What states should do to clarify claims

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THE STRAITSTIMES | SOUTHERN CHINA SEA DISPUTES

WEEN we observe the flurry of actions and reactions of states causing increased tension in the South China Sea, it often appears that there are no rules of international law governing claimant states’ actions orOfficials, and the UN gives notice of such baselines by publishing charts or lists of geographic coordinates, as required by Unclos.

One of the major sources of tension in the South China Sea is that many of the claimant states have made maps showing the EEZs claimed by coastal states from offshore geographic features and locations of islands over which they claim sovereignty, and lists of geographic coordinates that cannot sustain human habitation.

This is simply not the case.

First, the claimant states that are claiming a 200-nm EEZ from their mainland coast (or from their mainland coast, they should, if they have not already done so, give notice of such baselines by publishing charts or lists of geographic coordinates.

This would set the stage for negotiating the delimitation of the South China Sea. It would also be of great help in reaching a final agreement on the delimitation of the South China Sea.

Finally, such provisional arrangements are without prejudice to the final delimitation of the maritime boundaries.

If the claimant states brought their maps into conformity with Unclos as set out above, it would appear that most of the South China Sea is covered by such maps already.

This is all a game of power politics.