

recommendations for adoption by governments of the respective participant-countries.³⁹ In this sense, it is of limited value to the process of Philippine-Chinese confidence-building. In another sense, however, the MPC Workshops are helpful in that by pursuing such a broad agenda, they have allowed the Philippines and China, and perhaps other claimants, to identify selected areas that may be more or less acceptable for bilateral cooperation.

At the ASEAN Regional Forum, the United Nations, the Non-aligned Movement and other international fora, the Philippines has sought every opportunity to announce its concern over China's continued occupation and build-up on Mischief Reef, much to China's annoyance. In turn, China has sought to impress upon the international community that there are no tensions in the area, and that the Philippines is whipping up the issue rather than behaving in what China feels should be a "cool and constructive" manner.

CHINA'S POSTURE TOWARDS THE DISPUTE WITH THE PHILIPPINES

Thus far, through the twists and turns of Philippines-China relations since 1995, the following may be observed of China's policy and attitude towards its dispute with the Philippines:

1. China continues to assert indisputable sovereignty and territorial integrity over the entire South China Sea area. In actions, this translates into active military patrols and research activities; promoting and protecting the rights of its nationals to fish in the area; consolidation of areas already occupied and efforts to expand control through setting up territorial markers in new features.
2. Having occupied Mischief Reef, China is not about to withdraw its presence regardless of Philippine demands; however, it is reportedly prepared to consider opening the Reef for use by fishermen of other countries "when the conditions are ripe" and following an improvement in relations.
3. For China, the South China Sea dispute with ASEAN, and the Mischief Reef issue with the Philippines in particular, is not a major problem at the moment as its priorities lie elsewhere (e.g. Taiwan, relations with the United States). Therefore, it would rather put the matter on the backburner and otherwise prevent it from becoming a major problem.
4. At the formal diplomatic level, China continues to treat the Philippines as a friendly nation to the extent that in managing its disputes it constantly reiterates its position that it will not use force against the Philippines.

³⁹ Aileen S.P. Baviera, "Managing Territorial Disputes". Paper presented at the Seventh Southeast Asia Forum on ASEAN: Shared Identities, Interests and Values, March 1996, Kuala Lumpur.