



CALTRAIN'25
UNITED NATIONS SECURITY
COUNCIL
STUDY GUIDE



Agenda Item: Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea

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1. Letter from the Secretary General

Esteemed Participants,

As the Co-Secretary-Generals of Cağaloğlu Model United Nations, it is our distinct honor to welcome you all to the 2nd edition of CALTRAIN, which will take place on December 6th and 7th, 2025. It is with great pleasure that we present the study guide for ECOSOC, which aims to equip you with the essential knowledge and context for the upcoming two days. After months of preparation and dedicated effort, we are proud to say that we are now just one step away from CALTRAIN 2025. We hope that, by reading this guide, you will feel as ready and enthusiastic as we are. Without a doubt, this conference would not be possible without the contributions of our remarkable academic team. We are extending our gratitude to our Head of Academy, Azra Kayar; our Heads of Crisis, Ahmet Taha Özkul and his deputy Elif Köse; our devoted and hardworking team members; and our motivated trainees. Their commitment and passion have brought this vision to life and elevated CALMUN's academic quality to its peak. Furthermore, I would also like to extend my best wishes to all delegates participating in CALTRAIN 2025. Whether this is your first conference or not, we thank each of you for taking a step forward and joining us. We truly hope that CALTRAIN will be a special experience that you will remember warmly in the future. From our perspective, MUN is about motivation, enjoyment, meaningful discussion, and connection. We wish each delegate an inspiring, engaging, and memorable experience.

Warm regards,

Meryem Sultan Çok, Akay Engin

Co-Secretary-Generals of CALTRAIN'25

2. Glossary

EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone): An area of the ocean which extends 200 nm of the coastal side of a country. In this zone a country has jurisdiction over both living and nonliving resources.

Nine Dash Line: The map established by China which states the historical claim of PRC in the area.

UNCLOS: UNCLOS is the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Also referred to as “The Law of the Sea Convention,” UNCLOS is an international convention that sets out the legal framework for the seas and the oceans by defining the rights and obligations of States Parties with respect to the maritime environment

SLOCs: Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) are the key maritime passageways that facilitate heavy shipping traffic volumes and host the transportation of crucial maritime trades such as crude oil, which could be found in Western Pacific Ocean in reserves.

Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA): The PCA is not a conventional court, but an administrative organization with the objective of having permanent and readily available means to serve as the registry for purposes of international arbitration and other related procedures, including commissions of enquiry and conciliation.

Artificial Islands: Human-made, unnatural landscape. Main purposes of building are military zone areas, scientific research and economic interests.

ASEAN: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an organization established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand. The organization aims to achieve economical growth, security measurements and active collaboration between the Southeast Asian states. Promoting Southeast Asian studies by supporting technical and administrative institutions is also one of its main goals. Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia are among current member states.

Arbitration Ruling: The process of jurisdiction which is held by the Court of Arbitration. Refers to the settlement and the final decision agreed upon by arbitrators.

Cochinchina : A term used in order to refer to South Vietnam or Vietnam as a whole depending on the context.

3. Committee Introduction

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six main organs under the United Nations, appointed with the main task of providing peace and security worldwide. The Security council was formed after World War II in order to prevent any potential wars, promote healthy and peaceful international relations and counter events which threaten the secure environment.

The council was created as a replacement for the League of Nations, which had been formed after the first World War came to an end. Even though the Council was in a period of stagnation with its actions due to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, alongside their allies, the council has actively taken its place since 17 January 1946, by holding their first meeting. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the peacekeeping missions organized by the United Nations increased rapidly, expediting the authorization process of military interventions. The UNSC has interfered with many crises in today's history including the Korean War, the Congo Crisis and numerous peacekeeping missions in Kuwait, Somalia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cyprus and many more.

The United Nations Security Council consists of 15 member states, 5 of them being permanent. Those nations are also called the P5 countries and they make up the victors of World War II. China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States have the right to veto any resolution paper created by the committee. The other 10 members are elected on a regional basis for the duration of two years.

Main goals defined by the UNSC are focused on the same final aim of maintaining peace, with various different ways and authorities. The UNSC is allowed to determine the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression and take military action towards it. Additionally, investigations surrounding any potential danger, dispute or conflict must be conducted by the

Security Council. Outside of worldwide operations, the UNSC is the posse for nominating a new member state or making any necessary changes to the charters of member states. If needed, the UNSC can follow a procedure to call on its members to apply economic sanctions or other measures which don't directly involve a military action to stop a fraction. The UNSC is the organ which elects the judges of the International Court of Justice.

4. Overview

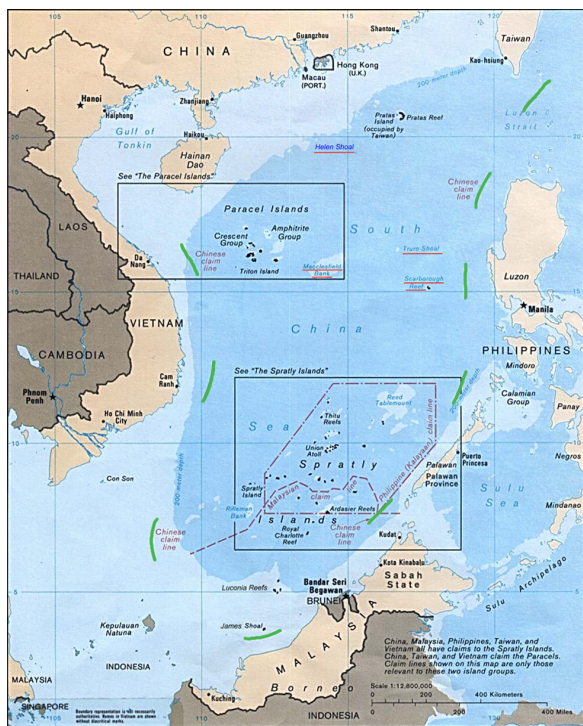
The South China Sea is considered one of the greatest problems in modern history. Geographically, this region is located in the Pacific Ocean and covers an area of approximately 3.5 million square kilometers. Geographically, the South China Sea is located south of China, west of the Philippines, east of Vietnam, and north of Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, and Indonesia.

One of the main reasons for the region's importance is its abundance of marine natural resources. It holds 1.1 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Similarly, ten percent of the world's fishing resources are also found here. Approximately one-third of global trade passes through this sea route, and 80% of China's energy imports also transit through the same route. Therefore, control of the region is of vital importance, especially for China.

a. The Origin of the Crisis

Before World War II, China gained rights in the region following the loss of Japan's rights there. The ongoing crisis stems from China's claim to rights over 80% of the region. China's claim to sovereignty covers approximately 80% of the South China Sea, including the Spratly and Paracel Islands, numerous other islands and rocks, and rich energy resources. These claims are represented internationally by the controversial "Nine-Dash Line" drawn in 1947.

The Nine Dash line has been invalidated by the PCA. And according to the United Nations, five more countries have rights within these boundaries. These are Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, and Malaysia. These boundaries are defined by the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone). The remaining areas are referred to as "International Waters."



In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration declared that China's historical claims were legally invalid and contrary to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The court also stated that coastal states such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia have the right to an EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) extending 200 nautical miles from their own coasts.

Even though China is among the countries that recognize and signed this court, it has invalidated this decision in favor of the Philippines. It has deemed any military activity in the region illegal.

b. EEZ and Current Key Points

One of the key points of escalating tension in this issue is China's construction of artificial islands and expansion of existing islands in the region. The Spratly Islands are islands located far from the coast in international waters. China, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines all claim rights to these islands. These islands are quite critical because the country that possesses them has the right to extend its EEZ boundaries to include these islands. China vehemently asserts its rights to these islands and emphasizes that it can use "force" to do so.

The CABBAGE strategy is one that China has been actively pursuing for a long time, with the goal of deploying as many ships as possible around the islands.

One critical incident in this area was China's attack on an Indonesian island just 115 nm away (within EEZ boundaries).

This incident has impacted U.S. trade, prompting the U.S. to become involved militarily and diplomatically by signing agreements to defend the rights of its allies against China.

The facilities that facilitate trade in the region for the United States and its allies have come under threat. Washington's defense agreement with Manila could potentially draw the United States into a China-Philippines conflict over important natural gas reserves or lucrative fishing grounds in the disputed region.

Other areas of conflict include the Paracel Islands, which are under the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China despite being located approximately 400 km off the coast of Vietnam. These islands, which belong to Vietnam according to EEZ boundaries, were seized by China in 1974 as a result of war, leading to a crisis. Military activities and attempts to establish a presence on these islands have increased significantly.

c. Risk of Escalation

According to the latest United Nations report, China and Vietnam are currently engaged in a war of words. This situation is escalating tensions and is on the verge of turning into a physical war.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry claims that Vietnam has deliberately rammed its ships more than 1,400 times. The Vietnamese government, on the other hand, blamed China for the sinking of a fishing boat on May 26 and has repeatedly accused Beijing of being overly aggressive.

The Vietnamese navy is significantly weaker than China's in terms of strength, but the increasingly aggressive military posture in the region heightens the risk of a deadly accident.

"For the first time in 500 years, Asia has surpassed the West in military spending, with China leading the way. Therefore, all countries in the region—from the smallest, Singapore, to India and Vietnam—have embarked on developing their naval and air forces." -UN press conference

The involvement of major powers has turned the issue into a global problem. Although the United Nations called on Vietnam and China to mediate, they refused.

5. Historical Background

There are many factors which play multiple roles in the current situation of the South China Sea. In order to understand the effects of the South China Sea and policies of numerous nations revolving around this matter, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of the region initially.

a. Resources

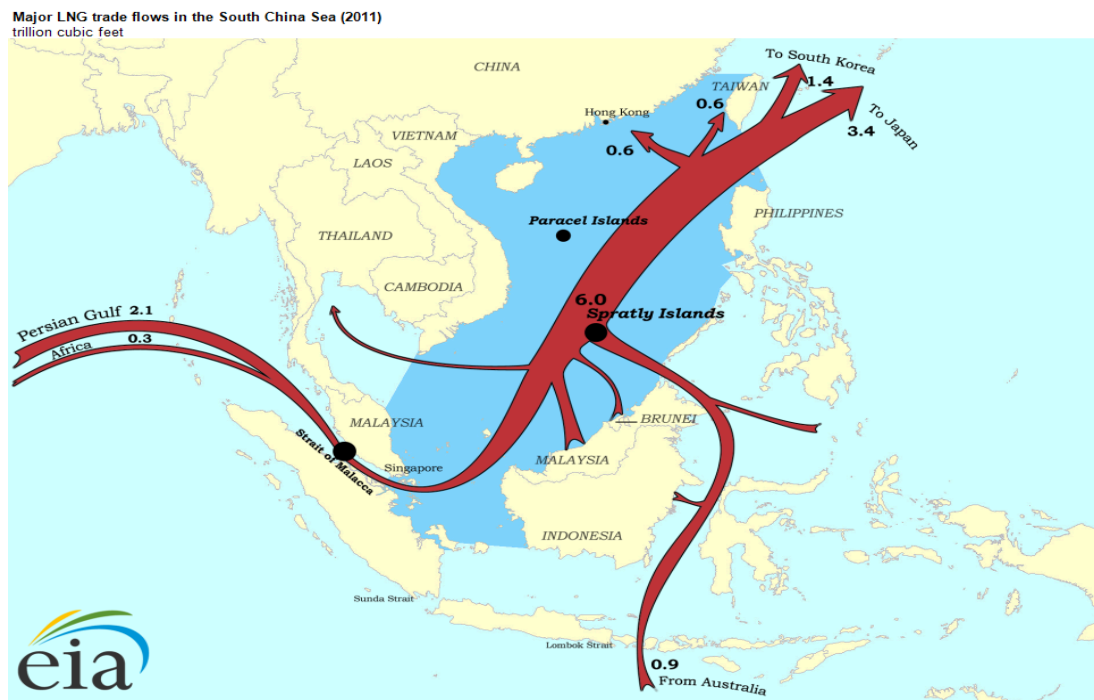
Natural resources such as oil (petroleum as an example) and natural gas reserves have been discovered to be lying in the ocean. Even though the South China Sea is underexplored due to border dispute issues occurring for a while, a total of 3596 million barrels of liquid oils and 40.3 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) natural gas have been proven to exist, as of 2023. However, the sea floor has not been studied enough to reach certain numbers. Mass potential of the region is estimated to be far more prolific with a prediction consisting of up to 190 Tcf natural gas and 11 billion barrels of crude oil reserves. It is crucial to add that the reasoning behind the far range between estimations is the resources not being processable to their fullest extent. Some researchers choose to publish the amount which is available to use.

b. Trade Routes

The South China Sea is known to accommodate some of the most vital trade routes for global trade, approximately %40 of the goods pass through the waters of the Sea annually, which makes it one of the busiest waterways connecting the large markets of Eastern and South Eastern Asia with the Eurasian Africa, thereafter Europe. Since controlling and having access with no interference to the area could possibly lead to becoming a leading power in terms of economy, this aspect takes place as a great motivation for countries which have had less impact on global economy throughout the history. In other words, still developing and third world countries. The South China Sea is the provider of two main straits, strait of Malacca on south and the strait of Taiwan on the northern side. Due to the strong connection the straits have to the global economy, external stakes have also been observing the dispute going on in the area.

c. Strategical Location

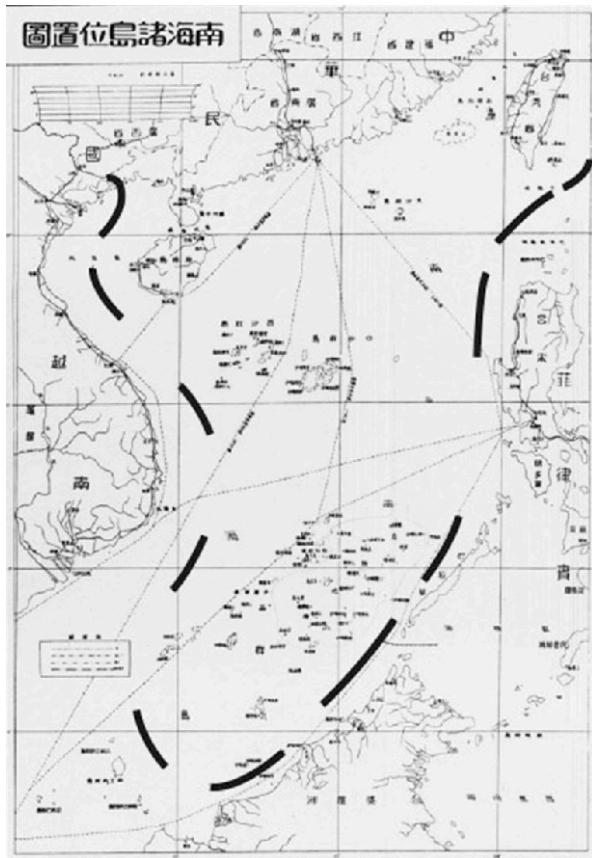
Thanks to the location of the sea, the lands surrounding the sea have been amongst one of the most desired places to conquer and populate. Apart from the reasons mentioned above, it is essential to note that the South China Sea is one of the most heavily fished waters, meaning that it has shaped the cuisine in the region and also presents massive export opportunities. The South China Sea lies under South China, accompanied by the There are many factors which play multiple roles in the current situation of the South China Sea. In order to understand the effects of the South China Sea and policies of numerous nations revolving around this matter, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of the region initially.



The Map of the Straits and Natural Formations

The historical background of claims made over the dispute in the South China Sea date back to the 1800s, despite the legal process beginning in the late 1900s.

Chinese claims depend on a few documents in their national archives. In the early 20th century, a



concerning doubt about the borders of the Republic of China (ROC) rose. The government was actively facing conflicts caused by disputes with particularly France and Japan. Thus, the nationalist government of ROC decided to establish a committee in order to map their territory and define borders, which was called 'Land and Water Maps Review Committee'. The committee contributed to the claims by allocating Chinese names to the natural formations on the sea such as reefs and rocks in 1935. A new atlas was written in the following year, called the 'New Atlas of China's Construction' by a geography professor, Bai Meichu. In his maps, Bai included the line covering Vanguard Bank off southeastern Vietnam, James Shoal off Brunei and Seahorse Shoal off the Philippines, which is the original resource of the eleven dash line. Even though Bai

was not a government officer, his lines used in maps were slightly adapted and later on became the official claim. The map was published by the ROC administration in approximately 1948. Simultaneously, the Chinese Civil war between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists was ongoing. In 1949, the Communist side won the war and declared themselves as the new rulers under the name 'People's Republic of China (PRC)'. The PRC has also inherited ROC's national claims and made it a mission to be the suppressive power in the area. However, the eleven dash line had two of its lines removed near the Gulf of Tonkin by the government as an outcome of the developing relations with North Vietnam, which is also a communist state. Eventually, the

line continued to be the main claim of the PRC as the nine dash line. ROC officials who retreated to Taiwan after the Civil War persisted in using the eleven dash line. Some claimants defend that the South China Sea has always been a Chinese Territory, in connection with the Chinese Dynasty of ancient times. Commenting on this topic has not been possible due to the shortage of written evidence.

In order to explain the historical reasonings behind other nations, understanding the chain of events that impacted the region and the power balance is crucial. It is known that the first Chinese occupation was made as early as the year 1909 to protect the Spratly and Paracel Island from the Japanese expeditions. Thereafter, next occupiers were the Japanese guano miners (guano is the term used for a kind of natural fertilizer), who caused the French to lead their interests towards Indochina in the late 1920s. This situation resulted in a dispute between China and France over the area and the features which lasted until the 1930s. In 1932, the Paracels were occupied by the French. According to the majority of the resources, China did not protest this occurrence and chose to remain silent in the matter. However, some historians argue that China in fact did protest and clarified that the Paracel Islands were their own territory. In July 1933, France formally claimed 6 figures in the South China Sea.

By May of 1939, the majority of Southeast Asia was under Japanese invasion, including the furiously desired Arcapelegos, the Paracels and the Spratly. During the second world war, the Japanese Empire used the islands to serve military purposes. After the conclusion of World War II, both France and ROC renewed their claims. Thus, the western part of the Archipelago was occupied by the French while the eastern part remained within the ROC borders. The Chinese Civil war took place in the upcoming years, forcing ROC to withdraw its presence on the Paracels and Spratly in May 1950. The process of reoccupying the ROC's previous positions on the Islands lasted for 5 years, PRC forces succeeding at occupying them in 1955.

The first Indochina war which happened between French Indochina and North Vietnam has come to an end with the assistance of Geneva Accords. The ownership issues about the Islands were one of the main topics negotiated in the Geneva Conference, which dates back to 1954. It was

decided that Vietnam could control the territories lying south of the 17th parallel. The South Vietnam government claimed the Paracels and Spratlys on this basis. However, France opposed this claim stating that Spratly must belong to the French Union since they were not Vietnamese territory when Cochinchina was ceded and North Vietnam did not protest Chinese claims on the Islands, showing that they had no interest. France has referred to the process, in which the Vietnamese government was forced to cede in 1862 and the country later on was proclaimed under French territory in 1864. The French accusation about North Vietnam could be explained as follows : North Vietnam received aid and military equipment from China during the Vietnam War. As a commonplace consequence, Vietnam at the time did not protest Chinese claims, on the contrary, recognised them. Only post war, it was declared that the Vietnamese recognition was solely caused by American pressure in the ongoing war, thus, the current government retracted their recognition. For the instance of interpretation, the first map published by Vietnam which included the Spratly Islands was dated 1830.

Discovery of potential petroleum resources in the area came into the attention of the global media in the beginning of 1970, which increased the tension in the dispute conflict. Approximately around the end of the year 1970, Philippines and Malaysia also began to refer to the Spratly Island as their own territory, exemplary the Philippines declaring the northwestern part of the Spratlys (also called the Kayalan Island groups) as their own territory. In the time between 1971 and 1973, the Philippines occupied 5 features in the South China Sea. South Vietnam occupied 6 while China has been building the infrastructure to retain the ownership, such as a harbor.

In 1974, PRC forces expelled South Vietnam units from the western half of the archipelago, which includes the Yagong Islands and the Crescent group of reefs. In order to defend themselves, South Vietnam began placing troops in unoccupied islands in February of 1974 with an operation named “Operation Tran Hung Dao 48” . Then, in 1988, PRC forces occupied six features in the Spratlys, adding a seventh in late 1994. China remains active on these seven features, building various harbours and runways. Additionally, storing military equipment and placing bases prepared to combat in any case of war.

One of the most crucial steps of legal history has been taken by the Philippines in 2013. The Philippines brought a legal case against the PRC under UNCLOS. The International Arbitral Tribunal in which the case was heard, has no right or authority to rule on the ownership of the Island and natural features on the Sea. What it has authority to do is to examine the situation of the dispute and clarify if it is within the regulations of the UNCLOS. In 2016, the Tribunal concluded the ruling and stated that the PRC's U-Shaped line (nine dash line) did not constitute any legal basis for them to occupy the area and none of the Spratly qualified as areas capable of creating EEZ. The PRC Government rejected the ruling and continues to do so today.

A few recent events occurred on the Sea caused chaos to rise on global media. In 2011, the Chinese frigate Donguan fired three shots at Philippine fishing boats near Jackson atoll. In May, Vietnamese and Chinese petrol vessels clashed near Hainan Islands. In 2012, the tension between the Chinese fishing vessels and the Philippine navy increased at the Scarborough Shoal.



The Map of Overlapping Claims

6. Major Events and Developments

a. 1947 - The Establishment of the Nine Dash Line

In 1947, China established a map that concluded its rights on the South China Sea. The map's first version included 11 dash lines and also included 80 percent of the sea area. This map was considered a step toward legitimizing China's claims over numerous islands, rocks, and reefs in the region.

b. 1974, Paracel Islands War (January 19-20)

In January 1974, a conflict occurred between Vietnam and China over the Paracel Islands. As a result of this conflict, China significantly increased its de facto control over the islands. These islands are strategically important for the region in terms of military strategy and energy resources. This event escalated tensions in the region and necessitated the intervention of other states, such as the United States.

This event also marked a turning point in China's ability to leverage its military capabilities to gain tangible advantages in the region.

c. 1988 , Johnson South Reef Conflict (March 14)

In 1980, following a decision by the International Oceanic Organisation (IOC), China, which was responsible for surveying global sea levels, did not officially recognize Taiwan as a country. As a result, China established military bases, and the 1988 conflict at Johnson South Reef occurred on a prominent reef in the Spratly Islands group. Through this armed conflict between China and Vietnam, China seized control of some of the reefs in the Spratly Islands group.

d. 2002, ASEAN-China Signs "Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea" (DOC)

In 2002, ASEAN countries and China signed a declaration aimed at regulating the conduct of participating parties in the South China Sea. This document first emerged as a diplomatic effort to reduce the risk of conflict in the region. The main articles of the document are:

- Reducing the risk of conflict in the South China Sea
- Resolving disputes by peaceful means
- Avoiding military provocations
- Implementing mutual confidence-building measures

However, this document lacked binding legal force, and over time, shortcomings in its implementation did not fully achieve the ideal of stable cooperation intended by the declaration.

a. 2016, Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Decision (July 12)

On July 12, 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands, ruled in a lawsuit filed by the Philippines against China that China's extensive historical claims along the "Nine-Dash Line" were not based on international law. This decision was made within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The court also emphasized that coastal states have the right to a 200-nautical-mile EEZ from their coasts. Since China did not recognize this decision, tensions in the region continued to rise over its implementation.

b. 2014 and After, Artificial Island Construction, Military Infrastructure Developments, and a Show of Force

In 2014 and after, developments in the region manifested themselves particularly in China's expansion of existing islands by bringing sand and soil, creating artificial islands, and establishing airstrips, ports, and radar systems. Examples of such projects include the construction of the Paracel and Spratly Islands.

This process played a role in making the region critical not only for sovereignty but also for military strategy, maritime superiority, and energy security.

c. Current Situation, Rising Military Tensions and the Rising Risk of Conflict

Recently, the potential for military, maritime, and diplomatic conflict in the South China Sea has been increasing. Issues such as freedom of navigation along the sea line, coastal states' EEZ rights, and access to fishing and natural resources have consistently led to new crises between the

actors. Analyses fear that small-scale collisions and accidents in the region will become "trigger events."

This has transformed the region from a merely local issue into a vital one for global maritime security and supply lines.

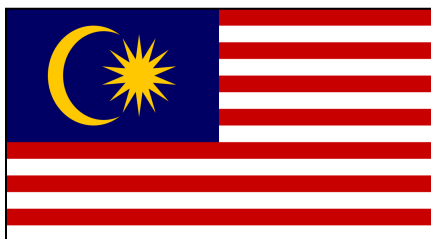
7. Key Stakeholders Involved



Vietnam: Vietnam argues that China's claims do not have legal bindings and are not historically accurate. Vietnam must have a say in the islands Paracel and Spratly in connection with the Vietnam War and their national history.



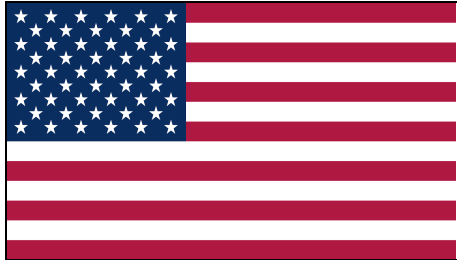
Philippines: Philippines brought PRC to the court after the new escalating events between the Chinese vessels and Philippine forces. The government believes that they must be authorised to use the island groups near their borders and to conduct research activities.



Malaysia: Malaysia's position on the South China Sea remains unchanged. The Government of Malaysia is committed to protecting Malaysia's sovereignty, sovereign rights and interests in its maritime areas in the South China Sea, as depicted by their 1979 Map.



China: China has not taken back its claims and is persistent on the matter. The government has not accepted the ruling made by the Attribution Court in 2026. Chinese vessels continue to reach the majority of the Sea and bring up oil.



The United States of America: The US does not claim any land on the territory. However, they believe that the research and expedition activities must not be stopped in accordance with the government. As a response to China's claim which states that the airspace in the territory is their air defence identification zone, they continue to fly US planes to patrol the area.



Indonesia : Indonesia has also experienced Chinese vessels within its EEZ. The Nation supports that the matter gets resolved by the ASEAN in the borders of the legal law. Dissension on the fate of Indonesia's Natuna Islands was the main concern for years. Natuna Islands, which are within the Indonesian EEZ, are also involved in China's 9-dash-line.



India: India has not directly interacted with the dispute. However, it is in its best interest that the trade routes remain efficient since the majority of its goods use the South China Sea to ensure trade.

8.Points to Address

1. To what extent should mentioned states be allowed to build or militarize artificial islands in discussed areas?
2. How can the UNSC address the growing militarization of the South China Sea while preventing a larger U.S. – China conflict?
3. What diplomatic mechanisms can be used to limit one-sided actions by any state, especially China?
4. How can the UN prevent the escalation of problems to other nations?
5. The clarification and stabilization of Indochina and Southeast Asian nations rights
6. Nine-Dash line's current validity
7. Must the natural sources in the area be divided equally? If so, how could it be done successfully ?
8. What law enforcement and organizations could be founded to prevent the tension?
9. What could be done to extend the validation and applicability of UNCLOS decisions?

9. Resources and Links for Further Research

- The South China Sea: Historical and legal background – Council on Geostrategy
<https://share.google/j4nKV8hf9s7LYgeod>
- What is the South China Sea dispute? - BBC News
<https://share.google/YwFhnLpHWjgJTZxp5>
- Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea | Global Conflict Tracker
<https://share.google/qVRoWNDS8AyMM1gL4>
- International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)
<https://share.google/cUjAC8FBqEBgonzXR>
- Source: ASEAN Main Portal <https://share.google/q9SijPnRgHWYEx4xq>
- <https://youtu.be/-2v6EJE3XKo?si=6On8wwJgEQmIFB7C>
- <https://youtu.be/f00V9MQBhg8?si=UJApvkPeUQfvZp16>
- <https://youtu.be/8eqtl0ym1p8?si=SVdBs0OyZO0f4yQ9>
- The Consequences of Shelving the South China Sea Disputes | Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative <https://share.google/Wq68U55ylkCDLtCir>
- Source: Atlas Institute for International Affairs
<https://share.google/CEmrRKgpIZv5s5c32>
- Source: RAND <https://share.google/8scq6fu8aUwcUpMhW>