

Cover-Up of US Nuclear Sub Collision in South China Sea

A Wake-up Call for East Asia – and the World

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“When elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled.”

So warned Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte in his [address to the UN](#) General Assembly on September 22, 2020. He was referring to the consequences for East Asia of a conflict between the US and China.

Fast forward to October 2, 2021, about one year later, and the first patch of grass has been stomped on by the U.S. elephant, trudging stealthily about, far from home in the South China Sea. On that day the nuclear-powered attack submarine, the USS Connecticut, suffered serious damage in an undersea incident which the US Navy ascribed to a collision with an undersea object.

After sustaining damage, the submarine apparently surfaced close to the Paracel Islands which lie only 150 nautical miles from China’s Yulin submarine base in Hainan Province. The Connecticut is one of only three Seawolf class of submarines, which are assumed to be on spying missions. But they can be equipped with Intermediate Range (1250-2500 km) Tomahawk cruise missiles which can be armed with nuclear warheads. It is claimed that they are not so equipped at present because the Navy’s [“policy decisions” have “phased out”](#) their nuclear role, according to the hawkish Center For Strategic and International Studies.

When a US nuclear submarine with such capabilities has a collision capable of killing US sailors and spilling radioactive materials in the South China Sea, it should be front page news on every outlet in the US. This has not been the case – far from it. For example, to this day (October 30), nearly a month after the collision, the *New York Times*, the closest approximation to a mouthpiece for the American foreign policy elite, has carried no major story on the incident and in fact no story at all so far as I and several daily readers can find.

This news is apparently not fit to print in the *Times*. (A notable [exception](#) to this conformity and one worth consulting has been Craig Hooper of Forbes.)

A blackout of this kind will come as no surprise to those who have covered the plight of Julian Assange or the US invasion of Syria or the barely hidden hand of the United States in various regime change operations, to cite a few examples.

The US media has followed the narrative of the US Navy which waited until October 7 to acknowledge the incident, with the following extraordinarily curt [press release](#) (I have edited it with strike-outs and bolded substitutions to make its meaning clear.):

The Seawolf-class fast-attack submarine USS Connecticut (SSN 22) struck an object while submerged on the afternoon of Oct. 2, while operating ~~in international waters in the Indo-Pacific region~~ **in the South China Sea near or inside Chinese territorial waters**. The safety of the crew remains the Navy's top priority **The crew is being held incommunicado for an indefinite period**. There are no life threatening injuries. **This allows the extent of injuries to the crew to be kept secret**.

The submarine remains ~~in a safe and stable condition~~ **hidden from public view to conceal the damage and its cause**. USS Connecticut's nuclear propulsion plant and spaces were not affected and remain fully operational **are in a condition that is being hidden from the public until cosmetic repairs can be done to conceal the damage**. The extent of damage to the remainder of the submarine is being assessed **is also being concealed**. The US Navy has not requested assistance **will not allow an independent inspection or investigation**. The incident ~~will be investigated~~ cover-up will continue.

Tan Kefei, spokesperson for China's Ministry of National Defense although not so terse, had much the same to say as my edited version above, as [reported](#) in China's Global Times:

"It took the US Navy five days after the accident took place to make a short and unclear statement. Such an irresponsible approach, cover-up (and) lack of transparency .. can easily lead to misunderstandings and misjudgments. China and the neighboring countries in the South China Sea have to question the truth of the incident and the intentions behind it.

But Tan went further and echoed the sentiment of President Duterte:

"This incident also shows that the recent establishment of a trilateral security partnership between the US, UK and Australia (AUKUS) to carry out nuclear submarine cooperation has brought a huge risk of nuclear proliferation, seriously violated the spirit of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, undermined the construction of a nuclear-free zone in Southeast Asia, and brought severe challenges to regional peace and security.

"We believe that the actions of the US will affect the safety of navigation in the South China Sea, arouse serious concerns and unrest among the countries in the region, and pose a serious threat and a major risk to regional peace and stability."

The crash of the USS Connecticut goes beyond the potential for harmful radioactive leakage into the South China Sea, with potential damage to the surrounding nations including the fishing grounds of importance to the economy. If the US continues to ramp up confrontation

far from its home in the South China Sea, then a zone of conflict could spread to include all of East Asia. Will this in any way benefit the region? Does the region want to be turned into the same wreckage that the Middle East and North Africa are now after decades of US crusading for “democracy and liberty” there via bombs, sanctions and regime change operations? That would be a tragic turn for the world’s most economically dynamic region. Do the people of the region not realize this? If not, the USS Connecticut should be a wake-up call.

But the people of the US should also think carefully about what is happening. Perhaps the foreign policy elite of the US think it can revisit the US strategy in WWII with devastation visited upon Eurasia leaving the US as the only industrial power standing above the wreckage. Such are the benefits of an island nation. But in the age of intercontinental weapons, could the US homeland expect to escape unscathed from such a conflict as it did in WWII? The knot is being tied, as Krushchev wrote to Kennedy at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and if it is tied too tightly, then no one will be able to untie it. The US is tying the knot far from its home this time half way around the world. It should not tie that knot too tight.

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Featured image: The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson (DDG 114) steams near the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. July 14, 2020 © U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Anthony Collier

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