

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2015

The Honorable Ashton Carter
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Carter and Secretary Kerry:

We are writing in regard to Chinese strategy in the Indo-Pacific maritime domains, and the alarming scope and pace of the land reclamation now being conducted by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Spratly island chain of the South China Sea. At a recent Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called the extent of the activities "aggressive," and described it as an effort by China to expand its presence and further consolidate its sovereignty claims. Without a comprehensive strategy for addressing the PRC's broader policy and conduct to assert its sovereignty claims in the South China Sea and East China Sea, including land-reclamation and construction activities, long-standing interests of the United States, as well as our allies and partners, stand at considerable risk.

The United States maintains vested interests in the Indo-Pacific region, including the security of our allies and partners, in the freedom of navigation, in free and unimpeded commerce, in respect for international law, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The South China Sea is a critical maritime highway through which some \$5 trillion in global ship-borne trade passes each year. Unilateral efforts to change the status quo through force, intimidation, or coercion threaten the peace and stability that have benefited all the nations of the Indo-Pacific region. China's land-reclamation and construction activities on multiple islands across the Spratly chain, and the potential command and control, surveillance, and military capabilities it could bring to bear from these new land features, are a direct challenge not only to the interests of the United States and the region, but to the entire international community.

It is our understanding that the majority of this work has been completed in the past twelve months alone, and if current build-rates proceed, China could complete the extent of its planned reclamation in the coming year. Gaven Reef has 114,000 square meters of new land since March 2014. Johnson Reef, which was previously a submerged feature, now stands as a 100,000 square meter "island." Construction and reclamation has increased Fiery Cross in size more than 11-fold since August of last year. Reclamation by any state to enhance their sovereignty rights in the South China Sea complicates these disputes and runs contrary to calls

from the United States and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for parties to exercise self-restraint. However, while other states have built on existing land masses, China is changing the size, structure and physical attributes of land features themselves. This is a qualitative change that appears designed to alter the status quo in the South China Sea.

China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, recently noted that this extensive reclamation "does not target or affect anyone." We disagree. At a minimum, the construction activities violate the commitments that China made as part of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea with ASEAN, in which all parties agreed to "exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes." If China attempts to militarize the artificial islands it has constructed or otherwise use the creation of these islands to attempt to strengthen its legal standing, such a provocation would likely hold serious consequences for the peace and stability of the region. Moreover, because these land reclamation activities could improve China's sustainment of its fishing boats, State Oceanic Administration ships, People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) ships, PLA Air Force (PLAAF) fighters, and other logistics and defense material from these completed islands, it could embolden China to declare an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in all or part of the South China Sea.

Like President Obama, we believe China can and should play a constructive role in the region. We also acknowledge that the costs of seeking to shape China's behavior in the maritime commons may affect other elements of our bilateral relationship. But if China continues to pursue a coercive and escalatory approach to the resolution of maritime disputes, the cost to regional security and prosperity, as well as to American interests, will only grow. For the international community to continue benefiting from the rules-based international order that has brought stability and prosperity to the Indo-Pacific region for the last seven decades, the United States must work together with like-minded partners and allies to develop and employ a strategy that aims to shape China's coercive peacetime behavior.

There is no doubt that the United States must continue to sustain a military balance in the region that secures our long-standing political and economic interests, upholds our treaty commitments, and safeguards freedom of navigation and commerce. At the same time, China's deliberate effort to employ non-military methods of coercion to alter the status quo, both in the South China Sea and East China Sea, demands a comprehensive response from the United States and our partners. While administration officials have highlighted various speeches and initiatives as evidence of a broader strategy, we believe that a formal policy and clearly articulated strategy to address these forms of Chinese coercion are essential. That is why the National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 includes a requirement for a report on maritime security strategy with an emphasis on the South China Sea and East China Sea.

Specifically, we believe such a strategy should address or consider a number of key items: specific actions the United States can take to slow down or stop China's reclamation activities in the South China Sea; the possible benefits of releasing intelligence more regularly about China's destabilizing behavior; what forms of security cooperation with China would be inappropriate to continue if land reclamation activities proceed and what forms of engagement might provide incentives for China to alter its behavior; the region's Maritime Domain Awareness needs; how to help regional partners enhance their own capacity; and additional

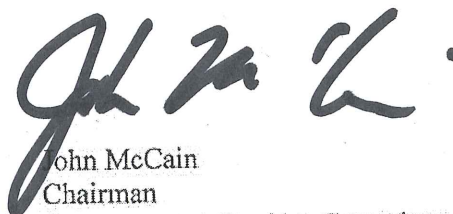
diplomatic engagement with ASEAN countries or others in the international community to support unimpeded access to the Indo-Pacific maritime commons.

The United States faces a myriad of international challenges that inevitably compete for our attention and resources. The slow, calculated competition for sovereignty and influence in the Indo-Pacific region is not currently a crisis that garners international headlines. Yet the impact of this competition will likely reverberate for years to come. The Congress stands ready to support a renewed effort to address this challenge. More specifically, we look forward to working with you on the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy for the maritime commons of the Indo-Pacific region, and to your thoughts on how the Administration and Congress can best work together on these issues.

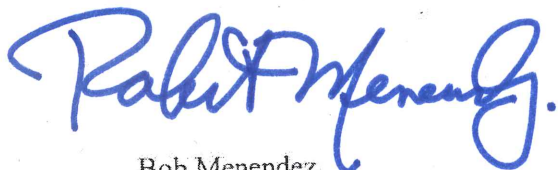
Sincerely,



Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee



John McCain
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee



Bob Menendez
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Bob Corker
Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee