

Chinese Admiral: South China Sea ‘Belongs to China’

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At a recent naval conference a Chinese Vice Admiral did not mince words.

Speaking at this year’s [First Sea Lord/RUSI International Sea Power Conference](#) in London, Chinese Vice Admiral Yuan Yubai, commander of the People’s Liberation Army Navy’s (PLAN) North Sea Fleet, did not shy away from controversy. He emphatically stated that the South China Sea belongs to China.

“The South China Sea, as the name indicates, is a sea area that belongs to China. And the sea from the Han dynasty a long time ago where the Chinese people have been working and producing from the sea,” he said through an interpreter, according to [Defense News](#).

Yubai was sitting on a panel with the U.S. Assistant Deputy Chief of Naval Operations Rear Adm. Jeff Harley and the President of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force’s Command and Staff College, Vice Admiral Umio Otsuka, discussing the role of naval power in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.



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Yubai's statement came in response to Otsuka [criticizing](#) the land reclamation activities of "certain state actors" in the region. "Land reclamation conducted by some countries has been a problem in the South China Sea (and) we have to admit that the rule of law is at risk in this region. The JMSDF will secure the credibility of a deterrence capability and seek a multilateral framework in the Indo-Pacific region," he said.

Otsuka also expressed his worries that commercial fishing fleets are used as maritime militias defending territory claimed by Beijing. "This may provoke, sooner or later, a debate how the conflict between military and maritime militia, if any, should be handled," he stated. The Japanese admiral warned that China's activities could turn the area from "an ocean of peace" to an "ocean of war." However, Yubai [cautioned](#):

I'm firmly convinced that the problems around the South China Sea, so far, can be successfully solved with the joint efforts and consultation of the hosting countries around the South China Sea.

He added:

China has conducted consultation with countries in the South China Sea... the principle we adopt is peaceful utilization and joint development (of the sea). The real situation is that safety of navigation can now be assured.

He also mentioned that China and the United States are working on a code of conduct for aircraft encounters, which will reduce the likelihood of conflict, according to Yubai.

Meanwhile, [according](#) to satellite photographs taken on behalf of a D.C.-based think tank, China is set to begin construction of a third airstrip on the on Mischief Reef, an artificial islands Beijing has created in the Spratly archipelago.

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