

Five dragons stirring up the sea: Challenge and opportunity in China's improving maritime enforcement capabilities

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Five Dragons Stirring Up the Sea: Challenge and Opportunity in China's Improving Maritime Enforcement Capabilities

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Description

In an age of delicate maneuvering among the great powers, coast guards have taken new and leading roles on the world stage. When Washington wanted to demonstrate conviction and bring supplies to beleaguered Georgia without escalating already simmering tensions around the Black Sea, the USCGC *Dallas*, a large U.S. Coast Guard cutter, was quickly dispatched. The trend has long been visible in Asia. Tokyo's most extensive use of deadly force in the postwar era was an action by the Japanese coast guard against a North Korean surveillance vessel.

More recently, a Japan Coast Guard cutter sank a Taiwanese fishing vessel in a collision near the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands in the East China Sea, prompting a relatively serious diplomatic incident. These most powerful coast guards are spawning imitators. India, for example, announced a bold new purchase of long-range patrol aircraft for its coast guard in the fall of 2008. South Korea's improving coast guard, meanwhile, has invited foreign reporters to a tour in the vicinity of islands that are administered by South Korea but claimed by Japan, accompanying the visit with belligerent rhetoric.

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Five Dragons Stirring Up the Sea Challenge and Opportunity in China's Improving Maritime Enforcement... China's strategy towards South Asia (SA) presents a patchwork of bilateral relations rather than a holistic policy due to the lack of a SA identity and China's policy preferences. China has pursued a subtle balance in SA with the exception of the antagonism that exists between it and India. China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) objectives, while hardly excluding strategic concerns, mainly [Show full abstract] flow from economic considerations: for example, restructuring industries, updating China's growth model, securing resource supplies, finding new markets, and so on, while incrementally increasing its maritime enforcement capabilities. Despite major improvements over the last decade, China's maritime enforcement authorities remain balkanized and relatively weak--described in a derogatory fashion by many Chinese experts as so many dragons stirring up the sea. In Northeast Asia, China's weak maritime enforcement capacities are the exception, especially when compared to the coast guard capacities of Japan (or, outside the region, of the United States). China's relative weakness in this area is a mystery, one that forms the central research question of the present study. This condition of relative weakness is outlined by the South China Sea Incidents. Over the past several years, China has revamped its maritime strategy to reflect its shifting national priorities. At the 18th National Party Congress in 2012, then-President Hu Jintao called for China to become a "maritime power" capable of safeguarding its maritime rights and interests. The establishment of a unified coast guard has corresponded with a substantial increase in Chinese government spending. Estimates from 2017 show that China averaged an annual coast guard budget of \$1.74 billion over the previous five years. By comparison, Japan is estimated to have spent \$1.5 billion per year while the average yearly budget of Vietnam and the Philippines is between \$100 million and \$200 million over the same period.