



Australia-China Friendship Society Ltd

PO Box 1520
Fortitude Valley Qld 4006
acfs.ltd@gmail.com
www.acfs.com.au

President: Dr. Ross Gwyther
mobile: +61408782983

Secretary: Norm Hung

28 June, 2015

The Minister for Foreign Affairs,
The Hon. Julie Bishop MP
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

The Australia-China Friendship Society notes with concern the rise in tensions in the South China Sea.

We also note media reports that suggest a Royal Australian Air Force plane will be sent to the twelve nautical mile limit around the Nansha Islands (the Spratlys) to test China's claim to sovereignty over these islands.

Regrettably, sections of our media portray recent Chinese activity in the Nansha Islands as a sign of territorial expansion, of new-found assertiveness and even as aggression.

China claims a historical association to the islands of the South China Sea that predates its recent activities there. Chinese fishermen used the islands as a base two thousand years ago. In 200 AD, Chinese monks settled on the Nansha Islands and built a monastery. The Tang Dynasty included the Nansha Islands in its administrative map and the twelfth century Yuan Dynasty exercised control of the islands. However, the last Chinese dynasty, the Qing, was severely weakened by colonial expansion and the British, Germans and French all nibbled away at islands in the South China Seas.

Following Japan's defeat in WW2, the Chiang Kai-Shek Nationalist regime declared its sovereignty over the Nansha Islands (1947), a sovereignty inherited by the Communists on their accession to power in 1949.

Australians would be rightly outraged if Chinese fighter planes repeatedly circled Christmas Island or Norfolk Island at the 12 nautical mile limit just to "test" our territorial claims to these islands which are as far – or further – from us than are the Nansha Islands from the Chinese mainland.

Competing territorial claims to islands and atolls in the South China Sea are best left to the countries concerned. Any outside interference is only likely to exacerbate matters.



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Our Society calls for the Australian Government to adopt an independent and peaceful foreign policy. The regional perception that we are doing the United States' bidding in the South China Sea disputes is not to our advantage.

We have worked for decades to promote friendship and understanding between the Australian and Chinese peoples. Provocations against the country which is now our major trading partner have the potential to seriously undermine those relations.

We call on you to convey our concerns to the Prime Minister and we encourage your Government to pursue the peaceful settlement of disputes in our region.

Yours sincerely,

Ross Gwyther

National President

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