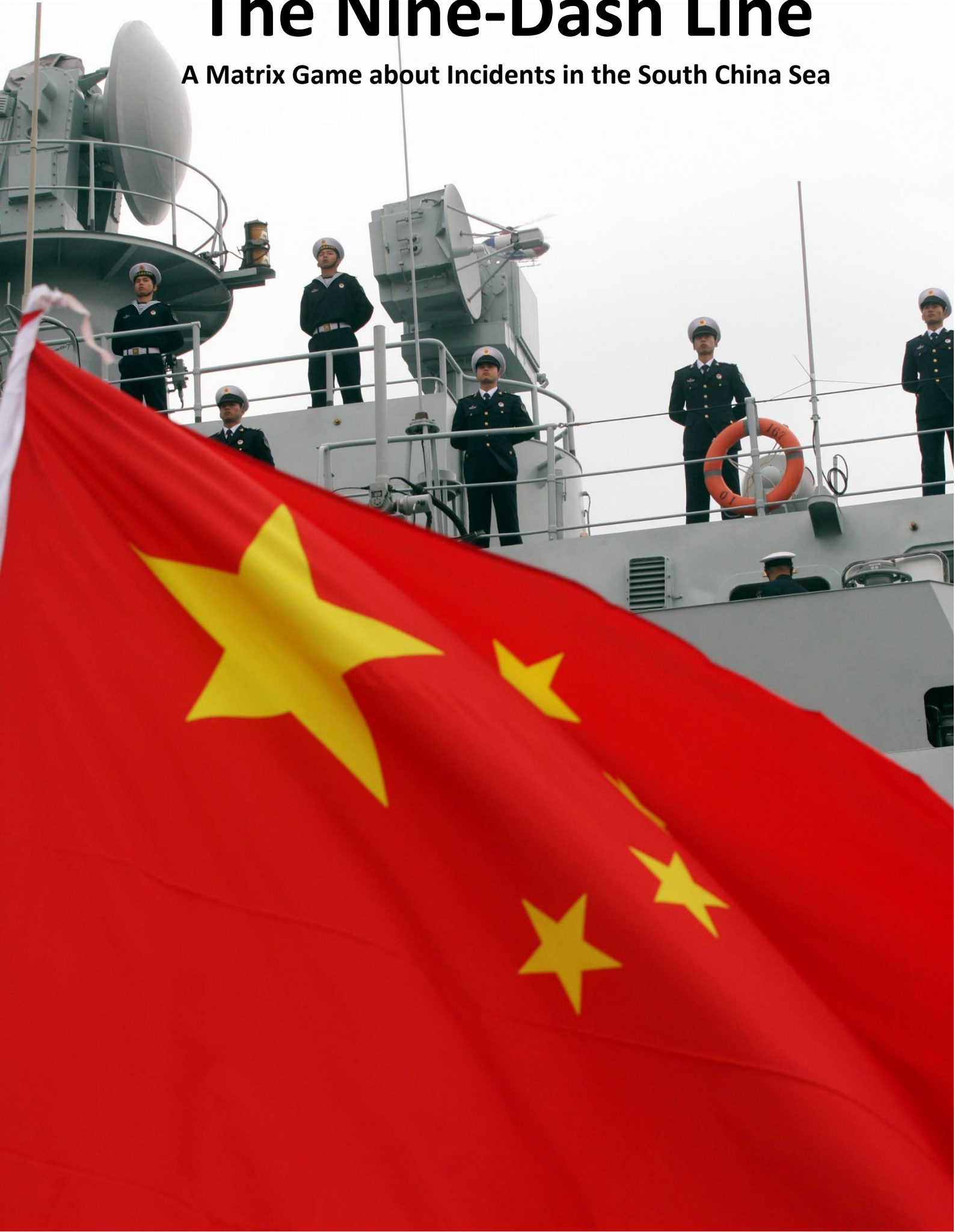


# The Nine-Dash Line

A Matrix Game about Incidents in the South China Sea



# **The Nine-Dash Line**

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## **Background.**

Rival countries have wrangled over territory in the South China Sea for centuries, but tension has steadily increased in recent years. China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei all have competing claims.

China has backed its expansive claims with island-building and naval patrols. The US says it does not take sides in territorial disputes, but has sent military ships and planes near disputed islands, calling them "freedom of navigation" operations to ensure access to key shipping and air routes.

All sides have accused each other of "militarising" the South China Sea and there are fears that the area is becoming a flashpoint, with potentially serious global consequences.

## **What is the argument about?**

It is a dispute over territory and sovereignty over ocean areas, with the Paracels and the Spratlys - two island chains claimed in whole or in part by a number of countries, being the most disputed areas.

Alongside the fully fledged islands, there are dozens of rocky outcrops, atolls, sandbanks and reefs, such as the Scarborough Shoal.

## **Why are they worth arguing over?**

Although largely uninhabited, the Paracels and the Spratlys may have reserves of natural resources around them. There has been little detailed exploration of the area, so estimates are largely extrapolated from the mineral wealth of neighbouring areas.

The sea is also a major shipping route and home to fishing grounds that supply the livelihoods of people across the region. Japan, in particular, depends on shipping travelling this route.

## **Who claims what?**

China claims by far the largest portion of territory - an area defined by the "nine-dash line" which stretches hundreds of miles south and east from its most southerly province of Hainan. Beijing says its right to the area goes back centuries to when the Paracel and Spratly island chains were regarded as integral parts of the Chinese nation, and in 1947 it issued a map detailing its claims. It showed the two island groups falling entirely within its territory. These claims are mirrored by Taiwan.

However, critics say China has not clarified its claims sufficiently - and that the nine-dash line that appears on Chinese maps encompassing almost the entirety of the South China Sea includes no coordinates. It is also not clear whether China claims only land territory within the nine-dash line, or all the territorial waters within the line as well.

Vietnam hotly disputes China's historical account, saying China had never claimed sovereignty over the islands before the 1940s. Vietnam says it has actively ruled over both the Paracels and the Spratlys since the 17th Century - and has the documents to prove it.

The other major claimant in the area is the Philippines, which invokes its geographical proximity to the Spratly Islands as the main basis of its claim for part of the grouping.

Both the Philippines and China lay claim to the Scarborough Shoal (known as Huangyan Island in China) - a little more than 100 miles (160km) from the Philippines and 500 miles from China.

Malaysia and Brunei also lay claim to territory in the South China Sea that they say falls within their economic exclusion zones, as defined by UNCLOS - the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Brunei does not claim any of the disputed islands, but Malaysia claims a small number of islands in the Spratlys.

### **Recent flashpoints**

The most serious trouble in recent decades has flared between Vietnam and China, and there have also been stand-offs between the Philippines and China. Some of the incidents include:

- In 1974 the Chinese seized the Paracels from Vietnam, killing more than 70 Vietnamese troops.
- In 1988 the two sides clashed in the Spratlys, with Vietnam again coming off worse, losing about 60 sailors.
- In early 2012, China and the Philippines engaged in a lengthy maritime stand-off, accusing each other of intrusions in the Scarborough Shoal.
- Unverified claims that the Chinese navy sabotaged two Vietnamese exploration operations in late 2012 led to large anti-China protests on Vietnam's streets.
- In January 2013, Manila said it was taking China to a UN tribunal under the auspices of the UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea, to challenge its claims.
- In May 2014, the introduction by China of a drilling rig into waters near the Paracel Islands led to multiple collisions between Vietnamese and Chinese ships.

### **Have they tried to reach a resolution?**

China prefers bilateral negotiations with the other parties. But many of its neighbours argue that China's relative size and clout give it an unfair advantage.

Some countries have argued that China should negotiate with ASEAN (the Association of South East Asian Nations), a 10-member regional grouping that consists of Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia. However, China is opposed to this, while ASEAN is also divided over how to resolve the dispute.

The Philippines has sought international arbitration instead. In 2013, it announced it would take China to an arbitration tribunal under the auspices of the UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea, to challenge its claims. In July 2016, the tribunal backed the Philippines' case, saying China had violated the Philippines' sovereign rights. China boycotted the proceedings, calling the ruling "ill-founded" and stating that they will not be bound by it.

# Matrix Games

## What are Matrix Games?

Matrix games are different to normal Wargames. In most of those games you compare lists of statistics and peer at complicated books of rules containing someone else's idea about what things are important, before rolling a dice. It takes a long time and can be very difficult to explain to a newcomer. Instead, in a Matrix Game you simply use words to describe why something should happen, the Umpire or the players (or both) decide how likely it is and you roll a dice. If you can say "This happens, for the following reasons..." you can play a Matrix Game.

## Where did they come from?

The Chris Engle Matrix Game was created in the USA by Chris Engle, and published in 1992. Chris wanted to create a system by which it was possible for a player to "role-play" anything from a single person to an entire country. Chris felt that previous numbers-ridden game designs essentially missed the point (and anyway were too complicated and boring). What he wanted was a system that could take into account anything the players thought was relevant, including intangible elements such as culture, beliefs, and perceptions of themselves.

Taking as his starting point the work of the philosopher Emmanuel Kant, Chris began to develop a "matrix" of cue words that would form the framework for his "model". To this he added George Hegel's idea that argument and counter-argument (thesis and antithesis) lead to a synthesis or consensus of ideas.

Thus the basic idea of the Matrix Game was formulated. Over the years the actual "matrix" of cue words has been dropped, but the name has stuck. Like all good ideas, the Matrix Game is very simple in concept, but has huge potential in that it can be adapted to fit any game setting. Matrix Games have been used by the UK MOD with the Unmanned Underwater Vehicle capability, education of Consultants in UK MOD Procurement systems and in the preparation by HQ ARRC for the deployment into Bosnia. They have even been used by the US DOD.

## Game arguments

In a Matrix Game, actions are resolved by a structured sequence of logical "arguments". Each player takes turns to make an argument, with successful arguments advancing the game, and the player's position. There are a number of ways you can do this and each has their own strengths and weaknesses, some of the most popular are:

- The "Three Reasons" system.
- The "Pros and Cons" system.
- The "simple narrative" system.

You just need to experiment to find which system best suits your circumstances, player audience and style of play.

## **The "Three Reasons" System**

In this system each argument is broken down into:

- Something That Happens.
- Three Reasons Why or How.

For Example:

In a Peninsular War campaign, Wellington might argue:

I shall fortify the town, and I am able to do this because:

- I have a ready source of trained manpower.
- I have an experienced Engineer in command.
- The British Government has recently sent me the money with which to pay for the work.

The arguments themselves are judged by the Umpire based on inherent likelihood, historical precedence, personal experience, and his own judgement (and quite often the other player's judgement), and a chance of success arrived at (percentage dice normally being thrown to see if the result was achieved, but you could use any combination of dice or random number generator that you like – or the Umpire decides based on military judgement and the justice of the circumstances).

The advantage of this system is that it works well where there are a number of teams of players and you have a strong central Umpire. You have to be careful, however, that other players don't interrupt or heckle with a reason why these arguments might not work - that is the role of the Umpire. Of course, if it turns out that one of the players is more knowledgeable about the situation than the Umpire, the Umpire can lose credibility and the game becomes less effective.

## **The "Pros and Cons" System**

In this system each argument is broken down into:

- Something That Happens.
- A Number of Reasons Why it Might Happen.
- A Number of Reasons Why it Might NOT Happen.

For Example:

In a Peninsular War campaign, Wellington might argue:

I shall fortify the town, and I am able to do this because:

- I have a ready source of trained manpower.
- I have an experienced Engineer in command.
- The British Government has recently sent me the money with which to pay for the work .
- The weather is fine so they can work interrupted.

This represents 4 x Pros - so at this point the other players are invited to point out Cons:

- The best source of trained manpower is the British regular troops, but these are on the frontier guarding the approaches. The Portuguese troops are less well trained or led so the first reason is weak.
- The weather is hot and there is little access to fresh water so there is a high chance of disease.

This represents 2 x Cons (or 1 x Con and cancels out 1 x Pro) - so at this point there is a net result of +2 Pros.

The overall argument is then adjudicated by taking 3 x D6 with a base chance of 10+ (this is an exact 50% probability - as, without any evidence for or against the outcome, the chance is even that it may or may not happen). So, in this case, we would roll 3xD6 and add 2 to the result, trying to score more than 10.

The advantage of this system is that you formalise the Pros and Cons of an argument and the role of the Umpire becomes that of ensuring that the Pros and Cons carry equal weight - perhaps making compelling reasons worth two Pros and two or three weaker reasons against only worth one Con. You need to ensure you don't end up with a list of trivial reasons or the player re-stating a reason already accepted in a slightly different way in a desperate attempt to gain points. One very useful product of this system is that it provides reasons for failure should the dice roll not succeed. In this case the two major failure outcomes would be shoddy work by lazy and untrained conscripts or work incomplete due to disease reducing the number of personnel. You can also more easily run the game with very knowledgeable players.

Personally, I like to have a "narrative bias" in the games I run, making the base success chance of 7+ on 2 x D6 (which is a 58% chance). This also has a significant increase / decrease in success probabilities for each point, which I use to encourage players to come up with a few good reasons, rather than a laundry list of lots of trivial ones.

This system is also very good with students when considering tactical problems in a syndicate wargame and I would recommend it as the most preferred way of adjudicating Matrix Games.

### **The "Simple Narrative" System**

In this system an argument simply consists of a narrative that advances the player's position in the game. The player states what happens next in the evolving story that is the current situation. The chances of success or failure and exactly what those results look like are judged by an Umpire or, more usually, by another player taking it in turns.

The advantage of this system is that it is extremely simple and accessible to players of all ages and abilities. The disadvantage is that it lacks structure and, if you get the players to assign the chance of success, you could get inconsistent and arbitrary results.

### **Notes about arguments**

The important thing to remember in a Matrix game is that arguments can be made about anything that is relevant to the scenario. You can argue about your own troops or about the enemy, the existence of people, places, things or events, the political leadership back home, the weather, plague, disease, public opinion, and you can even argue for changes in whatever rules you are using. With a bit of imagination, common sense and rational thinking, it is possible

to present persuasive arguments as to what should happen in any scenario - from traditional military campaigns to the strange world of defence procurement.

When an argument succeeds it remains in effect until another argument stops it. This means that if you are Napoleon and succeed in arguing that you march on Moscow, you will continue to move forward, every turn, until you get there - unless of course someone argues that you don't...

Optional Rule: If your argument fails to succeed, you get a "Fail Chit". This is retained and can be used at a later stage in the game to re-roll your dice (if the score wasn't what you wanted). This helps balance the game and prevent an unlucky player getting placed at a big disadvantage early in the game and being demoralised.

If two arguments are in direct opposition ("This happens" - "No it doesn't") they represent a Logical Inconsistency since they cannot both be true. The earlier argument has already happened, so it is impossible for it not to have happened. The later player may argue that the event is reversed, but this tends to make for a poor narrative in the game and should be discouraged (see Playing Tips below).

### **Resolving Conflicts**

If two sides are placed in direct Conflict, they resolve the outcome by making additional arguments. The players both make arguments as to the outcome of the Conflict situation they are in, and the strength of the arguments is decided upon by the Umpire. I usually allow the player with an advantage to choose who should go first (no Conflict situations are every really equal - but if you felt they were, you could make the players write their arguments down in secret).

They then both roll the dice, together, to see who succeeds. In a Conflict situation, one side must succeed and one side must fail. If both succeed, or both fail, they must both roll again, and again, until one succeeds and the other fails.

### **For Example:**

So if one player makes an argument that he is attacking the town with his troops and the other player makes an argument that he is improving the defences, the arguments are judged normally. If the attack argument fails, the attack does not take place at that time, and there is no conflict. If instead one player argued he was attacking, and the other player argued that the attacker ran away, it would be a Logical Inconsistency (since they both can't be true) and would be resolved in turn order.

If the attack argument succeeds, a Conflict situation will be inevitable, but if the defender's argument about improving the defences succeeds, he might have an advantage in the ensuing battle. Let's say that his argument does not succeed because the Umpire judged that he really didn't have sufficient time to get the work done, made the argument Weak, and it failed. The attacking player elects to go first and argues that he captures the town. The other player argues that he is repulsed with heavy losses. They then both dice to see who wins, with the likelihood that the defender will have to roll higher, because the town's defences were not what they could have been.

## **Comments on Resolving Conflicts**

This may seem a little arbitrary and all dependent on a good Umpire but, in practice, it works very well. When a player makes a particularly good argument it is obvious, normally from the rueful grins and grudging nods of the opposition, that he will have a good chance of succeeding.

Playing Tips

Some players get caught in the Logical Inconsistency trap by arguing directly against another player who has already had a successful argument. This puts them at a disadvantage because, not only has their argument got to succeed, but they then have to roll off against the other player. It is far better to be a little more subtle. If he succeeds in arguing that he attacks you, you might argue that the attack does indeed take place, but was ill-timed and badly coordinated - which might place you in an advantage in the resulting battle.

It helps the players to insist on an argument always failing if you roll very poorly. Nothing is ever certain, and the player can look on it as not necessarily a total failure, but simply that it didn't happen at that time. It might happen later, if they argue again.

Conversely, you will need to veto stupid or trivial arguments. I simply say that I don't believe the argument is realistic and give them a chance to come up with something else.

## **Secret arguments**

There will be some cases where you want to hide from the other players the thing you want to argue about. It could be that you have booby trapped a piece of equipment you think your opponent will use, or that you have swapped the vital blueprints for a set of fake ones in case the safe is broken into. In this case you simply write down your argument on a piece of paper, and present it to the Umpire announcing to the other players that you are making a secret argument. The Umpire will make a judgment and you will roll the dice normally, but the other players have no idea what it is about.

You should be careful, however, that the players don't make too many secret arguments. This can ruin the game's atmosphere and reduce the focus, so that the game drags on unnecessarily. They must only be permitted when they refer to quite specific things or events. An argument about gathering information from a spy, in most games, will be quite a generic argument and should be argued openly. Similarly Arguing about the placement of an IED to catch forces moving down a route should be made openly as the results will take effect the same turn. It is only really for secret things you need to establish several turn in advance.

You may want to limit the players to only a single secret argument per game.

## **Big Projects**

Depending on the level of the game, some actions and events represent such a large investment in time and effort that they require multiple arguments in order to bring them to fruition. In a Spy Game, recruiting a spy would take a number of arguments in order to make the spy do everything you want them to. You must make the initial contact, followed by persuasion to carry out a minor act (like stealing a copy of the Pentagon telephone directory), and followed by more important spying actions (like photographing secret plans). It would be



unreasonable to argue in a Spy Game that you recruit a girl from the typing pool to assassinate the head of the CIA in a single argument.

The level of the game will determine what sort of arguments are Big Projects, so in a game about Wellington's action in the Peninsular War a single argument about fortifying a town would be perfectly reasonable. In a game about individual Refugees in Bosnia, building a house might take several successful arguments. A Matrix Game can easily be at the Strategic level involving the actions of Governments and Countries; or equally at the Individual level involving the actions of you and your close friends.

As a rule of thumb, a Big Project should take no more than 3 successful arguments; otherwise the game is dominated too much by a single event. You should also remember the principal that once an argument has started an ongoing action, it will continue until another argument stops it.

This means that the 3 stages in, for example, building a house could logically be:

- Acquiring the funds (Can I get a mortgage?).
- Starting to build the house (When will the right builder be available?).
- Completing the building of the house (Are they ever going to finish it?).

### **Killing arguments**

It often arises in Matrix Games where one of the players argues that something happens to kill off one of the other player characters. This is, of course, permitted as you can argue about anything in a Matrix Game, and it will be assessed like any other argument. It may well be less likely to succeed as the player characters in the game are usually chosen from the survivors of a particular historical event, but it is not impossible - nor should it be.

If a character is killed off in a game, however, it does not prevent the player from continuing to make arguments.

### **Player Roles and the Level of the Game**

When you are designing a Matrix Game it is worth thinking about the level at which the player's roles will be operating in the game. It is usually better, and produces a more balanced game, when the level on which the player roles are operating are broadly similar. It would be difficult to get a balanced game if 3 of the players are playing Generals in command of vast Armies, and another player is playing a simple individual soldier.

### **Levels of Protection and Hidden Things**

At the start of a game there are certain things that are not readily accessible to some of the player characters. For example, in a Cyber-Security Game the secret plans for a new submarine would be heavily protected. Equally, in an X-Files game, the location of the secret government base would be carefully concealed.

Things that are hidden or secret require a successful argument merely to find them. Things that are protected will require successful arguments to overcome the different levels of protection.

A secret government base may be declared by the Umpire to have 3 levels of protection: its hidden location, its boundary fence, and the security guards, all of which must be overcome by successful arguments before the base can be penetrated.

### **Having Battles and Fighting**

Many players feel uneasy about the concept of the result of a single argument (and dice roll) deciding the outcome of a battle or a fight. This is natural, but they should remember that the Matrix Game is about the entire campaign and it is the results of many battles or fights, rather than a single one, that is important.

It is up to the umpire to decide exactly what the outcome of the battle or fight was. He will make a judgement, depending on the strength of the arguments and the difference in the score on the two dice rolls, as to how heavy the defeat was or just how narrow was the margin of victory. If the outcome was very close, the loser may have an opportunity to withdraw in his next turn with most of his forces intact.

### **More information**

More information and a book about Matrix Games can be found at:

<https://paxsims.wordpress.com/tag/matrix-games/>

<http://www.wargaming.co/books/innovations/homepage.htm>

The original Chris Engle Matrix Game site is here: <http://hamsterpress.net/> .

A very good website that has developed the Pros and Cons system: "The Open Ended Machine" is here: <http://theopenendedmachine.blogspot.co.uk/>.



# The Nine-Dash Line

**Order of Play:** The order of play is as follows:

1. China.
2. Taiwan.
3. Vietnam.
4. Philippines.
5. Malaysia.
6. USA.

**Turn Length:** Each turn represents about a month of real time.

**Random Events:** Shuffle the random event cards and draw one card at the start of a turn.

**Escalation:** Arguments should be resolved using 2 D6 with a base of 7+ to succeed:

- When a double 6 is rolled for an argument an additional escalatory event happens (such as your patrol vessel rides off another (random) Actor's patrol vessel).
- When a double 1 is rolled for an argument an additional bad even happens (your patrol vessel is ridden off by another (random) Actor) making you look bad in the media.



## **Briefings:**

The briefings should be read and studied carefully, then the players should generate a number of pithy bullet point aims for their Actor that summarise what they are trying to achieve. This will help focus the game properly, allow the Umpire to check if the players understood the briefing, and to assist in the post-game review.

## China:

China's aggressive posture toward the South China Sea has been stirring tensions in the region, and a new national security law suggests that Beijing is just getting started. The new law calls for security to be maintained in all fields, including culture, education, and cyberspace. Moreover, as reported by The New York Times, the law's passage indicates that there has also been a meaningful shift in how Chinese leaders view their country's "core interests."

In years past, China's core interests were believed to mean specific and limited territorial matters, such as those regarding Taiwan and Tibet, that the communist country determined to be internal matters. The new law is reportedly an indication that the "core interests" have been stretched.

Chinese and foreign officials and scholars began debating whether the South China Sea was now a core interest – and under the new definition it is. If the shipping channels and islands of the South China Sea are now counted as "core interests" by China, then it is likely to continue to push for greater control over the sea and the \$5 trillion in shipping that passes through it each year.

US officials, for their part, have repudiated China's posture toward the region. "As China seeks to make sovereign land out of sandcastles and redraw maritime boundaries, it is eroding regional trust and undermining investor confidence," said US Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken in late May.

In recent months, Chinese ships have clashed with vessels from Vietnam, with both governments naming the other as aggressor in several incidents. The Philippines has also reported confrontations with Chinese ships in disputed waters. China has accused the Philippines of escalating the situation. "Certain countries are roping in countries from outside the region to get involved in the South China Sea issue ... deliberately exaggerating the tense atmosphere ..." Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Yang Yujun said in late June.

At the centre of those disputed waters, land reclamation projects on the Spratly Islands, started by China last year, have begun to reach completion, producing 1,500 acres of land in just in 2015.

Beneath the surface of the South China Sea off the tropical Chinese resort island of Hainan, an underwater tunnel guides submarines into a lair reminiscent of a James Bond spy movie. From this pen the subs can venture in and out of the contested South China Sea, which for the past half century the U.S. Navy has enjoyed almost unfettered access to the waters. The waters are, however, shallow in this area and China wants to establish deep-water bases in order to increase the safety and security of their submarines.

The fleet of diesel and nuclear-powered submarines reflects President Xi Jinping's efforts to ensure the security of sea lanes vital for feeding the economic growth on which the nation's stability rests. It's also provoked discomfort among neighbours bruised by China's approach to territorial disputes.

The People's Liberation Army Navy has 56 attack submarines, of which 51 are conventional diesel-electric and five are nuclear powered, according to a U.S. Department of Defence report to congress. China also has three nuclear-powered submarines that can launch ballistic missiles, and may add five more, according to the Pentagon report. The report said these subs will this year carry the JL-2 ballistic missile, which has an estimated range of 7,400 kilometres (4,600 miles) and will "give the PLA Navy its first credible sea-based nuclear deterrent."

## **Taiwan:**

Taiwan is an often-overlooked player in the debate over control of the South China Sea, where its emphasis on multilateral negotiations tends to be drowned out by the bold claims of China, which considers Taiwan part of its territory and tries to limit its voice in world affairs.

But after an international tribunal broadly rejected China's claims to the strategic waterway, Taiwan reminded the world that it, too, had a stake in the sea. It denied the tribunal's findings soon after they were released, and sent a warship to patrol the contested region. "The mission of this voyage is to display Taiwan people's resolve in defending the national interest," Tsai Ing-wen, the president of Taiwan, said in a speech before the departure of the ship, a La Fayette-class frigate.

Ms. Tsai said the decision by the tribunal, which was established by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, had "gravely harmed" Taiwan's rights in the South China Sea, which is also claimed in part by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

On paper, Taiwan and China make the same claims to the South China Sea. The so-called nine-dash line that Beijing uses to claim most of the sea is based on a map issued in the late 1940s by China's then-Nationalist government, which fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing a civil war to Mao Zedong's Communists. Since then, Beijing and the government in Taiwan — the Republic of China, as it is formally known — have based their claims on the line, which the tribunal concluded had no basis in law.

But in recent years, Taiwan has hedged its support for the line and emphasized that its claims were based on land features in the South China Sea, Lynn Kuok, a non-resident fellow at the Brookings Institution, said in a 2015 paper. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, claims to bodies of water must be based on adjoining land.

"There is a basic principle in the Law of the Sea, that land dominates the sea," Ma Ying-jeou, the president of Taiwan at the time, said in an interview with The New York Times in 2014. "Thus marine claims begin with land."

The most severe blow to Taiwan's claims in the tribunal's findings, analysts and government officials said, was its declaration that Itu Aba, the largest land feature in the South China Sea, was not an island that could sustain human habitation or economic activity. Taiwan has controlled the 110-acre Itu Aba, also known as Taiping Island, since 1956.

In recent months, Taiwan has actively promoted its presence on Itu Aba, inviting journalists and scholars on inspection trips. Mr. Ma visited shortly before he left office in May. The tribunal's declaration that it is a rock, not an island, means that Taiwan is entitled to a territorial sea extending for 12 nautical miles around Itu Aba, but not a 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone.

China, which considers Taiwan to be part of its territory with which it must eventually be united, has largely backed Taiwan's activities in support of its South China Sea claims. Beijing views Taiwan's position in the South China Sea as bolstering its own argument that there is one China, to which both the mainland and Taiwan belong.

## **Vietnam:**

China's actions in the South China Sea are increasingly militaristic. Due to Vietnam's lack of strong treaty allies, the country is particularly vulnerable compared to its peers. In response to Vietnam's deteriorating security situation, it is likely to choose one of three strategies: 1) continue the current strategy of hedging between the U.S., China and Russia; 2) ally with the U.S. against China; or 3) develop Vietnam's military capabilities, including a potential nuclear deterrent.

China's actions against Vietnam's territory, Vietnam's strategic response, and the outcome of the interaction, have global consequences. A win by China against Vietnam would intimidate other countries into granting concessions, and embolden China militarily. For this reason, Vietnam's strategic decisions in the coming years should be of concern to everyone with an interest in international politics.

China's threat against Vietnam is principally an attempt to take over Vietnam's maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) reserves to Vietnam. Vietnam will likely address the threat through a mix of accommodation and two types of deterrence. Due to the exclusion effects of these strategic options, however, the emphasis of Vietnam's strategy will likely be only one of the three.

All three strategies incur costs, entail risk, and will likely cause fundamental changes in Vietnam's politics and economy. Vietnam's decision will profoundly affect the domestic and international outcome of events in the near future, including whether China strengthens its de facto presence in Vietnam's maritime territory, the stability of Vietnam's current leadership, and China's strategy against other countries.

Vietnam's current strategy, hedge between the U.S., China, and Russia, is the most complex, but least likely to lead to diplomatic, economic, or even military conflict. It includes the relatively inoffensive elements from all three strategies: seeking negotiations, development funding and trade with all potential allies, including the U.S. and China; only moderately increased defence cooperation with the U.S. and its allies; and new weapons purchases short of a nuclear deterrent.

Overemphasizing any single element of the three strategies that compose hedging will lead to unintended consequences and exclude the effectiveness of the other strategies. Too obvious hedging will alienate all major allies, and erode Vietnam's image as a committed ally. Too close alliance with the U.S. against China will lead to retaliatory measures by China and perhaps Russia. Obtaining a nuclear deterrent would produce, at the very least, strongly negative diplomatic reactions from both the U.S. and China.

Hedging reduces the risk of war, but leaves Vietnam relatively weak and vulnerable to increasing Chinese influence. As China increases its absolute and relative economic and military strength in Asia, its influence over Vietnam will increase proportionately. If Vietnam chooses to hedge as its primary strategy, it should expect China to demand, and obtain, concessions such as a private recognition of Chinese sovereignty within the 9-dash line, joint development and revenue sharing of hydrocarbon and fishing resources, and possibly even discreet forms of taxing Vietnam's maritime trade.

Increasing Chinese influence in Vietnam and the resulting concessions will create discontent among Vietnam's population, risking political stability and the tenure of the current Vietnamese leadership.

## **Philippines:**

The Philippines is competing for claims to the South China Sea. It lags behind its rivals, especially China, in military might and scope of claim to the ocean that covers 3.5 million square kilometres. It's not the most aggressive explorer for whatever oil and natural gas lurk under the ocean floor, nor is it the major marine shipper. But in 2014 President Benigno Aquino's government, bolstered by a strong legal claim to eastern parts of the sea and anger over China's combative presence, asked the United Nations to arbitrate the sovereignty dispute. The outcome favoured Manila and will affect how claimants treat one another for years to come even if they don't recognize the arbitration process.

Manila's U.N. gambit may well change the whole maritime dispute because all the other claimants are watching the Philippines. China, after trying to ignore the U.N. request for arbitration in 2014, fought back in December with a position paper explaining its objections. China believes the U.N. panel isn't entitled to hear the issue.

There is also a deeper reason why the Philippines will reshape the maritime dispute — which is Asia's stickiest with occasional violent clashes since the 1970s: China will re-calibrate. The U.N. arbitration panel in Europe is tipped to favour the Philippines in calling the "nine-dash line" inconsistent with international conventions on maritime rights. China says it won't recognize the U.N. body's decision. But it probably will, or risk being seen increasingly as a bully in Asia. It might start negotiating one-on-one with the Philippines and others, such as ever-angry claimant Vietnam, to shore up a reputation soiled by the landfill expansion of numerous disputed reefs. If China doesn't attempt amends, Vietnam and the Philippines are likely to ally ever closer to Japan and the United States, threatening China's maritime claims as well as its big-guy status in Asia.

Another long-term reason for how the Philippine legal action will change things: Support from the U.N. tribunal will empower governments with less aggressive maritime claims to work together and press China harder to sign agreements. Malaysia and Brunei also call parts of the South China Sea their own but seldom speak out. The Southeast Asian players feel frustrated that China won't agree to strengthen or replace a 14-year-old code of conduct. A new code would be aimed at preventing clashes in an ocean that's crawling with fishing boats, coast guard vessels and oil rigs. China uses its global clout to stop Taiwan from pursuing regional diplomacy, as well. A favorable U.N. arbitration outcome would strengthen the Philippine "negotiating posture," says Ramon Casiple, executive director of Philippine advocacy group Institute for Political and Electoral Reform. Manila, he says, will "aggressively pursue a unified ASEAN (pan-Southeast Asia) China policy, particularly on the maritime claims in the South China Sea."

The Philippines will however continue to move forward with official talks with China under Rodrigo Duterte in spite of lingering differences on the South China Sea. The Philippines, a U.S. treaty ally that had seen ties with China sour under Duterte's predecessor Benigno Aquino III following Beijing's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea, has been looking to repair ties with the Asian giant in the last few months. Duterte's special envoy Fidel Ramos was in Hong Kong last month to kick off the process by renewing ties with "old friends" in the country, with sources familiar with the trip saying that it had gone very well.

The PCA ruling: "China's claims to historic rights, or other sovereign rights or jurisdiction, with respect to the maritime areas of the South China Sea encompassed by the relevant part of the 'nine-dash line' are contrary to the Convention and without lawful effect". More details are here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines\\_v.\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines_v._China)

## **Malaysia:**

You would expect more noise out of Kuala Lumpur. The Malaysian government claims a dozen Spratly islands in the disputed South China Sea. China and Taiwan claim them as well along with the rest of the 3.5 million-square-kilometre sea that's packed with fish, gas and oil. Malaysia even opened one islet, Layang Layang, to diving tourism. The Southeast Asian country has reserves of 5 billion barrels of crude oil and 80 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in sea, more than other claimants, the U.S. Energy Information Administration says. But Malaysia says little about its claims compared to ever-vociferous neighbours such as China, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Malaysia tries to avoid rocking boats because the claimant most likely to splash disputed water on it is China. China happens to be Malaysia's chief economic partner and one with a record of withdrawing economic support elsewhere when friends turn hostile.

China, a global economic heavyweight, is Malaysia's top trading partner and source of direct foreign investment. State-owned China General Nuclear Power Corp. bought Malaysian development firm 1MDB's energy assets in another company for 9.83 billion ringgits (\$2.37 billion) in November and a month later China Railway Construction Corp. bought a multi-billion-ringgit equity stake in real estate mega-project Bandar Malaysia. Those are just two investment examples.

"China is getting involved in investment in Malaysia and is now Malaysia's top foreign direct investment source," says Ibrahim Suffian, program director with Kuala Lumpur polling group Merdeka Centre. "That's going to shape Malaysian policy on the South China Sea."

Keeping the boat steady also stops China from lashing out at Malaysia when disputes come up. Beijing has "tolerated" Malaysia's natural gas fields in a tract of ocean China wants, the conflict-resolution NGO International Crisis Group says. Malaysia exports what it extracts from the seabed, part of a domestic energy sector worth 20% of its GDP. So the government is happy to let Vietnam, the Philippines and their mutual ally the United States do the shouting.

But for the past year China has stationed a coast guard ship at one shoal that Malaysia claims and it regularly patrols another. There's no way Malaysia can be thrilled. The country's Prime Minister Najib Razak recently told fellow Southeast Asian leaders that "as China continues to grow its military presence in the region, tensions continue among Malaysia and neighbouring countries over the hotly disputed waters," local news outlet The Star Online said Monday. Najib urged that claimants to the sea to "recommit to the full and effective implementation" of a code of conduct that would avoid mishaps. Some people want their government to take an ever tougher line on China.

"Malaysia has been more hesitant to push back forcefully against China, partially because the Philippines and Vietnam have been a useful buffer, soaking up so much of China's bullying over the last few years, and partially because the ruling elite in Kuala Lumpur have been convinced that they have a 'special relationship' with Beijing," says Gregory Poling, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative director with the U.S. think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies. "But increasingly parts of the government in Malaysia have been disabused of that notion as China has increased its incursions into Malaysian waters."



## USA:

China's previous paucity of runways in the South China Sea is leading to a trust deficit in U.S.-China relations. Over the course of this summer, China's military and civilian leaders have repeatedly insisted that Beijing had finished land reclamation in the Spratly Islands, and that continued construction on the outposts was primarily for civilian purposes. Recently-released satellite imagery appears to reveal an unpleasant but unsurprising truth: neither one of these claims is accurate. China continues to dredge around Mischief and Subi Reefs, and may be constructing as many as three airstrips in the Spratly Islands for a total of four runways in the South China Sea.

The diplomatic picture is no rosier: at the late July ASEAN Regional Forum, China thwarted the United States' attempt to have all claimants agree to halt land reclamation, island militarization, and the use of coercion in the South China Sea. As the two countries prepare for their presidential summit, it is tempting to resign ourselves to the notion that the United States is out of options when it comes to checking China's build-up. This would be a mistake. Despite rapid-fire construction and apparent disinterest in dispute management, the United States can contribute meaningfully to the security and stability of the region if it uses the summit to define unacceptable behaviour in this crucial waterway.

When China's island building spree began to receive global attention this spring, top U.S. officials made strong public statements on Beijing's land reclamation. Land reclamation by itself, however, is neither illegal nor inherently destabilizing but it was Beijing's potential militarization of its island outposts and the possibility that it would use the islands for coercive ends that was of grave concern.

In its public statements, Beijing has taken care to acknowledge that its islands will have some defensive applications in addition to civilian uses. Many of the capabilities that China places in the Spratlys, including radar, communications equipment, and support facilities, are likely to be dual-use in nature. Helipads and port facilities can be used for search and rescue and humanitarian missions, just as they may also be used by the PLA Navy and Air Force. China's 3,000 meter runways are clearly being constructed with military applications in mind, and there is little policymakers can do to stop them from paving these.

But there are a few obvious actions that Beijing could take that would constitute overt militarization of its Spratly Islands. First, China could station or provide for the regular rotation of military aircraft through Fiery Cross, Subi, or Mischief Reefs. Second, it could station or regularly rotate PLAN vessels through its new island port facilities. Third, and most concerning, it could deploy advanced missiles to the islands, including the DF-21D (often dubbed the "carrier killer").

U.S. leaders will need to define what would constitute the use of coercion by China from its artificial islands. This could include: Efforts to use the islands to blockade any land feature occupied by another claimant; use of the islands to seize or encroach upon any feature occupied by another claimant; use of the islands to seize an otherwise unoccupied feature; employing the islands to advance claims to water or airspace that are not supported by international law, including the use of spurious "military alert zones"; using the islands to maintain and enforce air defence identification zones over disputed features.

Defining South China Sea militarization and coercion may not make China stop. Leaders in the United States and in the region will still have to implement appropriate responses. The aim of U.S. policy is both to defend order and the rule of law, but also to find ways to work with a rising China, and defining militarization and coercion before China takes these actions may support both ends.

## **Facilitator Notes:**

It is important to be a bit sceptical of having resource acquisition as a key Chinese aim. We hear that a lot from western analysts, but rarely from Chinese analysts. That said, any resource acquisition is a win for the PRC, so it should not be completely dismissed.

PRC foreign policy uses the phrase “core issues and other major concerns” to describe their key equities. Among the most critical core interests is *territorial integrity*. This concept is not only central to Beijing’s thinking about national security, it is also the third rail of PRC foreign policy. This is part of why we tend to see a kind of brittle intractability with the Chinese around territorial disputes. Tibet and the maritime disputes are great examples of how the concept has practically influenced Beijing’s decisions. So what we are talking about when it comes to the Nine Dash Line is an issue of territorial integrity, and therefore salient at a much deeper level than just practical defence matters would suggest. There’s an almost existential objective in play in the South China Sea for Beijing. If they relinquish what they have built up as a historical claim, they are backpedalling on a core tenet of their own national security message. Where the average western audience sees the term “historical claim” this has far less intensity than might be appropriate to a PRC audience.

There are camps in Beijing just like anywhere else, so if you take the perspective that the goal is to create a truly secure anti-access area denial region covering the key shipping lanes for global trade and shutting the US out of influence in the Western Pacific, then it is likely there are some people saying that - but it’s far from a monolithic picture. There are also people saying it is important because being the general guarantor of regional security is a critical part of becoming a first tier power and changing the international system. It is really more about China than about the US.

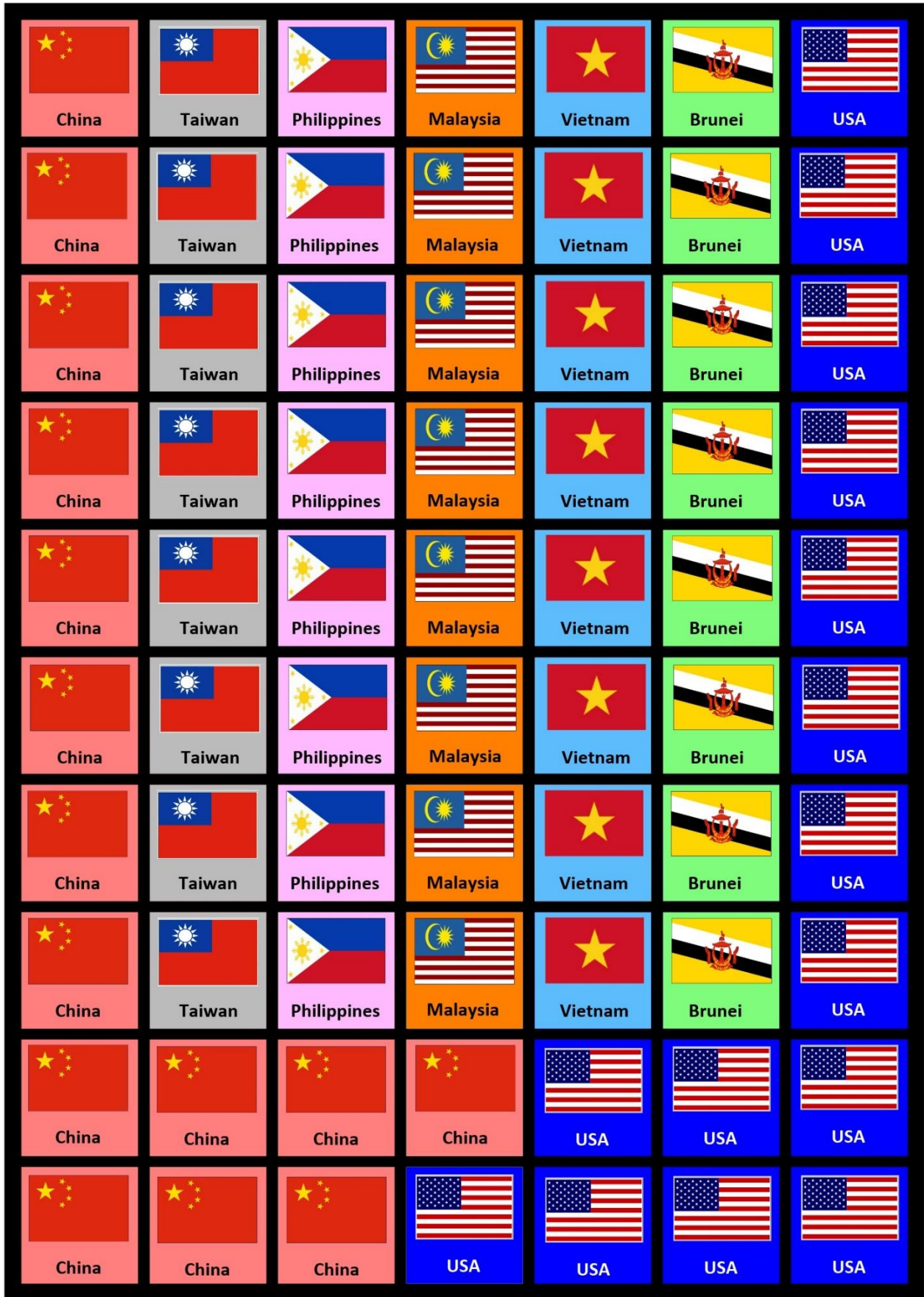
The other thing that should be emphasised is they do not see what they are doing is illegitimate. The USA has this constant argument where the Chinese say: "you’re encircling us!" and the USA says "It's your own fault – if you weren't so aggressive, we wouldn't get asked to try to stop you!" This looks like a self-fulfilling prophecy from the West, but from Beijing it looks like a fight for autonomy of manoeuvre, and rightful influence.

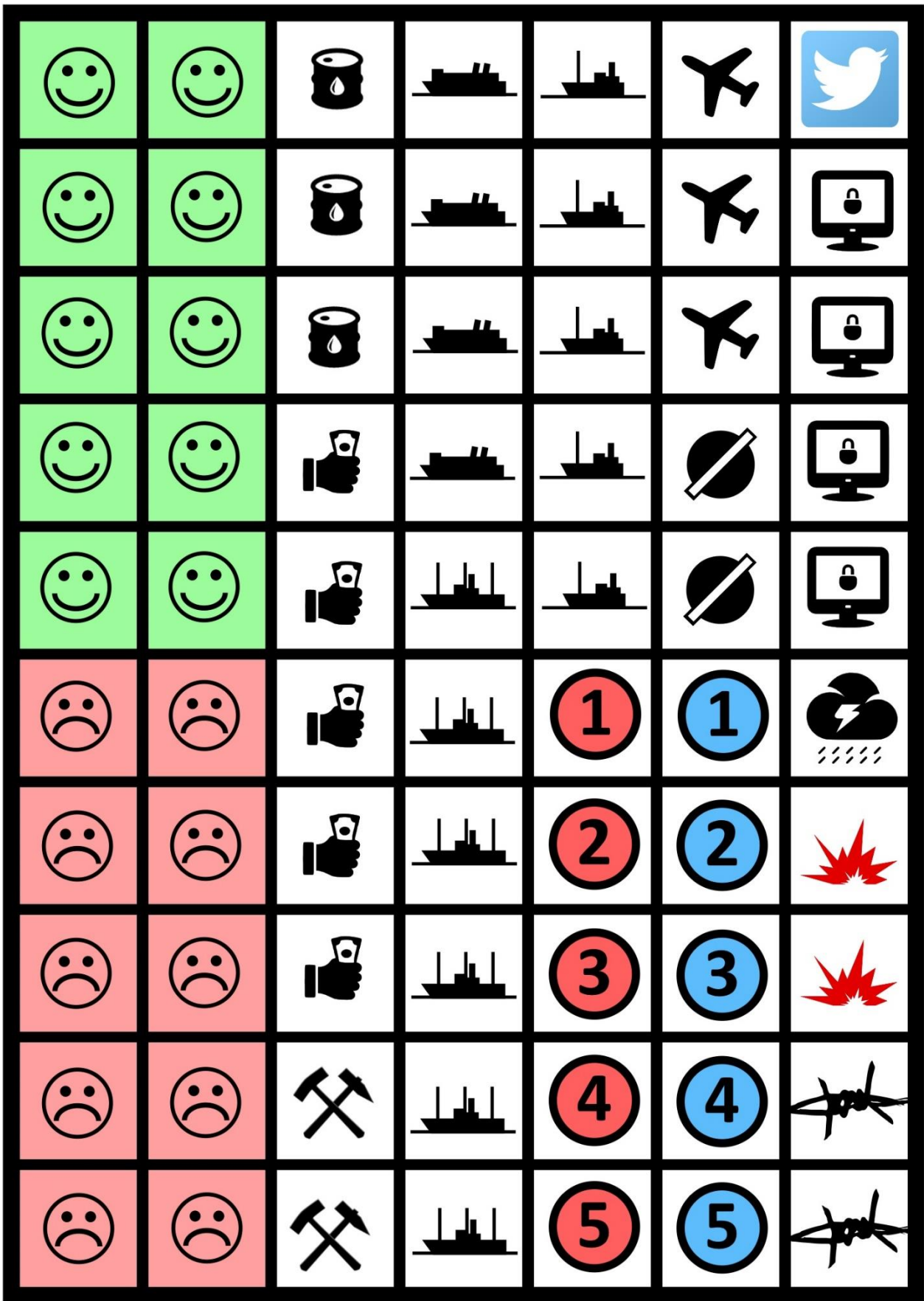
In terms of power projection – they want it, they need it, and the USA understands that. There was an epic argument last year about what Xi meant when he came to the US and said China would “not militarize the South China Sea” and then they started deploying missiles and building runways and hardened positions. When challenged, the official response was: "I wonder what you think the definition of the word ‘militarize’ is?" The Chinese claim that their emplacements are part of normal security operations that would take place anywhere in PRC territory, and they use the phrase “Reasonable, Justified, and Lawful” to describe them.

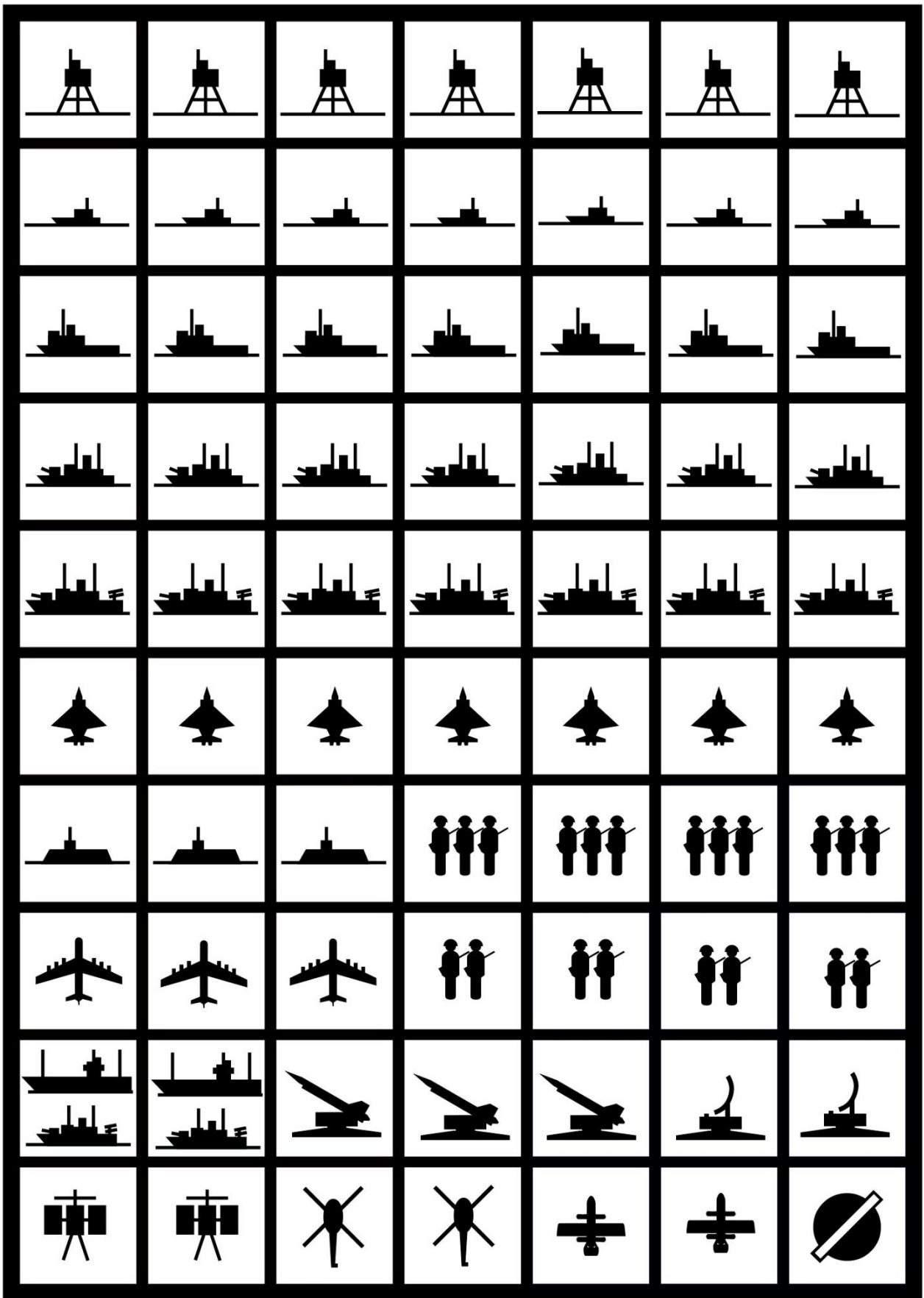
You should read the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling very carefully. They ruled for the Philippines on different issues for a variety of different legal reasons, but it’s important to remember that they *did not rule* on sovereignty. There are a lot of ill-informed statements about this, so be careful because it could be a credibility killer in certain audiences.

One of the preferred rhetorical techniques for the PLA side is to constantly emphasize that they are UNCLOS signatories and the US is not (hypocrites!). There are also funny terminology exchanges because of this; for example: when people use the term “international waters” the PRC will respond "as you know, there is no such thing as "International Waters" (for more information see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Convention\\_on\\_the\\_Law\\_of\\_the\\_Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Convention_on_the_Law_of_the_Sea)).

Counters:







Random Event Cards:

## Random Event Card

### Corruption Allegations!



Corruption allegations emerge against a high ranking Government figure. This is a national scandal resulting in a wide ranging investigation and the resignation of senior ministers.

Randomly determine the Actor involved.

Effect is: -1 on the Actor's Arguments until resolved.

## Random Event Card

### Mineral Discovery!



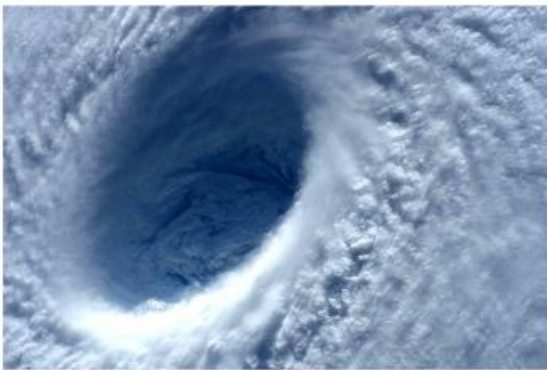
Information is leaked about a "significant discovery" of Adamantium, a valuable and rare mineral used in the production of high end computing devices and medical technologies.

The information is rumoured to come from a State survey vessel with strict orders to keep it and the precise location secret.

Effect is: A successful argument is required to determine the location

## Random Event Card

### Typhoon Weather!



Extreme weather affects the region causing widespread damage and loss of life.

Effect is: -2 on all arguments made that are affected by weather in the region, and may cause other events as the result of a successful arguments.

## Random Event Card

### Run Aground!



A warship runs aground and is a National embarrassment.

Randomly determine the Actor involved.

Effect is: -1 on the Actor's Arguments until resolved.

## Random Event Card

### Medical Records Hack!



There is a major breach of security in Germany and the private medical records of 2.7 million European citizens are stolen from a major international healthcare provider, including senior European political figures.

Effect is: No effect (unless determined as a result of a successful argument).

## Random Event Card

### Oil Discovery!



A survey vessel operating in the area discovers "significant oil deposits" as best meets the justice of the game circumstances.

Effect is: The extent and value of the oilfield is the result of a successful argument.

## Random Event Card

### Storm Weather!



Extreme weather affects the region causing widespread damage and loss of life.

Effect is: -1 on arguments affected by weather, as well as other effects determined by a successful argument.

## Random Event Card

### Run Aground!



A civilian cargo ship, the CS Escorial, registered in South Africa, runs aground in the region with a cargo of crude oil. If it leaks it will be a disaster for the marine ecology.

Effect is: Determined by a successful argument.

## Random Event Card

### Fishing Dispute!



There is a fishing dispute in the area resulting in lost nets, damage to fishing vessels and some physical injuries.

Randomly determine the two Actors involved.

Effect is: -1 on arguments from both sides until the situation is resolved.

## Random Event Card

### High Rise Destroyed!



A multi-story Government building in South Africa is destroyed with nearly a thousand casualties, by a plane crashing into the building. There is speculation that it was caused by a maintenance failure, but some believe it was terrorism.

Effect is: No effect (unless determined as a result of a successful argument).

## Random Event Card

### Sex Scandal!



A sex scandal emerges involving a high ranking Government figure. This is a national disgrace resulting in a wide ranging investigation and the resignation of a senior minister and his aides.

Randomly determine the Actor involved.

Effect is: -1 on the Actor's Arguments until resolved.

## Random Event Card

### Earthquake!

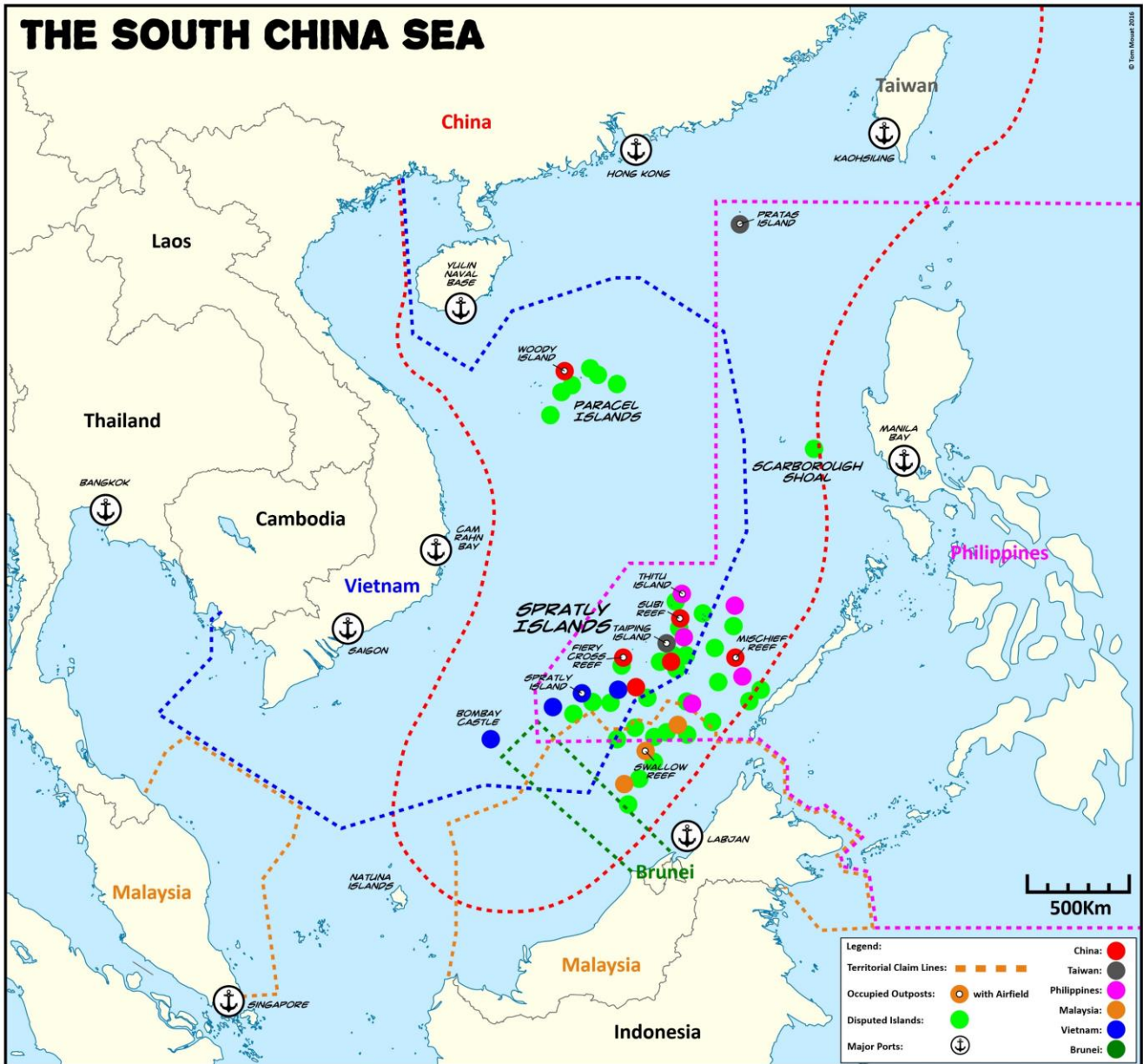


There is a large earthquake in Nepal, with much loss of life and property destruction.

Effect is: No effect (unless determined as a result of a successful argument).



**Map Layout:**



The map shows the different claims by the actors involved in the dispute. The red-dotted line is a projection of the "Nine-Dash Line" (shown below in China's submission to the UN in 2009).

The light green dots show the approximate position of disputed areas and the other coloured dots, coded by country, show the location of outposts manned by the various nations. The ones with white circles in them indicate those installations with airfields.

The exact number of disputed rocks, reefs and occupied islands are too many to show sensibly on the regional map.

**Occupied Features within the Spratly Islands region:**

Those in **BOLD** are equipped with airfields.

**Vietnam:** Vietnam has 21 features declared as occupied and possibly another 6 structures mounted on underwater banks:

Southwest Cay (Song Tu Tay),  
South Reef (Da Nam),  
Petley Reef (Nui Thi or Da Thi),  
Sand Cay (Son Ca),  
Namyit Island (Nam Yet),  
Discovery Great Reef (Da Lon),  
Sin Cowe Island (Sinh Ton),  
Collins Reef (Co Lin),  
Lansdowne Reef (Len Dao),  
Sin Cowe East Island (Sinh Ton Dong),  
Ladd Reef (Da Lat),

**Spratly Island (Truong Sa Lon),**  
West Reef (Da Tay),  
Central Reef (Truong Sa Dong),  
East Reef (Da Dong),  
Pearson Reef (Phan Vinh),  
Allison Reef (Toc Tan),  
Cornwallis South Reef (Nui Le),  
Pigeon or Tennent Reef (Tien Nu),  
Barque Canada Reef (Thuyen Chai),  
Amboyna Cay (An Bang).

**Philippines:** The Philippines has 9 features declared as occupied:

Northeast Cay (Filipino: Parola),  
**Thitu Island (Pag-asa),**  
Loaita Cay (Panata),  
Loaita Island (Kota),  
West York Island (Likas),

Flat Island (Patag),  
Nanshan Island (Lawak),  
Second Thomas Shoal (Ayungin),  
Commodore Reef (Rizal).

**Taiwan:**

Taiwan has **Itu Alba Island.**

**China:** China has 7 features declared as occupied:

**Subi Reef (Zhubi Jiao),**  
Gaven Reef (Nanxun Jiao),  
Hughes Reef (Dongmen Jiao),  
Johnson South Reef (Chigua Jiao),

**Fiery Cross Reef (Yongshu Jiao),**  
Cuarteron Reef (Huayang Jiao),  
**Mischief Reef (Meiji Jiao).**

**Malaysia:** Malaysia has 5 features declared as occupied:

**Swallow Reef (Malay: Layang-Layang)**  
Ardasier Reef (Ubi)  
Mariveles Reef (Mantanani)

Erica Reef (Siput)  
Investigator Shoal (Peninjau)

**The "Nine-Dash Line" Map:**

