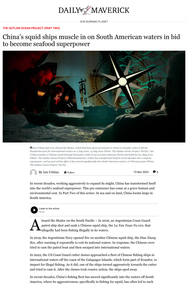
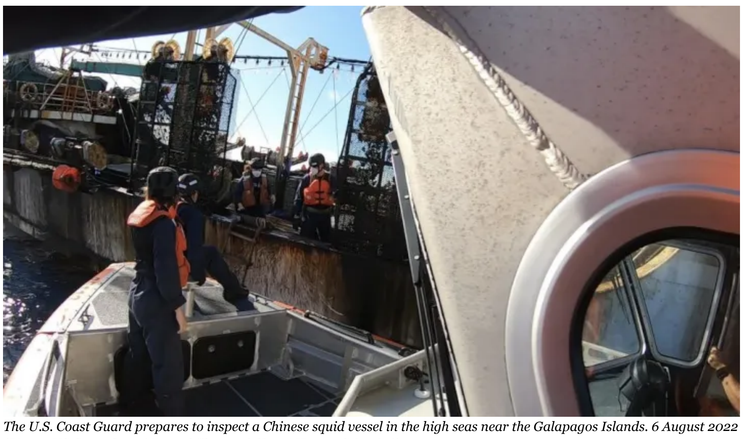
China's squid ships muscle in on South American waters in bid to become seafood superpower



Chinese fishing vessels are reflected in the water, which has become a hotspot for Chinese squid fishing. Ships from Chinese state-owned enterprises have been spotted in the waters of Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. Chinese fishing vessels in Argentina's waters (inset) (Photo: Sergio Ceballos Lopez, Marcelo Ariel Cabrera, Jorge Miguel Fernandez and Ivan de la Cruzada Gonzalez, Marcelo Ariel Cabrera, Jorge Miguel Fernandez and Ivan de la Cruzada Gonzalez) (Photo: Sergio Ceballos Lop

Several South American countries have imposed their own rules on Chinese foreign fleets, but China's presence in the region is on the rise. 9 July 2022. (Photo: The Outlaw Ocean Project/ Ben Blankenship)



The U.S. Coast Guard prepares to inspect a Chinese squid vessel in the high seas near the Galapagos Islands. 6 August 2022 (Photo: US Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class/ Hunter Schnabel)

Ian Urbina and crew aboard the Modoc, which had been given permission to return to Ecuador when it left the Ecuadorian port for international waters on 4 July 2022. 13 July 2022 (Photo: The Outlaw Ocean Project / Ed Ou)

Ambassador Fitzpatrick, when asked about the situation, did not agree. "These events were political," he said, "and had everything to do with China."

For more than a decade, more than 300 Chinese squid ships have visited this squid fishery annually – industrial squid fishing on an unprecedented scale. This, coupled with the fleet's occasional and alleged incursions into the biodiverse national waters of the Galapagos, had in 2020 spurred a media storm among Western news outlets that was highly unfavourable to the Chinese. "China did not want more media attention," Fitzpatrick said, explaining why the *Modoc* had been ordered out of Ecuadorian waters. "So they asked the Ecuadorians to help."

And the Ecuadorians – whose national debt to China amounts to more than 10% of its entire GDP – obliged. **DM**

This story was produced by The Outlaw Ocean Project, a nonprofit journalism organisation in Washington, D.C. Reporting and writing was contributed by Ian Urbina, Joe Galvin, Maya Martin, Susan Ryan, Daniel Murphy and Austin Brush. This reporting was partially supported by the Pulitzer Center.

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