of expeditionary forces (aircraft carriers) to creation of network of military installations (Ashraf, 2017, pp. 166–181), which serves this purpose. Third and final dimension of legal layer of Sea Power is the act of creation of legal acts which contributes to development of international law by generating additional acts, in forms of bilateral treaties which recognized and sanction changes in Sea Power distribution within the region. This sphere for now at least limited into bilateral relation between major contestants of South China Sea standoff, as People Republic of China is expanding its relations in South and South-East direction, mainly in the Indian Ocean Basin (Holmess & Yoshihara, 2008, pp. 40–60), whereas United States are investing in development of relations with ASEAN nations, such as Vietnam and Philippines (Banloi, 2021, pp. 117–133). As for now, there is no attempts to create multilateral treaties related to Sea Power, similar to mechanism placed in Naval Treaties of Interwar Period: Washington 1922

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10 In this case particular emphasis should be given to nation of ASEAN, Japan, Korea and Australia.

11 In this case particular emphasis should be given to ASEAN as an international organization.

(Washington Naval Treaty, 1922), London 1930 (Treaty for the Limitation of Naval Armament, 1930) and London 1936 (Treaty for the Limitation of Naval Armament, 1936) which main goal was to establish Naval Arms Reduction mechanism. Situation where predominant and only naval Power which were United States, there is only little demand to establish this kind of mechanism, but with growing Chinese naval capacities and more assertive attitude in International Relations in the region of South China Sea may be essential to establish legal parity. It will be much more difficult, because classical issues present within the arm reduction negotiations (like national egoisms) will be supplemented with issues associate with qualitative differences which are playing bigger parts than in former century, and which are extremely difficult to assess and even more to execute those restrictions.

And finally, third trend in development in Sea Power may be observed in a form of its *hybridization*. In essence this process originated from attempts made to analyze and comprehend conflict on the eastern oblasts of Ukraine of 2014, but those mechanisms may be applied to other conflicts as well. In essence this strain of warfare reverses civil-military relations known from historical instances of war. In this case, military logic and strategy sketched by authors such as Carl von Clausewitz (Clausewitz, 1995) becomes subservient to media and propaganda effects, which are politically most demanded. Rather than actual battles and confrontation, it's their interpretations that has the biggest impact on International Reality. Therefore, even operation which are completely pointless from military point of view, are conducted, because their value lies in effect they produce.

The similar effect can be observed in Sea Power. Especially that concept *fleet in being* is largely recognized and often applied by various entities. However recent developments in South China Sea, that this idea reached higher levels of attractiveness. In essence instead of factual engagements, there could be observed that simple deployment can be portrayed as hostile and effective operation. There could be identify even, that key role played in this conflict belongs to press releases, official declarations and sometimes rumors, which often are replacing more conventional Sea Power operations as a factor determining strategy and perception of International Environment. Therefore, announcement of for instance, Fourteenth Five-Years Plan, which was drafted in October 2020 (Outline of the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan [2021–2025] for National Economic and Social Development and Vision 2035 of the People's Republic of China, 2021) and embraced future for development and deployment plans

for Sea Power. Those declaration, as well as unconfirmed rumors and leaks are becoming point for changes and evolution for naval strategies of surrounding entities. It is also countered by individual narrative which projects feedback with the Chinese narratives. The standoff within the South China Sea, which is becoming more of a clash of narratives rather than actual strategic operation. Effectiveness of implementation of those tools will be determined by capacity to supplement and replace actual naval actions, which will be crucial to broad and thorough adaptation of modernized *fleet in being* concept.

Summarizing, South China Sea tension hub could be considered a focal point of evolution of Sea Power for post-Westphalian International Environment. Depending on actual outcome of various activities involved, particularly igniting actual warfighting, this evolution, which is also part of general changes in Power composition. Power becomes more transnational and virtual, relying mostly on the qualitative factor. The complexity, sophistication, and extreme price of primary carriers of Sea Power, despite strategic approach to this issue – it is applicable to green-sea navies as well as to blue-sea navies, makes entities wielding those capabilities extremely vulnerable to losing them in combat situations. Navy assets, despite their capabilities are in most cases protected rather than utilized according to their designation. Despite those drawbacks, naval vessels are still desired by various nations aspiring to ascend to higher echelons of International Community, for instance aircraft carriers and other vessels similar to them (Axe, 2021).

Instead of classical naval engagement, there could be observed introduction of developed strategies basing on indirect approaches with most widely adapted idea of *fleet in being*, which aim is at preservation of major naval assets, even for a price of avoiding confrontation. Instead of this, there are instance when Sea Power are applied in softer form, as legal treaties are used and applied in order to secure adjunct to national waters and lower the cost of operations. In case of China, it could be observed in form of *string of pearls*, although admittedly this initiative is less strategically important but more visible in case of *soft* and *normative Power* (Manners, 2006, pp. 182–199). In case of United States are strengthening ties and naval cooperation with Japan (Kotani, 2020, pp. 7–17), Philippines (De Castro, 2020, pp. 1–29) and Vietnam (Simón, Lanoszka & Meijer, 2021, pp. 379–381). The other application of Sea Power, which could be witnessed in South China Sea standoff it is the hybridization. This process could be understood as limiting the

use of actual naval capacities and exploit them in creating narratives often exceeding actual capacities. Instead of naval activities there could be observed conflicts where declarations, announcements, and programs (Jennett, 2020). To some extent there could be spotted rumors, unfortunately without clear clarification of their origins. This could be seen on the examples of Chinese carrier programs, in terms of scaling up (Lague & Lim, 2019) and scaling down (Roblin, 2021) their capabilities.

#### **4. Conclusions and perspectives of Sea Power**

The situation within the South China Sea is far from conclusion. However now it can be observed that it already accelerated the evolution of Sea Power. The question remains: in which direction it will take place in the future? There could be identified some major threads which were highlighted among arguments mentioned above. However, there will be left few doubts, which enforce limiting the level of certainty assigned to those features which allow to label them only scenario.

First and foremost, Sea Power will still be connected with major naval vessels however their application will be more indirect than ever before. Sheer complexity, size, manpower demands, and expensiveness makes their loss particularly devastating for national economy, population, and national prestige. There could be observed attempts to move them out of harm's way, for instance by extending range of weapons systems carried by them, like for instance new generation of warplanes. By replacing multirole fighters Boeing F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet with multirole fighters Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II, which means extending combat range from 722 km to 1.093 km (on internal fuel tanks) (Hellyer, 2019), which could remove carriers from effective range of coastal defenses. This effect might be supplemented with application of combat drones (the top five drones deployed by the US Navy 2020) rendering those vessels to operate on secure waters while carried crafts conduct carrier operation over hostile territory. Summing up, the conflict on South China Sea may effect in rise of application of technologies with will result in rise of range of weapon systems involved in order to secure major naval assets and deny opposition advantage of A2/AD approach. What is more important, there is some likelihood that application of unmanned systems air-based and sea-based. To some extent even submersibles. The confrontation, assuming it will eventually take place, will rely on more distanced battles

to limit burden on national potential, especially in demographic terms, which Western powers only recently defined as vulnerability will become bigger challenge in the future. Therefore, even Sea Power will rely on robotic replacements. At first crafted and improvised, and only after scoring major accomplishments, those devices will be mass produced in more sophisticated forms, but this is the issue for more advanced forecasts.

Second issue which could be observed in tensions around South China Sea are conducted not by single entities, but rather by coalitions. There could be observed at least two major blocks on nations involved in the standoff. On one hand there is being constructed network of alliances of China, which is constructed with outcast regimes of South Asia, such as Myanmar, Pakistan, and other loosely associated nations, united rather by national interests rather than shared values, with potentially of expanding on Philippines, but it is forecasted rather than feasible option. The main purpose of this coalition is to cooperate to limit and manage involvement of hyperpower – the United States – in their areas of vital interests. Second coalition is focused on ASEAN nations with informal support of Japan and United States. This coalition is dedicated to support certain values and ideas which are beneficial for mutual development of international community, with particular emphasis given to freedom of navigation. Therefore, primary objective of those nations is to limit and manage asymmetry of relations in region, even with external assistance. Third coalition only recently formed (Clarke, 2021) is focused around two segments: northern tier with embrace Republic of Korea, Japan and United States, and southern tier which embrace Australia, United Kingdom and United States. The contemporary hyperpower is a centerpiece of this coalition, and its main aim is to bolster its capacity to project and protect American interests in the area. The mutually confessed values are considered subservient to this aim. Moreover, main challenge for American interests may be understood Chinese A2/AD capabilities. All mentioned above coalitions members were rarely operate individually, at least when it comes to minor partners. In the coming years, this cooperation will rarely be avoided even by major partners, as cost – economically as well as in terms of prestige – will be beyond capacity to endure by all participants of South China Sea standoff.

Third and final trend in evolution in Sea Power is its dematerialization. It is reflection of a general tendency in Power evolution, which embrace growing application and effectiveness of non-material components of Power, particularly associated with creating and propagating narratives.



Therefore, elements of hybrid warfare will become more important part in application of Sea Power. Basic idea within this notion is that even during war times, war activities, stretching from complex strategies, atrocities to characters involved is only fraction of actual conduct. Most issues are translated to transnational space and shaped to exploit benefits and failures of military activities and aims at creating and propagating certain point of views. It is already identified, but this situation will be escalating in the future. It may turn out, that instead of major naval engagements, Sea Power will embrace struggle with narratives, such as declaration, deployment schedules, developments plans and strategic announcements, which are met with counter-announcements. Moreover, there are growing gap between audacious declaration and more conservative actual actions within the Sea Power components. This avenue is creative development of *fleet in being* concept and rely heavily on subjective interpretation of feasible actions. In fact, it may turn out that Sea Power application will be possible only with minimal engagement of naval vessels or even without them.

Summarizing this paper, there could be made assumption that evolution is interconnected with the evolution of international environment as well as redefinition of Power itself. This triangle, as Sea Power is very specific as it is the most developed tenet of Power which operates in more hostile space of global ocean, which requires reliance on the products of available technologies, when it comes to its survivability and capabilities. Therefore, Sea Power is extremely susceptible on changes in International Environment as well as within the framework of Power. It is particularly visible in the framework of focal points of international evolution, where change became artificially accelerated as it is in case of South China Sea standoff, there could be seen three major tendencies to reformulate Sea Power. First is the change of role of heavy combat vessels from actual combatants to symbols of power and prestige, which means that neither navy will be interested in placing them outside protective shell of countermeasures and security nets, often shore based. Hence, preference of ranged weapon systems will grow in time. Second, due to a cost of naval activities, the cooperative mechanisms will be introduced to greater extent than before. It may be particularly visible in a form of unprecedented involvement of international courts as a tool of Sea Power. And third, absence of naval engagements will be filled with cases of application of immaterial tools of Sea Power. In fact, the current mode of operation may be understood as a logical extension of *fleet in being* notion into direction of *hybrid warfare*. Whether those changes are permanent

change or just political evolutionary dead end, time will tell. But of one issue most of the scholars on international relations may be certain: next focal point involving Sea Power will be completely different from its historic counterparts.

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