

See China's Rapid Island-Building Strategy In Action

By Simon Denyer Washington Post



The Fiery Cross Reef, 2,740,000 square meters. (CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative/Digital Globe)

New images taken just this week show China building what look like military bases on reclaimed land in the South China Sea, a development likely to add to concerns in the United States and among its Asian neighbors. China said on Tuesday that land reclamation had now finished on "some islands" in the South China Sea. But the focus is now likely to shift to the construction work that China is carrying out, which many fear will lead to further militarization of the South China Sea.

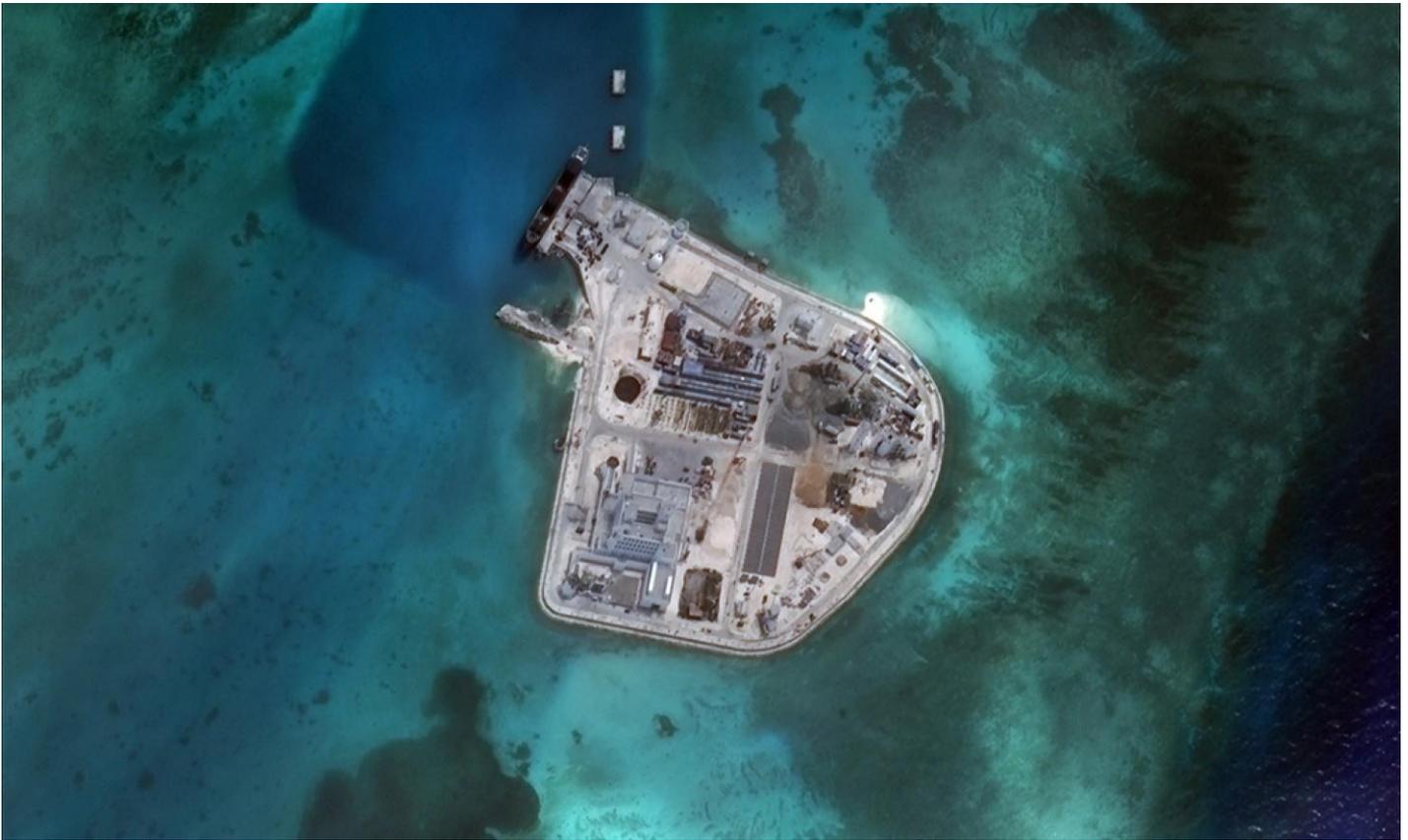
Images taken as recently as June 28 show how China has almost completed the construction of an airstrip at Fiery Cross Reef. The images were taken by Digital Globe and supplied to The Post by the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Land reclamation is now complete at Fiery Cross Reef. AMTI says construction of the air base is continuing "with ongoing paving and marking of the airstrip, an added apron, construction of a sensor array and development of additional support facilities."



Fiery Cross Reef (CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative / DigitalGlobe)
This image also shows a naval vessel docked at the island.

Images at Johnson South Reef show what looks like a significant military monitoring station.



Johnson South Reef, 109,000 square meters (CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative / DigitalGlobe)

According to AMTI, features here include: a small port with limited berth space and two loading stations, two helipads, three possible satellite communication antennae, one large multi-level facility, two possible radar towers under construction, six possible security and surveillance towers for weapons and or sensors, four possible weapons towers, a lighthouse, a possible solar farm with 44 panels and two wind turbines.

[See our full package of images showing China's land reclamation and construction activity here.](#)

AMTI Director Mira Rapp-Hooper says the facilities have “all the trappings” of military capabilities and applications and would improve China’s ability to monitor other nations’ activities in the disputed Spratly Islands.

The construction work, she says, “*is going to be the new diplomatic challenge, not just for the United States, but also for all the regional countries which have been very keen to deter China from militarizing the islands.*”

On June 16, [China’s Foreign Ministry announced](#) that the land reclamation work on some islands in the South China Sea would be completed in the near future and that it would now begin to build more infrastructure on the islands. On Tuesday, it confirmed the land reclamation “on some islands” was now complete. It says that infrastructure will mainly be for civilian purposes but acknowledges it will also be used for “military defense.” That does not reflect a change in policy but simply an acknowledgement of the fact that the project to stake China’s territorial claims in the South China Sea more forcefully had moved onto a new phase, experts say. Although AMTI says land reclamation does appear to have finished on five of the seven islands, other images taken between June 5 and 10 – and available on the [AMTI Web site](#) – show reclamation work still continuing on two islands, Mischief Reef and Subi Reef.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea but faces rival claims from Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan. Beijing says it is merely playing catch-up to other claimants that have established bases on other islands and reefs in the past, but the United States says it fears China will use its new facilities to bully smaller nations.

Last week, Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken said China's actions in the South China Sea pose a [“threat to peace and stability”](#) and compared them to Russia's in Ukraine. Both, he said, were *“efforts to unilaterally and coercively change the status quo — transgressions that the United States and our allies stand united against.”*

Russia has seized the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine and sent in troops to support a civil war in eastern Ukraine that has left thousands of people dead.

On Saturday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said changing position on China's claims over the South China Sea would [shame its ancestors](#), while not facing up to infringements of Chinese sovereignty there that would shame its children. *“One thousand years ago China was a large sea-faring nation. So of course China was the first country to discover, use and administer the Nansha Islands,”* Wang said, using the Chinese term for the Spratly Islands. *“China's demands of sovereignty over the Nansha Islands have not expanded and neither will they shrink. Otherwise we would not be able to face our forefathers and ancestors,”* he said, according to Reuters. Wang said China could not face its children and grandchildren if *“the gradual and incremental invasion of China's sovereignty and encroachment on China's interests”* was allowed to continue.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2015/07/01/new-images-show-china-building-military-facilities-in-south-china-sea/>