



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on May 7, 2019

China Complains After U.S. Warships Sail Near Spratly Islands

After two U.S. warships sailed near islands claimed by China in the South China Sea on May 6, China's foreign ministry complained that the ships had infringed on Chinese sovereignty. Commander Clay Doss, a spokesman for the Seventh Fleet, told the Reuters news agency that the "innocent passage" was "to challenge excessive maritime claims and preserve access to the waterways as governed by international law."



Doss confirmed that the U.S. guided-missile destroyers *Preble* (shown) and *Chung Hoon* traveled within 12 nautical miles of Gaven and Johnson Reefs in the Spratly Islands.

Al Jazeera reported that the Chinese navy asked the U.S. ships to leave after they entered waters in the Spratly Islands, which China calls the Nansha Islands.

"The relevant actions of the U.S. warships violated China's sovereignty and undermined peace, security and good order in the relevant sea areas," ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a press briefing.

"The Chinese side expresses strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition" to the operation, Geng added, asserting that the ships had entered "without permission."

[We reported last month](#) that back in 2015, the U.S. Navy flew P8-A Poseidon surveillance aircraft over seven artificial islands the Chinese were building in the disputed Spratly islands to gather intelligence about the Chinese activities. The P8-A Poseidon, in addition to carrying highly sophisticated electronic surveillance equipment, also carries torpedoes, depth charges, SLAM-ER missiles, Harpoon anti-ship missiles, and other weapons for use in anti-submarine and anti-surface vessel warfare.

After a P-8A flew over the Chinese construction zone, the Chinese Navy contacted the plane by radio and asked it to leave the area.

An article in Britain's *Telegraph* on May 22, 2015, reported that China was "strongly dissatisfied" with the U.S. flights over its island construction sites.

In an [article back in 2015](#), we cited an editorial in *The Global Times* (a newspaper owned by the Chinese Communist Party's *People's Daily*), which said that "U.S.-China war is inevitable in the South China Sea ... if the United States' bottom line is that China has to halt its activities" in the disputed Spratly Islands. As with other disputed islands in the South China Sea, multiple nations presently have claims to the Spratly Islands, including Brunei, mainland (Communist) China, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and Vietnam.

We observed that all of these nations occupy some portions of the disputed islands, sometimes areas as simple as a reef or cay. Only China (PRC), Taiwan (ROC), and Vietnam have made claims based on their historical presence in the islands, but the Philippines has claimed part of the area as its territory under



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the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) agreement,

We noted in 2015 that China was in the process of constructing seven artificial islands amidst the Spratlys/Nanshas and the United States fears that the communist nation might attempt to impose air and sea restrictions in the chain once it completes that construction.

Image: USS Preble (DDG-88)

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