

The Impact of the China Coast Guard on Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia Security from the Perspective of a Maritime Power

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Abstract

In 2024, the China Coast Guard (CCG) invoked China Coast Guard Regulation No. 3 to detain Taiwanese fishing boats in disputed waters twice. These actions can be dated back to 2019. The CCG entered the waters of the Diaoyu islands in Japan twelve times and carried out cruises on the Diaoyu islands. It is necessary to study the follow-up actions of the CCG and their impact on Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia security. This study examines the effect of the CCG's maritime rights protection on the security of the Indo-Pacific region and Southeast Asia when the People's Republic of China (China) becomes a maritime power. It was changed to the Maritime Police Corps of the Chinese People's Armed Police Force to integrate the business of marine surveillance, fishery administration, customs, border defense, and other units. The reason for the gradual expansion of powers and the impact of its strong protection of maritime rights and interests on Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia. The research results can help us understand the current situation of the CCG and further evaluate China's ability to achieve maritime power. This paper finds that China intends to implement regular patrols in disputed waters by increasing the tonnage of coast guard ships, strengthening rights protection, and militarizing organizations to demonstrate maritime power. On the other hand, this move triggered a maritime police competition among neighboring countries, and even a naval and air force arms race, intensified disputes between China and neighboring countries, especially the South China Sea dispute, and made the security of the Indo-Pacific region and Southeast Asia be more turbulent.

Keywords: Maritime Power, China Coast Guard, Diaoyu Islands, South China Sea, Southeast Asia

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Introduction

In 2024, the China Coast Guard (CCG) twice invoked China Coast Guard Regulation No. 3, which allowed them to take legal action against foreign fishing boats in disputed waters to detain Taiwanese fishing boats that caused tensions in relations across the Taiwan Strait and added conflict variables to the Indo-Pacific region (Kayleigh Madjar, 2024; Keoni Everington, 2024; The Taipei Times, 2024). These actions can be dated back to 2019. As of April 2019, the CCG entered the waters of the Diaoyu islands in Japan twelve times and carried out cruises on the Diaoyu islands. The differences over the Diaoyu island and Taiwan dispute have deepened day by day. It is necessary to study the follow-up actions of the CCG and their impact on Indo-Pacific security.

This paper mainly studies the changes in the CCG organization and the impact of realizing China's vision of becoming a maritime power. The CCG is one of the policy tools to achieve a maritime power which has undergone many changes. It is necessary to study the organizational changes, current situation, and future development of the CCG. This paper proposes to briefly explain two research questions. The first question: what are the reasons for the transformation of the CCG from a paramilitary agency to a military agency? The second: what impact does China have on realizing its vision of a maritime power and the regional security situation through the CCG?

This paper is divided into five main sections. Section 1 provides some background information about CCG and China's maritime power. Section 2 outlines China's goal of maritime power. Section 3 discusses the development of CCG, describing China's practice of maritime power. Section 4 presents the development restrictions of CCG, describing China's constraints in becoming a maritime power. Finally, section 5 outlines findings for the two research questions in this paper.

Literature Review

The Origin and Content of Maritime Power

China's concept of maritime power was first put forward in the National Marine Economic Development Plan announced in 2003 and was later included in reports to the 18th and 19th National Congresses of the Communist Party of China (CPC). It has further passed through the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC and the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China –equivalent to gaining the approval of the whole CPC. Under the political operation led by the CPC whose documents represent the direction of future policy implementation, so they were included in the relevant *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Guomin Jingji he Shehui Fazhan Dishisan Ge Wunian Guihua Gangyao (The 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China)* in 2017. The following explains maritime power's origin and how its connotation and value has been gradually developed through official documents.

According to the *National Marine Economic Development Plan Outline* (The General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2003):

Marine economic regions with unique characteristics will be formed, and the marine economy will become a new growth point for the national economy, gradually building our country into a maritime power.

This is the first time the term maritime power appears in official documents, connoting its emergence as a new focus. In 2012, Hu Jin-tao, former General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC, mentioned in his political report to the 18th National Congress (Hu, 2012, p.40):

In order to develop marine resources, marine economy, and protect the marine ecological environment, we have to build a strong maritime nation to safeguard the country's marine rights and interests.

This is the first time that the term 'maritime power' appeared in a CPC document, and the Central Committee of the CPC begins to attach importance to the development of the marine economy and set the direction for becoming a maritime power. In 2015, the first military strategy document mentioning the term was published, expounding China's military views and strategic vision. *According to Zhongguo Dejunshi Zhanlüe [China's Military Strategy]* (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2015, p.15):

In order to build a modern maritime military force system compatible with national security and development interests, we have to maintain the security of strategic corridors and overseas interests, participate in international maritime cooperation, and provide strategic support for building maritime power.

From the military strategy document, we believe that China wants to break away from the framework of a land power to become a maritime power. At the same time, national security and military power are integrated, and various maritime rights, interests and the protection of sea lanes are safeguarded by integrating maritime power. Although General Secretary Xi Jin-ping's report to the 19th National Congress of the CPC only used a few words to explain the focus of becoming a maritime power (The Peoples Publishing House, 2017, p.17):

Adhere to the overall planning of land and sea and accelerate the construction of a maritime power.

China wants to develop marine power based on past land power. At the same time, the establishment of a maritime power shows the urgency of building a maritime power, hoping to shorten the time to become a maritime power. To become a maritime power, we must first have corresponding marine economic development as the basis to support national strategic objectives. Therefore, Xi Jinping's report at the 19th National Congress of the CPC became the guiding ideology for maritime power. Later, a marine industry development plan was formulated to strengthen the overall industry. (The National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China, 2017, p.7):

Adhere to the new development concepts of innovation, coordination, green, openness, and sharing; establish a global layout view of the marine economy; actively adapt to and lead the new normal of marine economic development; accelerate supply-side structural reform; strive to optimize the regional layout of the marine economy, and enhance the marine industry structure and levels, improve marine science and technology innovation capabilities, promote the construction of marine ecological civilization, scientifically coordinate marine development and protection, expand open cooperation in the marine economy.

The maritime power was first proposed in 2003. The political report of the 18th National Congress of the CPC was announced in 2012, and the "13th Five-Year Plan for Marine Economy" announced by the State Oceanic Administration in 2017 took shape. From here, we can find that China is not only satisfied with becoming a land power but also wants to become a sea power.

The Relationship Between Maritime Power and Chinese Coast Guard

With the development of the maritime economy of China, considerable results have been achieved, and it has gradually become a maritime power. During the "12th Five-Year Plan" period, China's marine economy maintained overall stable development, with an average annual growth rate of 8.1%. In 2015, the total volume of the marine economy was close to 6.5 trillion yuan, an increase of 65.5% compared with the end of the 11th Five-Year Plan; gross marine product accounted for 9.4% of the GDP, and 35.89 million people were employed in the maritime industry.

Due to gradual expansion of the marine economic industry at the aforementioned growth rate of approximately 8%, it is necessary to establish a CCG to safeguard China's maritime rights. Li Jing-guang, former director of the International Cooperation Department of the State Oceanic Administration, said: "Comprehensive protection of national maritime rights and interests should be the main reason why our country reorganized the State Oceanic Administration." China's maritime rights and interests include two aspects: First, the rights that can be exercised on the ocean; second, the interests that can be obtained and need to be maintained (The General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2013a; Li, 2012).

The Background of Establishing the CCG

The evolution of the CCG toward China's goal of becoming a maritime power can be discussed in three parts. First, domestic and foreign factors contributed to establishing the CCG. Secondly, it developed from paramilitary agencies to military agencies. Finally, the CCG takes actions to become a maritime power. From the domestic factors, In the past, China's marine management functions involved various functions such as ocean, fishery, maritime, public security, border defense and customs. In particular, the decentralization of maritime law enforcement forces has been unresolved for many years (The General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2013c). The original operations of the CCG were scattered among five units and needed to be unified under one agency to perform their duties and responsibilities. Before establishing the CCG, the State Oceanic Administration was responsible for maritime external affairs. It had

experience in handling international maritime affairs and had international maritime law enforcement capabilities. Domestic maritime law enforcement comprises China Maritime Surveillance, Border Defense and Coast Guard, China Fisheries Administration, and the General Administration of Customs is responsible. (Wang & Dong, 2014, p.69).

The CCG is a comprehensive maritime law enforcement agency that integrates multiple responsibilities such as maritime rights protection, public security management, fishery management, and marine surveillance. It integrates armed, police, and administrative functions. The two responsibilities of fishery management and ocean surveillance still exist in local law enforcement agencies. In the long term, the CCG must still integrate local marine management and fishery law enforcement teams (Li, 2018, p.9).

From the international factors, the paper will discuss maritime conflicts and countries around China which have adopted checks and balances to impose on China. This paper will discuss the fishery conflicts between China and South Korea, North Korea, Russia etc. On the other hand, it explores the maritime strategies and specific actions of Japan, India, Vietnam, and other countries to check and balance China.

In September 2008, Chinese fishermen beat and injured four South Korean coast guards. Again, in March 2011, a South Korean coast guard was severely injured by a Chinese crew member while attempting to enforce the law. The guard then opened fire on the crew member, injuring and subsequently arresting him. In September 2016, the South Korean Coast Guard boarded a Chinese fishing vessel for inspection. Because the cockpit and engine room were locked, the Coast Guard team members broke the cockpit glass and dropped three sonic bombs and three Chinese fishermen died. In November of the same year, the South Korean Coast Guard used an M60 machine gun to fire 600 to 700 rounds at Chinese fishing boats to pursue two Chinese fishing boats. This is the first time that the South Korean Coast Guard has used machine guns against a Chinese fishing vessel. Subsequently, when the South Korean Coast Guard responded to Chinese fishing boats that crossed the border in December 2017 and January 2018, they fired hundreds of bullets from machine guns to drive them away (BBC News Chinese, 2011; Miao, 2018).

In May 2013, the Dalian fishing boat "Liaopu Fishing 25222" was seized by the Korean People's Army and fined 600,000 yuan. Due to years of uncontrolled fishing, fishery resources along China's coast are relatively scarce. Therefore, fishing in North Korean waters, coupled with the corruption of North Korean soldiers, has resulted in Chinese fishing boats paying protection fees for fear of North Korean soldiers crossing the border and arresting Chinese fishing boats (Lu, 2013).

On July 16, 2012, two Chinese fishing boats entered the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Russian Federation to fish illegally. Border Service of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation patrol boats pursued and fired warning shells; the Chinese boat ignored it and continued sailing. Finally, the patrol boat collided with the fishing boat, and the two sides exchanged fire. The Russian Federation border guards boarded the ship and seized the two boats (Oriental Daily News, 2012).

In response to the frequent entry and exit of Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) ships in the Miyako Strait, the Japanese Ministry of Defense decided to deploy surface-to-surface vessels with a range extending to 400 kilometers on Miyako island and Ishigaki island in Okinawa in 2023. Type 12 anti-ship missile to strengthen the defense posture in the southwest region. The

Ground Self-Defense Force is eager to strengthen defense in the southwestern region, which currently has a blank zone. The island of Amami Oshima is the first location for deployment of Type 12 anti-ship missiles in the southwest region (Lian, 2019; Sankei Shimbun, 2019).

After the Global War on Terrorism in 2001, the Indian Ocean once again became the focus of global attention; India also set its strategic sights on the Indian Ocean and other more expansive waters and proposed a significant change in its maritime security strategy. The critical direction is to strive to control the Indian Ocean based on a solid navy and active political, economic, and diplomatic means.

In 2004, India proposed the 'Indian Maritime Doctrine' and in 2007, promulgated the "Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy" and other documents to comprehensively outline the Indian maritime security strategy. In terms of perception of maritime security threats, the security threat to the east is China's growing influence, which will affect the maritime security environment in the Indian Ocean region (Song and Bai, 2011, pp. 38 and 48).

India's maritime security strategy is to dominate the Indian Ocean and move eastward into the Pacific Ocean. Dominating the Indian Ocean is the core of India's maritime security strategy and maritime interests. With the shift of the global economic and political center to the Indo-Pacific region and the rich resources and strategic importance of the South China Sea, India has gradually begun to pay attention to the Pacific Ocean (Wang, 2018a, pp. 63-64).

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam adopted the 'Vietnam Ocean by 2020' at the fourth plenary session of the 10th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam in January 2007. This is the first time Vietnamese officials have elevated maritime economic development and maritime security issues to a national strategic level. The Vietnamese government and the Vietnam People's Army determined the strategic concept of defending the ocean: using existing resources and preliminary maritime hard and soft power based on maritime defense and defense systems, forming an active maritime defense posture to deal with hostile forces.

Because Vietnam's land territory lacks a certain depth of adequate protection in terms of security and defense, by occupying as many islands as possible in the South China Sea, shifting the focus of defense forward, and focusing on coastal islands in an active defense posture, the overall goal of Vietnam's maritime security strategy is to continue to occupy the islands that have been settled in the South China Sea (Cheng, 2011, pp. 14, 16, and 18).

There are multiple motivations for India and Japan to increasingly attach importance to security cooperation in the South China Sea. Although neither India nor Japan is a neighboring country in the South China Sea, both countries regard sea routes as vital to their economies. Both India and Japan have strong ambitions as significant powers, and both want to improve their international status and expand international influence by intervening in the South China Sea issue. In addition, in the face of the rapid increase in China's strength and significantly the increase in maritime influence, the two countries hope to build security cooperation to leverage each other's strength in the South China Sea (Pang, 2018, p.76).

Japan hopes to maintain the inherent security order in the Indo-Pacific and reduce its pressure on the Diaoyu Islands dispute. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen maritime security cooperation with India to achieve the strategic goal of containing China. India needs to strengthen cooperation with major countries in the Indo-Pacific, compared with China, which has delicate and

complicated relations within itself due to factors such as territorial disputes. Therefore, cooperation in the field of maritime security between 'westward-looking' Japan and "eastward-looking" India is also an essential path for them to realize each other's naval strategies (Wang, 2018, pp.53 and 55).

Japan has strengthened its strategic interaction with Vietnam. Joining forces with Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries to check and balance China at the regional and global levels is one of the critical strategic considerations of the Japanese government. With the rapid rise of China, Sino-Japanese relations have entered a stage of competition. Japan is worried that China's rise will squeeze its strategic space and weaken Japan's leading role in the construction of regional political, economic, and security order. It is also worried that the rapid growth of China's maritime power will increase its pressure on Japan.

Like Japan, Vietnam has territorial sovereignty disputes with China at sea, and Vietnam is one of the significant claimants of sovereignty in the South China Sea. In recent years, Vietnam has taken advantage of the opportunity of the United States, Japan, India, and other major powers to actively intervene in the South China Sea and strengthen interaction with significant powers. Therefore, Japan and Vietnam have an inevitable convergence of interests in containing China, and joint efforts to check and balance China have become an important starting point for the two countries to strengthen security strategic interaction (Chang, 2018, pp. 20 and 22).

On April 2, 2019, the South Korean Coast Guard stated that the number of ships deployed near the Northern Limit Line (NLL) would be increased from 6 to 8, of which the number of medium-sized ships would be increased from 3 to 4. ships, the general number of vessels will be increased from 2 to 3. An additional medium-sized boat will be deployed according to changes in circumstances (Yonhap News Agency, 2019).

Indonesia has island disputes and fishery issues with China and has also claimed to deploy armed helicopters in the South China Sea. These helicopters can carry air-launched anti-armor missiles to cope with future maritime conflicts. In December 2017, the Indonesian Army announced that it would deploy AH-64E armed helicopters in the Natuna islands. The Natuna islands are the world's most significant undeveloped natural gas area. They also overlap with the maritime demarcation boundaries of China, and the two sides have had several small-scale naval conflicts. The deployment of these armed helicopters demonstrates the determination of the Indonesian military to defend the island. This batch of eight armed helicopters can use the AN/APG-78 Longbow fire control radar and AGM-114R3 anti-armor missiles (Yu, 2017).

On December 18, 2018, the Indonesian government announced the completion of the military base on the Natuna islands. Indonesian President Joko Widodo said: "There are 169,000 Indonesian people in Natuna where is Indonesian territory. There is no doubt about it. No matter who claims sovereignty over Natuna, if anyone wants to start a war, we will fight to the end." At the same time, Air Force General Hadi Tjahjanto, commander-in-chief of the Indonesian National Army, said at the opening ceremony of the military base: "The purpose of Indonesia's move is to deter any potential security threats."

On the other hand, Hadi emphasized that the military base would house an infantry battalion from the Army, several infantry companies from the Marine Corps, engineering companies, artillery companies, air defense units, and a drone squadron. According to the establishment of the Indonesian National Army, a battalion has about 800 to 1,000 people, a

company has about 100 people, and the number of troops stationed is as high as more than 1,000 soldiers. In addition to the above forces, five American-made F-16 fighter jets and the German-made Sky Shield air defense system have been stationed before, which means that the three-armed forces on the island have complete combat power, demonstrating the ability to defend Indonesian territory. Determination (Oriental Daily News, 2016; Voice of America Chinese version, 2018; Li, 2016 Feng, 2018).

In the Philippines, a maritime country like Indonesia, President Rodrigo Duterte ordered the deployment of troops to the claimed South China Sea areas, especially Thitu Island, to build runways and raise the national flag to declare sovereignty. The other is to let the decommissioned transport ship run aground on Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippine Navy will still send personnel to rotate on the boat to demonstrate territorial claims. This move differs significantly from Duterte's previous non-confrontation policy (Felipe Villamor, 2019).

This paper believes that Indonesia's deployment of armed helicopters, fighter jets, and air defense systems in the Natuna Islands intentionally adopts strategic deterrence purposes, deters foreign armed forces that attempt to seize the islands, protects Indonesia's maritime and land territories, and prevents natural resources. On the other hand, Indonesia has deployed armed helicopters and fighter jets with mighty attack power. The Philippines adopts a defensive strategy of island defense and declares its sovereignty over the territory by garrisoning troops on the islands.

History of Establishing China Coast Guard

The evolution of the CCG is explained in two different stages. First, during the paramilitary period, the CCG was affiliated with the State Oceanic Administration of the Ministry of Land and Resources at the State Council level. During the military agency period, the CCG was subordinated to the Central Military Commission and was no longer under the command of administrative agencies. Suppose the business needs to be dispersed into different agencies from the administrative organization and management perspective. In that case, the powers are not unified, the orders are divided into multiple branches, and the strategic goals of a maritime power cannot be truly realized. To become a maritime power, the first organizational change of the CCG was carried out in 2013. This change is based on the *State Council Institutional Reform and Functional Transformation Plan*. It is intended to solve the problem of fragmented CCG operations (The General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2013b):

The State Oceanic Administration carries out maritime rights protection and law enforcement in the name of the China Coast Guard and accepts operational guidance from the Ministry of Public Security. This reform plan proposed the establishment of the State Oceanic Administration (deputy ministerial level), which was approved by the first session of the 12th National People's Congress as a national bureau managed by the Ministry of Land and Resources.

The details are based on the *Regulations on the Main Responsibilities, Internal Organizations and Staffing of the State Oceanic Administration* (The General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2013c). Regarding the reasons for the country's reorganization of the

State Oceanic Administration on March 10, 2013, the State Council made a simple statement in its explanation of the institutional reform and functional transformation plan: "promote unified law enforcement at sea." However, Wang Feng, deputy director of the Office of the Central Institutional Establishment Commission that China's marine management, especially marine law enforcement, has been dispersed, and there have been many discussions about repeated inspections, inefficiency, and other aspects.

Based on the above plan, all ocean, marine surveillance, border defense, fishery, customs, and other businesses will be integrated under the new State Oceanic Administration. Safeguarding maritime rights and interests is done in the name of the CCG. This solves the problem of dispersed business among various agencies in the past but also creates new issues, namely the dual leadership of the Ministry of Land and Resources and the Ministry of Public Security which is not conducive to safeguarding maritime rights and interests.

In 2018, CCG was reformed and transferred to the Chinese People's Armed Police Force. The Central Military Commission of the CPC directly leads it and is no longer under the dual leadership of the Ministry of Land and Resources and the Ministry of Public Security (The General Office of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2018a, pp. 266-267).

In addition, according to the *Decision on the China Coast Guard's Exercise of Maritime Rights Protection and Law Enforcement Powers* (The General Office of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2018b, p. 505):

The coast guard team was assigned as a whole to the Chinese People's Armed Forces Under the command of the leadership of the police force, the Coast Guard Corps of the Chinese People's Armed Police Force was restructured and renamed the China Coast Guard. The China Coast Guard uniformly performed maritime rights protection and law enforcement duties.

After the above two documents were issued, the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Adjusting the Leadership and Command System of the Chinese People's Armed Police Force (Decision)" was finally announced. On January 1, 2018, the Armed Police Force will be centralized and unified by the Central Military Commission of the CPC and the Central Military Commission leadership and implement the Central Military Commission-Armed Police Force-troop leadership and command system (Xinhuanet, 2017).

The "Decision" clarifies that the Armed Police Force will be organized under the Central Military Commission and no longer listed under the State Council. The construction of the armed police force shall be organized and led by the organizational relations stipulated by the Central Military Commission. Relevant departments of the central and state agencies, local party committees and governments at all levels, and the armed police force have established task requirements and work coordination mechanisms accordingly. The "Decision" requires that all regions and departments, the PLA and the Armed Police Force must resolutely implement the decisions and arrangements of the Central Committee of the CPC, proactively coordinate and cooperate, carry out relevant work in detail, and ensure the orderly transformation and stable operation of the leadership and command system of the Armed Police Force.

Method

To explore the research question, this article employed documents analysis. Under this circumstances, this article gained a deeper understanding of the change process, organizational structure, and business functions of the CCG, this article collected numerous official documents and journal papers including *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Guo Wu Yuan Gong Bao* (State Council Gazette), *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Quan Guo Ren Min Dai Biao Da Hui Chang Wu Wei Yuan Hui Gong Bao* (Gazette of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China), *Journal of Public Security Marine Police Academy*, etc., supplemented by academic journals, such as *Contemporary International Relations*, *Forum of World Economics & Politics*, *Japanese Research*, *Journal of Boundary and Ocean Studies*, *Indian Ocean Economic and Political Review*, etc. Research material analysis was conducted using qualitative analysis. The first step in the qualitative analysis was to examine the key words of the official documents which were *Hai Yang Qiang Guo* (maritime power), *Zhong Guo Haijing* (China Coast Guard), *Hai Yangjing Ji* (marine economy) in order to understand what China's thinking in this issue.

Results and Discussion

CCG's rights protection patrol around Japan's islands

The CCG's role in safeguarding maritime rights can be illustrated by its naval operations against Japan and Vietnam. The main reasons are the territorial disputes between China and Japan over the Diaoyu Islands and between China and Vietnam over the Paracel Islands. The CCG has taken more obvious actions in handling sovereignty disputes, which can be used as practical actions. The CCG's patrol around Japan's islands is based on the "Diaoyu Islands are China's inherent territory" policy white paper published by the State Council of the People's Republic of China in 2012. The white paper gives the CCG the legal basis for its patrol mission on the Diaoyu Islands. In the white paper it states (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2012):

China has always maintained a regular presence in the waters around the Diaoyu Islands and exercised jurisdiction over them. China's maritime surveillance and law enforcement vessels insist on patrolling and enforcing laws in the waters of the Diaoyu Islands, and fishery law enforcement vessels carry out regular law enforcement patrols and fishery protection in the waters of the Diaoyu Islands to maintain the normal order of fishery production in the waters.

On January 18, 2019, Japan's 11th District Coast Guard Headquarters stated that four ships of the CCG entered Japanese waters one after another, one of which was equipped with a machine gun. After sailing for about 2 hours each, they left the sea area and entered the adjacent area outside. The Japanese patrol ship issued a warning. According to statistics, in 2018, CCG ships sailed into the waters of the Diaoyu Islands 19 times, with a total of 70 boats (Sputnik, 2019).

CCG's use of force to safeguard Vietnam's rights

On May 2, 2014, China National Offshore Oil Corporation's "Hai Yang Shiyou 981" oil drilling platform moved to the Paracel islands waters where Vietnam and China have sovereignty disputes for drilling. On May 26, about 40 Chinese fishing boats surrounded a Vietnamese fishing boat, and then one of the fishing boats rammed the Vietnamese fishing boat, causing it to sink. The accident occurred 17 nautical miles south of China's CNOOC 981 drilling platform in the Paracel islands. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Qin Gang said that Vietnam caused the incident and that Vietnam had repeatedly sent various types of ships to forcibly interfere with the normal operations of relevant Chinese companies in the waters. China took resolute measures at the scene to prevent interference and sabotage with Vietnam. On May 27, the "Haiyang Shiyou 981" oil drilling platform completed the first phase of drilling operations in the waters near Zhongjian island in Xisha islands and obtained relevant geological data (BBC News Chinese, 2014a).

On June 1, 2014, a CCG ship blocked and collided with a Vietnamese fishery inspection ship 7 to 9 miles from the China Offshore Oilfield 981 drilling platform. The Chinese and Vietnamese ships later collided, but no one was injured. Vietnamese official media said that the CCG's ship also fired water cannons at the Vietnamese ships. Some equipment of the Vietnamese fishery inspection vessel was damaged. The Vietnamese Coast Guard said that Vietnam detected that the Chinese oil platform had moved again, moving 140 meters to the northwest (BBC News Chinese, 2014b).

CCG's Maritime Power Gradual Growth and Some Constraints of Becoming Maritime Power

In July 2015, three Type 053H2G frigates that had served in the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) were converted into CCG ships, retaining four H/PJ-76 twin-mounted 37 mm anti-aircraft guns. In June 2016, a batch of CCG's ships were equipped with H/PJ-26 single-barreled 76 mm naval guns. Its design was based on the Type 054A frigate with a displacement of 3,500 tons. Three other CCG ships were being built at the Huangpu Shipyard. One of them has a hull similar to a warship, especially the Type 056 frigate with a displacement of 1,500 tons, which was also equipped with a 30mm gun (Huanqiu, 2016).

In 2017, the National Coast Guard Work Conference explained the annual work priorities and results. The CCG actively deployed the management and control of critical islands and reefs, strictly organized and implemented special rights protection and law enforcement tasks, dispatched naval vessels to protect fisheries and law enforcement, and provided escort for the maritime production operations of relevant sea-related departments. To help the stable development of the marine economy. The CCG has carried out many fishing protection and escort operations, effectively protecting the lives and property of our country's fishermen and building a safety barrier for the coastal people's production operations. In 2017, the CCG participated in 272 maritime rescue operations, rescuing 62 ships and 425 people in distress (Xiong, 2018).

Although the CCG's maritime power is gradually strengthening, and the number and tonnage of ships are increasing year by year, the number of carrier-based helicopters and fixed-wing maritime patrol aircraft is insufficient and disproportionate to the number of ships at sea, indicating that the CCG still has room for development in its aviation power.

After years of research and practice, the PLAN has formed a relatively systematic joint combat command theory and accumulated rich joint combat command experience. These theories and practices are of great significance to strengthening the construction and ability of joint maritime rights protection command. Therefore, it is necessary to learn from the military to enhance joint naval rights protection and command capabilities. To achieve the goals above, it is essential to strengthen cooperation between the CCG and the PLAN, People's Liberation Army Air Force and other military forces, give full play to the intimidating role of maritime military forces, establish a coordination and cooperation mechanism with the military's maritime operations, strengthen collaborative training and share intelligence resources (Yang, 2018, pp. 17; 19 and 25).

Specifically, the Coast Guard and the Navy work together in peacetime. The PLAN can provide intelligence support, aviation support, logistics support, etc., to the CCG team in the non-traditional security field when the CCG team participates in front-line rights protection tasks, such as in the waters of the Diaoyu Islands, Renai Reef in the South China Sea, and Huangyan Island, during maritime patrols; if there is a possibility of escalating to an armed conflict, the PLAN should be prepared for combat. It must have a certain number of ships deployed for combat readiness and be ready to support the CCG in their first-line rights protection missions at any time. In addition, the CCG also regularly reports the security situation in maritime jurisdictions to the PLAN and serves as a security guard for the PLAN.

Furthermore, when performing major national tasks, such as rights protection patrols in the waters of Diaoyu island and the South China Sea and protection of offshore oil and gas fields, it is necessary to make full use of the advantages of the CCG in non-traditional security fields and put CCG's ships to work on the front line to protect rights; the PLAN is prepared for support and cover according to the maritime conflict situation. PLAN's ships can stand 20-30 miles behind and are ready to set sail anytime (Lu, 2014, pp. 51-54).

Conclusion

From now on, CCG is active in the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, Sea of Japan etc. It has become a force that cannot be ignored and helps to realize China's maritime power vision.

To conclude, the present study advances preliminary research on CCG and China's maritime power. In response to the first question – what are the reasons for the transformation of the China Coast Guard from a paramilitary agency to a military agency? – a major finding is that the CCG has gone through many reforms. The first one in 2013 was to solve the problem of multiple agencies for maritime rights and interests' protection. Since related businesses were scattered among different units, it was impossible to handle emergencies of naval conflicts effectively. In the 2018 reform, it was reorganized under the Chinese People's Armed Police Force and became the Armed Police and CCG. It was directly affiliated with the Central Military Commission to solve the problem of being under the dual leadership of the Ministry of Land and Resources and the Ministry of Public Security. It also transformed from paramilitary to military agencies and cooperated with the People's Liberation Army. Both are jointly under the direct leadership of the Central Military Commission. In other words, the Chairman of the Central Military Commission can directly command the Coast Guard's actions without the need for indirect command through the public security system.

From the second question: what impact does China have on realizing its vision of a maritime power and the regional security situation through the transformed China Coast Guard? A primary finding is that CCG's ships have become more extensive, and their number has doubled, strengthening their ability to safeguard rights and interests at sea. However, it also increases the fear of neighboring countries and drives another type of arm's race among CCG units in the Indo-Pacific region. Especially after being directly commanded by the Central Military Commission and becoming a military agency, it adds to regional tensions and is not conducive to the Indo-Pacific region's safe development. In other words, maritime conflicts between the CCG and Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, and other countries may break out at any time in Southeast Asia. Based on national security considerations, relevant units must establish corresponding handling mechanisms to prevent the conflict from expanding.

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