Joint Crisis Committee

South China Sea

Head chair: Catrina Shields
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The South China Sea, located in the Pacific ocean has an area of around 3,500,000 square kilometers. It is situated in the south of Mainland China, east of Taiwan, Vietnam and Cambodia, with the Philippines in the west. The South China Sea waters is used by nearly one-third of the world’s shipping trade. Furthermore, the South China Sea islands, although largely uninhabited have large deposits of oil resources and other natural resources, and is a major shipping ground that supplies the livelihood of people within the region. The South China Sea dispute began when China claimed sovereignty of the South China Sea and the Paracels and Spratlys islands to be part of their territory. China’s claim of the South China Sea dates all the way back to 1947, and is based on the “nine-dash line”, which is an area that stretches hundreds of miles south and east. It was in 1947 when China issued a map, with the “nine-dash line” claiming the South China Sea and the islands within it, which included 291 islands and reefs within the region.
This map shows the location of the South China Sea, along with the “nine-dash line” in red, which China bases its claim of the South China Sea and the islands within it. The 200 nautical mile line is also displayed, which allows states to consider waters which are 200 nautical miles within their borders as part of their territory, known as their Economic Exclusive Zone, based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
China’s pursuit for the South China Sea is pushed by a large number of oil and natural gas reserves on the floor of the South China Sea, and would allow it to dominate a major trade route where a majority of the world’s oil shipping transits through, this would allow China to control, threaten or disrupt trade to Eastern and South-east Asian countries. Furthermore, foreign military access could also be denied to countries, such as the United States by China. China’s claim to the South China Sea and the possible power that could come along with it, has led to various reactions by countries in the surrounding region, which include Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and countries which have been wary of China’s possible increase in power, such as the United States of America. Thus, bringing up a major and significant threat of an armed conflict taking place between China and the stakeholders to the South China Sea and the United States.
Key stakeholders

Vietnam: Vietnam strongly contests China’s claim to the South China Sea and its islands, and claims that Vietnam has ruled over the Paracels and Spratlys islands since the 17th century, long before China claimed sovereignty over the South China Sea.

Malaysia: also claims the South China Sea to be theirs, as it falls within their Economic Exclusive Zone, set by UNCLOS. Malaysia also claims a small number of islands in the Spratlys.

United States of America: reacted strongly to China’s claims of sovereignty in the South China Sea, to ensure that the U.S Navy is capable of continuing operations in the region, which date back to World War Two, and to ensure that US military bodies are free to navigate within the region.
Philippines: Philippines claims the Spratlys islands to be theirs due to its geographical location, due to which a part of the Spratlys island are located within its Economic Exclusive Zone, which is a 200 nautical mile range.

Other stakeholders: Brunei, Indonesia, Russia, Australia
Timeline

1974- Chinese troops seized Paracels island from Vietnam, killing more than 70 troops.

1988- Vietnam and China once again faced off for the Spratlys island, resulting in the death of more than 60 Vietnamese troops.

Early 2012- China and the Philippines accused each other of intruding each other in the Scarborough Shoal.

July 2012- Formal creation of Sansha City by the Chinese in the Paracels island, to oversee Chinese territory in the South China Sea. This angered the Philippines and Vietnam

2014- China introduces a drilling rig into waters close to the Paracels island, resulting in several collisions and hostilities between Chinese and Vietnamese ships.

2015- Satellite images have shown the building of an airstrip on land in the Spratlys island.

Defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world’s oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources.

166 countries and the EU have joined in the convention, as of January.

Clearly states that each state's Economic Exclusive Zone as 200 nautical miles from their borders.

Several stakeholders in the South China Sea argue that China is violating articles mentioned in UNCLOS, and is violating the 200 nautical mile zone, claiming territory beyond its Economic Exclusive Zone and thus having no right of claim in the South China Sea and on it’s islands.
UNCLOS states that in the Economic Exclusive Zone, the coastal state has:

“(a) sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or non-living, of the waters superjacent to the seabed and of the seabed and its subsoil, and with regard to other activities for the economic exploitation and exploration of the zone, such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds;
(b) jurisdiction as provided for in the relevant provisions of this Convention with regard to:
(i) the establishment and use of artificial islands, installations and structures;
(ii) marine scientific research;
(iii) the protection and preservation of the marine environment;
(c) other rights and duties provided for in this Convention.”
Established in 1899 at the Hague Peace Conference, and administers cases arising from international treaties. Looks at a wide range of legal cases, including territorial and maritime boundary disputes, sovereignty, matters concerning international and regional trade. The Philippines has brought up the case to the PCA regarding the South China Sea. Court proceedings began on 7 July 2015. However, the Chinese Government has refused to participate in these arbitral proceedings. The Philippines argues that China is not entitled to exercise “historic rights” over South China Sea waters, as it exceeds the given entitlements under the convention. It also disregards China’s “nine-dash line” and states that China has interfered with The Philippines’ sovereign rights.


