

**NYT**

**Vietnamese Navy Confronts Chinese Ships in Oil Rig Dispute**

By [GERRY MULLANY](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/m/gerry_mullany/index.html) and [DAVID BARBOZA](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/david_barboza/index.html)MAY 7, 2014

HONG KONG — Tensions in the South China Sea intensified Wednesday as Vietnamese vessels confronted Chinese ships that were working to place an oil rig off Vietnam’s coast, and Vietnamese officials claimed that their ships had been rammed by the Chinese vessels.

Vietnam said the Chinese ships also fired water cannons at its flotilla in the encounter, injuring Vietnamese sailors, although Chinese officials did not confirm the incident. The skirmishing highlighted the hair-trigger tensions in the region as Asian nations try to contain China’s more aggressive posture in pursuing maritime claims in the South China Sea.

“On May 4, Chinese ships intentionally rammed two Vietnamese Sea Guard vessels,” Tran Duy Hai, a Foreign Ministry official, told a news conference in Hanoi. “Chinese ships, with air support, sought to intimidate Vietnamese vessels. Water cannon was used,” he said.

The confrontation occurred just days after the Chinese state oil company Cnooc stationed the oil rig 120 nautical miles off the coast of Vietnam, in waters claimed by China and Vietnam. The placement of the rig led to protests and demands by Vietnam that it be withdrawn, and the deployment of a Vietnamese naval flotilla to the area.

China’s state councilor, Yang Jiechi, rebutted the criticisms in a telephone call on Tuesday with Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh of Vietnam. Mr. Yang said the rig was operating within Chinese waters, but Mr. Minh told the Chinese diplomat during the call that Vietnam would “take all suitable and necessary measures” to protect its rights and interests, according to the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry.

The incident is the latest chapter in territorial disputes involving China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia. Taiwan also claims swaths of the ocean. The disputes themselves are not new, but an increasingly powerful China with new military capabilities to reinforce its claims has caused ripples in the region over the last few years. China claims expansive areas of the sea, encompassed in a “nine-dash line” map that critics have said has no basis in international law.

In another flare-up, the authorities in the Philippines have detained the crew of a Chinese fishing vessel in a disputed area of the South China Sea, officials said.

The Chinese government initially said that it had “lost contact” with 11 fishermen in the area and reported that the crew had been taken away Tuesday morning by armed men, who had fired warning shots before boarding the vessel. But on Wednesday, China acknowledged that the crew had been detained by the Philippine authorities near the Spratly Islands.

A Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, said that China has called upon authorities in the Philippines to “immediately” release the fishermen, to “make rational explanations” of its actions and to “take no more provocative action,” the Xinhua news agency reported.

Relations between China and the Philippines have grown increasingly tense over the last year because of territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

The tensions are flaring at a time when the American and Philippine armed forces are engaged in joint military exercises in the region and just after Washington and Manila forged a new security agreement.

Dante Padilla, a senior inspector with the Maritime Group of the Philippine National Police, said Wednesday afternoon in a phone interview that in addition to the Chinese fishing vessel’s crew, several hundred sea turtles were seized by a Philippine National Police patrol boat during the operation, near Half Moon Shoal.

“From our initial reports, there was no resistance from the apprehended vessel, and no shots were fired,” he said.

Mr. Padilla said the fishing boat was being escorted to the Philippine city of Puerto Princesa, where charges of poaching will be filed against the fishermen. They could also face charges related to the protection of wildlife, he said.

Mr. Padilla added that it was not clear when the vessel would arrive in Peurto Princesa.

The Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs said later in a statement that the seizure of the boat “carrying large numbers of endangered species” was undertaken “to enforce maritime laws and uphold Philippine sovereignty rights over its E.E.Z.,” or exclusive economic zone.

NYT

# China Flexes Its Muscles in Dispute With Vietnam

By [JANE PERLEZ](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/p/jane_perlez/index.html) and [RICK GLADSTONE](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/g/rick_gladstone/index.html)MAY 8, 2014

Photo



After using water cannons on Vietnamese ships in disputed waters, Beijing demanded Thursday that they withdraw. Credit Vietnam Marine Guard, via Reuters

BEIJING — China’s escalating dispute with Vietnam over contested waters in the South China Sea sent new shudders through Asia on Thursday as China demanded the withdrawal of Vietnamese ships near a giant Chinese drilling rig and for the first time acknowledged its vessels had blasted the Vietnamese flotilla with water cannons in recent days.

While China characterized the use of water cannons as a form of restraint, it punctuated the increasingly muscular stance by the Chinese toward a growing number of Asian neighbors who fear they are vulnerable to bullying by China and its increasingly powerful military. The latest back-and-forth in the dispute with Vietnam — the most serious in the South China Sea in years — sent the Vietnamese stock market plunging on Thursday and elicited concern from a top American diplomat who was visiting Hanoi.

Political and economic historians said the China-Vietnam tensions signaled a hardening position by the Chinese over what they regard as their “core interest” in claiming sovereignty over a vastly widened swath of coastal waters that stretch from the Philippines and Indonesia north to Japan. In Chinese parlance, they say, “core interest” means there is no room for compromise.

“I find it quite alarming, because it was not so many years ago that there was a relatively tranquil relationship between China and its neighbors,” said Orville Schell, a China scholar who is the director of the Center on U.S.-China Relations at the Asia Society in New York.

“Now we have a picture that’s slowly pixelating, from Indonesia, to Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Japan, up the neighborhood,” Mr. Schell said in a telephone interview. “We begin to get a picture of stress and strain. This is not exactly the peaceful rise of China that we were advertised.”

While Mr. Schell said he did not necessarily foresee an armed conflict — a view echoed by others — he said the Chinese had “created a climate where it will be very hard for China to exist in this state of fraternal relations with its neighbors.”

The tensions with Vietnam began last week when a state-owned Chinese energy company moved the drilling rig into position in waters that Vietnam claims, and intensified this week as ships sent by both countries faced off.

On Thursday, a Chinese Foreign Ministry official said that Vietnamese ships had rammed Chinese vessels as many as 171 times over four days. The announcement followed accusations by Vietnam on Wednesday that Chinese ships had rammed its vessels early this week.

The Chinese say Vietnam has dispatched 35 ships to the area, while the Vietnamese say China has deployed about 80 vessels.

The movement of the drilling rig, analysts said, was among the most assertive steps China has taken to solidify claims over both the South China Sea, one of the world’s major trading routes, and the East China Sea.

In November, Beijing [declared an air defense zone](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/world/asia/china-warns-of-action-against-aircraft-over-disputed-seas.html) over a band of the East China Sea, including islands that both China and Japan claim, and demanded that other countries notify the Chinese authorities before their planes pass through the airspace. Although the United States military and Japanese aircraft flouted the demands, analysts have suggested the air defense zone helps China build a case for gaining control over the disputed islands, which Japan administers.

China also appears to have tightened its hold over a reef called Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, which the Philippines claims.

[[](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/25/world/asia/claims-south-china-sea.html)](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/25/world/asia/claims-south-china-sea.html)

## [Map: Territorial Disputes in the Waters Near China](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/25/world/asia/claims-south-china-sea.html)

The disputes have raised concerns in Washington, which has been trying to calibrate its response to the various territorial claims. The Obama administration has courted countries in Southeast Asia as a counterbalance to China’s power, but it has also been trying not to antagonize the Chinese.

On Thursday, the American assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, Daniel R. Russel, who was on a trip to Hanoi, said that the latest dispute had been a major topic of his discussions there.

“We oppose any act of intimidation by vessels, particularly in disputed areas,” he said. The United States did not take a position on the competing claims of sovereignty, he added, but the disputes need to be “dealt with diplomatically and must be dealt with in accordance to international laws.”

The conflicts center in part on a competition for natural resources, including what some believe are substantial deposits of oil and gas beneath the seabed. China has been particularly eager to find energy reserves to feed its growing industrial needs.

The oil rig in the South China Sea was stationed there by China National Offshore Oil Corporation, or Cnooc, 120 nautical miles off Vietnam.

Yi Xianliang, deputy director general of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs of China’s Foreign Ministry, who acknowledged Thursday that China had used water cannons, said, “They are the most gentle measure we can take when trying to keep the other side out.”

But he added that China’s oil drilling operations were legal because they were in “China’s inherent territory.”

China is prepared to negotiate with Vietnam to solve the dispute, Mr. Yi said, but first Vietnam must end its “disruption” and remove its vessels from the area near the rig. There have been 14 “rounds of communication” between the two sides in the past few days, Mr. Yi added.

In the past, Vietnam and China have resolved some disputes by holding talks, and Mr. Yi said that relations between the two countries had improved in recent years. But the latest conflict has unsettled Vietnam and contributed on Thursday to a 5.9 percent drop in the country’s key stock market index, its biggest one-day decline in 13 years.

The oil rig is about 17 nautical miles from disputed islands known in the West as the Paracels, in Vietnam as the Hoang Sa and in China as the Xisha. Dennis C. McCornac, a professor at Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore, said China’s assertiveness was partly aimed at a domestic audience, and that Beijing’s leaders were not interested in fighting with Vietnam.

“I think China and Vietnam have a lot of economic interests that are tied to each other,” he said. “I can’t see a war. That doesn’t make sense for anyone.”

NYT

# China’s Monroe Doctrine

MAY 8, 2014

HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam — In the new edition of his classic “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,” John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago makes a powerful case for the inevitability of war in Asia as [China](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/china/index.html?inline=nyt-geo) rises:

“My argument in a nutshell is that if China continues to grow economically, it will attempt to dominate Asia the way the United States dominates the Western Hemisphere. The United States, however, will go to enormous lengths to prevent China from achieving regional hegemony. Most of Beijing’s neighbors, including India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Russia and Vietnam, will join with the United States to contain Chinese power. The result will be an intense security competition with considerable potential for war.”

This is the core strategic question of the 21st century. History is not rich in peaceful transitions of power from one hegemon to another. China needs resources. It will seek them near and far — and find America in its path. As with the Soviet Union, but without the ideological conflict, the issue will be whether the evident potential for a conflagration can be finessed through alliances or forestalled through the specter of mutual assured destruction.

The seeds of conflict are evident. On his recent visit to Asia, President Obama made clear how the tensions between Japan and China over the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands to Beijing) could draw in the United States. His declaration that the Japan-administered rocks in the East China Sea “fall within the scope of Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security” incensed China, which claims the islands. Mind your own business and get over the Cold War was the essence of the Chinese message to Washington.

Vietnam and China also have maritime conflicts that have flared in recent days as a result of a Chinese decision to place an [oil](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/energy-environment/oil-petroleum-and-gasoline/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) rig in the South China Sea. Chinese ships escorting the rig rammed and fired water cannons at Vietnamese vessels attempting to stop the move in potentially oil- and gas-rich waters claimed by Hanoi.

The U.S. response in support of Vietnam, its erstwhile enemy turned pivot-to-Asia partner, was firm: “China’s decision to introduce an oil rig accompanied by numerous government vessels for the first time in waters disputed with Vietnam is provocative and raises tensions,” Jen Psaki, a State Department spokeswoman, said in a statement. “This unilateral action appears to be part of a broader pattern of Chinese behavior to advance its claims over disputed territory in a manner that undermines peace and stability in the region.”

China is asserting sovereignty in the South China Sea, angering the Philippines and Vietnam. Its actions appear to vindicate Mearsheimer, who writes that a more powerful China can “be expected to try to push the United States out of the Asia-Pacific region, much as the United States pushed the European great powers out of the Western Hemisphere in the nineteenth century. We should expect China to devise its own version of the Monroe Doctrine” — the 19th century keep-out-of-this-hemisphere message of the United States to Europe.

The push here in Vietnam to hedge against China by strengthening ties with the United States is evident. The “comprehensive partnership” announced last year indicates how far the wounds of war have healed. Cooperation extends across trade, investment, education (Vietnam is the eighth-largest provider of foreign students to the United States) and defense areas. The proposed trade agreement known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership in which Vietnam would be a participant (but not China) is luring manufacturing investment from China. So are lower wages. A joint U.S. exercise with the Vietnamese navy was recently conducted.

Vietnam looks at virtually everything through the lens of relations with China. The fraternity of one-party communist systems is seen as insufficient insurance against vassal state status. France and the United States were latecomers to this corner of Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese creation story is one of a 1,000-year struggle to free itself from Chinese rule. So Vietnam looks to the United States as its offshore balancer.

Other smaller Asian nations will do the same as China rises. These American alliances, if firm, could be powerful deterrents to war. Economic interdependence, which did not exist during the Cold War standoff, could also prevent conflict. Competitive cooperation is a possible scenario. The Chinese seem bent on peaceful development, at least for now; harmony is at the core of the national vocabulary. But then Deng Xiaoping famously counseled: “Hide our capacities and bide our time.”

The Vietnamese pivot to the United States demonstrates how real its fears of China are. The little naval battle being fought around a Chinese rig suggests they have cause. The Mearsheimer prediction is not inevitable, as he acknowledges, but it is plausible. American retrenchment would make it more so. Rising hegemons seize on weakness when they see it. Deterrence is far preferable to war.

NYT

# Q & A: M. Taylor Fravel on China’s Dispute With Vietnam

By [EDWARD WONG](http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/author/edward-wong/)

May 8, 2014, 11:19 pm

ReutersA Chinese Coast Guard ship used water cannon on a Vietnamese Sea Guard vessel near the Paracels Islands on May 4.

The [long-simmering territorial dispute](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/31/world/asia/31beijing.html) between China and Vietnam in the South China Sea had one of its [periodic eruptions](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/09/world/asia/china-and-vietnam.html?ref=world&_r=0) this week, as Vietnamese vessels confronted Chinese ships that are trying to place an oil rig near [the disputed Paracel Islands](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/05/world/asia/05hanoi.html) and off Vietnam’s coast. The rig is run by China National Offshore Oil Corporation, or Cnooc, and lies just 120 nautical miles off the main coastline of Vietnam. Chinese ships have fired water cannons at the Vietnamese vessels, and both sides have said their ships have been rammed by opposing forces. The Chinese military fought with units from South Vietnam over the southern Paracels in 1974, which led to China taking over the islands, though they remain uninhabited.

A United States State Department spokeswoman said on Tuesday that “given the recent history of tensions in the South China Sea, China’s decision to operate its oil rig in disputed waters is provocative and unhelpful to the maintenance of peace and stability in the region.”

On Thursday, [M. Taylor Fravel](http://www.taylorfravel.com), an associate professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, answered questions from The New York Times on the latest events off the coast of Vietnam. He studies China’s territorial issues and is the author of [“Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes,](http://press.princeton.edu/titles/8782.html)” published by Princeton University Press. He posts on these issues on Twitter under [@fravel](https://twitter.com/fravel).

Q.

**Why is China trying to place an oil rig at this time in this location?**

A.

The most likely reason is political and not economic. Economically, the area where the rig will drill has few proven or [probable hydrocarbon reserves](http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=10651). Moreover, the rig, which cost $1 billion to build, is extremely expensive to operate on a daily basis, which begs the questions why Cnooc would explore in an area with uncertain prospects.

Instead, China is most likely using the rig to assert and exercise its jurisdiction over the waters it claims in the South China Sea. In light of President Obama’s recent trip to the region, including visits to two states with claims in the SCS, Malaysia and the Philippines, China may also be seeking to test the renewed U.S. resolve to “pivot” to Asia.

Nevertheless, the timing of China’s action is puzzling. Next week, Asean will hold its annual summit in Burma. China’s action ensures that its behavior in the South China Sea will be a key topic discussed at that meeting and that greater international attention will be focused on its claims in the region. More generally, in the past few years, China and Vietnam have improved their relations and managed their maritime disputes peacefully. They reached an agreement on basic principles for resolving maritime disputes in October 2011, established several hotlines and formed working groups on maritime demarcation and joint development.

Q.

**Given what has occurred in the last week and the history of the struggle between China and Vietnam over the Paracels, could this situation escalate into a more intense or larger conflict?**

A.

The risk of escalation is real. Offshore oil and gas play an important role in Vietnam’s economy. This gives Hanoi a strong incentive to deter China from operating within Vietnam’s 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) even if this particular area may not hold large reserves. The proximity to both countries facilitates the deployment of naval forces and government maritime law enforcement forces. The prospect of many ships jostling for control of a small area increases opportunities for miscalculations and collisions that could escalate into armed conflict.

In the past few years, Vietnam has demonstrated a willingness to use its government ships to challenge what it views as assertive Chinese behavior threatening its interests. In 2007, Vietnam sought to prevent China from conducting a seismic survey in waters near the Paracel Islands, north of where the rig is located. In 2010, Vietnamese vessels surrounded a Chinese patrol ship from the Bureau of Fisheries Administration in disputed waters. Now, the stakes are even higher for Vietnam, which suggests it may choose to continue with efforts to prevent China’s rig from commencing drilling operations.

Q.

**On what basis does China argue that the placement of this rig is within its legal rights?**

A.

China claims sovereignty over the Paracel Islands (Xisha in Chinese and Hoang Sa in Vietnamese). Mirroring Japan’s position on the Senkaku Islands, China maintains that no dispute exists with Vietnam over these islands. China has controlled the northern portion of the Paracels since the mid-1950s and the southern portion since 1974, when it clashed with South Vietnamese forces. According to China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the rig’s activities are occurring “[within waters](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-05/07/c_133317025.htm) off China’s Xisha islands.”

The rig itself is located roughly 17 nautical miles south of Triton Island, the southwestern-most land feature in the Paracels. In 1996, China drew baselines around the entire Paracel archipelago. Based on a 1998 law, China claims from such baselines a 200-nautical-mile EEZ under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos) in which it has the sole right to exploit any maritime resources from such baselines. The location of the rig falls within such an EEZ based on China’s claim to sovereignty over the Paracels.

Q.

**Does Vietnam have a legitimate case that the placement of the Chinese oil rig violates Vietnam’s territorial sovereignty or is an action done in bad faith given the disputed nature of the Paracels?**

A.

Vietnam objects to the location of the rig for two reasons. First, the rig is located within an EEZ that Vietnam claims from its own coastline. The rig is approximately 120 nautical miles from Vietnam’s Ly Son Island and thus on Vietnam’s continental shelf and well within a 200-nautical-mile EEZ.

Second, Vietnam claims sovereignty over the Paracels and contests China’s position that no dispute exists. Although Vietnam has not drawn baselines around the Paracels, it does reject Chinese claims to sovereignty over the islands and jurisdiction over the adjacent waters. In Vietnam’s view, China’s rig is located in Vietnamese waters and China has no basis for drilling in this location.

Q.

**What has been the position of the United States on territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and how do you think it will or should react in this case?**

A.

The U.S. policy is to not take a position on the sovereignty of the land features in the South China Sea, including the Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands. At the same time, the United States has underscored its key interests in the region, including freedom of navigation, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the avoidance of coercion and intimidation in the disputes. To support peaceful resolution, the United States has urged China and Asean to reach a binding code of conduct and supports the use of international arbitration, such as the case the Philippines recently filed before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

In response to this event, the United States should call on all parties to not take unilateral actions in clearly disputed waters. The United States can also highlight that the incident underscores the need for a code of conduct to manage the potential for escalation and avoid such incidents in the future. Finally, the United States could urge all parties to devise mechanisms for joint development that might prevent such incidents from occurring in the future.

Q.

**How do you think other Southeast Asian nations that also have claims to parts of the South China Sea will react to these latest actions by China?**

A.

China’s action can only harden the perception among other states with claims in the South China Sea that China harbors aggressive intentions and preference for unilateral action. In particular, China’s deployment of the rig will redouble the resolve of these states to do what they can to defend their own claims. These states will likely invest in greater naval and maritime law enforcement capabilities and seek to enhance maritime security cooperation with the United States and Japan, among others, and perhaps with each other.

Q.

**How committed is China to using the “nine dashes” in the Republican-era map as the basis for its territorial claims in the South China Sea?**

A.

Although the nine-dashed line has appeared on Chinese maps for decades, China has maintained a curious silence on the meaning of the line. China has never stated what the line depicts, either positively or negatively. The line could represent a claim to sovereignty over the enclosed land features or it could be much more expansive and represent a claim to an EEZ or historic rights (both of which would be inconsistent with Unclos.)

Within China, disagreement exists over how to define the line. Nevertheless, Chinese actions in the past few years, such as protecting fishermen in the southern reaches of the South China Sea or inviting foreign oil companies to invest in exploration blocks off the coast of Vietnam, indicate that China may favor a more expansive definition.

Regarding China’s claims to sovereignty over the Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands, China asserts that the nine-dashed line, which was officially published in the late 1940s, provides support for their claim to these land features.

# NYT

# China Offers Its Side of Story in Sea Dispute With Vietnam

By [BREE FENG](http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/author/bree-feng/)

May 8, 2014, 11:14 am

/Vietnam Coast Guard, via Associated Press

China acknowledged on Thursday it had used a water cannon against Vietnamese vessels in a dispute in the South China Sea, but denied that Chinese Navy ships were present.

At a special briefing to present its side of the case in the dispute over Beijing operating a new deep water oil rig in waters claimed by both China and Vietnam, a Foreign Ministry official said: “Water cannons are the most gentle measure we can take in trying to keep the other side out.”

The official, Yi Xianliang, deputy director general of the department of boundary and ocean affairs, said China had dispatched government and civilian vessels to the area, not military, and he dismissed a question from a reporter about whether Chinese Navy boats were present as “unprofessional.” He declined to say how many ships China had dispatched.

Mr. Yi said that Vietnam had taken the offensive. “Between May 3 and May 7, Vietnam has dispatched 35 ships that have rammed Chinese vessels 171 times,” he said. “Chinese ships are government ships. Vietnam ships are armed.”

Vietnam insists that China was at fault.

Last week, the Chinese state oil company CNOOC began setting up the oil rig 120 nautical miles off the coast of Vietnam, in waters claimed by both China and Vietnam. The placement of the rig led to protests and demands by Vietnam that it be withdrawn, and the deployment of a Vietnamese naval flotilla to the area.

“On May 4, Chinese ships intentionally rammed two Vietnamese Sea Guard vessels,” Tran Duy Hai, a Foreign Ministry official, said at a news conference on Wednesday in Hanoi, Vietnam. “Chinese ships, with air support, sought to intimidate Vietnamese vessels.”

Mr. Yi said that China was trying to “keep maximum restraint” in the dispute, but also said “we cannot tolerate the undermining of the safety of our personnel or the operation.”

On the question of territory, Mr. Yi was defiant, insisting that the oil rig was located inside the line in the South China Sea that China had said defines its territorial waters. He said the islands near the oil rig, known internationally as the Paracel — and known as the Xisha in China and as the Hoang Sa in Vietnam — were indisputedly Chinese.

Moreover, the location of the oil rig was 17 nautical miles from Xisha and 150 nautical miles from Vietnam, he said. “Which is the closer? I think the international community can make its own judgment.”

But critics of China’s territorial line, which encompasses about 80 percent of the South China Sea and covers trading routes that carry about one-third of the world’s cargo, say it has no basis in international law.

The United States assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific, Daniel R. Russel, said in Hanoi on Thursday that he had stressed Washington’s concerns about the “dangerous conduct and intimidation by vessels” during a meeting with senior Vietnamese officials.

“It’s fair to say both Vietnam and China have rights to claim sovereignty over the Paracels,” Mr. Russel said. “It is not for the U.S. to say which position is stronger. It’s within the rights of the United States and the international community to call all parties to address the dispute in a peaceful way.”

At the Beijing briefing, the chief executive of China Oil Field Services, Li Yong, said he was concerned about the well-being of the Chinese workers on the oil rig, and called on the Vietnamese to stop ramming Chinese ships for the sake of the workers’ safety. He declined to give the number of Chinese workers on the rig.

Despite the tense standoff between China and Vietnam, Chinese news media focused their South China Sea coverage on Thursday on a separate quarrel between China and the Philippines.

The Philippines detained 11 Chinese fisherman on Wednesday in the southern Spratly Islands for allegedly poaching protected turtles, the same day Vietnam released video footage of the Chinese ships using water cannons. Both state-controlled media and more commercial news portals focused on the fate of the Chinese fishermen. Some published detailed graphics of the disputed islands where the crew was detained, while others discussed various protected species of turtles around the world.

The dispute with Vietnam was largely ignored, suggesting Beijing is keen to control the message regarding the dispute with what state media call an “old friend.”

Still, one of China’s leading experts on the South China Sea, Wu Shicun, said that China would stand firm this time, and not back down as it had in 1994 when CNOOC abandoned a joint exploration process with the American company Crestone Energy after Vietnam protested.

“I think Vietnam will continue to harass China and hype the incident,” said Mr. Wu, president of the National Institute for South China Seas Studies. “But this time China will not act the same as 20 years ago. We will continue our resource development, no matter how much you protest.”