

# CHINA-US STRATEGIC RIVALRY AND REGIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA



By

**ASAD ULLAH**

**Area Study Centre for Africa, North and South America**

**Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad**

**2023**

# CHINA-US STRATEGIC RIVALRY AND REGIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA



**By**

**Asad Ullah**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of degree of Master of**

**Philosophy in American Studies**

**Supervised By**

**Dr. Sadia Sulaiman**

**Area Study Centre for Africa, North and South America**

**Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad**

**2023**

**Area Study Centre for Africa, North and South America**

**Quaid-i-Azam University  
Islamabad**

**Approval of the Thesis**

This is to certify that we have read the dissertation submitted by Mr. Asad Ullah under the title **China-US Strategic Rivalry and Regional Security Dynamics in the South China Sea**. In our opinion it is up to the standard of acceptance by Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad for granting the master degree Master of Philosophy in American Studies

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner: \_\_\_\_\_

In charge: \_\_\_\_\_

**Area Study Centre for Africa, North and South America  
Quaid-i-Azam University  
Islamabad**

**Approval of the Thesis**

This is to certify that I have read the dissertation submitted by Mr. Asad Ullah under the title **China-US Strategic Rivalry and Regional Security Dynamics in the South China Sea**. In my opinion it is up to the standard of acceptance by Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad for granting the master degree Master of Philosophy in American Studies.

Supervisor

Dr. Sadia Sulaiman

## **Declaration**

In submitting this dissertation titled **China-US Strategic Rivalry and Regional Security Dynamics in the South China Sea**, I declare that I have read and understood the rules and regulations of Area Study Center and QAU regarding assessment procedures and formally declare that all work contained within this document is my individual research work carried out in consultation with research supervisor. I further confirm that this work has not been accepted in substance for any other degree, nor is it currently being submitted in candidature for any other degree.

**Asad Ullah**

## Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere appreciations to all people that helped me, and were involved in a way or another in the accomplishment of this study.

First of all, I want to express my gratitude to my parents for their devotion, sacrifices, unconditional support and being constant source of prayers and inspiration, which enabled me to complete this study successfully. Thus, I want to dedicate this work to my parents.

Secondly, I feel vastly privileged in taking the opportunity to record the deep sense of appreciation and indebtedness to my teachers particularly to my supervisor Professor Dr. Sadia Sulaiman for her dedication, patience, support, and advice, without which this work would have been infinitely more difficult.

Thirdly, I also cordially express my appreciation to my dearest uncle and friend, Muhammad Zeeshan, for his encouragement and for being beside me during all the time.

Finally, I am beholden of all my well-wishers and friends who always been there to motivate me and became a source of inspiration throughout the journey. I want to show my special appreciation to my friend circle Alpha, among them are Muhammad Shahab, Ehsan Kazmi, Syed Ali Bukhari, Farwa Baloch, Muniba, Javeriva and my roommates Hassan Zaib and Muhammad Yasir that were being here with me these two years to support and helped me in every circumstances.

## **Abstract**

The South China Sea is a crucial region that has become a focal point of territorial disputes and geopolitical tensions between China and its neighboring countries, resulting in a complex security landscape. Against this backdrop, the US has sought to counter China's assertiveness in the region, resulting in a strategic rivalry that has far-reaching implications for regional security. The theoretical framework of the study is based on Neo-realism which posits that state behavior in the international system is driven by the pursuit of self-interest and the desire for power and security. The concept of offensive realism and balance of power play a supportive role in the dissertation. The researcher adopted a qualitative method to carry out this study. Drawing on existing literature and analysis of current events, this study explores the strategic and historical importance of the SCS, overlapping claims, and the US's position over territorial claims. The study explores the emerging China-US rivalry and key drivers behind their rivalry in the South China Sea, including economic and military factors, as well as broader geopolitical considerations. The study argues that China in any way did not want military engagement with the US at this time because it is aware that it is not yet prepared to win such a war. Instead, China has concentrated on developing its own military capabilities and increasing its influence in the region through diplomatic, military, and economic means. Furthermore, China-US strategic rivalry in the South China Sea affected the regional security dynamics that led to the militarization of SCS, arms race, alliances, instability and heightened tensions in the region.

## Table of Contents

|  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Abstract.....  | vi                                  |
| List of Abbreviation.....  | xi                                  |
| List of Figure .....   | xiii                                |
| List of Tables.....  | xiv                                 |
| <i>Introduction .....</i>  | <i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i> |
| Background .....   | 1                                   |
| Statement of the Problem.....  | 3                                   |
| Significance of the Study .....                                      | 3                                   |
| Research Questions .....   | 4                                   |
| Proposed Hypothesis .....  | 4                                   |
| Limitation of the Study.....   | 5                                   |
| Literature Review .....  | 6                                   |
| Theoretical Framework .....  | 13                                  |
| Research Methodology .....   | 15                                  |
| Organization of the Study.....                                       | 16                                  |
| <i>Chapter I .....</i>   | <i>18</i>                           |
| <i>South China Sea: Its Historical and Strategic Importance.....</i> | <i>18</i>                           |
| Introduction .....   | 18                                  |
| The South China Sea: A Crucial Maritime Region .....                 | 19                                  |



|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <b>Navigating the Significance of South China Sea: A Historical Perspective .....</b>          | <b>21</b>        |
| <b>Strategic Significance of the South China Sea .....</b>                                     | <b>26</b>        |
| Economic significance of the region in terms of trade and resources.....                       | 27               |
| Geo-political importance of the region .....   | 29               |
| Military significance of SCS in terms of regional security .....                               | 30               |
| <b>International Law and Territorial Claims in the South China Sea .....</b>                   | <b>32</b>        |
| UNCLOS and the South China Sea.....  | 32               |
| Permanent Court Arbitration-South China Sea, 2016.....   | 34               |
| The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) .....  | 35               |
| <b>Overview of Territorial and Maritime Claims by Different States .....</b>                   | <b>37</b>        |
| Chinese claims .....   | 39               |
| Vietnam claims.....  | 40               |
| Philippines claims.....  | 41               |
| Indonesia claims .....   | 41               |
| Malaysia claims.....   | 42               |
| Taiwan claims.....   | 42               |
| Brunei claims.....   | 43               |
| United States position on the claims in the SCS .....  | 43               |
| <b>Recent Developments and Tensions .....</b>  | <b>44</b>        |
| <b>Conclusion .....</b>  | <b>45</b>        |
| <b><i>Chapter II .....</i></b>   | <b><i>47</i></b> |
| <b><i>China-US Interest in the South China Sea and main drivers of their rivalry .....</i></b> | <b><i>47</i></b> |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>  | <b>47</b>        |

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| <b>US Official Policy in the South China Sea .....</b>                                  | <b>47</b>        |
| Obama’s policy of pivot to Asia .....   | 48               |
| Trump’s policy of Free and Open Indo Pacific .....                                      | 49               |
| Biden administration policy: Focus on alliances .....                                   | 50               |
| <b>United State Priorities and Interests in the SCS .....</b>                           | <b>51</b>        |
| US Economic Interest through Sea lanes .....  | 52               |
| Defense and security interest through strengthening ties with regional states .....     | 53               |
| Being a globally dominant power .....   | 54               |
| Why South China Sea matter to US? .....   | 55               |
| <b>Chinese Interest in the South China Sea .....</b>                                    | <b>56</b>        |
| Economic Interest: Natural Resources and Reserves .....                                 | 56               |
| Security Interest.....  | 56               |
| Geostrategic interest .....   | 57               |
| <b>China-US Strategic Rivalry in the SCS .....</b>                                      | <b>58</b>        |
| <b>Drivers of China-US strategic rivalry.....</b>                                       | <b>60</b>        |
| Territorial dispute and maritime rules.....   | 60               |
| Military presence of China and US in the South China Sea .....                          | 61               |
| Power politics .....  | 61               |
| Third party factor and regional alliances .....   | 62               |
| <b>Will China-US Rivalry will Escalate into a Full-Scale Conflict? .....</b>            | <b>63</b>        |
| China's Reluctance: Avoiding Direct Military Confrontation in the South China Sea ..... | 64               |
| <b>Conclusion .....</b>   | <b>65</b>        |
| <b><i>Chapter III .....</i></b>   | <b><i>67</i></b> |
| <b><i>Impact of China-US Strategic Rivalry on Regional Security Dynamics.....</i></b>   | <b><i>67</i></b> |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Introduction .....</b>  | <b>67</b> |
| <b>Regional Dynamics of the South China Sea.....</b>   | <b>67</b> |
| Territorial disputes and overlapping claims.....   | 68        |
| External involvement in the SCS .....  | 68        |
| Absence of trust and cooperation .....   | 70        |
| Trade routes of SCS: connecting global economies and shaping regional dynamics .....               | 70        |
| <b>Impacts of China-US Strategic Rivalry on the Security Dynamics of the South China Sea .....</b> | <b>71</b> |
| Militaryization of the SCS and power projection.....   | 72        |
| Alliances and partnerships.....  | 73        |
| Shifting dynamics in the region and balance of power.....  | 75        |
| Regional instability.....  | 76        |
| Arms race .....  | 77        |
| Enhancing national security: Risk of accidental escalation.....                                    | 78        |
| <b>Conclusion .....</b>  | <b>79</b> |
| <b><i>Conclusion</i>.....</b>  | <b>81</b> |
| <b>Recommendations .....</b>   | <b>87</b> |
| <b>BIBLOGHRAPGY .....</b>  | <b>89</b> |

## List of Abbreviation

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| A2/D2 | Anti-Access/Area Denial  |
| ADIZ  | Air Defense Identification Zone                                  |
| ARF   | ASEAN Regional Forum   |
| ASBM  | Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile                                      |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations                           |
| AUKUS | Alliance between Australia, United Kingdom, United States        |
| CBM   | Confidence Building Measure                                      |
| CMS   | China Maritime Surveillance                                      |
| CSS   | Center for Strategic Studies                                     |
| DOC   | Declaration on the Conduct of the parties in the South China Sea |
| DRV   | Democratic Republic of Vietnam                                   |
| ECAFE | Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East                    |
| ECS   | East China Sea   |
| EDCA  | Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement                           |
| EEZ   | Exclusive Economic Zone  |
| EIA   | Energy Information Administration                                |
| FOIP  | Free and Open Indo-Pacific                                       |
| FON   | Freedom of Navigation  |
| FONOP | Freedom of Navigation Operation                                  |
| ICJ   | International Court of Justice                                   |
| IEA   | International Energy Agency                                      |
| PCA   | Permanent Court of Arbitration                                   |

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| PLA    | People's Liberation Army                        |
| PLAN   | People's Liberation Army Navy                   |
| PRC    | People's Republic of China                      |
| QUAD   | Quadrilateral Security Dialogue                 |
| ROC    | Republic of China                               |
| SCS    | South China Sea                                 |
| SLBM   | Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles           |
| SLOC   | Sea Lines of Communication                      |
| UN     | United Nation                                   |
| UNCLOS | United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea |
| US     | United States                                   |

## List of Figure

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: The South China Sea .....          | 19 |
| Figure 2 UNCLOS Maritime Zones .....         | 33 |
| Figure 3: Overlapping Claims in the SCS..... | 38 |

## List of Tables

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1 Important Historical Events in the SCS..... | 26 |
|---|----|

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

The South China Sea (SCS), which is a part of the Pacific Ocean, stretches from the Strait of Malacca to the Taiwan strait and at the strategic crossroads connecting Pacific and the Indian Ocean on one hand and Northeast and Southeast Asia on the other. In addition to China, there are six other significant claimant parties: Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Brunei. Meanwhile, China claimed most of the SCS, and it has a strong military and strategic influence over the disputed territories.<sup>1</sup> China claims most of the South China Sea with its nine-dash line, which was formally presented to the UN in 2009. China has said that it discovered, occupied, and ruled the South China Sea around two thousand (2000) years ago when Han Dynasty was in power.<sup>2</sup> However, China has no strong evidence to back up its historical claims over the area.<sup>3</sup> Most interestingly, international maritime law as written in the UNCLOS 1982 doesn't recognize China's historical claims over the SCS waters. The Court of Arbitration decided in favor of the Philippines regarding the Scarborough Shoal dispute in the South China Sea in July 2016. China has been prohibited from granting its historical rights to natural resources and the construction of the islands on Mischief Reef because Beijing has been found guilty of violating the sovereignty of the Philippines and its rights to the exploitation of resources within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). While the China strongly rejects the decision of Arbitration Court.<sup>4</sup> However, for China and other claimants states, the SCS conflict is about territorial sovereignty, security, and political legitimacy but the United States (US) neither accept any

---

<sup>1</sup> Shiv Kumar and Shabaz Hussain Shah, "The Great Asian Security Complex," *China's Foreign Relations and Security Dimensions*, 2018, pp. 133-144, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507496-9>.

<sup>2</sup> Nong Hong, "Unclos and Ocean Dispute Settlement: Law and politics in the South China Sea." Routledge, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203111215>, 37-38.

<sup>3</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Risk of Applying Realpolitik in Resolving the South China Sea Dispute: Implications on Regional Security\*," *Pacific Focus* 27, no. 2 (2012): pp. 262-289, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2012.01084.x>.

<sup>4</sup> Kumar and Shah, "The Great Asian Security Complex," 141.



state claim over sovereignty of the South China Sea. China effectively occupies the South China Sea by creating artificial islands and demonstrating its ownership of the region. Washington intends to maintain its global maritime predominance and role as lead defender of the global commons while seeing the South China Sea as a key battlefield in the region.<sup>5</sup>

The US remained tranquil with China's rise until it was within the threshold of the western liberal order. Beijing's military modernization and assert of its sovereignty claim most of the SCS has created antagonism in China-US relation.<sup>6</sup> The strategic confrontation between two leading political and economic powers China and US in the South China Sea exemplifies the region's relevance in world politics. Tensions in the SCS have risen due to territorial disputes and lack of security as a result of diverse national and commercial interests on a regional and international level.<sup>7</sup> It is one of the world's most volatile hotspots and the contested area between the US, China, and its neighbors.<sup>8</sup> Since 2010, the level of attention paid to the SCS dispute is unprecedented. The dynamics of the growing China-US rivalry are currently affecting the stability of regional security and influencing the SCS dispute. The security of each state in a region interacts with the security of other states. There is generally significant security interdependence within a region, which creates challenges. China has chosen assertiveness, while the US intends to enhance its influence to counterbalance China's aggressiveness and rise in the region. Some claimant states want the US presence to stop China's expanding strategy in the SCS and have bilateral relations with China as well. As tensions continue to rise, China's assertiveness and the US counter strategy

---

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Scobell. "The geography of conflict: South China Sea and US–China Rivalry." In *US-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes*, pp. 29-47. Routledge, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Shazia Mehboob, "Sino-US Geostrategic Competition in the South China Sea: Contextualising Rivalries, Interests, and Strategies," *Orient Research Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (December 2018): 204–2018, <https://doi.org/https://gcwus.edu.pk/wp-content/uploads/4.-Sino-US-Geostrategic-Competition-in-the-South-China-Sea.pdf>, 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Iraj Roudgar, "The Strategic Competition in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs* 05, no. 03 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4172/2332-0761.1000277>.

<sup>8</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "South China Sea Emerging as a Dangerous Flashpoint," *The Economic Times*, August 1, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/south-china-sea-emerging-as-a-dangerous-flashpoint/articleshow/65218028.cms>.

has expanded the military presence in the SCS, threatening regional security dynamics and international peace.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Historically, the United States and China accepts one another's position in the regional security in the SCS region. Nowadays, their relationship is characterized by mistrust regarding the aims and means of security policy in the region. US strategy in SCS based on military/naval superiority to preserve a favorable balance of power. On the other hand, China cannot directly challenge the United States, but want to prevent the US's influence. The China-US strategic rivalry in SCS isn't about legal or marine rights. It seems a political game between a growing power and an existing superpower. It has an established fact that South China Sea is of utmost importance to security, geostrategic and economic interests for the foreseeable future. The increasing Sino-American rivalry are currently affecting the stability of regional security. The increasing tensions have raised questions regarding security dynamics in the region. The rivalry has the potential to push countries in the region towards one side or the other, creating a split in the region which could lead to heightened political tensions. Ultimately, China's expanding power, US influence in the SCS region, and their growing rivalry costs regional security and stability.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research study is significant because it deals with one of the crucial flashpoints in the international politics. Its strategic location and large number of natural resources make SCS more important not only for the claimant states but also for the external players such as the US. The China-US strategic rivalry particularly in the SCS are of critical significance in the international arena. The SCS facilitates a major portion of global trade, energy, good and food supply. It has also been subject to territorial disputes between China and its neighboring states, which have heightened tensions and complicated regional security dynamics. The

strategic rivalry between China and the US has further exacerbated the situation, with both countries vying for influence and control in the region. This research topic is of great academic interest as it requires a nuanced understanding of international relations, security studies, and regional dynamics. The study highlights the developments in this area to understand the nature of the China-US rivalry in the SCS and its impact on regional security and international peace.

## **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the main question regarding the security situation emerging from the China-US rivalry.

- Why is the South China Sea's strategic location important for the United States?
- What are the main drivers of China-US rivalry and how it contributed to further escalate their rivalry in the SCS?
- How the China-US strategic rivalry in SCS affected the regional security dynamics?

## **Proposed Hypothesis**

A battleground between US and China is taking place in the South China Sea. The rivalry between these two powers on the strategic front has an effect on the dynamics of regional security. It is hypothesized that:

- The rivalry between China and US will not escalate into a full-blown conflict because of the security interdependence in the SCS region. China is concerned that any military engagement with the US in the SCS could escalate into a larger conflict. The US and China are two of the world's most powerful militaries, and any military confrontation between the two countries could have serious consequences for the regional security and the world peace.

- The US has become a threat to China and China in any way did not want military engagement with America at this time. China has been aiming to avoid direct military conflict with the US because it is aware that it is not yet prepared to win such a war. Instead, China has been concentrating on developing its own military capabilities and increasing its influence in the region through diplomatic, military and economic means.
- The strategic rivalry between China and the US in the South China Sea (SCS) has negatively impacted the regional security dynamic by fuelling a cycle of military build-up, heightened tensions, arm race, and militarization in the region. The competition for influence in the SCS region has led to increased incidents of assertive behaviour by both China and the US. As a result, the security environment in the region has become increasingly unstable, creating challenges for regional actors to maintain peace and stability.

### **Limitation of the Study**

This qualitative research study has some limitations. Firstly, the focus of this research is a specific geographical location, the South China Sea, involving two states, the superpower US and the emerging power China having the potential to influence the regional dynamics. It's not a detailed study due to which it ignores other states in the region with different stakes and interests but some states such as Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, Brunei, Philippines, and Indonesia are mentioned in the context of their direct claims in the SCS and in regards to the actions and strategies of the China and US. Secondly, this study is not wide-range regarding the bilateral ties and rivalry between China and the US as there are other important aspects that exist. It's only focused on their rivalry and regional security dynamics in the SCS. Thirdly, the study will not take a position regarding the historical and legal rights in the SCS

as China and US did not accept the Jurisdiction of UNCLOS despite the fact that China is the signatory of the UNCLOS.

## **Literature Review**

The South China Sea has become a site of intense strategic rivalry between the US and China, as both countries compete for dominance in the region. This rivalry is driven by several factors, including the control of key shipping lanes, access to valuable natural resources, and the assertion of geopolitical influence. In recent years, China has pursued an aggressive territorial expansion in the South China Sea, building artificial islands and militarizing them in an effort to establish a "nine-dash line" claiming virtually the entire sea. This has led to increased tensions with other countries in the region, particularly with the US, which has sought to counter China's territorial claims and uphold the principle of freedom of navigation. One of the key pieces of literature on the US-China rivalry in the South China Sea is the report by the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI), which provides detailed analysis and satellite imagery of China's territorial expansion in the region (AMTI, 2018). The report highlights the significance of the South China Sea as a vital shipping lane and the potential implications of China's territorial claims for regional stability and security.<sup>9</sup>

Security situation in the SCS region is precarious. Chinese aggression, the US desire to maintain a balance in the region and lack of interest of ASEAN, all contribute to the region's fragmentation. The dual pressures and ongoing supervision by the international community have led to a variety of approaches to the South China sea territorial disputes. As a result, China's national security strategy has become more aggressive. The regional security will always involve a power position held by China, which represents an ever-present danger. It is possible that China's growing influence in the region may eventually force the US to leave the region, but it will create a power vacuum in the region. in which China would

---

<sup>9</sup> CSIS, "Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, December 14, 2022, <https://amti.csis.org/>.

dominate other regional states and shareholders.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the United States grand strategy of Asia-Pacific aims to promote long-term economic & maritime security objectives in the South China Sea. Due to the unpredictability of the region, Washington draw up a monitor strategy that can be supported by navigation programs and multilateral coalitions to achieve the goals of maritime security and freedom of navigation in the SCS.<sup>11</sup>

Through land acquisition, China has extended its presence and control, although it remains unclear about the nine-dash line. China's assertiveness has changed the SCS status quo, however, it's uncertain how far China will go and even China doesn't know about the US intentions in SCS. The U.S. has gone from being passive to proactive with SCS issues. The US has denounced China's assertiveness and supported other littoral states and expanded military ties with the Vietnam and Philippines. In China's eyes, the United States pivot, or rebalancing strategy is containment. It is important to mention that both countries are conscious of the risks of more confrontation in the region. In Nov 2014, the United States and China entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on safety norms for air and marine engagements. The objective of the MOU was to establish "rules of the road" and avoid problems caused by unexpected meetings between China and US. This MOU, however, did not resolve their Commitment to cooperate in the South China Sea region.<sup>12</sup>

Feng and He in their chapter: "The bargaining dilemma between the United States and China in the South China Sea" explores the dynamic of the strategic competition between the China and United states over the South China Sea (SCS). They stated that tension and rivalry are an undecided bargaining dilemma between a growing power China and an existing power America for dominance in the region. It makes sense for China to negotiate for a new

---

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Scott, "Regional Security in the South China Sea: What Are Its Ramifications for Chinese National Security?," *Undergraduate Journal of Politics, Policy, and Society (UJPPS)* 1, no. 1 (2018): pp. 214-233, [https://doi.org/file:///C:/Users/Asad/Downloads/6-Article%20Text-107-1-10-20180407%20\(2\).pdf](https://doi.org/file:///C:/Users/Asad/Downloads/6-Article%20Text-107-1-10-20180407%20(2).pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Iraj Roudgar, "The Strategic Competition in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs* 05, no. 03 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4172/2332-0761.1000277>.

<sup>12</sup> Mark J. Valencia, "The US-China MOU on Air and Maritime Encounters," *The Diplomat*, November 17, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/11/the-us-china-mou-on-air-and-maritime-encounters/>.

position as a rising state, for example, China should negotiate for more power and stakes in the region. China needs to come up with a non-confrontational plan of action to persuade the US to accept its demands. As an existing global power, the United States has a strong reason to reject China's demands. However, simply rejecting or dismissing China's attempts to negotiate could lead to costly confrontations that would further harm US interests.<sup>13</sup> Chinese Minister for Foreign affairs Wang Yi has clearly said that “History will prove who is a mere guest and who is a real host in the SCS”.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of a military engagement in the South China Sea, the United States Navy is exposed to an unacceptable level of danger on the part of China. The Anti-Access/Area Denial policy that China is implementing won't be a solution to stop the US military from deploying force in the region where it is already present. If China and the United States engage in hostilities, the Chinese A2/AD Strategy is difficult to put into action and carry out successfully. Stashwick says that overt wars between China and the United States are far from inevitable, even though there is latent competition between the two countries. Knowing their interest and military capabilities can help US and China that hurdles in the peaceful solution and tension in the region may lead to the outbreak of war.<sup>15</sup>

Li argues in her paper titled "ASEAN and the South China Sea: Approaches to Resolving the Conflict" that ASEAN experiences Challenges with the South China Sea issue. Regional disputes over land sovereignty and resource sharing in the South China Sea have prevented official negotiations from moving forward. The absence of coordination and bilateral and multilateral communication between states has heightened regional tension.

---

<sup>13</sup> Huiyun Feng and Kai He, “The Bargaining Dilemma between the United States and China in the South China Sea,” in *US-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes*, 1st Edition (New York, Routledge, 2018), pp. 14-28.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Forsythe and Jane Perlez, “South China Sea Buildup Brings Beijing Closer to Realizing Control,” *The New York Times*, March 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/09/world/asia/south-china-sea-militarization.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Stashwick, “Being Realistic About Engagement with China and the A2/AD Threat,” *The Diplomat*, September 23, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/being-realistic-about-engagement-with-china-and-the-a2ad-threat/>.

ASEAN failed to find a sustainable compromise on the issue. Without an all-encompassing deal, the states in the SCS would continue to engage in protracted confrontation. Despite its accomplishments, ASEAN does not look capable of resolving the SCS issue on its own. Even though many states see the new China-ASEAN code of conduct for the SCS as crucial to promote harmony and stability in the region. On the other hand, the US and allies in the SCS will not be able to end the maritime conflict on their own; other international institutions and governments must also participate. To support a long-term, peaceful solution to historical issues, ASEAN must deliberately engage the United States in its diplomatic channels.<sup>16</sup>

The China-US rivalry does not only occur in the waters, but also occurs in the air space in the South China Sea. This rivalry raises the risk of a full-scale war, which will destabilize regional security and stability, particularly in Southeast Asia. US-China rivalry affected ASEAN, as a bilateral and multilateral partner. The two countries' hostile and confrontational activities affect their economic stability. The role that ASEAN may play in the US-China tension in the SCS region is to foster cooperation, including political, social, economic, culture and security. The cooperation is carried out to decrease the open hostility between the US and China and to ensure that the stability of Southeast Asia is maintained.<sup>17</sup>

South China Sea is China's top foreign policy goal for a variety of reasons, including its strategic political, and economic significance. To keep the America out of the SCS, China has adopted a strategy that encourages non-disputing regional states to stay on the sidelines while it deals bilaterally with disputing states. A conventional policy of Power Politics and every influential individual in China's position likely picked the same strategy. A conventional policy of Power Politics and every influential individual in China's position

---

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Jie Li, "ASEAN and the South China Sea: Approaches to Resolving the Conflict," *Independent Study Project (ISP)*, 2017, [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3777&context=isp\\_collection](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3777&context=isp_collection).

<sup>17</sup> Gerald Theodorus Toruan, "Indonesia and ASEAN in Facing US-China Rivalry in the South China Sea to Create Regional Security Stability," *International Journal of Science and Society* 3, no. 2 (2021): pp. 82-87, <https://doi.org/10.54783/ijssoc.v3i2.319>.



likely picked the same strategy. Before the UNCLOS, China would launch a grand institutional program by establishing a regional economic organization to discuss and find solutions to difficulties inside ASEAN.<sup>18</sup> It is evident that the United States established itself in some Southeast Asian countries. However, China's recent expansion has fundamentally changed the scenario. Many experts believe that China's expanding political influence, economic resources and military strength are the ultimate danger to the region's peace and security. Uncertain security dynamics lead to conflicts of interest in the geo-political geo-strategic and geo-economic domains. Regional states' determination and respect for the border and boundaries remain important issues and problems. Although ASEAN has also struggled to build its strength and legitimacy in the region to address these issues as it is strongly based on state sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs.<sup>19</sup>

Robert Kaplan, a renowned strategic analyst, has described the South China Sea as "the future conflict."<sup>20</sup> Taylor refuted the common perception that the South China Sea is becoming an increasingly dangerous Pacific security flashpoint. China's ambitions in the SCS are frequently exaggerated, and Beijing will try to prioritize non-military measures to achieve regional goals. The military balance in the South China Sea does not change against the US. Even though he claims that the South China Sea is not a flashpoint. The region does not involve the interests of major powers to the extent that is so frequently depicted. In the SCS region, significant Sino-American crises have been effectively addressed in recent times. Tensions between China and the United States rose in 2009 following an incident in which five Chinese warships harassed the USNS Impeccable. To put an end to the conflict, China's

---

<sup>18</sup> Victor Alexandre TEIXEIRA and Jose Francisco PAVIA, "East Asia: The Systemic Disorder and the South China Sea Dispute. An International Law Prospect," *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, no. 34 (May 2021): pp. 66-83, <https://doi.org/10.24193/csqs.34.4>.

<sup>19</sup> Bama Putra, Darwis Darwis, and Burhanuddin Burhanuddin, "Asean Political-Security Community: Challenges of Establishing Regional Security in the Southeast Asia," *Journal of International Studies* 12, no. 1 (2019): pp. 33-49, <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-8330.2019/12-1/2>.

<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "The South China Sea Is the Future of Conflict," Foreign Policy Research Institute, August 15, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/08/15/the-south-china-sea-is-the-future-of-conflict/>.

officials issued remarks claiming that such events would not become the norm and urging collaboration in the region.<sup>21</sup>

Zhang in his chapter: “Chinese thinking on the South China Sea and the future of regional security” stated that Beijing is adamant that conflicts over maritime rights and sovereignty be settled through diplomatic engagement with other claimant nations. The recent conflicts after 2009, China has adopted the power-centered strategy to establish control over marine affairs, arousing regional uncertainty. Regional tensions have been primarily caused by China's increasing assertiveness, which history witnessed in a conflict with the Philippines over Scarborough shoal in 2012, an oil issue with Vietnam, and industrial-scale land acquisition from 2014. The strategic engagement in the South China Sea between China, the US, and other regional nations will in turn have an impact on the policy of each state. Cooperation and a stable security environment are possible in the SCS like conflict and rivalry because of the ambiguity, unpredictability, and unexpected outcomes of international politics.<sup>22</sup>

Before 2010, the conflict and rivalry were hijacked by US primacy and whose rules were accepted by all the regional stakeholders, but now the situation and power politics has been changed to a large extent. He argued that the broad agreement on the structure and operation of the regional security framework was essential to its ability to bring about peace and stability. Any regional security environment must take great power relations into consideration. As soon as Beijing and Washington could establish a working and cooperative diplomatic relationship, the region's security situation would be shifted from an ideological to geopolitical rivalry to one where US military superiority and all the major

---

<sup>21</sup> Brendan Taylor, “The South China Sea Is Not a Flashpoint,” *The Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (February 2014): pp. 99-111, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660x.2014.893176>.

<sup>22</sup> Feng Zhang, “Chinese Thinking on the South China Sea and the Future of Regional Security,” *Political Science Quarterly* 132, no. 3 (2017): pp. 435-466, <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12658>.

regional states recognize it. To moderate the tension between the regional states and major powers will be possible through economic interdependence and Cooperation.<sup>23</sup>

Scobell stated in his chapter “the geography of conflict: south China sea and US rivalry” that the conflict between China and the United States has made the South China Sea a major hotspot. Regarding Southeast Asia and particularly the SCS, China has chosen a geostrategic stance while by politics highlights the importance of the region to United States. Early in the twenty-first century, the United States adopted a geostrategic orientation, which is why the Obama administration started the "pivot" or "rebalance" to the region of Asia-Pacific. Washington would be forced to respond to geopolitical reality and probably embrace a hardline approach against China in the South China Sea.<sup>24</sup> Since 2008, the balance of power has changed, signaling a new stage in the US-China struggle for global hegemony. The engagement in the SCS has confirmed that China is a revisionist state attempting to build regional hegemony in Asia to preserve its global hegemony. The military security portion of the rebalance placed a strong emphasis on sabotaging China's assertiveness in the SCS. Given that the latter is crucial to the US retaining its influence in Asia and assuring its survival as a global hegemony. The policy of Xi Jinping is founded on an offensive realist logic since it reflects a dramatic shift in the power balance in China's favor. SCS under Xi Jinping is definitely the basis of China's domination in the world. The significant security rivalry among the United States and China might result in a direct military clash over the SCS.<sup>25</sup>

China's strategic objectives include sharing the resources in these marine areas, establishing sovereignty over the islands, and pursuing supremacy in the maritime domain in the SCS. Beijing's unclear stance on some aspects of its South China Sea claim may reflect its

---

<sup>23</sup> Nick Bisley, “The South China Sea as Symptom of Asia’s Dynamic Security Order,” in *US-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes*, Routledge, 2018, pp. 98-115.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Scobell, "The geography of conflict: South China Sea and US–China Rivalry." In *US-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes*, Routledge, 2018. pp. 29-47.

<sup>25</sup> Danah Ali Alenezi, “US Rebalance Strategy to Asia and US-China Rivalry in South China Sea from the Perspective of the Offensive Realism,” *Review of Economics and Political Science* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1108/refs-10-2019-0132>.

long-term aspirations. In the future, Beijing is likely to be more forceful in dealing with maritime issues in the region. Beijing seems to be expanding its reliance on hard force and its capacity to handle differences and resolve disputes. To portray a positive regional impression and promote good political relations with neighboring countries, Beijing may occasionally practice restraint and downplay strategic disagreements with other big powers. He believes that Beijing should take its time in resolving these problems because, as its hard power rises, it may have more options in the future. It is highly feasible to argue that Southeast Asian regional security would continue to confront many uncertainties and problems in the upcoming days.<sup>26</sup>

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research study focuses on the China-US strategic rivalry in the SCS and uses this framework that how their rivalry affect the regional security dynamic in the SCS. In order to comprehensively analyze the China-US rivalry and regional security dynamic in the SCS, it is essential to consider multiple factors including politics, economy, military, foreign policy, and other related elements. The theoretical framework is based on Neo-Realism. Realist perspective views states as single actors that act in a state of anarchy without a central authority. As a result, each state prioritizes its own safety and security above all else, leading to a constant fear and distrust of other states, thereby creating a potential for conflict.<sup>27</sup> Realism comprises three main realist categories These are classical, neo-realism and neoclassical. The Neo-Realist perspective shifts focus away from human nature towards the international system's structure, suggesting that the structure determines the methods used by

---

<sup>26</sup> Fang Yang and Mingjiang Li, "Comparing China's Claims and Policies in the East and South China Seas: Implications for Regional Security," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2016): pp. 135-156, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797016645451>.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Toft, "John J. Mearsheimer: An Offensive Realist between Geopolitics and Power," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 8, no. 4 (2005): pp. 381-408, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800065>, 383.

states to attain the desired level of security.<sup>28</sup> In the context of Neo-Realism, Defensive Realism holds that states simply preserve the existing balance of power and do not make any aggressive moves to acquire more power.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Offensive Realism argues that states strive to acquire greater power in their pursuit of hegemony.<sup>30</sup>

This study is anchored in John Mearsheimer's Offensive Realist perspective. He theorizes that states continuously seek to gain more power compared to other states to become the dominant power. According to Mearsheimer, as long as the international system remains in a state of anarchy, where states can harm each other and cannot trust each other, weaker states will continually increase their security to challenge stronger states, leading to an ongoing competition for security among all states.<sup>31</sup>

Neorealist theory posits that state behavior in the international system is driven by the pursuit of self-interest and the desire for power and security. In the context of China-US rivalry in the South China Sea and regional security, neorealism would predict that both China and the United States are motivated by their desire to increase their power, expand their sphere of influence and ensure their security in the region. In the South China Sea, neorealism would suggest that both China and the US are pursuing control over valuable resources and strategic waterways, which they see as crucial to their national interests. China, as a rising power, seeks to expand its sphere of influence and protect its territorial claims, while the US, as the dominant power in the region, seeks to maintain its dominant position and prevent the rise of potential threats to its security.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Rong Chen, "A Critical Analysis of the U.S. 'Pivot' toward the Asia-Pacific: How Realistic Is Neo-Realism?," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 12, no. 3 (2013): pp. 39-62, <https://doi.org/10.11610/connections.12.3.03>, 45.

<sup>29</sup> Eric J. Labs, "Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims," *Security Studies* 6, no. 4 (1997): pp. 1-49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636419708429321>, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Miroslav Nincic, "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics. by John J. Mearsheimer. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001. 448P. \$27.95 Cloth," *Perspective on Politics* 1, no. 1 (2003): pp. 157-246, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592703280166>, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Michael A. Jensen and Colin Elman, "Realisms," *Security Studies*, July 2018, pp. 17-32, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315228358-2>, 22.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

The study also embedded neoclassical realism which builds on the foundation of neorealism, but on the importance of domestic politics and other factors that influence state behavior. Neoclassical realists argue that the international system is still anarchic and that states are still rational actors who seek to maximize their power and security. However, it also argues that domestic politics, such as the nature of a state's regime, the interests of its elites, and the values of its citizens, can play a significant role in shaping state behavior in international politics.<sup>33</sup> Neo-classical realism helps us to understand the behavior and motivation of both China and the US in the SCS. China is a growing power to expand its influence while the US is the current global power to maintain its dominancy. Neoclassical realism also helps us to understand China and the US as the domestic factors that are shaping the behavior of the states. Neoclassical realism also helps us to understand that China and the US are likely to manage their rivalry in the South China Sea. It suggests that states are likely to avoid conflict if they believe that the costs of conflict outweigh the benefits. China and the US are both nuclear-armed powers and a conflict between them would be very costly for both sides. This means that both China and the US are likely to try to manage their rivalry in the South China Sea.

## **Research Methodology**

Methodology refers to the process and techniques used for collecting and analyzing data.<sup>34</sup> This research is descriptive and analytical because it uses existing knowledge for the evaluation of the phenomenon. This study is qualitative in nature because it does not involve any numerical or statistical data. The relevant information and data are utilized to instigate the analytical method for understanding and analyzing the US-China Strategic rivalry and

---

<sup>33</sup> Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–72, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0043887100007814>.

<sup>34</sup> Denise Polit-O'Hara and Bernadette P. Hungler, *Study Guide to Accompany Sixth Edition of Nursing Research: Principles and Methods* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1999), 648.

regional security dynamics in the SCS. Both primary and secondary data have been used, but secondary data is most relied upon. Primary sources always include data that is very close to the event in question. On the other hand, Secondary sources are written by those who didn't see the event or haven't a close connection to it, but who may be able to add information and explanations that aren't in the primary sources.<sup>35</sup> The research data includes official documents, books, Journal articles, newspaper articles, reports, and web sources.

## **Organization of the Study**

The dissertation includes an introductory section, three main chapters, and a conclusion. The introductory section includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, the significance of the study, research questions, literature review, theoretical framework, limitations of the study, and methodology. Chapter 1 serves as a starting point elucidating the geostrategic importance of the South China Sea to highlight its economic, military, and geopolitical significance. Furthermore, the chapter shed light on the SCS under UNCLOS, the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration and an overview of the claims of the claimant states. Chapter 2 looks at the China-US rising rivalry and main driver behind their rivalry in the SCS. At the beginning of the chapter, the researcher elucidates US official position across the last three administrations and the core interests of the US and China in the SCS. Then, the look into drivers behind China-US rivalry in the SCS. The chapter also examines that their rivalry will not escalate into a full-scale conflict and gives a theoretical explanation. Chapter 3 addressed the main question of the dissertation that how chia US rivalry affects the regional security dynamics in the SCS. It investigates the regional dynamics and examines how the China-US rivalry impacts the regional security dynamics in

---

<sup>35</sup> Bernd Frohmann, "Discourse Analysis as a Research Method in Library and Information Science," *Library & Amp; Information Science Research* 16, no. 2 (1994): pp. 119-138, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-8188\(94\)90004-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-8188(94)90004-3).

the SCS. The last section provides the conclusion of the study which summarize the major findings of the research followed by recommendations for future research.



## **Chapter I**

### **South China Sea: Its Historical and Strategic Importance**

#### **Introduction**

The South China Sea (SCS) is a region of colossal historical and strategic significance as it has been a hotbed of strategic rivalries and political tensions among the states that claim over its waters. In this segment, the researcher delves into the historic and strategic importance of the SCS, its past, and present, and has a look at emerging conflicts and the role of UNCLOS in resolving disputes. Additionally, the chapter gives insight into the overlapping claims by different states and US's position in the SCS. The SCS is relevant in global power politics because the major powers such as China, the USA, and other regional actors are involved in a tug of war in this region. By including these complicated dynamics at play in the SCS, one can gain a deeper understanding of the historical context and contemporary forces which are shaping the geopolitical dynamics of this region, and its implications and strategic significance in international politics.



Figure 1: The South China Sea

Source: [The Nation Online](#)

## The South China Sea: A Crucial Maritime Region

The SCS is one of the busiest maritime trade routes in the world, connecting East Asia with other regions and facilitating the movement of goods, resources, and people.<sup>36</sup> It's a vast body of inland and semi-closed seas, encompassed by multiple coastal states in Asia. It spans approximately 1750 miles from the Bashi/Luzon straits to Singapore, and roughly 1,250

<sup>36</sup> Baber Ali Bhatti, "South China Sea in Strategic Calculus of South East Asia," Daily Times, August 14, 2020, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/654074/south-china-sea-in-strategic-calculus-of-south-east-asia/>.

miles from Hong Kong to Brunei. To put this distance into perspective, it is comparable to the span from the eastern tip of Hokkaido to Japan's westernmost island of Yonaguni.<sup>37</sup> The region is home to numerous prominent archipelagos, including the Paracels, Spratlys, and Pratas Islands, and Scarborough Shoal, encompassing numerous rocky outcrops, reefs, and shallow shoals.<sup>38</sup>

The South China Sea (SCS) comprises four significant island clusters, namely the Spratlys, Paracels, Pratas, and Scarborough Shoal, encompassing numerous rocky outcrops, coral reefs, and shallow shoals.<sup>39</sup> It is intricately linked and diverse marine surroundings, characterized through an abundance of marine flora and fauna, and is widely seen as one of the most affluent seas globally. The region's marine habitats, consisting of floral reefs and mangroves, play an important role in offering vital ecosystems for diverse marine species. Furthermore, the region is home to several kinds of fish and plant life, making it a giant supply of sustenance and livelihood for a substantial proportion of population that depends at the area's marine resources.<sup>40</sup> However, despite its economic significance, the SCS has been a highly contested region due to disputes over territory, sovereignty and marine boundaries between various countries in the region. The SCS has also been a focus of international attention as its strategic location and economic significance have attracted external actors such as the America, Japan, and other major powers.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the SCS has become an arena of complex geopolitical competition and a potential flashpoint for conflicts.

---

<sup>37</sup> Yoji Koda, "Maritime Security in the Region: SCS and ECS as Key Arenas for Converging Political Interests," *Asia-Pacific Review* 23, no. 2 (February 2016): pp. 86-108, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13439006.2016.1256077>, 92.

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey Bader, Kenneth Lieberthal and Michael McDevitt, *Keeping the South China Sea in Perspective* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2014), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Kanwal Hayat and Rehana Saeed Hashmi, "China's Territorial Claim at South China Sea: A Strategic Competition with USA and Its Implications," *South Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (August 2019): 617–34, <https://doi.org/http://111.68.103.26/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/view/3290>, 618.

<sup>40</sup> Nalanda Roy, "Dragon-Elephant Relationship in the South China Sea Imbroglio," *Journal of Third World Studies* 32, no. 1 (2015): pp. 181-197, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/45195117>, 182.

<sup>41</sup> Hidetaka Yoshimatsu, "China, Japan and the South China Sea Dispute," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 4, no. 3 (December 2017): 294–315, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48602159>, 310-311.

## Navigating the Significance of South China Sea: A Historical Perspective

The historical presence of the Chinese people in the SCS can be traced back over two millennia. Chinese sailors undertook exploratory missions, leading to the discovery of the Nanhai Zhudao, historical name of the SCS. It is notable that China was the original discoverer, namer, explorer, and exploiter of the Nanhai Zhudao and the surrounding waters. Furthermore, China has effectively exercised peaceful and continuous sovereignty and jurisdiction over these territories.<sup>42</sup>

The history of trade and communication through the SCS, as evidenced by the Han Chinese history that mentioned episodic trade with Nanyang states in 140 BCE.<sup>43</sup> However, in the Period of Six Dynasties and the T'ang dynasty, most of the trade traffic within the South China Sea became from the Middle East, carried by using coastal residents from Persia and Arabia who specialized in carrying high-cost low-bulk items via Southeast Asia.<sup>44</sup> In the 16th century, European ships began to trade with China and Southeast Asia, which changed the nature of trade and politics in the SCS Countries like Portugal, England, Spain, and Holland began to send traders, explorers, and representatives to these regions. This caused anxiety among Southeast Asian nations, who had earlier shipped tribute to China, as they had to deal with the aggressive trade of these European powers. The violence spread along the sea routes eventually changed the nature of trade in the region, which had significant long-term effects on the lives of regional people.<sup>45</sup> During the 19th century, the littoral shore of southern China, particularly Fujian and Guangdong provinces, became a hub for global trade. Western powers exploited China's resources and economy through the "Canton system," which became increasingly unequal until the Opium Wars (1839-1842)

---

<sup>42</sup> Stefan Talmon, "The Final Award," in *South China Sea Arbitration: Jurisdiction, Admissibility, Procedure* (S.I.: BRILL NIJHOFF, 2022), pp. 226-333, 260.

<sup>43</sup> Eric Tagliacozzo, "The South China Sea," in *Oceanic Histories*, ed. Sujit Sivasundaram, Alison Bashford, and David Armitage (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 113-133, 114.

<sup>44</sup> Eric Tagliacozzo, 114.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Tagliacozzo, 121.

permanently shifted the balance towards exploitation. Western traders brought a lot of opium to sell in order to get the things they wanted from Europe and the Americas. In the aftermath of French colonization in the late 1800s, eventually, the French took over Vietnam and Cambodia as protectorates, turning South China into an economic cash-cow for Western trade interests.<sup>46</sup>

Prior to the 1950s, the SCS was mainly known for its importance in shipping routes and navigation. However, in the 1950s, the situation changed as nations began to claim and occupy islands and features within the sea, leading to disputes over ownership and territorial claims. This shifted the focus of discussions about the SCS from its use as a maritime passageway to the issue of sovereignty and territorial disputes. With the technological advancement, geologists started to pay more close and thoughtful attention to the SCS as they predicted it might contain rich natural like gas and oil. With this newfound interest, researchers began to study the water and seabed of the SCS more closely, revealing the existence of potential natural resources that could be valuable to the states in the region.<sup>47</sup> A significant historical turning point that explains the rejuvenated interest in the SCS was a report by the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) published in 1969. According to the report, vast oil reserves are present in the SCS. This report drew the attention of the SCS littoral states, and they started claiming maritime territory in the SCS on a specific basis.<sup>48</sup>

The nine-dash line map was first publicly introduced by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1948. The map features nine dashes or lines that encircle much of the SCS,

---

<sup>46</sup> Eric Tagliacozzo, 127-128.

<sup>47</sup> Stein Tønnesson, "Locating the South China Sea," in *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska, Remco Raben, and Schulte Nordholt (Leiden, Netherland: KITLV Press, 2005), pp. 203-233, 209-10.

<sup>48</sup> Monika Chansoria, "1969 Report by UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East: A Turning Point in the Historical Debate over Senkaku Islands," *Japan Review* 2, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 36-48, [https://doi.org/https://www.jiia-jic.jp/en/japanreview/pdf/JapanReview\\_Vol2\\_No3\\_03\\_Chansoria.pdf](https://doi.org/https://www.jiia-jic.jp/en/japanreview/pdf/JapanReview_Vol2_No3_03_Chansoria.pdf).

indicating a broad area claimed by China as its historical territory.<sup>49</sup> The map has since become a source of tension and dispute among countries in the region, particularly those with overlapping claims in the SCS. The map's origins and legal basis are unclear and have been a topic of debate among scholars and international legal experts. On March 15th, 1965, America declared a major part of the SCS a "Maritime Combat Zone". The Pacific Command of the US Navy actively engaged to bomb the military installations, lines of communication, and logistical facilities of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). After a month, a meeting occurred between the General Secretary of Vietnam's Communist Party, Le Duan, and the incumbent President of the PRC, Liu Shaoqi. They agree to the four-point peace formula of DRV in response to US President Johnson's announcement of being prepared for "unconditional discussions."<sup>50</sup>

The US and PRC signed the Shanghai Communiqué in 1972 to start a new era regardless of their different social systems, both sides agreed that they should conduct their relations on to respect the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, non-interference, non-aggression in other states' internal matters, mutual benefit, equality and peaceful coexistence.<sup>51</sup> The previously mentioned accord facilitated the Paris Peace Accords on Vietnam, which were executed in 1973. The agreement entailed the end of hostilities and the termination of American military engagement in Vietnam. Subsequently, the PRC resorted military tactics in order to seize control of the Crescent group of islands situated within the Paracel archipelago. In January 1974, South Vietnam accused China of taking control of Paracels Island illegally. China responded by saying that South Vietnam's claim was illegal and that the Paracels, Spratlys, Pratas, and Macclesfield Bank belonged to China.

---

<sup>49</sup> Stein Tønnesson, 215.

<sup>50</sup> "Discussion between Liu Shaoqi and Le Duan," Discussion between Liu Shaoqi and Le Duan | Wilson Center Digital Archive (November 20, 2011), <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/discussion-between-liu-shaoqi-and-le-duan>.

<sup>51</sup> "FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME XVII, CHINA, 1969–1972," U.S. Department of State, accessed April 26, 2023, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>.

China also said that it would not allow anyone to infringe on its territory.<sup>52</sup> According to reports, South Vietnamese troops opened fire on individuals who were attempting to raise a Chinese flag, one week after alleging that China was illegally occupying the Paracel Islands. The events mentioned above resulted in the rise of hostilities, as China asserted its right to protect itself and accused South Vietnam of encroaching Chinese territories, causing harm to their fishermen, and engaging in hostile actions towards their naval ships. China insisted that the islands had always belonged to them and accused South Vietnam of trying to blame China for its own aggression.<sup>53</sup> Such conflicts led to hostility and a number of issues under contention. Their relationship went through different phases of hostility during the 1970s, ranging from peaceful coexistence to skirmishes and ultimately a full-scale war in 1979. This clash is particularly significant in understanding the historical importance of the South China Sea, as it demonstrates the complex and longstanding disputes over the region's maritime boundaries. China and Vietnam's competing claims over the Gulf of Tonkin, Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, and other border areas highlight the spatial competition in the SCS.<sup>54</sup> After a cold decade another historical event take place in 1987-88. It was a series of conflicts between the claimant states over the maritime and territorial claim of Spratly Island. The military conflict between Vietnam and China took place at Johnson South Reef which was occupied by China.<sup>55</sup> This motivation led China to take over the Mischief Reef in 1995 which was previously occupied by the Philippines.<sup>56</sup> This enduring exercise of control over the region is an undisputed fact of historical significance. To avoid conflict and resolve the issue

---

<sup>52</sup> Kirsten Sellars, "Rocking the Boat: The Paracels, the Spratlys, and the South China Sea Arbitration," *Columbia Journal of Asian Law* 30, no. 2 (January 2017): pp. 221-262, <https://doi.org/10.52214/cjal.v30i2.9263>, 223.

<sup>53</sup> Kirsten Sellars, 224.

<sup>54</sup> David R. Dreyer, "One Issue Leads to Another: Issue Spirals and the Sino-Vietnamese War," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 4 (2010): pp. 297-315, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2010.00114.x>, 302-3.

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Joyner, rep., *The Spratly Islands Dispute in the South China Sea: Problems, Policies, and Prospects for Diplomatic Accommodation* (JSTOR, 1999). 72.

<sup>56</sup> Stanley Meyer, rep., *Incident at Mischief Reef: Implications for the Philippines, China, and the United States*. (Fort Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 1996).



through peaceful and diplomatic means, China and ASIAN states including Vietnam and Philippines sign the “Declaration on the Code Parties in the SCS (DOC)” in 2002.<sup>57</sup>

The competing claims in the SCS highlights the significance of international law. In 1982, UNCLOS was established to provide a guiding principle regarding governing rights in the Seas. It is the most important international document providing basic principles to solve the disputes among the claimant states in the SCS. All the claimant states to SCS are the signatory of this important UN document.<sup>58</sup> In 2013, the Philippines filed a petition in the PCA under the principles of UNCLOS against China whiling Challenging the nine-dash line claims over the SCS. Philippines argued that China is constantly violating our EEZ and Continental Shelf Sovereignty under the UNCLOS. The PCA decides the case in the right of the Philippines and invalidated the Chinese historical claims over the SCS.<sup>59</sup> It was one of the important developments throughout the entire history of SCS under international law. However, the decision was rejected by the people Republic of China.

---

<sup>57</sup> ASEAN Document, “2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea,” National University of Singapor, November 4, 2002, <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2002-Declaration-on-the-Conduct-of-Parties-in-the-South-China-Sea.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> Dong Manh Nguyen, “Settlement of Disputes under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea The Case of the South China Sea Dispute ,” UN.org, December 2005, [https://www.un.org/depts/los/nippon/uniff\\_programme\\_home/fellows\\_pages/fellows\\_papers/nguyen\\_0506\\_vietnam.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/nippon/uniff_programme_home/fellows_pages/fellows_papers/nguyen_0506_vietnam.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> “South China Sea Arbitration Ruling: What Happened and What's next?,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, July 12, 2016, <https://www.uscc.gov/research/south-china-sea-arbitration-ruling-what-happened-and-whats-next>.



*Table 1 Important Historical Events in the SCS*

| Date             | Important historical Events  |
|------------------|--|
| 1951             | The San Francisco Peace Treaty is signed. Japan loses all rights and claims to the SCS. Vietnam, at the conference, claims that both the Spratlys and Paracels are territories of Vietnam. |
| 1956             | China gained control over the Paracel Islands, establishing control and expelling the existing Vietnamese forces.  |
| 1969             | A report published by UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, revealing that high probability of large amount of oil reserves may be found in the South China Sea.               |
| 1974             | Battle of the Paracel Islands (Prelude to the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979).  |
| 1982             | The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is concluded (entering into force in 1994).   |
| 1987-88          | Conflict over Spratlys Island between China and Vietnam.   |
| 1995             | China occupies the Mischief Reef (Eastern parts of Spratlys)   |
| 2002             | ASEAN and China agree on a Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS.   |
| 2016, July<br>12 | The final decree of the SCS arbitration case (Republic of the Philippines vs. People's Republic of China – PCA Case No 2013-19) published.   |

## **Strategic Significance of the South China Sea**

The SCS is a vital Marine hotspot that has drawn the attention of multiple international players because of its rich natural resources and economic significance. Throughout the Asian political and economic history, it remains a crucial region. The SCS possesses all the attributes important to qualify as a strategic waterway. SCS has the potential to emerge as a power center due to the fact that its shoreline is home to more than 500 million

people.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the SCS provides an important shipping route between Europe and East Asia. It is also full of natural resources, along with oil and gas reserves, fisheries, and minerals, making it an essential source of economic activities for the countries located in its vicinity.

The SCS has emerged as a complex and contentious area in Asia's regional security due to the divergent territorial integrities and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) claimed by all the claimant states, including China. China's attempts to exercise comprehensive control over the entire SCS through the nine-dash line claim which deviates considerably from established international norms and protocols such as UNCLOS, have further complicated the situation.<sup>61</sup> To delve into a detailed analysis of the strategic importance of the SCS, we will discuss its economic, geopolitical, and military significance.

### ***Economic significance of the region in terms of trade and resources***

The SCS is a strategically important region because of its crucial geographical location as the shortest route between the Indian and Pacific Ocean. It serves as a vital artery for global trade and energy shipments, making it a critical hub for international commerce. More than fifty percent of global trade volume is transported through the Strait of Malacca, the Sunda Strait, and the Lombok Strait, all of which intersect with the waters and islands of the SCS.<sup>62</sup> According to the assessment of the US Pacific Command, the SCS serves as a critical conduit for the transportation of commodities, with an approximate value of USD 5.3 trillion trade passing through it on an annual basis, of which USD 1.2 trillion of the US.<sup>63</sup> In

---

<sup>60</sup> Tahir Abbas, "South China Sea as a Potential Flashpoint," Strafasia, September 14, 2020, <https://strafasia.com/south-china-sea-as-a-potential-flashpoint/>.

<sup>61</sup> Yoji Koda, Maritime Security in the Region, 94

<sup>62</sup> Geollect, "The Strategic Importance of the South China Sea," Geollect, March 11, 2022, <https://www.geollect.com/news/the-strategic-importance-of-the-south-china-sea/#:~:text=Therefore%2C%20the%20South%20China%20Sea,trade%20moves%20through%20the%20waters>

<sup>63</sup> "Press Briefing by NSA for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes and Admiral Robert Willard, U.S. Pacific Command," National Archives and Records Administration (National Archives and Records Administration, November 13, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/13/press-briefing-nsa-strategic-communications-ben-rhodes-and-admiral-rober>.

2016, China Power researched that roughly USD 3.4 trillion worth of trade was transported through SCS. While this represents a significant percentage of global commerce, accounting for approximately 21 percent of total trade. It is important to note that this figure is 36 percent smaller than the previously cited estimate of USD 5.3 trillion.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, this region hosts the most critical energy routes for East Asian nations to transport energy oil and gas from the Persian Gulf.<sup>65</sup>

The SCS offshore oil and gas reserves have generated considerable interest and potential for economic growth and development. It is widely believed that the seabed of the SCS, particularly the Spratly area, holds an exceptionally high concentration of oil and natural gas reserves compared to other regions within the sea.<sup>66</sup> SCS is often referred to as a "second Persian Gulf," owing to its vast reservoirs of natural resources. Geologically speaking, the SCS is an area that is recognized for its abundance of carbon deposits and possesses the ideal geological attributes necessary for the development of hydrocarbon reserves, particularly oil.<sup>67</sup> According to the US Energy Information Administration, the SCS is estimated to contain up to 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, there may exist an additional 12 billion barrels of oil and 160 trillion cubic feet of gas as undiscovered resources in the SCS, excluding the Gulf of Thailand and adjacent areas. However, it is worth noting that a relatively small proportion of these resources, approximately one-fifth, are in the disputed region. Nevertheless, the commercial viability of

---

<sup>64</sup> "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?," ChinaPower Project, January 25, 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>65</sup> Geollect, "The Strategic Importance of the South China Sea".

<sup>66</sup> Nalanda Roy, *Dragon-Elephant Relationship in the South China Sea Imbroglio*, 183.

<sup>67</sup> Tim Daiss, "How Oil Drives the South China Sea Conflict," OilPrice.com, March 14, 2018, Accessed march 1, 2023, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/General/How-Oil-Drives-The-South-China-Sea-Conflict.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> "South China Sea Analysis Brief," International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), February 7, 2013, [https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South\\_China\\_Sea](https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South_China_Sea).

these additional resources is debatable, as their extraction may not be economically feasible at present.<sup>69</sup>

The South China Sea has acquired strategic Significance among claimant states owing to its geographical location along major sea trade routes utilized by crude oil tankers to transport oil from the Middle East to Asia, as well as for the transport of goods from Asia to other parts of the world. Major naval powers such as the US and Japan have significant naval interests and seek to maintain uninterrupted access to the straits and sea lanes of the SCS for their oil tankers, container ships, and naval vessels. This maritime corridor is also a critical link that facilitates Japan's energy imports from the Middle East.<sup>70</sup> Approximately 90% of Japan's oil imports traverse the SCS, highlighting the region's significance as a key maritime route for energy trade.<sup>71</sup> Overall, the South China Sea possesses immense geostrategic significance in terms of trade and natural resources, a shipping route for various states, facilitating global commerce, and a critical energy hub, with vast hydrocarbon reserves located beneath its waters.

### ***Geo-political importance of the region***

In the above section, we explain how SCS is an indispensable conduit for global trade and energy substances. Nonetheless, its strategic significance transcends economics, as the SCS has become a primary flashpoint for geopolitical tensions and strategic competition due to its strategic location and rich natural resources. However, its importance is not wholly oriented toward natural resources but Chinese rise and its assertiveness as a threat to the

---

<sup>69</sup> Alexander Metelitsa and Jeffery Kupfer, "Issue Brief: Oil and Gas Resources and Transit Issues in the South China Sea," Asia Society, 2014, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/issue-brief-oil-and-gas-resources-and-transit-issues-south-china-sea>, 3.

<sup>70</sup> David Rosenberg, "Governing The South China Sea: From Freedom of The Seas to Ocean Enclosure Movements," Har," *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, 2010, pp. 4-12, [https://doi.org/https://tailieu.tapchithoidai.org/Governing\\_South\\_China\\_Sea.pdf](https://doi.org/https://tailieu.tapchithoidai.org/Governing_South_China_Sea.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

existing superpower in the region.<sup>72</sup> The tensions have risen in recent years as Beijing has become more assertive in its territorial claims, leading to disputes between China and other neighboring states over ownership and control of certain islands and reefs in the area. The geopolitical importance of the SCS will continue to be a major concern for states in the region and beyond, as they navigate issues related to maritime security, economic development, and political stability.

### ***Military significance of SCS in terms of regional security***

Due to its strategic location and potential as a flashpoint of conflict, SCS is militarily significant. The SCS is a region of many disputed islands and reefs, which have been the focus of territorial issues and military tensions. The geopolitical consideration affect the evolving strategic and military balance in the region. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is going through a process of rapid military modernization with technological advancement in the major areas of capability i.e. naval, air, land, and ballistic missile forces.<sup>73</sup> According to a US military commander, Admiral John Aquilino that Beijing has militarized three of the islands in the SCS with weapons such as missiles and fighter jets, creating problems for other states. These developments by China are seen as aggressive and concerning.<sup>74</sup> China justifies that its military modernization is due to the increasing concentration of the American Naval forces in the SCS. Currently, the US is the only state which can be a threat to PLA supremacy in the SCS region. On the other hand, the US is trying to enhance military cooperation with

---

<sup>72</sup> Victor Alexandre Gonçalves Teixeira, "United States' Policy Strategy in South China Sea," *Scholar Journal of Applied Sciences and Research* 1, no. 6 (September 6, 2018): 24–32, <https://doi.org/http://innovationinfo.org/articles/SJASR-6-163.pdf>, 31.

<sup>73</sup> Kartik Bommakanti and Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy, "China's Military Modernization: Recent Trends," Observer Research Foundation, May 25, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/chinas-military-modernisation-recent-trends-2/>.

<sup>74</sup> "China Has Fully Militarized Three Islands in South China Sea, US Admiral Says," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, March 21, 2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/china-has-fully-militarized-three-islands-in-south-china-sea-us-admiral-says>.

regional countries like Vietnam and the Philippines to strengthen security ties.<sup>75</sup> A noteworthy agreement ECDA (Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement) concluded between the US and the Philippines in which the Philippines give permission to the US to use their bases for the ships, aircraft, and military personnel.<sup>76</sup> It is further magnified by military power projection providing strategic significance for the states to protect their long-lasting interest to control over the SCS. This competition has led to an “alarming rate” arms race among the states in the region, including China, the US, and other littoral states, as they seek to enhance their military capabilities in the SCS.<sup>77</sup>

The military significance of the SCS is further amplified by the presence of natural resources such as oil, gas, and fish stocks, which have fueled territorial disputes and increased the potential for conflict. The disputed islands and reefs in the SCS have also become increasingly militarized, with several countries constructing military facilities and deploying troops to the area. The military importance of the SCS is a prime concern for regional security, as tensions between countries in the region are continuously rising. On the other hand, the US military shifted has shifted their focus from terrorism to power competition and minor threats. If the US intended any military engagement against major powers, one would be China centered in the SCS.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Umut Yüksel, “Arms Race in the South China Sea: What Threshold?,” Geneva Graduate Institute (Global Challenges, February 2017), <https://globalchallenges.ch/issue/1/arms-race-in-the-south-china-sea-what-threshold/>.

<sup>76</sup> “Defense Cooperation Between the United States and the Philippines,” Department of States, April 28, 2014, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/14-625-Philippines-Defense-Cooperation.pdf>.

<sup>77</sup> Ravi Buddhavarapu, “South China Sea Faces Higher Risk of Conflict as Arms Race Builds Up,” CNBC (CNBC, April 28, 2022), <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/27/south-china-sea-region-at-a-higher-risk-for-conflict-weapons-expert.html>.

<sup>78</sup> Marvin Ott, “The South China Sea in Strategic Terms,” Wilson Center, May 14, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-south-china-sea-strategic-terms>.

## International Law and Territorial Claims in the South China Sea

### *UNCLOS and the South China Sea*

The initial demand for a ‘constitution of the seas’ was put on November 1, 1967, by Arvid Pardo, then Ambassador to the UN.<sup>79</sup> After three UN conferences, the UNCLOS was approved with 130 votes in favor, 4 against, and 17 abstentions on December 10, 1982. It came into force in 1994, twelve months after Guyana became the 60th state to ratify the treaty. As of the present day, the UNCLOS has been acknowledged by 168 nations worldwide.<sup>80</sup> However, the US did not ratify UNCLOS till now as conservative Republicans were concerned that it may erode US sovereignty by handing "ownership" of the high seas to the UN.<sup>81</sup> UNCLOS aims to provide a means for resolving disputes related to maritime matters through peaceful means.<sup>82</sup> While it has some limitations, it is still regarded as the primary legal document relevant to maritime disputes. The legal framework was expanded in 1996 with the adoption of the Declaration on the Baselines of the Territorial Sea, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and Continental Shelf Act of 1998. Within UNCLOS, these three sections (the territorial sea, EEZ, and the Continental Shelf) are widely acknowledged as being most applicable to the South China Sea dispute while China Showed reservations on these three sections.<sup>83</sup>

UNCLOS has led to major changes and standardization of ocean law. This convention has allowed for the acceptance of a 12-NM territorial limit by all the states while granting

---

<sup>79</sup> “United Nation General Assembly Twenty-Second Session,” [Static.un.org](https://static.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/pardo_ga1967.pdf), accessed April 29, 2023, [https://static.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/pardo\\_ga1967.pdf](https://static.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/pardo_ga1967.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> “Chronological Lists of UNCLOS,” United Nations, accessed April 10, 2023, [https://www.un.org/Depts/los/reference\\_files/chronological\\_lists\\_of\\_ratifications.htm](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/reference_files/chronological_lists_of_ratifications.htm).

<sup>81</sup> Anya Wahal, “On International Treaties, the United States Refuses to Play Ball,” Council on Foreign Relations, January 7, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/international-treaties-united-states-refuses-play-ball#:~:text=UN%20Convention%20on%20the%20Law%20of%20the%20Sea&text=The%20United%20States%20did%20not%20ratify%20UNCLOS%20because%20of%20fears,seas%20to%20the%20United%20Nations.>

<sup>82</sup> “United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea”, United Nation. Article 19, December 10, 1982, Accessed April 5, 2023. [https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> Thanh-Dam Truong and Knio Karim, “The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III) and China’s Assertion of the U-Shaped Line,” in *The South China Sea and Asian Regionalism: A Critical Realist Perspective* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), pp. 61 -83, 64.

ships the right to an innocent and safe way through foreign waters, which is an important component of freedom of navigation.<sup>84</sup> The importance of international law in relation to the issues of SCS has been widely acknowledged. However, as a signatory to UNCLOS, Beijing has demonstrated its Sovereignty over maritime territory beyond its EEZ and claimed almost the entire area of the SCS.<sup>85</sup> UNCLOS has been an important tool in influencing the legal framework in the SCS, specifically in relation to the explanation of maritime borders. Its implementation has been hindered by several challenges, such as conflicting interpretations of historical evidence, legal precedents, and strategic interests of influential actors in the region, resulting in overlapping claims.

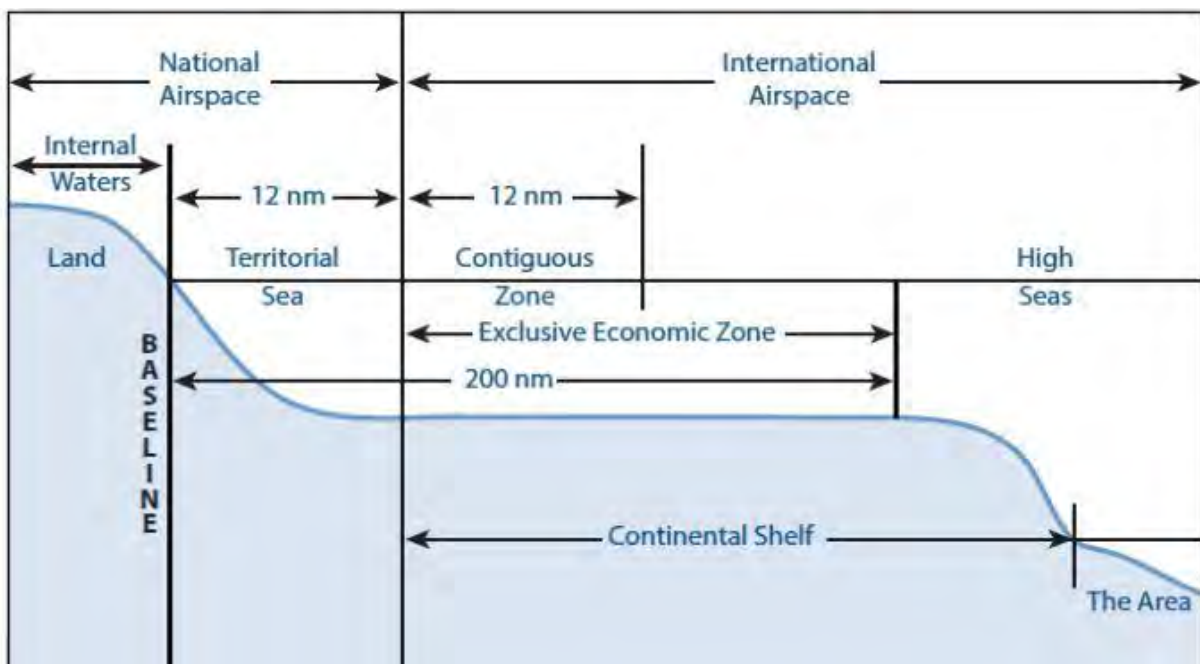


Figure 2 UNCLOS Maritime Zones

Source: [Tufts University](#)

<sup>84</sup> United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea”, United Nation. Article 19, December 10, 1982, Accessed April 5, 2023. [https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Wang Yi, “It Is Political Arrogance and Legal Prejudice to Pressure China over South China Sea Arbitration,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of china, April 22, 2016, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/gjhdq\\_665435/2675\\_665437/2696\\_663396/2698\\_663400/201604/t20160426\\_510808.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2696_663396/2698_663400/201604/t20160426_510808.html).



### *Permanent Court Arbitration-South China Sea, 2016*

The UNCLOS nations can choose the ICJ or special tribunal to settle the dispute as Philippines bring South China Sea issue before the tribunal of Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) against China after failing to solve it through negotiations. The proceeding started on 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan 2013, under the UNCLOS provision of compulsory dispute settlement.<sup>86</sup> The arbitration settles disputes between both sides about the legality of maritime rights and territorial entitlement in the SCS. However, China did not participate in the proceedings of the Tribunal. On July 12, 2016, the Tribunal issued a decision that substantially favored the Philippines.<sup>87</sup> The PCA gives its decision in a unique way that it did not confine itself to addressing the issue between the China and Philippines but implicitly addressed the broader dispute of the SCS. The PCA made four important observations:

1. The decision declares that China's assertion of historical rights and its classification of the nine-dash line do not have a legal foundation to claim its territory and maritime resources.<sup>88</sup>
2. The Tribunal looks at evidence by studying hydrographic data and satellite images to see if the reefs claimed by Beijing are those features above water at high tide or within 12Nm. They reached the conclusion that historically, the Spratly Islands were only used by groups of fishermen, which is not considered a stable community. Therefore, none of the Spratly Islands are capable of being declared maritime zones.<sup>89</sup>
3. The Tribunal found that Beijing had violated the Sovereignty of the Philippines in its EEZ. It also found that traditionally, Filipino fishermen had fishing rights at Scarborough Shoal, whose access had been restricted by China. Moreover, law

---

<sup>86</sup> “The South China Sea Arbitration (the Republic of Philippines V. the People's Republic of China),” Permanent Court of Arbitration, accessed April 29, 2023, <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/7/>.

<sup>87</sup> “South China Sea Arbitration Ruling: What Happened and What's next?,” 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Arbitral Tribunal, “In the Matter of the South China Sea Arbitration,” Permanent Court of Arbitration, July 12, 2016, <https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Award.pdf>, 117.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 260.

enforcement vessels of China had engaged in an unlawful act by posing a significant risk of collision by blocking the Philippine vessels.<sup>90</sup>

4. The Tribunal also examined the impact of extensive land reclamation and creation of artificial islands in the Spratly Islands at seven locations. It was revealed that these activities caused significant harm to coral reef ecosystems and the habitats of endangered species. The Government of China did not implement any measures to mitigate the damage caused by these activities.<sup>91</sup>

Following the issuance of the award, China continued to oppose the decision and did not accept the award. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in a press briefing supported the state's stance that the Tribunal's decision had been declared invalid and rendered despite China's non-participation. The Chinese government has asserted that the decision has not impacted Chinese territorial sovereignty and maritime rights in the region.

### ***The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)***

The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) was established by UNCLOS in 1982 to provide a framework for the management and exploitation of ocean resources beyond the territorial waters of coastal states. The establishment of the EEZ has had significant implications for the management of ocean resources and the economic development of coastal states. The EEZ is an area extending 200 nautical miles from a coastal state's baseline, in which the country has special rights to explore, exploit, and manage the natural resources found in the water column, on the seafloor, and beneath the seafloor. These resources include fish stocks, oil and gas reserves, and minerals.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 279-80

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 369,70

<sup>92</sup> UNCLOS, 1982, Article 56-57.

The ocean is divided into EEZ and international waters. Coastal states have special rights to exploit resources within their EEZ, while international waters are under the jurisdiction of the international community and cannot be exploited by any country for exclusive economic benefit. Ships navigating in international waters are subject to the laws of their flag state. The concept of international waters establishes a framework for international cooperation, protection, and preservation of the global maritime environment.<sup>93</sup> Defining the EEZ is crucial in understanding the extent of a claimant state's sovereignty and where it may conflict with that of another claimant state. This is because the EEZ determines a coastal state's special rights to exploit resources within its designated zone, and this can potentially overlap with the claims of other countries.

The 1998 EEZ and Continental Shelf Act incorporates the term "historical rights" with the purpose of bolstering the Chinese assertion that the waters surrounding its islands constitute not only internal waters but also historical waters. This interpretation would allow Beijing the authority to claim all water areas within the U-shaped line as its inland waters. Put it differently, the inclusion of "historical rights" in the Act aims to strengthen China's sovereignty claim over these waters.<sup>94</sup> The issue of sovereignty in joint development efforts often centers on the idea of "equity", particularly in cases where there are overlapping claims to EEZs. Due to the unsatisfactory results of negotiations with China over the years, countries with competing claims have opted to seek joint ventures with international companies outside of China for offshore exploration and development within their EEZs.

On July 12, 2016, PCA established under the auspices of the UNCLOS issued a verdict pertaining to the SCS territorial dispute. The Tribunal determined that there was insufficient proofs to demonstrate that Beijing had exercised exclusive control over the waters and resources of the SCS, and thus could not claim historic rights to sea areas within

---

<sup>93</sup> UNCLOS, 1982, Article 94.

<sup>94</sup> Thanh-Dam Truong and Knio Karim, "The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III) and China's Assertion of the U-Shaped Line," 65.

the U-Shaped/nine-dash line. Additionally, the Tribunal observed that while certain groups of fishermen had utilised the rocky outcrops comprising the Spratly Islands, none of these groups were able of maintaining a stable community and, as a result, could not claim an EEZ. The Tribunal further found that some of the disputed areas fell within the Philippines' EEZ, and that Beijing had violated the rights of Philippine's fishermen and oil exploration teams by interfering with their activities. Finally, the Tribunal held that China's construction and building of artificial islands violates its obligations under UNCLOS.<sup>95</sup>

### **Overview of Territorial and Maritime Claims by Different States**

The South China Sea (SCS) is a contested maritime area, characterized by competing and overlapping territorial claims among its bordering states. Currently, more than a hundred territorial features are disputed in the SCS which creates the issue of sovereignty and ownership of resources.<sup>96</sup> The dispute is exacerbated by China's steadfast reliance on historical claims, while its neighboring countries attempt to utilize the UNCLOS and its established maritime boundaries to provide some measure of resolution. Although the US maintains a position of non-involvement and impartiality with respect to territorial disputes while US Navy regularly undertakes Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) to counter unwarranted maritime claims and uphold the principles of UNCLOS.<sup>97</sup> The modern SCS issue started in 1933 when France claimed sovereignty over Spratly and Parcel Island on behalf of Vietnam.<sup>98</sup> However, in 1938 Japan rejected the French claim over the Island.<sup>99</sup> Till

---

<sup>95</sup> “Press Release on The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of the Philippines v. The People’s Republic of China),” Permanent Court of Arbitration, July 12, 2016, <https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Press-Release-No-11-English.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> Rep: *Competing Claims in the South China Sea: Potential Paths Forward and Implications for the United States*, The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), November 5, 2018, <https://www.nbr.org/event/competing-claims-in-the-south-china-sea-potential-paths-forward-and-implications-for-the-united-states/>.

<sup>97</sup> Eleanor Freund, rep., *Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea* (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2018), 24-25.

<sup>98</sup> Harry Roque, “China’s Claim to the Spratly Islands under International Law,” *Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law* 15, no. 3 (August 1, 1997): 189–211, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02646811.1997.11433105>, 190-191.

1950, China and other claimant states did not claim any of the features of the SCS. The matter of sovereignty over the SCS and territorial claims started between China and other Claimant states when China came into being in 1949. Currently, seven states, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, and the Philippines have competing claims over the sovereignty and territory of the SCS but still now there is not any agreement between these states for maritime demarcation.<sup>100</sup>



Figure 3: Overlapping Claims in the SCS

Source: [Voice of America](#)

<sup>99</sup> Jianming Shen, "China's Sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands: A Historical Perspective," *Chinese Journal of International Law* 1, no. 1 (2002): 94–157, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.cjilaw.a000432>, 137.

<sup>100</sup> "South China Sea Regional Hotspot," Dryad Global, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://dg.dryadglobal.com/south-china-sea2>.

### *Chinese claims*

PRC is the most assertive and active state in SCS. Beijing claims almost the entire (90%) SCS based on the nine-dash line dating back to the 1940s. However, the map was officially included in the UN submitted by the PRC in the aftermath of the conflict with Vietnam in 2009. The PRC claim depends on the historical rights and justifies its claims in the SCS.<sup>101</sup> Over the course of time, China tried multiple times to draw a marine boundary line in the SCS. For the first time, China officially claims the rights over the SCS in “Declaration on the Government of the People’s Republic of China on China’s Territorial Sea” in 1958.<sup>102</sup> Till the 1970s, no state had questioned the nine-dash line in the SCS. In the 1970s, China started military control forcefully over the different islands of the SSC. In January 1974, Chinese troops forcefully occupied Parcel Island in the aftermath of two days war between China and South Vietnam. Since that time Chinese controlled, the whole of Parcel Island while Vietnam claims it in several official statements.<sup>103</sup>

China had no physical presence in the Spratly Islands till the mid of 1980s. After a calm decade in the SCS, in 1987 Beijing sent a “scientific expedition” to the Island. With exploration, China illegally occupied Cuarteron and Fiery Cross reefs which were already claimed by the Philippines and Vietnam. Both states forces fight over the reef in 1988 and both states occupied more reefs.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, Beijing started to build an artificial Island in the 1990s. The first island was built in 1995, the Philippines government officially stated in public that Mischief Reef (The Eastern portion of the Spratly Island) was forcefully occupied

---

<sup>101</sup> Jing Huang, Andrew Billo, and Robert C. Beckman, “The Philippines v. China Case and the South China Sea Disputes,” essay, in *Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea: Navigating Rough Waters* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 54–65.

<sup>102</sup> “Resolution of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of the Approval of the Declaration of the Government on China’s Territorial Sea,” AsianLII, September 4, 1958, <http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/rotscotnpcotaotdotgocts1338/>.

<sup>103</sup> Stein Tønnesson, “The Paracels: The ‘Other’ South China Sea Dispute,” *Asian Perspective* 26, no. 4 (2002): 145–69, <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2002.0006>, 150-51.

<sup>104</sup> Peter Kreuzer, “Facing China: Crises or Peaceful Coexistence in the South China Sea,” JSTOR, January 2015, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep14484.5>, 7.

by PLA troops which was claimed by PRC, Vietnam, Taiwan, and the Philippines.<sup>105</sup> In 2012, a conflict take place between the Philippines and China over the Scarborough Shoal which was already claimed by the Philippines. On the bases of the nine-dash line China get control over the Scarborough Shoal and built an island on it.<sup>106</sup>

China also claims Continental shelf and EEZ which are extended to 200 NM from the baseline. So far, China's claims in the SCS are more than mentioned in the UNCLOS despite China having ratified the treaty. These Claims are based on the ancient inheritance and historical rights dating back to the Xia dynasty (c. 2070-1600 BC). It violates the UNCLOS principles of 12 NM while overlapping the maritime territory, EEZ claims, and other state territories. However, none of China's claims has legal justification under the international law.<sup>107</sup> In sum, China's claims all the four group of islands in SCS: Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Pratas Island, and Macclesfield Bank. China also claims adjacent water of the SCS on the basis of nine-dash line and historical right.

### *Vietnam claims*

Vietnam asserts its claims over the multiple parts of the SCS, specifically Spratly and Paracel Island. These claims are of two types i.e. maritime and sovereignty. Vietnam claims sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel Islands while maintaining its sovereignty over a substantial part of the Spratly Islands regardless of the conflicting claims by the Philippines, Taiwan, and China. Officially, Vietnam claims the historical and legal foundation over the sovereignty of Spratly and Paracel Island while considering other state claims illegal and a violation of their sovereignty. Vietnam Contemplate other state claims over these two Island

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Green et al., "Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, June 27, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-scarborough-standoff/>.

<sup>107</sup> Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, Kevin Baumert, and Brian Melchior, China: Maritime claims in the South China Sea § (2014), 15-22.

weaker and unsubstantial historically as well as legally.<sup>108</sup> Vietnam also claims rights over the Continental Shelf and EEZ under the principle of UNCLOS. They referred to historical facts to support their claims and its longstanding activities in the region.<sup>109</sup>

### *Philippines claims*

The Philippines has two fundamental claims in the SCS. The first claims include sovereignty over the marine features of Spratly Island known as Kalayaan Island Group while the second claim is over the sovereignty of Scarborough Shoal. These maritime features include reef Shoals and Islands under the principles of the UNCLOS. These features fall in the Philippine EZZ and continental shelf. However, Taiwan and China disagree with the Philippines over the right of Scarborough Shoal and Malaysia, Vietnam, and China also challenge the Philippine rights in the Spratly Island.<sup>110</sup> The Philippines' claims in the SCS are based on legal and historical rights. From 1968 to 1971 they started sending the military to KIG to take control over several islands.<sup>111</sup> After a few years, Philippines President Marcos officially claimed sovereignty over the Spratly Island.<sup>112</sup> In 2013, the Philippines Challenged Chinese Claims in the Permanent Court of Arbitration. In July 2016, the Court unanimously decided the case in favor of the Philippines.<sup>113</sup>

### *Indonesia claims*

Officially, Indonesia doesn't claim any part of the SCS but has a geostrategic interest in the Peaceful SCS. However, China poses a threat to Indonesia in the North Natuna Sea.

<sup>108</sup> "Vietnam's Note Verbale No. 22/CH-2020 Submitted to the United Nation," Unofficial Translation, United Nation, March 30, 2020, [https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/mys\\_12\\_12\\_2019/VN20200330\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/mys_12_12_2019/VN20200330_ENG.pdf).

<sup>109</sup> Vo Ngoc Diep, "Vietnam's Note Verbale on the South China Sea," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, May 5, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/vietnams-note-verbale-on-the-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>110</sup> Mark Rosen, rep., *Philippine Claims in the South China Sea: A Legal Analysis* (CNA Analysis And Soutlution, 2014), [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008435.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008435.pdf) 6-14.

<sup>111</sup> Juan Arreglado, *Kalayaan, Historical, Legal, Political Background* (Philippines: Foreign Service Institute, 1982), 45–46

<sup>112</sup> Official Gazette, "Presidential Decree No. 1596, s. 1978," President of the Philippines, signed June 11, 1978, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1978/06/11/presidential-decree-no-1596-s-1978/>.

<sup>113</sup> The South China Sea Arbitration (the Republic of Philippines V. the People's Republic of China), 2016.



Indonesia rejects any conflict with China in the North Natuna Sea; however, it is a fact that Beijing considers some areas of the Natuna Sea as a part of the nine-dash line.<sup>114</sup> Indonesia is treating the SCS disputes and North Natuna Sea issue separately which is not sustainable due to its interconnectedness.

### ***Malaysia claims***

Malaysia claims overlap with other states in Spratly Island, the Eastern Malaysian part of the SCS. It is surrounded by twelve maritime features including reefs, shoal, and rocks in the Spratly Islands but physically present in the five islands i.e Swallow Reef, Terumbu Mantanani, Mariveles Reef, Ardasier Reef, Erica Reef, and Investigator Reef. Other than that, two features, Amboyna Cay and Commodore Reef are occupied by Vietnam and the Philippines correspondingly.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, Luconia Shoals and James Shoal claim by China. Malaysian claims are based on legal as well as historical rights as these claims were subject to different Maps, documents submitted to the UN, and historical factors such as tight control and occupation on some of these features.

### ***Taiwan claims***

There is a historical linkage between Republic of China (Taiwan) and People Republic of China (China). The ROC was come into being in 1912, after the fall of the Qing dynasty. The actual architect of the U-shaped line or nine-dash line was ROC. The ROC rule over the major part of the mainland China. Their activities are profoundly linked with the

---

<sup>114</sup> Aditya Pratama, "Indonesia's Ambiguity in the South China Sea Is Hampering Its Interest," *Modern Diplomacy*, January 12, 2023, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/01/13/indonesias-ambiguity-in-the-south-china-sea-is-hampering-its-interest/>.

<sup>115</sup> Dzirhan Mahadzir, "Malaysia's Maritime Claims in the South China Sea Security and Military Dimensions," essay, in *Entering Uncharted Waters? ASEAN and the South China Sea*, ed. Pavin Chachavalpongpun (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014), 208–22, 208-209.

current claims of PRC.<sup>116</sup> Taiwan claims in the SCS is similar to that of China. However, it only occupied the Itu Aba Island in 1950s but further not expanded its occupation.<sup>117</sup>

### ***Brunei claims***

After independence from the British, Brunei a “salient Claimant” state claimed only Louisa Reef, which falls within its Continental Shelf and part of the Spratly Island. It’s also claimed by China and Vietnam. It is the only state in the SCS that did not hold any maritime feature and have not present any of its troops.<sup>118</sup>

### ***United States position on the claims in the SCS***

The US is not a claimant of any maritime territory or takes no position over the sovereignty of the SCS while just advocating free navigation in the Sea. Regarding SCS, the US always adopted a straightforward stance that China’s claims to SCS resources and maritime boundaries are mostly unlawful. China has no legal right to control the SCS solely. In 2016, the historical right over the SCS and “nine-dash line” is also rejected by the Arbitral Tribunal unanimously under the UNCLOS. The US upholds the decision of the court and takes sides with the Philippines over the claim of the SCS. The US portrayed a message to Beijing that we will not allow you to make SCS your Maritim domain. The US firmly stand with the other Southeast Asia claimant states to safeguard their marine rights and resources under the principles of international law.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> He Xiaoheng Derek, “The Taiwan Factor in the Clarification of China’s U-Shaped Line,” E-Internation Relation, January 16, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/01/16/the-taiwan-factor-in-the-clarification-of-chinas-u-shaped-line/>.

<sup>117</sup> Hasjim Djalal, rep., *South China Sea Island Disputes* (Jakarta, 2000), <https://lknhm.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/app/uploads/2017/04/s08rbz009-021.pdf>, 11.

<sup>118</sup> Pete Cobus, “South China Sea: Conflict and Diplomacy on the High Seas,” Recent Claimants | South China Sea | Conflict and Diplomacy on the High Seas, December 29, 2016, <https://projects.voanews.com/south-china-sea/recent/>.

<sup>119</sup> Michael Pompeo, “U.S. Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea,” U.S. Department of State, December 1, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-position-on-maritime-claims-in-the-south-china-sea/index.html>.

## Recent Developments and Tensions

In recent times, developments and tensions in the SCS have continued to shape the geopolitical environment of the region. It has been characterized by a combo of assertive and aggressive actions, maritime disputes, and continuing efforts to manage the situation. The most important development is the militarization of the SCS by Beijing. Despite the regional and international concerns, China has enhanced its military activities and construction of certain military facilities and industrial outposts on the disputed Island. It includes the installment of radar system, airstrip and stationing of missile system.<sup>120</sup> In April, Beijing installed missile system on Mischief reefs, and Fiery Cross in the SCS. Chinese officials clarify that these steps were taken to protect Chinese territory and sovereignty and not to target any state in the region.<sup>121</sup> However, these developments raised concerns among the regional states and global community as it would increase the tension in the region. It could potentially further affect the balance of power as the claimant states consider it the violation of territorial sovereignty and consider it a threat to a regional peace. The US also reiterated concerns over the ongoing developments and Chinese militarization in the SCS and demanded the removal of missile system. In response to Chinese militarization US also increased its naval and military activities and conducted six freedom of navigation operations in the SCS and emphasize that the water near the Mischief Reef is regarded as international where the free navigation of sea apply.<sup>122</sup>

On the other hand, territorial disputes and sovereignty also contributed to the tension in the region. Vietnamese and Chinese ships confronted multiple times recently. Expert says

---

<sup>120</sup> Frances Mangosing, "Exclusive: New Photos Show China Is Nearly Done with Its Militarization of South China Sea," Inquirer.net, February 5, 2018, <https://www.inquirer.net/specials/exclusive-china-militarization-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>121</sup> Amanda Macias, "China Quietly Installed Missile Systems on Strategic Spratly Islands in Hotly Contested South China Sea," CNBC, January 30, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/02/china-added-missile-systems-on-spratly-islands-in-south-china-sea.html>.

<sup>122</sup> Ankit Panda, "China Condemns US FONOP near Mischief Reef in the South China Sea," – The Diplomat, March 26, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/china-condemns-us-fonop-near-mischief-reef-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

that Chinese research ships entered into Hanoi's EEZ which is actually antagonistic and sovereignty violation, if conducted without any prior notification. In response to that China said that we hold almost entire SCS based on Nine-Dash line including that maritime territory which came under the EEZ of Vietnam and other states in the SCS.<sup>123</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The South China Sea has a long and complex history, marked by centuries of trade, migration, and disputes. It has served as an important route between the Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, and other parts of the world and has been a place of major naval clashes, territorial disputes, and geopolitical tensions over the years. In recent times, the strategic importance of the SCS has grown significantly, as it has become an important artery for world trade and energy transport. It is a crucial passageway for oil tankers, cargo, and other vessels that transport goods between Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the US. Each year, over 30 percent of global shipping, including more than 50 percent of the world's liquefied natural gas trade, navigates through the SCS. This vital role in the global economy, combined with ongoing diplomatic tensions has led many experts to predict that the strategic importance of the South China Sea will continue to rise in the coming years. The SCS's geopolitical importance is likely to remain a key factor in global affairs for the upcoming years, with implications for trade, security, and international relations.

The ongoing territorial disputes, overlapping claims, the assertions of sovereignty over the disputed islands carry significant ramifications for economic interests, regional security, and the utilization of waterways within the surrounding area. The overlapping claims in the SCS are the subject of controversy between the claimant states and major world

---

<sup>123</sup> "Vietnam Rebukes China, Philippines over South China Sea Conduct," Reuters, May 18, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/vietnam-rebukes-china-philippines-over-south-china-sea-conduct-2023-05-18/>.

power such as the US. These claims and conflicts revolve around legal and historical rights and are based on the principles of international law. China and Vietnam's claims are based on historical rights and have no base under the principles of UNCLOS. On the other hand, the US has no direct claims but forces the claimant states to settle the disputes under the principles of international law and advocate the Freedom of Navigation (FON) on the high seas. The US indirectly involves in the SCS dispute to counter China's assertive posture, increase its sphere of influence and maintain the US rule-based order. It led to the emerging rivalry and power competition between China and the US in the SCS. The forthcoming chapter provides a detailed discussion of the subject matter.

## **Chapter II**

# **China-US Interest in the South China Sea and main drivers of their rivalry**

### **Introduction**

The South China Sea (SCS) has become a major contested maritime region in recent years because of China-US strategic rivalry to capture and control the blue economy and enhance its sphere of influence. These two states are the major military powers having the world's largest economies, hence, their rivalry in the SCS has significant implications for regional security and global politics. The strategic importance of the region has made it a focal point for geopolitical rivalry and strategic competition, with both China and the US pursuing their respective interests. In this Chapter, the core interests, political, and official positions of China and the US it discussed and analyzed in detail. The researcher further investigated the intricate dynamics of the China-US rivalry and the main drivers behind their rivalry in the SCS. While tensions may run high between these global powers, we explore the reasons why a full-scale conflict is unlikely to erupt in this strategic maritime region. Within these pages, it also investigates why it is unlikely to escalate the China-US rivalry into a full-scale conflict. While tensions have been high, a careful examination of various factors reveals a more nuanced picture of the emerging rivalry between these two major powers in the region.

### **US Official Policy in the South China Sea**

Many East Asian states claim sovereignty over the geography of the SCS. The US officially has no territorial claim over the sovereignty of the SCS nor on its any geographical features. However, the US has increased its importance because of its involvement in the efforts to manage the dispute and has urged it to solve the dispute without any intimidation

and as per international law.<sup>124</sup> Even the US did not support any state's claim against other states over the sovereignty of the SCS. The US involvement is mainly associated with the settlement of the SCS issue and is linked with the behavior of China in the region as well. Despite the Chinese assertiveness, the US does not want to increase its direct involvement in the SCS to make it a hot issue in its relationship with China.<sup>125</sup> However, the US declared that Chinese claims are unlawful and not in line with the principle of international law. The US wants to maintain peace and stability, uphold free navigation, uninterrupted flow of trade, and oppose the use of any unilateral action in the SCS. The US stands with the other claimant states in protecting their sovereign rights and access to natural resources under international law.<sup>126</sup>

### ***Obama's policy of pivot to Asia***

The US position in the SCS gained significant public attention in 2010 as the tension escalated among the claimant states over the sovereignty of territorial waters and maritime features. The then secretary of state, Hillary Clinton clarified the US position aligning it with Obama's policy of pivot to Asia. In 2011, President Obama highlighted the US stance and objectives in the SCS in front of the Australian parliament. His policy of pivot to Asia was to rebalance and strengthen US engagement in Asia Pacific including SCS. The other prominent attribute of that policy includes freedom of navigation and uninterrupted flow of trade through air and sea routes over the SCS. The US urged a peaceful resolution of the SCS issue through international law and encourage the claimant state to adhere to the principles of UNCLOS. President Obama focused on the multi-lateral and regional talk over the conflict

---

<sup>124</sup> Taylor Fravel, "U.S. Policy Towards the Disputes in the South China Sea Since 1995," essay, in *Power Politics in Asia's Contested Waters: Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea*, ed. Enrico Fels and Truong-Minh Vu (SPRINGER, 2018), 389–402. 389

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 390.

<sup>126</sup> "U.S. Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea - United States Department of State," U.S. Department of State, December 1, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-position-on-maritime-claims-in-the-south-china-sea/index.html>.

which was against the Chinese approach of bilateral negotiation.<sup>127</sup> Obama administration policy was comprehensive and rational. The US adhered to naturalty over the conflicting claims while protecting the trade activities and free navigation. However, it was unable to prevent China from building bases and artificial islands over the disputed areas, expanding its military power, and engaging in mutual diplomatic pressure tactics.

### ***Trump's policy of Free and Open Indo Pacific***

By the time when President Trump took office, the Permanent Court of Arbitration decided the case against China, that there is no evidence of the Chinese claim of historical rights over the SCS. Moreover, under President Xi, China adopted the strategy “Chinese Dream” from peaceful rise while adopting the aggressive and assertive approach in the SCS. Consequently, the Trump administration transformed its policy to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy and expanded it to the Asian nations and SCS.<sup>128</sup> The US policy shift over the SCS issue further fueled the tension between China and US. Mike Pompeo Secretary of State rejects China’s claims as “completely unlawful” in the SCS and once again acknowledged the 2016 decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.<sup>129</sup>

The US has a longing for strengthening military presence, countering Chinese military buildups in the SCS, and encouraging the claimant states to coordinate and cooperate while defending its interest in the SCS. The transition from the policy of “Pivot to Asia” to an “aggressive and stubborn policy under the Trump administration create further challenges for the US. China increases its presence in the southern part of the SCS and gets more control

---

<sup>127</sup> “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament,” National Archives and Records Administration, November 17, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>.

<sup>128</sup> Alyss Ayres, “Continuity and Change: The Trump Administration’s South Asia Policies,” Council on Foreign Relations, April 4, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/continuity-and-change-trump-administrations-south-asia-policies>.

<sup>129</sup> Deirdre Shesgreen, “Trump Administration Rejects Nearly All Beijing’s Claims in South China Sea, a Move Likely to Inflamm Tensions,” USA Today, July 14, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2020/07/13/trump-administration-chinas-claims-south-china-sea-unlawful/5429955002/>.



over the nearby water. These actions led to minimizing US access to air space and important waterways. Consequently, the US warned China that would have adverse consequences.<sup>130</sup>

David Stilwell, US Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs During the Trump administration told that there is room for Sanctions against private enterprises, doing business in the SCS and China in the aftermath of their assertiveness in the SCS.<sup>131</sup> Despite the change in policy, the US goal remained the same in both the administration to uphold freedom of navigation and halt China's assertiveness in the SCS.

### ***Biden administration policy: Focus on alliances***

Trump and Biden, both candidates for the presidential election of 2020 criticized China in broader terms but the SCS issue remained uncertain because of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and US domestic economic concerns.<sup>132</sup> Joe Biden win the presidential election of 2020 and continued the previous administration's hardcore policy in the SCS. Biden administration continued to uphold freedom of navigation and actively engaged US Navy. Biden's policy seems similar to the previous two administrations but his approach is totally different from the previous premier. The Biden administration is ardently making informal alliances against Beijing while maneuvering both bilateral and multi-lateral platforms.<sup>133</sup> Since the Biden administration came into power, the US prioritized diplomatic engagement with the regional allies to give strengthen a collective response to Chinese assertiveness. His advisors and federal ministers consistently assured to protect the Philippine vessels and ships in the SCS under the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) between the

---

<sup>130</sup> Phuong Nguyen, "Deciphering the Shift in America's South China Sea Policy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no. 3 (2016): 389–421, <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs38-3b>.

<sup>131</sup> Humeyra Pamuk and David Brunnstrom, "David R. Stilwell Says Room for Sanctions in Response to China in South China Sea," Reuters, July 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-southchinasea-stilwell/u-s-says-room-for-sanctions-in-response-to-china-in-south-china-sea-idUSKCN24F1TB>.

<sup>132</sup> Leonardo Baccini, Abel Brodeur, and Stephen Weymouth, "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the 2020 US Presidential Election," *Journal of Population Economics* 34, no. 2 (2021): 739–67, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-020-00820-3>, 740.

<sup>133</sup> Igor Mishin, "U.S.' South China Sea Policy: The First Steps under Presidency of Joe Biden," *Asia and Africa Today*, no. 12 (December 8, 2021): 12–19, <https://doi.org/10.31857/s032150750017800-2>.

Philippines and the US. Furthermore, using a multi-literal platform, Biden concentrated on the first summit of Quad leaders held on March 12, 2021. The Quad leaders collectively identified threats to the regional order specifically in the SCS.<sup>134</sup> Additionally, AUKUS has been formed by US, UK, and Australia in September 2021. It is a common perception that its ambition was to counter Chinese assertiveness in the Pacific and specifically in the SCS. Although, AUKUS states denied this perception, however, both Australia and US are against China's assertiveness in the SCS.<sup>135</sup> To Analyze President Biden's policy of SCS and his allies outside and within the region reflect like a cold war approach and mentality to counter China.

US policy regarding the SCS has remained consistent across the three administrations (Obama, Trump and Biden) to ensure freedom of navigation in high sea and to stop Chinese assertiveness. However, all the three presidents adopted different approach to get the required aims in the region.

### **United State Priorities and Interests in the SCS**

There is no universal approach for finding out what are the state's "permanent" interests. Mostly, it involves making prediction of the official decision and prioritized public will regarding a certain issue. These predictions are actually the educated guess not the final decisions.<sup>136</sup> The US priorities in the SCS are those that the previous, current and upcoming administrations are certain to focus. The US does not have any territorial claims like Beijing in the SCS but it has other strategic interests. Over the last decade, the SCS has become a matter of increasing concern and interest for US officials due to Chinese increasing assertiveness. The US has deep strategic and economic interests in the region. After the end

---

<sup>134</sup> Chen Xiangmiao, "Biden's South China Sea Policy Has Cold War Currents," Global Times, April 25, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1221998.shtml>.

<sup>135</sup> Ruhanas Harun, "Aukus, the South China Sea Dispute and Regional Peace and Stability In ...," Antalya Diplomacy Forum, February 2022, <https://antalyadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Aukus-The-South-China-Sea-Dispute-and-Regional-Peace-And-Stability-in-The-Indo-Pacific.pdf>.

<sup>136</sup> Robert D. Lamb, Sadika Hameed, and Kathryn Mixon, rep., *South Asia Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns* (Washington: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 8.

of the cold war, the US still influence the region while defending the principle of free navigation.<sup>137</sup> The US Interest in the SCS encompasses three broad areas, economic interest which is connected with Sea lines, defense and security which is tied up with its regional partners, and global influence and balance of power in the region. Each US interest will have a profound impact on China if achieved successfully.

### ***US Economic Interest through Sea lanes***

On the global level, the economic value of high seas and oceans is quite significant. More than 80% of international trade and commerce is conducted via the seas. Maritime transport through high seas is the spine of global economy and international trade.<sup>138</sup> The SCS sea lanes of communication are the largest and busiest and most significant in the world. It's important to note that these sea lanes not only connect East-Asia with the South-Asia and Middle-East but the shortest and cheapest route for trade as well. These sea lanes stretch from Taiwan to Sumatra and home to four islands and important petroleum exploration zones.<sup>139</sup> Whenever the US talk about Freedom of navigation in the SCS, they refer to two different interests through navigation; Continuous legal commerce and trade through sea lanes and the right to conduct military activities.<sup>140</sup> So, ensuring free navigation and stability in the SCS is important for the continuous flow of trade which is directly in the interest of the US economy. Approximately \$5.3 trillion worth of trade passes through the SCS annually; \$1.2

---

<sup>137</sup> Richard Sokolsky, Angel Rabasa, and Richard Neu, essay, in *The Role of Southeast Asia in U.S. Strategy toward China* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2000), 5–15, 5

<sup>138</sup> Rajni Nayanthara Gamage, “Blue Economy in Southeast Asia: Oceans as the New Frontier of Economic Development,” *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 12, no. 2 (2016): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2016.1244361>.

<sup>139</sup> Rini Laimou-Maniati, rep., *The Management of the Sea Lanes of Communication in South East Asia and the ASEAN Regional Forum's Performance*, *ETH Zürich*, n.d., <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/23243/Management%20of%20the%20Sea%20Lanes%20of%20Communication%20in%20SE%20Asia.pdf>, 2.

<sup>140</sup> Michael McDevitt, “The South China Sea: Assessing U.S. Policy and Options for the Future ,” *CNA Analysis and Solution: Occasional Paper*, November 2014, [https://doi.org/https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-009109.pdf](https://doi.org/https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-009109.pdf), 18.

trillion of the total trade account for the US.<sup>141</sup> The US has strong economic interest due to the high trade volume passing through the sea lanes of SCS. The US is devoted to ensure free navigation and uninterrupted flow of trade under the UNCLOS.

***Defense and security interest through strengthening ties with regional states***

The US has a powerful interest in defense and security and its partners look forward to the US to maintain regional peace and security in the SCS. The US military presence in the SCS also seen as important by the regional state because the US upholds the commitment to alliance and support with its partners and freedom of seas.<sup>142</sup> The US has also robust interest to stop China's assertiveness in the SCS. For this reason, the US prevents Chinese assertiveness by enhancing defense cooperation with the regional states. The US-Philippines signed the "Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement" in 2014 that allows US military to Use Philippines bases for warfighting and disaster relief in specific agreed locations.<sup>143</sup> One of the important sites is Magsaysay which is Philippines' largest military base and serves as the core of the US-Philippines annual joint military exercises. This US-Philippines military alliance aims to successfully meet the required challenges and help to address the growing Chinese aggression in the SCS.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, the US administration announced \$250 million in the fiscal year of 2015-16 to strengthen the allies' maritime capabilities in the region. It includes \$79 million to the Philippines, \$40 million to Vietnam, \$20 million to Indonesia, and \$2.5 million to Malaysia to improve their maritime surveillance and strengthen security capabilities.<sup>145</sup> In addition, the US has close security ties with Singapore and Taiwan and

---

<sup>141</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser, "Armed Clash in the South China Sea," *JSTOR*, April 2012, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05637>, 4.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> "Defense Cooperation Between the United States and the Philippines," Department of States, April 28, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Gregory Poling and Conor Cronin, "The Dangers of Allowing u.s.-Philippine Defense Cooperation to Languish," *War on the Rocks*, January 22, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/05/the-dangers-of-allowing-u-s-philippine-defense-cooperation-to-languish/>.

<sup>145</sup> "Press Release: U.S. Building Maritime Capacity in Southeast Asia," National Archives and Records Administration, November 17, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/17/fact-sheet-us-building-maritime-capacity-southeast-asia>.

different agreements with Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia to strengthen their security cooperation. Through these efforts, the US interest comprises to stop China from assertiveness, Military buildup, and construction of islands in the SCS. Fostering collaborative ties with the regional states are significant and safeguarding US security interest in the SCS.

### ***Being a globally dominant power***

Rule-based order is a system of rules values and institutions that regulate the interaction of states with others in the international system.<sup>146</sup> The US wants to maintain rule-based order, and spin the balance of power in its favor under the principles of international law and as a guarantor of the security of regional states. The concept of regional order linked with certain interests and values embodied in the world order emerged after the second world war reflects US values and interests.<sup>147</sup> The US has maintained a naval presence in the region to project its military supremacy and influence. It also aims to contain China's aggressive posture specifically in the SCS. The US feels threatened by the resources, sea lanes and trade volume in the SCS which look crucial for the rise of China.<sup>148</sup> If China supersedes the US influence in the Indo-pacific and China's assertiveness continued in the SCS then global politics will step into a different era. The US security guarantee for the regional ally will rip up. All these developments will occur in the world trade artery while the US predominance will be over to new rising power and will make the US uncomfortable.<sup>149</sup> In a nutshell, the SCS is the flashpoint where two global giants are contesting for supremacy and it will have a profound impact in the near future.

---

<sup>146</sup> Malcolm Jorgensen, "Equilibrium & Fragmentation in the International Rule of Law: The Rising Chinese Geolegal Order," *The International Rule of Law – Rise or Decline?* |, 21, no. working paper (November 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3283626>, 7-8.

<sup>147</sup> Caitlin Byrne, "Securing the 'Rules-Based Order' in the Indo-Pacific: The Significance of Strategic Narrative," *JSTOR* 16, no. The Indo-Pacific: From Concept to Contest (2020): 10–15, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/26924333>.

<sup>148</sup> Victor Alexandre Gonçalves Teixeira, 2018, 26.

<sup>149</sup> Marvin Ott, 2019.

### ***Why South China Sea matter to US?***

Being a superpower, the US defines its interest globally. The foremost interest of the US lies in protecting the American land and its allies politically economically and militarily.<sup>150</sup> The US believes in the naval and marine Supremacy and considers Asia Pacific a crucial region in this regard. The Defense Department of the US issued Asia Pacific Maritime Security Strategy which mostly focused on the SCS.<sup>151</sup> The US volume of trade with Europe is much greater than that of Asia. Numerous sea lines of communication and trade routes across the Pacific playing crucial role in augmenting world trade. SCS trade routes are the busiest shipping routes of supply goods and energy resources. The US wants to control these routes and ensure free navigation.<sup>152</sup> After the end of the cold war, the US diversified its interest and diverted its focus to Asia. For the last few decades, the US is working on the democratization of Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia and successful to some extent. In the security domain, the US expanded its ties with the regional allies and maintain its regular naval presence to keep watch on China's activities in the region.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, SCS transformed into a geopolitical flashpoint between China and the US as China quest to become regional power is a challenge to the US liberal-based world order. Beijing has the intention to reshape the current order at least partially.<sup>154</sup> The US believes that China intend to throw out US from the Asia Pacific particularly SCS. However, the US is a key defender of the current order in the Pacific region and beyond it. If US fails to prevent China assertiveness in the SCS, it will further strengthen China's position in the region.

---

<sup>150</sup> Andrew Scobell, 2018, 40.

<sup>151</sup> Department of Defense, *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy* (2015).

<sup>152</sup> Mehmood-ul-Hassan Khan, "Geo-Economy of South China Sea," *Pakistan Observer*, August 13, 2022, <https://pakobserver.net/geo-economy-of-south-china-sea-by-dr-mehmood-ul-hassan-khan/>.

<sup>153</sup> Leszek Buszynski, "Why Is the South China Sea so Important to the US?," *The Conversation Academic rigour, journalistic flair*, December 22, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/why-is-the-south-china-sea-so-important-to-the-us-71477>.

<sup>154</sup> Huiyun Feng and Kai He, "China's Institutional Challenges to the International Order," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 11, no. Winter (December 1, 2017): 23–49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26271633?refreqid=search-gateway>, 43-44.

## Chinese Interest in the South China Sea

As international relations and regional integration continue to evolve the national interests are also under transformation. The traditional interest of a state is limited to its land while the foreign interest is decided by a state's national assimilation.<sup>155</sup> China has multiple interests in the SCS. These interests are driven by the combination of the economy, geostrategy, and security.

### *Economic Interest: Natural Resources and Reserves*

SCS is enriched with natural resources; living and non-living and a hub of international trade as the researcher earlier discussed in chapter II. These resources are directly significant for China's economy. The EIA estimated 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 cubic feet of natural gas reserves in the SCS. Accessing all these resources would enhance China's ability to be self-sufficient.<sup>156</sup> In terms of Fish resources, 12% of the global fishing is found in the SCS. 78% of fishery activities take place in China-occupied territories in the SCS. About 14 to 15 million fishermen work in China's fishery industry and generate revenue of 3% of the overall GDP of China.<sup>157</sup> These maritime resources and reserves are important for the Chinese national economic growth and people's living.

### *Security Interest*

From the security perspective, Beijing wants to focus on the SCS and enhance its naval capabilities to become a regional maritime power. The security interest is linked with China's maritime and territorial claims in the SCS. Control over the SCS and its sea lanes are linked with the competing claims over the sovereignty and features of the SCS between the claimant states. China shifted its policy from integration and cooperation to competition over

---

<sup>155</sup> Su Hao, rep., *China's Positions and Interests in the South China Sea: A Rational Choices in Its Cooperative Policies* (Washington: Center for Strategic and international studies, 2011), 7.

<sup>156</sup> "SOUTH CHINA SEA," International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), October 15, 2019, [https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South\\_China\\_Sea](https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South_China_Sea).

<sup>157</sup> Adam Greer, "The South China Sea Is Really a Fishery Dispute," *The Diplomat*, July 20, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/the-south-china-sea-is-really-a-fishery-dispute>.

the security and sovereignty of the SCS.<sup>158</sup> Security interests are not only confined to SCS territory but to the sea lanes and trade routes. Half of the oil consumption China imports and 90% imports through the SCS.<sup>159</sup> These sea lanes connect Singapore and Malacca Straits, the Bashi Channel, and Luzon Strait which are considered lifelines for the Taiwan, Korean, and Japanese economies. SCS is also one of the most crucial and busiest trade routes having \$5 trillion of trade pass through it annually.<sup>160</sup> It is a fact that the US influences global maritime security which makes China insecure. This poses consequential threats to China because US Navy is the security guarantor of these sea lanes. Despite the fact, China wants to secure only those sea lanes which are crucial for its development not to dominate it globally. On the other hand, SCS has been militarized by Beijing, Washington, and other regional states. The US regularly conduct joint military exercises with partners and FONOP operation in the SCS. On one side China keeps modernizing its military and naval capabilities while on the other side, the US monitoring China's rise.<sup>161</sup> Keeping in view the emerging dynamics in the SCS, China has protentional threats and a larger security interest in the SCS. SCS is not simply an issue of prestige and control but holds China's core security interest.

### ***Geostrategic interest***

China aims to dominate the SCS which is subdued by the other claimant nations. The predominance of China is related to the occupation and control of the SCS and its islands. The Spratly Island is located strategically to project power regionally. Chinese military and

---

<sup>158</sup> Peter Dutton, "Three Disputes and Three Objectives—China and the South China Sea," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 4 (2011): 43–57, <https://doi.org/https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol64/iss4/6/>, 58.

<sup>159</sup> "More than 30% of Global Maritime Crude Oil Trade Moves through the South China Sea," U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), August 2018, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=36952>.

<sup>160</sup> Lindsay Murdoch, "South China Sea: Experts Clash over China Threat to Commercial Trade," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 13, 2016, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/south-china-sea-experts-clash-over-china-threat-to-commercial-trade-20160113-gm4s9c.html>.

<sup>161</sup> U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs, "7th Fleet Cruiser Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea," United States Navy, November 28, 2022, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3229970/7th-fleet-cruiser-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-south-china-sea/#:~:text=The%20freedom%20of%20navigation%20operation,%2C%20Vietnam%2C%20and%20Taiwan.>



naval presence illustrate its long-lasting ambition to strengthen its control in the SCS. China militarized the occupied island to prevent any regional retaliation. The US and other claimant states have reservations on Chinese assertiveness and militarization but China disregards the issue and not taking into account at all.<sup>162</sup> China's presence creates hurdles for the US Navy to operate in China's vicinity. These islands facilitate China to increase its air and naval presence, enhance military capabilities and ports for the Chinese naval ships. It will enhance China hard power and provides an opportunity to pursue a considerable strategic interest. The Chinese expanding strategic interests have led the state to find a pertinent position in the international system but it does not mean that Beijing has a desire for regional or global hegemony.<sup>163</sup>

### **China-US Strategic Rivalry in the SCS**

China-US rivalry started a long ago with ideological differences, one claimed to be a democratic state while the other called himself a communist state. Their different economic system intensifies their rivalry. The rivalry between China and US occurs in different fields i.e. ideological, different political and economic system, trade war and power politics in the Pacific, particularly in the SCS. The US wants to free the SCS from the control of any state while upholding the principle of Free Navigation. On the other hand, China claims ownership over the maritime and land features while constructing an artificial island and deploying its navy in the SCS.<sup>164</sup> The China-US rivalry aroused in the SCS in the early years of the second

---

<sup>162</sup> Ali Zafar, "South China Sea: A Geopolitical Tinderbox," Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research, October 5, 2020, <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/south-china-sea-a-geopolitical-tinderbox/>.

<sup>163</sup> Klaus Heinrich Raditio, "China's Interests in the South China Sea," essay, in *Understanding China's Behaviour in the South China Sea a Defensive Realist Perspective* (Singapore: Palgrave macmillan, 2019), 69–94, 87.

<sup>164</sup> Gerald Theodorus Toruan, "Indonesia and ASEAN in Facing US-China Rivalry in the South China Sea to Create Regional Security Stability," *International Journal of Science and Society* 3, no. 2 (2021): 82–87, <https://doi.org/10.54783/ijssoc.v3i2.319>, 85-86

decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and become the center of attention beyond the territorial claims and maritime resources.<sup>165</sup>

America pursues China-US rivalry through the lens of the clash and conflict between China and other regional states in the SCS. On the other hand, China looks to the US responses to these clashes by taking side of claimant states in the SCS. In May 2014, Vietnam and China get involved in a conflict over the oil resources. The situation was worsened by the deployment of the oil rig Haiyang Shiyou 981 for drilling in the Continental shelf of Vietnam. In response to the conflict US official, John Kerry declare Chinese action “proactive” against Vietnam. Washington encouraged Vietnam to follow international arbitration against China.<sup>166</sup> China-US rivalry heightens by China’s assertiveness and US’s proactive approach in the SCS to counter and contain China.

Beijing has commenced to influence and impose its norms and self well through diplomatic, economic, and military means in the SCS. China’s behavior and actions aim to establish hegemonic stability and dominancy in the region. Most developments in the SCS preponderate by Chines PLA(N) as their aggressiveness and assertiveness show that Beijing is behaving like a coercive hegemon. The US pursues this behavior as a threat to its liberal rule-based order. The US adopted a proactive approach across the three successive administrations to maintain its supremacy.<sup>167</sup>

Most probably the SCS will remain an unwavering issue in the China-US rivalry. Many commentators and policy analysts in the US think that it’s time that the US Should adopt a harder approach toward China to prevent her from assertiveness and expansion. It is a

---

<sup>165</sup> Andrew Scobell, 2018, 31-32

<sup>166</sup> “U.S.’s Kerry Says China Action in Seas Dispute ‘Provocative,’” Reuters, May 13, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-kerry-china/u-s-s-kerry-says-china-action-in-seas-dispute-provocative-idUKKBN0DT0H520140513>.

<sup>167</sup> Muhammad Askari Usman, “Sino-US Rivalry in the South China Sea: A Hegemonic Stability Theory Perspective,” *Journal of Politics and International Studies* 6, no. 2 (December 2020): 115–127, [https://doi.org/http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/politicsAndInternational/PDF/8\\_v6\\_2\\_2020.pdf](https://doi.org/http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/politicsAndInternational/PDF/8_v6_2_2020.pdf), 124.

fact that the two states will continue to involve in the tug of war, legal contention, and balance of power in the SCS.

### **Drivers of China-US strategic rivalry**

The China-US strategic rivalry is characterized by complicated aggregation of different driving factors. It includes the following drivers:

#### ***Territorial dispute and maritime rules***

Territorial disputes and overlapping claims are the primary factors of the China-US rivalry in the SCS. Chinese assertiveness, construction, and militarization of artificial islands raised concern among the regional states and the US. China claims almost the whole SCS on the basis of a nine-dash line while overlapping with the claims of other states. The US accentuates that Chinese claims in the SCS based on the nine-dash line are against international law and UNCLOS.<sup>168</sup> China and US have different stances on the SCS issue as both interpret the specific articles of UNCLOS according to its own will. China defends its historical claim that it's not mentioned in the UNCLOS that what makes historic rights while on the other hand, it is clearly mentioned in the UNCLOS that "matters not regulated by this Convention continue to be governed by the rules and principles of general international law."<sup>169</sup> However, China has adopted different approaches to the SCS dispute and focused on security and sovereignty because of its geography and political history while the US peruse it through the international principle of free navigation. This divergence led to strategic confrontation and rivalry in the SCS.<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Department of State, "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific - U.S. Department of State," US Department of State, November 4, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>, 23.

<sup>169</sup> United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982, 25.

<sup>170</sup> Peter Dutton, "China 's Maritime Disputes in the East and South China Seas," *Naval War College Review* 67, no. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol67/iss3/2>, 1-2.

### ***Military presence of China and US in the South China Sea***

Another factor that contributes to the rivalry between China and US is the recapturing of islands and militarization of those islands. Since 2014, China deployed various military facilities in the Spratly Islands. The US Secretary of Defense office report claimed that Beijing occupied approximately 3200 acres of land in the SCS by 2016 through military means.<sup>171</sup> China strengthens various bases by deploying air missiles, antiship cruise missiles, as well as radars, hangars, and underground storage facilities.<sup>172</sup> Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command Admiral John Aquilino told that over the past two decades, PRC modernized its capabilities and build up its military on a large scale. The large military buildup in the Spratly Island is a threat to all the states who operate in the domain of that marine or air space.<sup>173</sup> In response, the US focused to hold military activities in the SCS such as FON operations, and military drills. They deployed four combat service groups, two amphibious ready groups, eleven SSN submarines, and twenty-two bomber stories. The US engaged regional states like the Philippines and Vietnam to involve militarily in the SCS which further intensifies the China-US rivalry in the region.<sup>174</sup>

### ***Power politics***

It is a fact that the PLA is insufficient to challenge the US at the international level even in the Pacific at large and nor can disturb the balance of power which is dominated by the US. However, considerable power politics has occurred in the Pacific, particularly in the

---

<sup>171</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2019,” U.S. Department of Defense, 2019, [https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-/1/1/2019\\_CHINA\\_MILITARY\\_POWER\\_REPORT.pdf](https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-/1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf), 75.

<sup>172</sup> Amanda Macias, “China Quietly Installed Missile Systems on Strategic Spratly Islands in Hotly Contested South China Sea,” CNBC, January 30, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/02/china-added-missile-systems-on-spratly-islands-in-south-china-sea.html>.

<sup>173</sup> Associated Press, “China Has Fully Militarized Three Islands in South China Sea, US Admiral Says,” The Guardian, March 21, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/china-has-fully-militarized-three-islands-in-south-china-sea-us-admiral-says>.

<sup>174</sup> SCSPI, “Rep: An Incomplete Report on US Military Activities in the South China Sea in 2021,” South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative, April 1, 2022, <http://www.scspi.org/en/yjbg/incomplete-report-us-military-activities-south-china-sea-2021>.

SCS. An unpopular opinion is that China's rise in the western Pacific will lead to disturb the balance of power. China is challenging the status quo in the Pacific who dominate it for the last few decades.<sup>175</sup> Apparently, the US is not willing to accept this power transition in the Asia Pacific despite the fact of changing power dynamics. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said:<sup>176</sup>

*“Today’s security environment is dramatically different than the one we’ve been engaged in for the last 25 years and it requires new ways of thinking and new ways of acting”*

The US strategic rivalry with Beijing has several aims but most fundamentally is to maintain its marine dominancy and regional balance of power in the SCS.<sup>177</sup> On the other hand, China is strengthening its presence in the Sea through the military and enhancing its influence in the region. This tug of power politics in the region will further escalate the rivalry between the two states.

### ***Third party factor and regional alliances***

The US demonstrates security to build an alliance with Manila and other ASEAN states. Over the past decade, the US increased security commitments with the regional states with respect to Chinese assertiveness in the SCS. Unsurprisingly, China's efforts for securing maritime rights and sovereignty would be resisted by the other states: the third parties. Sometimes, the US responds to China politically, diplomatically, and militarily in compence with its ally and partners. However, the US thinks that Beijing will use the dispute to create differences between the US and its partner which will weaken the security

---

<sup>175</sup> Bo Hu, “Sino-US Competition in the South China Sea: Power, Rules and Legitimacy,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 26, no. 3 (January 5, 2021): 485–504, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09716-1>, 487.

<sup>176</sup> Andrea Shalal and David Alexander, “U.S. Defence Budget Focuses on Changing Security Environment - Carter,” Reuters, February 2, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-defense-budget-idINKCN0VB1HT>.

<sup>177</sup> Ronald O'Rourke, rep: “U.S.-China strategic competition in South and East China Seas: Background and issues for Congress,” Committee of Congress R42784 (2023), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42784.pdf>. 28

posture in the region.<sup>178</sup> This third-party factor between the two states is an important variable in their power relation. The US considers these third parties as part of its rivalry with Beijing. In a larger picture, the SCS rivalry is not about the recapturing or claims but it's about the power, dominance, and influence in the region which is aligned with the US rule-based order.

### **Will China-US Rivalry will Escalate into a Full-Scale Conflict?**

The power politics, rivalry, or a 2<sup>nd</sup> cold war, China and US are involved in a long-term fierce rivalry. Foreign policy observers believe that China-US rivalry is based on an ideological basis.<sup>179</sup> However, in SCS it seems more politically, strategically, and geographically driven as Beijing is continental and Washington is a marine power. SCS emerged as the epic center of their rivalry during the China-US rivalry. The rivalry may further escalate as China is challenging the role of US dominance in the region.<sup>180</sup> However, under the Leadership of President Xi, China has more focus on resource accumulation and expanding China's marine capabilities in the SCS through different means.<sup>181</sup>

Some researcher has the opinion that China-US rivalry in the SCS may develop into a direct military confrontation in the upcoming years. However, offensive realism provides a more effective explanation that their rivalry will not escalate into a full-blown conflict as the state is a rational actor driven by self-interest but careful while calculating the cost of his actions.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, the US would maintain the balance of power in favor of China up to

---

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 31-32.

<sup>179</sup> Andrei Lungu, "The u.s.-China Clash Is about Ideology after All," Foreign Policy, April 6, 2021, [https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/06/us-china-ideology-communism-capitalism/?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=&gclid=CjwKCAjwvdajBhBEEiwAeMh1U3J07Sx6S70K2OaTQQ6G3AoNCdWS57KS282BHPTaSjY7Wzb8xNopDxoCn9IQAvD\\_BwE](https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/06/us-china-ideology-communism-capitalism/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=&gclid=CjwKCAjwvdajBhBEEiwAeMh1U3J07Sx6S70K2OaTQQ6G3AoNCdWS57KS282BHPTaSjY7Wzb8xNopDxoCn9IQAvD_BwE)

<sup>180</sup> Scobell, 2018, 31

<sup>181</sup> Andrew Erickson, "China's Maritime Ambitions." In *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Security Studies*, 2nd ed., edited by Sumit Ganguly, Andrew Scobell, and Joseph Chinyong Liow, 100-114. London: Routledge, 2017.

<sup>182</sup> Robert Keohane, "Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond." In *Neorealism and Its Critics*,. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 164

some extent. If we analyze the rebalance Strategy, the US did not contain China and its strategy completely failed. President Trump also tried hard to rebalance China through SCS and trade war, however, China strongly resists it. The China-US rivalry under the President Trump era escalates as compared to President Obama's tenure. The two states still act rationally as both powers recognized that outright conflict could disrupt the balance in the region and could potentially lead to their own damage.<sup>183</sup> Thus, they tend to avoid direct conflict and instead focus on maintaining relative power through various means, such as alliances, diplomacy, maximizing security and military deterrence.

### ***China's Reluctance: Avoiding Direct Military Confrontation in the South China***

#### ***Sea***

The peaceful rise of Beijing as an economic global power led to a discussion of a potential conflict with the US specifically in the SCS where both state navies are operating. However, some significant factor is that China is unlikely to engage in conflict with the US in the SCS. The US and Chinese economies are interdependent deeply. The Conflict would damage both state economies. It's estimated that a year-long war be catastrophic for China as it will hit a 25-30 percent decrease in China's GDP.<sup>184</sup> Even a small-scale conflict could weaken the Chinese economy. President Xi has a vision to advance the Chinese economy. Currently, China is more focused on expanding its economy and sphere of influence. In response to President Trump's slogan "to make America great again", he called for the "the great Rejuvenation of China". He initiates the BRI project to expand its sphere of influence beyond Asia to Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. It is estimated that its investment will

---

<sup>183</sup> Danah Ali Alenezi, "US Rebalance Strategy to Asia and US-China Rivalry in South China Sea from the Perspective of the Offensive Realism," *Review of Economics and Political Science* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1108/reps-10-2019-0132>.

<sup>184</sup> David C. Gompert, Astrid Stuth Cevallos, and Cristina L. Garafola, rep., "War with China: Thinking through the Unthinkable," *RAND Cooperation*, (Santa Monica, California, 2016).

touch one-third of the world economy and half of the world population.<sup>185</sup> According to IMF, China supersedes the US economy in power purchasing parity by 2014 and declare 20% larger than the US.<sup>186</sup> Currently, China is focusing to strengthen its global and regional standing, economy, and modernization of the military. China has the realization of its economic stability and growth. A full-scale conflict will not only agitate economic progress but will also pose a consequential threat to its internal stability. China is concerned over the potential threat that the US will take a pre-emptive strike against her in the SCS which will have the potential to escalate the conflict while utilizing its Navel superiority in the Pacific which will also put at risk the Chinese Sea route, trade, and unfavorable environment for durable peace in the region.<sup>187</sup> China has the realization that a calmer SCS is in their interest and it will be a continuous contest rather than a full-scale conflict.

## Conclusion

The United States has officially no direct claims in the SCS but involves in the games of politics in the region. The significance of the SCS dispute is heightened due to the involvement of the US. The presence and engagement of the US in the SCS added new dimensions, amplifying its importance on the global stage. The US involvement not only influences the regional power dynamics but also introduces additional geopolitical complexities and potential ramifications for China-US strategic rivalry. Washington looks at this rivalry through the lens of the clash and conflict between China and other regional states in the SCS and Chinses assertiveness while Beijing inspects the US responses to these clashes by taking sides of claimant states and violating the territorial sovereignty through conducting

---

<sup>185</sup> Vikram Mansharamani, "China Is Spending Nearly \$1 Trillion to Rebuild the Silk Road," PBS, March 2, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/china-is-spending-nearly-1-trillion-to-rebuild-the-silk-road>.

<sup>186</sup> "China Just Overtook Us as the World's Largest Economy, IMF Says," The Christian Science Monitor, October 8, 2014, <https://www.csmonitor.com/Business/Latest-News-Wires/2014/1008/China-just-overtook-US-as-the-world-s-largest-economy-IMF-says>.

<sup>187</sup> "War with China: Thinking through the Unthinkable", 14



FON operations in the SCS. the US's policy in the SCS has remained consistent to ensure freedom of navigation and to stop Chinese assertiveness and military build-up. The SCS has become a subject of increasing concern and interest for the US due to Beijing's increasing assertiveness and expansionist design in the SCS. The US has strategic and economic interests while defending and advocating the principle of free navigation in the seas. The US wants to maintain the rule-based order and turn the balance of power in its favor to stop Chinese assertiveness and dominate her sphere of influence in the region. The conflict of interest, quest for superiority, and struggle for influence led to the China-US strategic rivalry in the SCS. This rivalry is intensified by various factors such as territorial disputes, military presence, alliances, and power politics. It seems that their rivalry may further escalate because China is challenging the US dominancy and superiority in the region through its expansionist poster in the SCS. It is concluded under the offensive realist framework that this rivalry will not escalate into full-blown conflict as the state is a rational actor and very calculative regarding the cost of its actions. Mearsheimer argues the state is aware of its external environment and thinks strategically about how to survive in that environment. States take into account both the short-term and long-term ramifications of their actions, showing attentiveness to the broader implications of their decisions. Furthermore, China is also reluctant to any extreme actions as direct confrontation with the US will impact their economic development and peaceful rise in the international arena. It will be a continuous contest and rivalry between the two giants and it will have a consequence for the regional security dynamics. These considerations are thoroughly examined in the subsequent chapter and provide detailed discussion.

## **Chapter III**

### **Impact of China-US Strategic Rivalry on Regional Security**

#### **Dynamics**

##### **Introduction**

The international political environment is going through unseen changes. Globalization, economic integration, emerging rivalries and cultural diversification blooming in the emerging multi-polar world. The uncertainties in the international security environment and other prominent factors destabilizing the tranquility of the world. SCS is one of the flash points between two rival power due to which the regional security dynamics are disrupt. The China-US rivalry in the SCS discussed in details in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter. In this chapter, regional security dynamics of the region are thoroughly discusses and examined that how China-US rivalry impacted Security dynamics in the South China Sea.

##### **Regional Dynamics of the South China Sea**

Regional security can be defined as a regional environment related to the security perceived by the states in the region. It means the decrement of all the states in a certain region where each actor has different opinions, capabilities, strengths, and interests.<sup>188</sup> The SCS is strategically a significant maritime region having complex security dynamics. Its natural resources, reserves, important sea lanes and trade routes make it a striking point for numerous security concerns. The SCS regional security dynamics determine by various factors.

---

<sup>188</sup> Gerald Theodorus Toruan, 83.

### ***Territorial disputes and overlapping claims***

The primary factor which shapes the regional security dynamics is the territorial disputes and overlapping claim of the claimant states in the SCS. China, Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines have different and somewhere overlapping territorial claims in the SCS on various geographical and historical basis. The overlapping claims over the sea have given rise to differences among the countries about their maritime rights. China claims eighty to ninety percent of SCS on the basis of a nine-dash line. Vietnam asserts its right over the Paracel and Spratly Islands, while the Philippines claims its ownership of Scarborough Shoal and Spratly. Malaysia and Brunei have claimed some of the Spratly Islands and sovereignty over southern parts of the SCS.<sup>189</sup> The disputes actually rotate around the control over the resources, island occupation, and sovereignty over the maritime territory. The overlapping claims and conflict over the SCS contribute to the tension and may have consequences for the relationship between the claimant states and regional stability. Such as the difference over the resources in the disputed areas would heighten tension between claimant states.<sup>190</sup>

### ***External involvement in the SCS***

The SCS is one of the major hotspots in the international political environment. Some non-claimant nations consider it crucial for their national interest. The US is one of the most important states advocating the principle of free navigation in the sea. To show commitment with international law and guarantee to claimant parties in the SCS, the US conducts FONOPs in the SCS through the navy transits.<sup>191</sup> The US conducts these navigation operations to exercise the principle of freedom of the sea and ensure the use of the sea

---

<sup>189</sup> SCMP, "Which Are the Key Countries in the South China Sea Dispute?" South China Morning Post, August 20, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/article/2186449/explained-south-china-sea-dispute>.

<sup>190</sup> Ueno Hideshi, "The problems in the South China Sea." *Review of Island Studies* (2013): 90-99. <https://www.spf.org/islandstudies/transfer/readings/docs/b00004r.pdf> 97-98

<sup>191</sup> Mark Raymond and David A. Welch, "What's Really Going on in the South China Sea?," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 41, no. 2 (2022): 214–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034221086291>. 215

according to the principles of international law. Recently in March 2023, US warship (DDG-69) conduct FONOP around Parcel Island. Through conducting the FONOP, US challenges the China's claim around the Parcel Island as a violation of international law.<sup>192</sup> In response to the FONOP, China's defense spokesperson protested and said:

*“US military has gravely violated China's sovereignty and security, as well as the international law, which is another irrefutable proof of its navigation hegemony and militarization of the South China Sea. We sternly demand the US side to immediately stop such provocative behaviors, otherwise it would take the serious consequences of every eventuality it caused”<sup>193</sup>*

In early 2019, the UK warship frigate HMS Argyll and USS McCampbell of the US carried out a joint operation in the SCS for a week. It includes communication drills, personal exchange, division tactics, and building navy-to-navy relations.<sup>194</sup> On the other hand, Like-minded states such as the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, and France also conducted FONOPs in SCS. In 2018, the British Royal Navy also conduct FONOP as the HMS Albion warship enter the territorial water near Parcel Island without permission. Beijing strongly protests and warn to avoid proactive measure, as it will harm regional stability.<sup>195</sup> Additionally, UK and France carried out joint FONOP and HMS Albion operations like the US. China warned them that its violation of their maritime sovereignty. These increased

---

<sup>192</sup> Heather Mongilio, “China Protests U.S. South China Sea Freedom of Navigation Operation,” US Naval Institute, March 24, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/03/24/china-protests-u-s-south-china-sea-freedom-of-navigation-operation#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThis%20freedom%20of%20navigation%20operation,PRC's%20claim%20to%20straight%20baselines>.

<sup>193</sup> Li Wei, “Defense Ministry Spokesperson Remarks on US Warship's Illegal Entry into Waters off China's Xisha Islands,” Ministry of National Defense, March 24, 2023, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News\\_213114/NewsRelease/16211781.html](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/NewsRelease/16211781.html).

<sup>194</sup> Jesse Johnson, “U.S. and British Navies Conduct First Joint Military Exercises in Disputed South China Sea,” The Japan Times, January 16, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/01/16/asia-pacific/u-s-british-navies-conduct-first-joint-military-exercises-disputed-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>195</sup> Tim Kelly, “Exclusive: British Navy Warship Sails near South China Sea Islands, Angering Beijing,” Reuters, September 6, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-china-southchinasea-exclusive-idUSKCN1LM017>.

presences of Western navies and operations exemplified the external involvement in the SCS. The region is becoming an arena for rivalry among major powers.

### ***Absence of trust and cooperation***

The disagreement between states over the right of different features and territories of the SCS led to trust issues. China wants to cooperate on the SCS bilaterally while other Claimant countries and the US want the settlement and cooperation through multilateral forums such as ASEAN.<sup>196</sup> On the other hand, ASEAN norms and the practice of collective decision-making are the constraints to taking an extreme step on the SCS issue.

The claimant parties have trust issues that China will get more benefits if we cooperate bilaterally. Realist believes that cooperation between states is difficult in the international system even if their interests are the same.<sup>197</sup> Lack of cooperation exists because of the presumption of relative gain and fear of deception.<sup>198</sup> Under this approach, states act in their own interests while ignoring the win-win upshot. The situation is the same in the SCS, proactive measures from a decade have led to a lack of cooperation and an increase in trust issues between China and calamint states, China and the US as well as within ASEAN. The proactive steps include China's occupation of land features, the Philippines' case against China in PAC, the American strategy of countering China such as its Pivot to Asia and the joint submission of Vietnam-Malaysia to limit the continental shelf in the SCS.<sup>199</sup>

### ***Trade routes of SCS: connecting global economies and shaping regional dynamics***

The strategic location and its trade routes make SCS is dynamite hub for the international trade of goods, energy, and resources between Asia, the Middle East, Europe,

---

<sup>196</sup> Rizky Widian and Arimadona, "Cooperation & Security Dilemma in the South China Sea," *Journal Global Strategies* 12, no. 2 (November 30, 2018): 91–106, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jgs.12.2.2018.91-106>. 92

<sup>197</sup> Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 485–507, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818300027715>. 485

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, 487.

<sup>199</sup> Sam Bateman, "Building Cooperation for Managing the South China Sea without Strategic Trust," *Asia & Amp; the Pacific Policy Studies* 4, no. 2 (2017): 251–59, <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.178>, 254.

and America. Nealy, one-third of the international maritime trade including \$5.3 of trade, and energy vessels pass through the SCS highlights its significance.<sup>200</sup>

The dynamic flow of trade through SCS has paramount for the regional states and beyond. According to the last report regarding SCS published by CSIS, the value of China trade passes through SCS \$1470 billion, US-\$2080 billion, Japan-\$240 billion, Indonesia-\$239 billion, and South Korea-\$343 billion.<sup>201</sup> The continuous flow of trade stimulates economic interdependence and shapes regional dynamics in SCS.

## **Impacts of China-US Strategic Rivalry on the Security Dynamics of the South China Sea**

Recently, the world's strategic and economic hub and pivot shifted toward the Asia Pacific which become the focus of major power competition. The tug-of-war between major powers in the region brings uncertainties to regional security.<sup>202</sup> America is focused to strengthen its military posture and security alliance while deploying its navy in the Asia Pacific which increased the complexity of regional security dynamics.<sup>203</sup> The SCS issue is considered a proxy for China-US strategic rivalry for power competition, regional trade, alliance realignment, and rebalancing. Certainly, Beijing has taken control of occupied marine and land features and militarized them while the US through its presence and naval activities intimidating but unlikely to take extreme measures to further strain the regional security environment.<sup>204</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> Uptin Saiidi, "Here's Why the South China Sea Is Highly Contested," CNBC, February 7, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/07/heres-why-the-south-china-sea-is-highly-contested.html#:~:text=The%20area%20is%20globally%20important,surface%3A%20oil%20and%20natural%20gas>.

<sup>201</sup> Sam Bateman, "SEA LINES OF COMMUNICATION AND SAFETY OF NAVIGATION," essay, in *Routledge Handbook of the South China Sea*, ed. Keyuan Zou (London: Routledge, 2023), 46–64. 51.

<sup>202</sup> White Paper released by State Council of the People's Republic of China, "China's National Defense in the New Era," Xinhua, July 24, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c\\_138253389.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm).

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>204</sup> Wei-chin Lee, "Introduction: The South China Sea Dispute and the 2016 Arbitration Decision," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 22, no. 2 (2017): 179–84, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-017-9473-z>, 183.

### ***Militarization of the SCS and power projection***

The SCS extensively militarized because of China-US rivalry, Chinese assertiveness, and the US naval presence and standing with the principle of free navigation. Being an assertive regional power, China occupied islands and build-up militarily to prevent the US violation of its sovereignty. The tension between China and the US and its partners has escalated in the past decade when China becomes more assertive in the SCS. The China-US rivalry escalates Navel activities and military build-up in the SCS. PLA Navy is the nucleus of China's military modernization and expansion program. Beijing has installed military facilities including Radar systems and airstrips on several disputed islands. China knows very well that to achieve the required strategic goal in the SCS, it is important to have a modern military capability. They included anti-ship cruise missiles, surface-to-air missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles, submarines, destroyers, aircraft carriers, amphibious ships, etc.<sup>205</sup> Beijing has acquired anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) marine capability to retaliate against the US potential military intervention in Taiwan and SCS.<sup>206</sup> According to US Pacific Commander that Beijing has installed anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile system, jamming materials along with fighter jets, and other military facilities and equipment on Mischief Reef, Fiery Cross, and some other entities over which Vietnam claim its sovereignty.<sup>207</sup> Even Beijing temporarily installed H-6K nuclear-capable bombers on Woody Island.<sup>208</sup>

On the other hand, the US also increases its naval presence in response to the emerging dynamics and Chinese assertiveness. Last year, US military presence intensified excessively, which serves as a risk of maximizing hostilities in the region. China blames the US for the

---

<sup>205</sup> Enrico Fels and Rix Li, 129.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 129

<sup>207</sup> "China's Militarization in the South China Sea Violates Vietnam's Territory," Vietnam Law & Legal Forum, April 8, 2022, <https://vietnamlawmagazine.vn/chinas-militarization-in-the-south-china-sea-violates-vietnams-territory-48479.html>.

<sup>208</sup> Tuan Anh Luc, "Are France and the UK Here to Stay in the South China Sea?," The Diplomat, September 17, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/are-france-and-the-uk-here-to-stay-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

Spy plan activities in the surroundings of occupied islands. According to a Chinese report that the US carried out 95 different FONOPs in the year 2020.<sup>209</sup> Aside from free navigation operation, China holds military exercise with other regional states to challenge Beijing's claims and aggressive posture in the SCS. In August 2021, Quad member states conducted a "Large Scale Exercise" which is considered one of the largest naval exercises in the past four decades.<sup>210</sup> In addition, the US also encourages the regional states and allies to enhance their defense and military capabilities and make agitation against China.

In response to the Chinese assertive posture and militarization in the SCS, the US enhanced its defense cooperation with the claimant allies. The US has the opinion that it has obliged to support its partners against China under certain treaties.<sup>211</sup> Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between the US and the Philippines allows the US to deploy its military and construct military facilities and bases. Recently, the Philippines allows the US to install and construct four bases under the EDCA near strait of Taiwan and the SCS. Military build-up in the SCS seems provocative and a source of tension between the two states.<sup>212</sup> The region has become a theater of militarization and power projection. The race for military modernization and power projection between the regional states and especially between China and the US increased the risk of miscalculation and a threat to the security of the region.

### *Alliances and partnerships*

The China-US rivalry instigated states to seek partnership and alliance as a track to balance the growing Chinese influence in the SCS. During President Trump's tenure, the US

---

<sup>209</sup> Xiao Ming, "US Increases Presence in South China Sea," Chinadaily.com.cn, August 16, 2021, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202203/29/WS62423c08a310fd2b29e53c18.html>.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Enrico Fels and Rix Li, "China's Sea Power Aspirations and Strategic Behaviour in the South China Sea from the Theoretical Perspective of Identity Construction," essay, in *Power Politics in Asia's Contested Waters: Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea* (Cham: Springer, 2016), 117–37, 129.

<sup>212</sup> Anna Malindog-Uy, "Manila Should Resist Us' Tension-Raising Attempts," Global Times, April 23, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202304/1289637.shtml>.



released an Indo-Pacific strategy and declare Beijing as a revisionist power in the SCS. As the effect of China-US rivalry, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), the only informal security forum emerged. The revival of Quad serves as the backbone of that strategy, which aims to counter China and its assertiveness in the Western Pacific particularly in the SCS. Since its revival, Quad has taken a more open approach giving tough times to China in the SCS while advocating a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) region.<sup>213</sup> Quad focused to counter Chinese growing influence and assertiveness in the region. However Chinese analyst believes that quad member will not directly counter China, especially an issue like SCS because of their bilateral ties and economic interdependence but they certainly support rule base order in the region because of their aligned interest.<sup>214</sup> at the same time, Quad member state are decreasing their dependence on China economically, minimizing trade and enhancing security cooperation with each other and other regional states. The Quad members believe that through Quad we can compel China to reconsider its strategy as Quad is more effective and potent than ever.<sup>215</sup>

Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) was signed between the US and the Philippines which authorized access to US forces to agreed locations and bases for security exercises military training, and drills. With the increase in China's assertiveness, they renewed EDCA to Mutual Logistic Support Agreement (MLSA) to enhance military cooperation in the regional emerging security dynamics in 2017.<sup>216</sup> In addition, the US and Vietnam security cooperation and partnership are based on mutual defense cooperation and security challenges. They held more than ten security defense and political dialogues to

---

<sup>213</sup> Wu Xinbo, rep., *Sino-US Strategic Competition and Asia-Pacific Security* (JSTOR, 2019), 14.

<sup>214</sup> Graham Plaster, "The Quad: A Mature Counterbalance in the South China Sea," *The Quad: A Mature Counterbalance in the South China Sea*, December 16, 2022, <https://faoajournal.substack.com/p/the-quad-a-mature-counterbalance>.

<sup>215</sup> Shane D. Hughes, rep., *The Quad: A Mature Counterbalance in the South China Sea* (Fort Belvoir: DEFENSE TECHNICAL INFORMATION CENTER, 2022).

<sup>216</sup> Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with the Philippines - United States Department of State," U.S. Department of State, October 7, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-the-philippines/>.

enhance their security cooperation. Vietnam received \$92 million in security assistance from 2017 to 2022 and \$81.5 under the FMF in 2018.<sup>217</sup> The US's efforts to make an alliance and enhance partnerships aim to build its influence and counter China by providing military and non-military support which disturb the equilibrium of the regional security dynamics.

### ***Shifting dynamics in the region and balance of power***

Under the Trump National Security Strategy, the US declare China as a revisionist power in the SCS. China is trying to become an Asian regional power.<sup>218</sup> Offensive realism argues that in the international system, the balance of power is a constant change and maximization of power. It creates power allurements for a nation to pursue opportunities and enhance its power at the expense of the opponent state. As Robert Gilpin argues, “as the power of a state increases, it seeks to extend its territorial control, its political influence, and/or its domination of the international economy”.<sup>219</sup> However, offensive realism holds that rise of regional power would not be peaceful because it will try hard for influence and survival as a power in the region. China adopted the policy of peaceful rise but in the last decade, it become more assertive in the SCS. Adopting this posture China is certain to stand by national interest and sovereignty and strive for regional power.<sup>220</sup>

Since the President Xi Era, the balance of power has shifted and states a new era of China-US rivalry between a regional power and a global hegemon. The US policies of rebalance and Indo-pacific strategy mainly adopted to contain China because of the shift in the regional balance of power. It involved the military and security elements focused on countering the Chinese offensive strategy. It is crucial for the US to maintain its influence in

---

<sup>217</sup> Department of Defense, “U.S. Security Cooperation with Vietnam - United States Department of State,” U.S. Department of State, April 11, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-vietnam/>.

<sup>218</sup> Jennifer Lind, “Asia’s Other Revisionist Power: Why U.S. Grand Strategy Unnerves China,” *Foreign Affairs and Council on Foreign Relations* 96, no. 2 (2017): 74–82, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/44821708>, 74.

<sup>219</sup> Robert Gilpin, “Growth and Expansion,” essay, in *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 106–55. 106

<sup>220</sup> Jian Zhang, “China’s New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards ‘Peaceful Rise 2.0?’” *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27, no. 1 (2015): 5–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2015.993958>.

the SCS to protect its survival as a global power.<sup>221</sup> The tug of war and balancing the regional power dynamics, the claimant states are affected by their approaches toward the disputes and increasing security concerns as both powers are in the power struggle, and want to maximize their own influence, and security in the region.

### ***Regional instability***

Beijing tried to maintain the balance between “stability” and “protecting rights” in the SCS. The revision of China’s maritime policies increased tension in the region which affect its relationship with the regional states. Despite cordial relations with claimant states, China become more assertive in the SCS. China thinks that regional claimant states have taken advantage of Beijing’s passive posture in the past at the cost of our interest. China adopted a “dual tactics” approach to cooperate with the regional state but actively depend on the rights and its claims.<sup>222</sup> The discord between the SCS claimant states evolve into strategic rivalry between China and major powers such as the US. Beijing conveys a message that the US should respect Beijing’s “core interest” in the region.<sup>223</sup> On the other hand, the US clearly declare Chinese claims in the SCS unlawful. Beijing has no lawful and legal ground to impose its own will unilaterally. The US stands with the claimant allies against China’s growing influence and guarantees rule-based order and free navigation in the region.<sup>224</sup> Even the US provided security and defense assistance under FOIPS to the claimant states specifically the Philipian Vietnam and Taiwan.<sup>225</sup> China is concerned over the US support of the claimant states and intervention in the dispute through its naval presence. The US

---

<sup>221</sup> Danah Ali Alenezi.

<sup>222</sup> Fang Yang and Mingjiang Li, “Comparing China’s Claims and Policies in the East and South China Seas: Implications for Regional Security,” *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2016): 135–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797016645451>, 147

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 148

<sup>224</sup> Department of State, “U.S. Support for the Philippines in the South China Sea - United States Department of State,” U.S. Department of State, December 19, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-support-for-the-philippines-in-the-south-china-sea-2/>.

<sup>225</sup> Department of Defense, “U.S. Security Cooperation with Vietnam - United States Department of State”.

conducted regular FONOPS to challenge Beijing's extensive claims to ensure Freedom of Navigation. However, China demanded from the US to stop intervening with the claimant states in the SCS.<sup>226</sup> This hostility between two power has increased tension and contributed to regional instability and an uncertain security environment.

### *Arms race*

Arms race refers to an action-reaction chain whereby countries increase the quality and quantity of their armaments in response to perceived threats about other states' actual or expected military strength.<sup>227</sup> The China-US increasing Strategic rivalry has added new dimensions to the existing security situation. The rivalry has contributed to the surge of the arms race, with both states trying to advance their military capabilities in the SCS. In the SCS, the neighboring states perceived a threat and rapidly expands their military budget and arms procurement. China's defense budget increased by 50% in the last decade from \$145 billion in 2012 to \$293.3 billion in 2021.<sup>228</sup> By 2023, China increases its defense budget by 7.2% taking it the highest peak ever.<sup>229</sup> China's defense spending clearly shows its military capabilities and expansionist design. The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) is a notable development in strengthening national defense and advancing the national armed forces. These defense spendings are not just about the numbers but the intentions that lie hidden behind these developments.<sup>230</sup>

Presently, it seems that the US is the only power that can look to China's military modernization and supremacy over the SCS. The US also prioritized increasing and strengthening its military presence in the Asia Pacific region as the US considered China the

---

<sup>226</sup> Fang Yang and Mingjiang Li, 149.

<sup>227</sup> Umut Yüksel, "Arms Race in the South China Sea: What Threshold?,"

<sup>228</sup> "China Military Spending/Defense Budget 1989-2023," MacroTrends, accessed June 8, 2023, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CHN/china/military-spending-defense-budget>.

<sup>229</sup> Amy Hawkins et al., "Asia's Arms Race: Potential Flashpoints from Taiwan to the South China Sea," The Guardian, April 4, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/30/asia-pacific-flashpoints-fuelling-regional-arms-race-taiwan-north-korea-south-china-sea-pacific-islands>.

<sup>230</sup> Amrita Jash, "China's 2023 Defense Spending: Figures, Intentions and Concerns," Jamestown, April 14, 2023, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-2023-defense-spending-figures-intentions-and-concerns/>.

only competitor and threat to her hegemonic role in the region.<sup>231</sup> In this regard, the United States provides defense support to claimant states particularly to Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam to counter or address the growing influence and assertiveness of China in the SCS. In the past decade, military spending in Southeast Asia grew by 57 percent. The massive increases in the region's defense budgets are particularly impressive in absolute terms. The Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam doubled their defense budgets during the past decade. Thailand also greatly increased its military spending during the same period.<sup>232</sup> One of the main reasons of the increase in military spending of Vietnam, Indonesia, Taiwan, and the Philippines is their increasing concern about China's aggressive and assertive behavior, which poses a threat to their territorial claims.<sup>233</sup> on the other hand, it is also a fact that the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam are not striving to match or surpass China or each other in an arms race and military spending. Their main objective is "minimal deterrence" in the South China Sea. This means they aim to have enough military capability to make potential aggressors think twice before attacking them.<sup>234</sup>

### ***Enhancing national security: Risk of accidental escalation***

With the increase in military activities, FON operations, and tension in the SCS, the risk of accidental escalation has increased. Beijing seems committed regarding its national security as President Xi has the intention to resolve the SCS issue in his tenure. To ensure its sovereignty over the SCS, China can take military actions on a small scale.<sup>235</sup> China's control

---

<sup>231</sup> Associated Press, "Biden Budget Includes Billions for Pacific Islands in Bid to 'out-Compete' China," The Guardian, March 10, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/10/biden-budget-includes-billions-for-pacific-islands-in-bid-to-out-compete-china>.

<sup>232</sup> Felix Heiduk, "An Arms Race in Southeast Asia? Changing Arms Dynamics, Regional Security and the Role of European Arms Exports," *Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, August 2017, [https://doi.org/https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research\\_papers/2017RP10\\_hdk.pdf](https://doi.org/https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2017RP10_hdk.pdf), 8.

<sup>233</sup> Felix Heiduk, 24.

<sup>234</sup> Alex Vuving, "OpEd: Force Buildup in the South China Sea: The Myth of an Arms Race," Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, October 14, 2017, <https://dkiapcss.edu/oped-force-buildup-in-the-south-china-sea-the-myth-of-an-arms-race/>.

<sup>235</sup> Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Military Confrontation in the South China Sea," Council on Foreign Relations, May 21, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/report/military-confrontation-south-china-sea#chapter-title-0-7>.

over the SCS would be a threat to throw the US from the region. Thwarting Beijing from doing so is the objective of the US national security strategy.<sup>236</sup> On the other hand, the Philippines has signed EDCA with the US to enhance its national security in the region against Chinese assertiveness.<sup>237</sup> The claimant states specifically Vietnam and the Philippines including the US are at risk of accidental escalation in the region. The enhancement of the national security from the claimant states and the US complicated the security dynamics of the SCS. Any unintended move or close encounter can abruptly escalate tension and lead to drastic consequences.

## **Conclusion**

The SCS is a pivotal maritime region having multi-faceted and complex security dynamics. The China-US rivalry has a transcendent impact on the security dynamic in the SCS. The tortuous interconnection of territorial conflict, major power involvement, absence of trust and cooperation, maritime security and trade routes has heightened tension and increased security risk in the region. The China-US rivalry has largely militarized the SCS and maximized arm race which raised the regional security concerns for accidental or intended clashes. The race of military buildup and power projection among the claimant states and two major power China and the US in the SCS agitate regional peace and security. Due to this power play, the regional balance of power is at risk. The approaches of both powers affected the other claimant states while balancing the regional dynamics. The US trying to counter the Chinese offensiveness through military means and alliance tactics. It also influenced regional partnerships and alliances. The US has strengthened security cooperation with the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Malaysia and enhanced its military presence. While on the other hand, China pursued economic engagement with these states but committed to its claims in the SCS. It further complicated the security dynamics as China

---

<sup>236</sup> Ibid

<sup>237</sup> "Defense Cooperation Between the United States and the Philippines," Department of States.

want to create a balance between regional stability and protecting her claims in the SCS. In response the US clearly stated that China's claims are unlawful and stand with the other claimant states against China. The persuasion of national security in the SCS increased the instability. China and other claimant states are trying to enhance national security and safeguard their claims in the SCS through different means while the US wants to counter Chinese expansionist design in the region which significantly impacted the security dynamics and regional peace.

## Conclusion

The main dimension of this study is the US-China rivalry and regional security dynamics in the South China Sea (SCS). The SCS is one of the most significant and busiest trade routes having a long history of trade and disputes since the Han dynasty, 140 BCE.<sup>238</sup> It has served as an important route between the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and other parts of the world and has been a place of major naval clashes, territorial disputes, and geopolitical tensions. It is a vital maritime hotspot that has drawn the attention of major powers because it is rich in natural resources and has high geostrategic significance. The strategic importance of the SCS has grown significantly as it is a passageway for oil tankers, ships, and other vessels that carry goods and energy between Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the US. Annually, over 30% of shipping and more than 50% of global trade volume is transported through the Strait of Malacca, the Sunda Strait, and the Lombok Strait, all of which intersect with the waters and islands of the SCS.<sup>239</sup> The economic significance further amplifies the significance of the SCS. The SCS's geopolitical importance is likely to remain a key factor in international politics in the upcoming years, with implications on trade, security, and international relations.

The territorial disputes, overlapping claims, and the issue of sovereignty over the disputed islands in the SCS carry important ramifications for the economic and political interests, regional security, and utilization of sealines within the area. The overlapping claims in the SCS are the subject of controversy between the claimant states and major world powers such as the US and China. China claims almost all the SCS on the basis of 9 dash-line and historical rights.<sup>240</sup> China and Vietnam's claims are based on historical rights and have no

---

<sup>238</sup> Eric Tagliacozzo, "The South China Sea," in *Oceanic Histories*, 114

<sup>239</sup> Geollect, "The Strategic Importance of the South China Sea," 2022.

<sup>240</sup> Jing Huang, Andrew Billo, and Robert C. Beckman, 54-55



base under the principles of UNCLOS. On the other hand, the US has no direct claims but she forces the claimant states to settle the disputes under the principles of international law and advocate the Freedom of Navigation (FON) on the high seas.<sup>241</sup> The US has indirect involvement in the SCS dispute to counter Chinese assertiveness, increase its sphere of influence, and maintain the rule-based US order in the region.

The US has no direct claims in the SCS but involves in the power politics of the region. The US engagements in the SCS added new dimensions, amplifying its importance on the international front. Its involvement not only influences the regional power dynamics but also adds additional geopolitical complexities to the region. The US's official policy in the SCS has remained consistent during the past few administrations to ensure freedom of navigation and stop Chinese assertiveness and military build-up. Obama administration adopted a comprehensive and rational policy. He wanted to strengthen US engagement in Asia Pacific including SCS through the policy of Pivot to Asia. However, this policy did not fulfill its objective to contain China. Conversely, it forced China to get control of further islands and became more offensive and aggressive in the SCS.<sup>242</sup> Trump administration adopted aggressive behavior towards China and transformed Southeast Asian policy to a Free and Open Indo Pacific to confine China. Biden administration adopted the same policy with a different approach, prioritizing engagement and partnership with allies to give a collective and befitting response to China. The security alliances like Quad and AUKUS are made functional which aims and foresight to restrain China.

The US has deep Geo-strategic interests while defending and advocating the principle of free navigation in the SCS. Whenever the US talks about FON in the SCS, it means two different interests through navigation; trade through sea lanes and the right to conduct

---

<sup>241</sup> Michael Pompeo, "U.S. Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea," U.S. Department of State, December 1, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-position-on-maritime-claims-in-the-south-china-sea/index.html>.

<sup>242</sup> Joseph, "The South China Sea Disputes and the Pivot to Asia," The Geopolitics, July 31, 2018, <https://thegeopolitics.com/the-south-china-sea-disputes-and-the-pivot-to-asia/>.

military activities.<sup>243</sup> The US has a massive economic interest due to the high trade volume which is connected to these sea lines. It has also a substantial security interest in the SCS and thus has enhanced its defense cooperation with other claimant states to maintain peace and security in the SCS.

On the other hand, the US wants to maintain the rule-based order to maintain its superiority and confine Chinese rise. The quest for superiority, and struggle for influence led to the China-US strategic rivalry in the SCS. The China-US rivalry aroused in the SCS in the early years of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and become the center of attention beyond the territorial claims and maritime resources.<sup>244</sup> China-US rivalry heightens by China's assertiveness and US's proactive approach in the SCS to counter and contain China. The rivalry further intensified by various factors such as maritime disputes, military presence, alliances, and power politics. China and US have different stances on the SCS issue as both interpret the specific articles of UNCLOS according to their own will and wishes. This divergence has heightened tensions and led to the massive militarization of the SCS. China has built various bases and deployed air missiles, antiship cruise missiles, radars, hangars, and underground storage facilities in the Spratly Islands.<sup>245</sup> In response, the US has also deployed four combat service groups, two amphibious ready groups, eleven SSN submarines, and twenty-two bomber stories. China is challenging the status quo in the Pacific who dominates it for the last few decades.<sup>246</sup> The US believes that China's rise in the Western Pacific will disturb the balance of power in the region. It seems that their rivalry may further escalate because China is challenging the US dominancy and superiority in the region

---

<sup>243</sup> Michael McDevitt, 18.

<sup>244</sup> Andrew Scobell, 2018, 31-32

<sup>245</sup> Amanda Macias, "China Quietly Installed Missile Systems on Strategic Spratly Islands in Hotly Contested South China Sea," CNBC, January 30, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/02/china-added-missile-systems-on-spratly-islands-in-south-china-sea.html>.

<sup>246</sup> Bo Hu, 487.

through its assertive behavior. Apparently, the US is not willing to accept this power transition in the Asia Pacific despite the fact that regional power dynamics are changing.

It is concluded that China-US rivalry will not escalate into full-blown conflict as the state is a rational actor and very calculative regarding the cost of its actions. Mearsheimer argues that the state is always aware of its external environment and thinks strategically and rationally about how to survive in that environment. States take into account both the short-term and long-term ramifications of their actions, showing attentiveness to the broader implications of their decisions.<sup>247</sup> As the China-US Rivalry under President Trump administration escalated and even a trade war was started but both powers still acted rationally to recognize that outright conflict could disrupt the balance of power and could potentially lead to an escalation and damage beyond repair. Interestingly, China is more reluctant to any extreme actions as direct confrontation with the US will impact their economic development and peaceful rise in the international arena. It is estimated that a year-long war could be catastrophic for China as it will cause a 25-30 percent decrease in China's GDP.<sup>248</sup> Even a clash on a small level can affect the economy of China and President Xi's Vision of the great Rejuvenation of China. China is dealing the rivalry with rationality and striving for its larger national and security interests. It hence is concluded that it will be a continuous contest and rivalry between the two giants rather than a full fledged military confrontation.

The SCS is flash point having complex security dynamics. The findings carried out transcendent impacts on China-US rivalry on the regional security dynamic in the SCS. The territorial conflict, major power involvement, absence of trust and cooperation, maritime security, and trade routes shaped the regional security dynamics of the SCS. The territorial dispute and overlapping claims such as China's claims on the basis of the nine-dash line,

---

<sup>247</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014). 31

<sup>248</sup> "War with China: Thinking through the Unthinkable", 2016.

Vietnam's claims over the Paracel and Spratly Islands, Philippines' claims on the ownership of Scarborough Shoal and Spratly Island. Malaysia and Brunei have claims over some of the Spratly Islands and sovereignty over southern parts of the SCS contributes to the complexity of the security dynamics. The dispute among the claimant states over the larger part of the sea attracts major powers like the US, Japan, and Australia to pursue their interests in the region. The US advocates the principle of free seas and supports the small claimant states against the assertive power China. To uphold the principles of the law of the seas, the US conducts FONOPs in the SCS through the Navy transits.<sup>249</sup> UK and France are also carrying out FONOPs in the sea which China considers a violation of its territorial sovereignty. The involvement of international players in the SCS is due to its sea lines and high oil, natural gas, fish, and dynamite reserves. The continuous flow of trade galvanizes economic interdependence. These factors collectively shape the regional security dynamics in the SCS.

The rivalry between China and the US brings uncertainties with respect to peace and stability and largely impacts the regional security dynamics. The SCS is considered as a buffer zone between China and USA. The rivalry has largely militarized the SCS and maximized arm race which raises regional security concerns for accidental or intended clashes. The race of arms procurement, military modernization, and power projection among the US, China, and the claimant states agitate regional peace and security. China has installed military facilities including Radar systems, airstrips, anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, nuclear-capable bombers, jamming materials along with fighter jets, and other military facilities and equipment on Mischief Reef, Fiery Cross, and some other entities in the SCS.<sup>250</sup> On the other hand, the US has strengthened its military posture and security alliances

---

<sup>249</sup> Mark Raymond and David Welch, 215

<sup>250</sup> "China's Militarization in the South China Sea Violates Vietnam's Territory," Vietnam Law & Legal Forum, April 8, 2022, <https://vietnamlawmagazine.vn/chinas-militarization-in-the-south-china-sea-violates-vietnams-territory-48479.html>.

while deploying its navy in the Asia Pacific.<sup>251</sup> The US enhanced defense and military cooperation with the claimant states and constructed military facilities and bases in the SCS under the defense treaties such as EDCA. The SCS has become a theater of militarization and power projection and it threatens the security of the region.

Over the past few years, the role of SCS in China-US relations has expanded. The ongoing power dynamics have heightened tensions in the strategic contest. The disputes have expanded from a contest over sovereign rights and claims to a contest over regional and international power dynamics. For example, the US perceives China's claims and refusal of the 2016 PCA ruling as evidence that China is a revisionist power and has expansionist ambitions to challenge the rules-based order. On the other hand, China looks at the US Naval FONOPs, and increased security cooperation with the littoral states as evidence of a larger US effort to confine and contain China.

The regional balance of power is at risk because of the power play between China and US. The approaches of both powers affect the other claimant states while balancing the regional dynamics. The US is trying to counter the Chinese offensiveness through military pressure and alliance tactics. The US has strengthened security cooperation with the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Malaysia and enhanced its military presence to counter Chinese assertiveness. While on the other hand, China focuses more on economic engagement with these states but committed to its claims and sovereignty in the SCS. This dual approach complicates the security dynamics as China wants to create a balance between regional stability and protection of her claims in the SCS. In response the US clearly stated that China's claims are unlawful and stand with the other claimant states against China. the US wants to confine China by any means and is agitating the regional balance of power. The emergence of AUKUS and the revival of Quad aims to compel China to reconsider its

---

<sup>251</sup> "China's National Defense in the New Era", 2019

assertiveness and expansionist posture in the western pacific. The US's efforts to make informal alliances, enhance defense cooperation and providing military and non-military support to the regional states disturb the regional balance of power and the equilibrium of the regional security dynamics. The persuasion of national security interests through extreme actions increases instability. China and other claimant states are trying to enhance national security and safeguard their claims in the SCS through different means while the US wants to counter Chinese expansionist designs in the region which significantly impacts the security dynamics and regional peace.

## **Recommendations**

There is no immediate or magic solution for resolving these complex and longstanding maritime issues and rivalry. It will need pragmatic steps, sustained efforts, patience, and exceptional craftsmanship on the part of China and the US both. This research study reveals that China's maritime ambitions and ultimate objectives are control and dominance in the SCS. To pursue these objectives through different means so far is problematic like adopting an assertive and expansionist approach. While the US wants to prevent China from doing so and advancing its sphere of influence and maintaining its marine supremacy and dominancy. The continuous tug-of-war between China and the US has largely impacted the regional security dynamics. Following are the recommendations in support of peaceful and stable regional security dynamics.

- The US should adopt its policies such that it minimizes its direct involvement in the SCS and force China and other claimant states through its allies and international organizations for a peaceful resolution to the SCS disputes.
- The US has legitimate interests and concerns in the SCS but it should also consider China as a regional power and give it the necessary space to maintain its own balance of power in the SCS.

- China should refrain itself from challenging the rule-based order in the SCS, as doing so could result in reciprocal measures from the US. It is in the best interest of both the states and regional security and peace.
- Both states should engage in sustained dialogue which is crucial for de-escalation and conflict prevention. The US should prioritize bilateral and multilateral talks to address the issue and find common ground for the SCS dispute and power politics.
- Establishing communication channels with all the claimant states at different levels that can help to manage crises, miscalculation and promote understanding.
- Beyond the power politics and conservative security concerns, the US should collaborate with the claimant states on other challenges like environmental degradation and marine disasters which can build resilience and de-escalate tensions in the region.
- Both states should work on CBMs in the SCS, so, that the US will stop providing military and defense support to the claimant states and minimize its naval presence while China will roll back its military buildups in Spratly and Parcel Islands.
- The US should try to convince Beijing that its expansionist posture would be extremely costly for China as well as for the region. One effective approach to discourage Beijing's assertiveness and aggression is to actively seek and establish arrangements for arms control agreements, resolution on SCS sovereignty and territorial disputes that would probably resolve the desired use of force in the region.

## BIBLOGHRAPGY

### Books

Arreglado, Juan. *Kalayaan, Historical, Legal, Political Background*. Philippines: Foreign Service Institute, 1982.

Bader, Jeffrey, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Michael McDevitt. "Keeping the South China Sea in Perspective". Washington, DC: Brookings, 2014.

Hong, Nong. "Unclos and Ocean Dispute Settlement: Law and politics in the South China Sea." Routledge, 2012.

Kumar, Shiv, and Shabaz Hussain Shah. "The Great Asian Security Complex." *China's Foreign Relations and Security Dimensions*, Routledge, 2018, 133–44.

Mearsheimer, John J. *The tragedy of great power politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.

Polit-O'Hara, Denise, and Bernadette P. Hungler. *Study guide to accompany Sixth edition of nursing research: Principles and methods*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1999.

### Books Chapter

Bateman, Sam. "SEA LINES OF COMMUNICATION AND SAFETY OF NAVIGATION." Essay. In *Routledge Handbook of the South China Sea*, edited by Keyuan Zou, 46–64. London: Routledge, 2023.

Bisley, Nick. "The South China Sea as Symptom of Asia's Dynamic Security Order." Essay. In *US-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes*, 1st ed., 98–115. Routledge, 2018.

Erickson, Andrew. "China's Maritime Ambitions." In *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Security Studies*, 2nd ed., edited by Sumit Ganguly, Andrew Scobell, and Joseph Chinyong Liow, 100-114. London: Routledge, 2017.

Fels, Enrico, and Rix Li. "China's Sea Power Aspirations and Strategic Behaviour in the South China Sea from the Theoretical Perspective of Identity Construction." Essay. In



*Power Politics in Asia's Contested Waters: Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea*, 117–37. Cham: Springer, 2016.

Feng, Huiyun, and Kai He. “The Bargaining Dilemma between the United States and China in the South China Sea.” Essay. In *US-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes*, 1st Editioned., 14–28. New York,: Routledge, 2018.

Fravel, Taylor. “U.S. Policy Towards the Disputes in the South China Sea Since 1995.” Essay. In *Power Politics in Asia's Contested Waters: Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea*, edited by Enrico Fels and Truong-Minh Vu, 389–402. SPRINGER, 2018.

Gilpin, Robert. “Growth And Expansion.” Essay. In *War and Change in World Politics*, 106–55. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Huang, Jing, Andrew Billo, and Robert C. Beckman. “The Philippines v. China Case and the South China Sea Disputes.” Essay. In *Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea: Navigating Rough Waters*, 54–65. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Jensen, Michael, and Colin Elman. “Realisms.” Essay. In *Security Studies*, edited by Williams & McDonald, 17–32, Routledge, 2018.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315228358-2>.

Keohane, Robert. "Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond." In *Neorealism and Its Critics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Mahadzir, Dzirhan. “Malaysia’s Maritime Claims in the South China Sea Security and Military Dimensions.” Essay. In *Entering Uncharted Waters? ASEAN and the South China Sea*, edited by Pavin Chachavalpongpun, 208–22. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014.

Raditio, Klaus Heinrich. “China’s Interests in the South China Sea.” Essay. In *Understanding China's Behaviour in the South China Sea a Defensive Realist Perspective*, 69–94. Singapore: Palgrave macmillan, 2019.

Scobell, Andrew. "The geography of conflict: South China Sea and US–China Rivalry." In *US-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes*, pp. 29–47. Routledge, 2018.

Tagliacozzo, Eric. "The South China Sea." Essay. In *Oceanic Histories*, edited by Sujit Sivasundaram, Alison Bashford, and David Armitage, 113–33. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Talmon, Stefan. "The Final Award." Essay. In *South China Sea Arbitration: Jurisdiction, Admissibility, Procedure*, 226–333. S.l.: BRILL NIJHOFF, 2022.

Tønnesson, Stein. "Locating the South China Sea." Essay. In *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space*, edited by Paul H. Kratoska, Remco Raben, and Schulte Nordholt, 203–33. Leiden, Netherland: KITLV Press, 2005.

Truong, Thanh-Dam, and Knio Karim. "The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III) and China's Assertion of the U-Shaped Line." Essay. In *The South China Sea and Asian Regionalism: A Critical Realist Perspective*, 61–83. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016.

## Journal Article

Alenezi, Danah Ali. "US Rebalance Strategy to Asia and US-China Rivalry in South China Sea from the Perspective of the Offensive Realism." *Review of Economics and Political Science* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1108/rep-10-2019-0132>.

Baccini, Leonardo, Abel Brodeur, and Stephen Weymouth. "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the 2020 US Presidential Election." *Journal of Population Economics* 34, no. 2 (2021): 739–67. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-020-00820-3>.

Bateman, Sam. "Building Cooperation for Managing the South China Sea without Strategic Trust." *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 4, no. 2 (2017): 251–59. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.178>.

- Bommakanti, Kartik, and Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy. "China's Military Modernisation: Recent Trends." Observer Research Foundation, May 25, 2021. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/chinas-military-modernisation-recent-trends-2/>.
- Bowen, Glenn A. "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method." *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (August 3, 2009): 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/qrj0902027>.
- Buszynski, Leszek. "Rising Tensions in the South China Sea: Southeast Asia Responses." *Security Challenges* 6, no. 2 (Winter, 2010): 85–104. <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/26459939>.
- Byrne, Caitlin. "Securing the 'Rules-Based Order' in the Indo-Pacific: The Significance of Strategic Narrative." *JSTOR* 16, no. The Indo-Pacific: From Concept to Contest (2020): 10–15. <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/26924333>.
- Chansoria, Monika. "1969 Report by UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East: A Turning Point in the Historical Debate over Senkaku Islands ." *Japan Review* 2, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 36–48. [https://www.jiia-jic.jp/en/japanreview/pdf/JapanReview\\_Vol2\\_No3\\_03\\_Chansoria.pdf](https://www.jiia-jic.jp/en/japanreview/pdf/JapanReview_Vol2_No3_03_Chansoria.pdf)
- Chen, Rong. "A Critical Analysis of the U.S. 'Pivot' toward the Asia-Pacific: How Realistic Is Neo-Realism?" *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 12, no. 3 (2013): 39–62. <https://doi.org/10.11610/connections.12.3.03>.
- De Castro, Renato Cruz. "The Risk of Applying Realpolitik in Resolving the South China Sea Dispute: Implications on Regional Security\*." *Pacific Focus* 27, no. 2 (2012): 262–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2012.01084.x>.
- Dreyer, David R. "One Issue Leads to Another: Issue Spirals and the Sino-Vietnamese War." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 4 (2010): 297–315. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2010.00114.x>.
- Dutton, Peter. "China 's Maritime Disputes in the East and South China Seas." *Naval War College Review* 67, no. 3 (2014). [https://doi.org/ https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol67/iss3/2](https://doi.org/https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol67/iss3/2).

- Dutton, Peter. "Three Disputes and Three Objectives—China and the South China Sea." *aval War College Review* 64, no. 4 (2011): 43–57. <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1553&context=nwc-review>
- Feng, Huiyun, and Kai He. "China's Institutional Challenges to the International Order." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 11, no. Winter (December 1, 2017): 23–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26271633?refreqid=search-gateway>.
- Frohmann, Bernd. "Discourse Analysis as a Research Method in Library and Information Science." *Library & Information Science Research* 16, no. 2 (1994): 119–38. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-8188\(94\)90004-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-8188(94)90004-3).
- Gamage, Rajni Nayanthara. "Blue Economy in Southeast Asia: Oceans as the New Frontier of Economic Development." *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 12, no. 2 (2016): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2016.1244361>.
- Glaser, Bonnie S. "Armed Clash in the South China Sea." *Council for foreign Relation*, April 2012. <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05637>.
- Grieco, Joseph M. "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism." *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 485–507. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818300027715>.
- Hayat, Kanwal, and Rehana Saeed Hashmi. "China's Territorial Claim at South China Sea: A Strategic Competition with USA and Its Implications." *South Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (August 2019): 617–34. <http://111.68.103.26/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/view/3290>.
- Heiduk, Felix. "An Arms Race in Southeast Asia? Changing Arms Dynamics, Regional Security and the Role of European Arms Exports." *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, August 2017. [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research\\_papers/2017RP10\\_hdk.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2017RP10_hdk.pdf).
- Hideshi, Ueno. "The problems in the South China Sea." *Review of Island Studies* (2013): 90–99. <https://www.spf.org/islandstudies/transfer/readings/docs/b00004r.pdf>

- Hu, Bo. "Sino-US Competition in the South China Sea: Power, Rules and Legitimacy." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 26, no. (3 January 5, 202): 485–504. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09716-1>.
- Jorgensen, Malcolm. "Equilibrium & Fragmentation in the International Rule of Law: The Rising Chinese Geolegal Order." *The International Rule of Law – Rise or Decline?* , 21, no. working paper (November 2018). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3283626>.
- Koda, Yoji. "Maritime Security in the Region: SCS and ECS as Key Arenas for Converging Political Interests." *Asia-Pacific Review* 23, no. 2 (2016): 86–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13439006.2016.1256077>.
- Labs, Eric J. "Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims." *Security Studies* 6, no. 4 (1997): 1–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636419708429321>.
- Lee, Wei-chin. "Introduction: The South China Sea Dispute and the 2016 Arbitration Decision." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 22, no. 2 (2017): 179–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-017-9473-z>.
- Li, Jennifer Jie. "ASEAN and the South China Sea: Approaches to Resolving the Conflict." *Independent Study Project (ISP)*, 2017. [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3777&context=isp\\_collecti](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3777&context=isp_collecti)  
[on](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3777&context=isp_collecti).
- Lind, Jennifer. "Asia's Other Revisionist Power: Why U.S. Grand Strategy Unnerves China." *Foreign Affairs and Council on Foreign Relations* 96, no. 2 (2017): 74–82. [https://doi.org/ https://www.jstor.org/stable/44821708](https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/44821708).
- McDevitt, Michael. "The South China Sea: Assessing U.S. Policy and Options for the Future ." *CNA Analysis and Solution: Occasional Paper*, November 2014. [https://doi.org/https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-009109.pdf](https://doi.org/https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-009109.pdf).
- Mehboob, Shazia. "Sino-US Geostrategic Competition in the South China Sea: Contextualising Rivalries, Interests, and Strategies." *Orient Research Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (December 2018): 204–2018. <https://doi.org/https://gcwus.edu.pk/wp-content/uploads/4.-Sino-US-Geostrategic-Competition-in-the-South-China-Sea.pdf>.

- Metelitsa, Alexander, and Jeffery Kupfer. "Issue Brief: Oil and Gas Resources and Transit Issues in the South China Sea." *Asia Society*, 2014. <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/issue-brief-oil-and-gas-resources-and-transit-issues-south-china-sea>.
- Mishin, Igor. "U.S.' South China Sea Policy: The First Steps under Presidency of Joe Biden." *Asia and Africa Today*, no. 12 (December 8, 2021): 12–19. <https://doi.org/10.31857/s032150750017800-2>.
- Nguyen, Phuong. "Deciphering the Shift in America's South China Sea Policy." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no. 3 (2016): 389–421. <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs38-3b>
- Nincic, Miroslav. "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics. by John J. Mearsheimer. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001. 448P. \$27.95 Cloth." *Perspective on Politics* 1, no. 1 (2003): 157–246. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592703280166>.
- Plaster, Graham. "The Quad: A Mature Counterbalance in the South China Sea." *FAOA Journal of International Affairs*, December 16, 2022. <https://faoajournal.substack.com/p/the-quad-a-mature-counterbalance>.
- Putra, Bama, Darwis Darwis, and Burhanuddin Burhanuddin. "Asean Political-Security Community: Challenges of Establishing Regional Security in the Southeast Asia." *Journal of International Studies* 12, no. 1 (2019): 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-8330.2019/12-1/2>.
- Raymond, Mark, and David A. Welch. "What's Really Going on in the South China Sea?" *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 41, no. 2 (2022): 214–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034221086291>.
- Roque, Harry. "China's Claim to the Spratlys Islands under International Law." *Journal of Energy & Natural Resources Law* 15, no. 3 (August 1, 1997): 189–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02646811.1997.11433105>.
- Rose, Gideon. "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy." *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–72. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0043887100007814>.

- Rosenberg, David. "Governing The South China Sea: From Freedom of The Seas to Ocean Enclosure Movements," *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, 2010, 4–12.  
[https://tailieu.tapchithoidai.org/Governing\\_South\\_China\\_Sea.pdf](https://tailieu.tapchithoidai.org/Governing_South_China_Sea.pdf)
- Roudgar, Iraj. "The Strategic Competition in Southeast Asia." *Journal of Political Sciences & Public Affairs* 05, no. 03 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.4172/2332-0761.1000277>.
- Roy, Nalanda. "Dragon-Elephant Relationship in the South China Sea Imbroglio." *Journal of Third World Studies* 32, no. 1 (2015): 181–97.  
<https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/45195117>.
- Scott, Nicholas. "Regional Security in the South China Sea: What Are Its Ramifications for Chinese National Security?," *Undergraduate Journal of Politics, Policy, and Society (UJPPS)* 1, no. 1 (2018): 214–33. [https://doi.org/file:///C:/Users/Asad/Downloads/6-Article%20Text-107-1-10-20180407%20\(2\).pdf](https://doi.org/file:///C:/Users/Asad/Downloads/6-Article%20Text-107-1-10-20180407%20(2).pdf).
- Sellars, Kirsten. "Rocking the Boat: The Paracels, the Spratlys, and the South China Sea Arbitration." *Columbia Journal of Asian Law* 30, no. 2 (2017): 221–62.  
<https://doi.org/10.52214/cjal.v30i2.9263>.
- Shen, Jianming. "China's Sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands: A Historical Perspective." *Chinese Journal of International Law* 1, no. 1 (2002): 94–157.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.cjilaw.a000432>.
- Taylor, Brendan. "The South China Sea Is Not a Flashpoint." *The Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2014): 99–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660x.2014.893176>.
- Teixeira, Victor Alexandre Gonçalves. "United States' Policy Strategy in South China Sea." *Scholar Journal of Applied Sciences and Research* 1, no. 6 (September 6, 2018): 24–32.  
<https://doi.org/http://innovationinfo.org/articles/SJASR-6-163.pdf>.
- TEIXEIRA, Victor Alexandre, and Jose Francisco PAVIA. "East Asia: The Systemic Disorder and the South China Sea Dispute. An International Law Prospect." *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, no. 34 (2021): 66–83. <https://doi.org/10.24193/csqr.34.4>.

Toft, Peter. "John J. Mearsheimer: An Offensive Realist between Geopolitics and Power."

*Journal of International Relations and Development* 8, no. 4 (2005): 381–408.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800065>.

Tønnesson, Stein. "The Paracels: The 'Other' South China Sea Dispute." *Asian Perspective*

26, no. 4 (2002): 145–69. <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2002.0006>.

Toruan, Gerald Theodorus. "Indonesia and ASEAN in Facing US-China Rivalry in the South China Sea to Create Regional Security Stability." *International Journal of Science and Society* 3, no. 2 (2021): 82–87.

<https://doi.org/10.54783/ijssoc.v3i2.319>.

Usman, Muhammad Askari. "Sino-US Rivalry in the South China Sea: A Hegemonic

Stability Theory Perspective." *Journal of Politics and International Studies* 6, no. 2

(December 2020): 115–27.

[https://doi.org/http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/politicsAndInternational/PDF/8\\_v6\\_2\\_2\\_020.pdf](https://doi.org/http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/politicsAndInternational/PDF/8_v6_2_2_020.pdf).

Widian, Rizky, and Arimadona. "Cooperation & Security Dilemma in the South China Sea."

*Jurnal Global Strategis* 12, no. 2 (November 30, 2018): 91–106.

<https://doi.org/10.20473/jgs.12.2.2018.91-106>.

Yang, Fang, and Mingjiang Li. "Comparing China's Claims and Policies in the East and

South China Seas: Implications for Regional Security." *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 2 (2016): 135–56.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797016645451>.

Yoshimatsu, Hidetaka. "China, Japan and the South China Sea Dispute." *Journal of Asian*

*Security and International Affairs* 4, no. 3 (December 2017): 294–315.

<https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48602159>.

Zhang, Feng. "Chinese Thinking on the South China Sea and the Future of Regional Security." *Political Science Quarterly* 132, no. 3 (2017): 435–66.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12658>.



Zhang, Jian. "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0'?" *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27, no. 1 (2015): 5–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2015.993958>.

## Newspaper Articles

Bhatti, Baber Ali. "South China Sea in Strategic Calculus of South East Asia." *Daily Times*, August 14, 2020. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/654074/south-china-sea-in-strategic-calculus-of-south-east-asia/>.

Buddhavarapu, Ravi. "South China Sea Faces Higher Risk of Conflict as Arms Race Builds Up." *CNBC*. *CNBC*, April 28, 2022. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/27/south-china-sea-region-at-a-higher-risk-for-conflict-weapons-expert.html>.

Buszynski, Leszek. "Why is the South China Sea so important to the US?" *The Conversation* Academic rigour, journalistic flair, December 22, 2022.  
<https://theconversation.com/why-is-the-south-china-sea-so-important-to-the-us-71477>.

Chaudhury, Dipanjan Roy. "South China Sea Emerging as a Dangerous Flashpoint." *The Economic Times*, August 1, 2018.  
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/south-china-sea-emerging-as-a-dangerous-flashpoint/articleshow/65218028.cms>.

Forsythe, Michael, and Jane Perlez. "South China Sea Buildup Brings Beijing Closer to Realizing Control." *The New York Times*, March 8, 2016.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/09/world/asia/south-china-sea-militarization.html>.

Geollect. "The Strategic Importance of the South China Sea." *Geollect*, March 11, 2022.  
<https://www.geollect.com/news/the-strategic-importance-of-the-south-china-sea/#:~:text=Therefore%2C%20the%20South%20China%20Sea,trade%20moves%20throug%20the%20waters>.

Greer, Adam. "The South China Sea Is Really a Fishery Dispute." *The Diplomat*, July 20, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/the-south-china-sea-is-really-a-fishery-dispute>.

- Hawkins, Amy, Helen Davidson, Justin McCurry, Rebecca Ratcliffe, and Daniel Hurst. "Asia's Arms Race: Potential Flashpoints from Taiwan to the South China Sea." *The Guardian*, April 4, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/30/asia-pacific-flashpoints-fuelling-regional-arms-race-taiwan-north-korea-south-china-sea-pacific-islands>.
- Jash, Amrita. "China's 2023 Defense Spending: Figures, Intentions and Concerns." *Jamestown*, April 14, 2023. <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-2023-defense-spending-figures-intentions-and-concerns/>.
- Johnson, Jesse. "U.S. and British Navies Conduct First Joint Military Exercises in Disputed South China Sea." *The Japan Times*, January 16, 2019. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/01/16/asia-pacific/u-s-british-navies-conduct-first-joint-military-exercises-disputed-south-china-sea/>.
- Kaplan, Robert D. "The South China Sea Is the Future of Conflict." *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, August 15, 2011. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/08/15/the-south-china-sea-is-the-future-of-conflict/>.
- Kelly, Tim. "Exclusive: British Navy Warship Sails near South China Sea Islands, Angering Beijing." *Reuters*, September 6, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-china-southchinasea-exclusive-idUSKCN1LM017>.
- Khan, Mehmood-ul-Hassan. "Geo-Economy of South China Sea." *Pakistan Observer*, August 13, 2022. <https://pakobserver.net/geo-economy-of-south-china-sea-by-dr-mehmood-ul-hassan-khan/>.
- Luc, Tuan Anh. "Are France and the UK Here to Stay in the South China Sea?" *The Diplomat*, September 17, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/are-france-and-the-uk-here-to-stay-in-the-south-china-sea/>.
- Lungu, Andrei. "The u.s.-China Clash Is about Ideology after All." *Foreign Policy*, April 6, 2021, [https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/06/us-china-ideology-communism-capitalism/?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=&gclid=CjwKC\\_AjwvdajBhBEEiwAeMh1U3J07Sx6S70K2OaTQQ6G3AoNCdWS57KS282BHPTaSjY7Wzb8xNopDxoCn9IQAvD\\_BwE](https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/06/us-china-ideology-communism-capitalism/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=&gclid=CjwKC_AjwvdajBhBEEiwAeMh1U3J07Sx6S70K2OaTQQ6G3AoNCdWS57KS282BHPTaSjY7Wzb8xNopDxoCn9IQAvD_BwE)

- Macias, Amanda. "China Quietly Installed Missile Systems on Strategic Spratly Islands in Hotly Contested South China Sea." CNBC, January 30, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/02/china-added-missile-systems-on-spratly-islands-in-south-china-sea.html>.
- Malindog-Uy, Anna. "Manila Should Resist Us' Tension-Raising Attempts." Global Times, April 23, 2023. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202304/1289637.shtml>.
- Mansharamani, Vikram. "China Is Spending Nearly \$1 Trillion to Rebuild the Silk Road." PBS, March 2, 2016. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/china-is-spending-nearly-1-trillion-to-rebuild-the-silk-road>.
- Ming, Xiao. "US Increases Presence in South China Sea." Chinadaily.com.cn, August 16, 2021. <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202203/29/WS62423c08a310fd2b29e53c18.html>.
- Mongilio, Heather. "China Protests U.S. South China Sea Freedom of Navigation Operation." US Naval Institute, March 24, 2023. <https://news.usni.org/2023/03/24/china-protests-u-s-south-china-sea-freedom-of-navigation-operation#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThis%20freedom%20of%20navigation%20operation,PRC's%20claim%20to%20straight%20baselines>.
- Murdoch, Lindsay. "South China Sea: Experts Clash over China Threat to Commercial Trade." The Sydney Morning Herald, January 13, 2016. <https://www.smh.com.au/world/south-china-sea-experts-clash-over-china-threat-to-commercial-trade-20160113-gm4s9c.html>.
- Pamuk, Humeyra, and David Brunnstrom. "David R. Stilwell Says Room for Sanctions in Response to China in South China Sea." Reuters, July 14, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-southchinasea-stilwell/u-s-says-room-for-sanctions-in-response-to-china-in-south-china-sea-idUSKCN24FITB>.
- Panda, Ankit. "China Condemns US Fonop near Mischief Reef in the South China Sea." – The Diplomat, March 26, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/china-condemns-us-fonop-near-mischief-reef-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

- Poling, Gregory, and Conor Cronin. "The Dangers of Allowing u.s.-Philippine Defense Cooperation to Languish." War on the Rocks, January 22, 2019.  
<https://warontherocks.com/2018/05/the-dangers-of-allowing-u-s-philippine-defense-cooperation-to-languish/>.
- Pratama, Aditya. "Indonesia's Ambiguity in the South China Sea Is Hampering Its Interest." Modern Diplomacy, January 12, 2023.  
<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/01/13/indonesias-ambiguity-in-the-south-china-sea-is-hampering-its-interest/>.
- Reuters. "Beijing Calls Tribunal Ruling on South China Sea 'a Farce' – Video." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, July 12, 2016.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2016/jul/12/beijing-calls-tribunal-ruling-on-south-china-sea-a-farce-video>.
- Saiidi, Uptin. "Here's Why the South China Sea Is Highly Contested." CNBC, February 7, 2018. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/07/heres-why-the-south-china-sea-is-highly-contested.html#:~:text=The%20area%20is%20globally%20important,surface%3A%20oil%20and%20natural%20gas>.
- Scimia, Emanuele. "Indonesia Boosts Its Air and Sea Denial Capabilities." Asia Times, November 20, 2017. <https://asiatimes.com/2017/11/indonesia-boosts-air-sea-denial-capabilities/>.
- SCMP. "Which Are the Key Countries in the South China Sea Dispute?" South China Morning Post, August 20, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/article/2186449/explained-south-china-sea-dispute>.
- Shalal, Andrea, and David Alexander. "U.S. Defence Budget Focuses on Changing Security Environment - Carter." Reuters, February 2, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-defense-budget-idINKCN0VB1HT>.
- Shesgreen, Deirdre. "Trump Administration Rejects Nearly All Beijing's Claims in South China Sea, a Move Likely to Inflame Tensions." USA Today, July 14, 2020.  
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2020/07/13/trump-administration-chinas-claims-south-china-sea-unlawful/5429955002/>.

Stashwick, Steven. "Being Realistic About Engagement with China and the A2/AD Threat." *The Diplomat*, September 23, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/being-realistic-about-engagement-with-china-and-the-a2ad-threat/>.

Torode, Greg. "Exclusive: Vietnam Moves New Rocket Launchers into Disputed South China Sea - Sources." Reuters, August 10, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-vietnam-exclusive-idUSKCN10K2NE>.

U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs. "7th Fleet Cruiser Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea." United States Navy, November 28, 2022.

Valencia, Mark J. "The US-China MOU on Air and Maritime Encounters." *The Diplomat*, November 17, 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/11/the-us-china-mou-on-air-and-maritime-encounters/>.

White Paper released by State Council of the People's Republic of China,. "China's National Defense in the New Era." Xinhua, July 24, 2019. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c\\_138253389.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm).

Xiangmiao, Chen. "Biden's South China Sea Policy Has Cold War Currents." Global Times, April 25, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1221998.shtml>.

Yüksel, Umut. "Arms Race in the South China Sea: What Threshold?" Geneva Graduate Institute. Global Challenges, February 2017. <https://globalchallenges.ch/issue/1/arms-race-in-the-south-china-sea-what-threshold/>.

Zafar, Ali. "South China Sea: A Geopolitical Tinderbox." Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research, October 5, 2020. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/south-china-sea-a-geopolitical-tinderbox/>.

## **Blog Post**

- Ayres, Alyss. “Continuity and Change: The Trump Administration’s South Asia Policies.” Council on Foreign Relations, April 4, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/continuity-and-change-trump-administrations-south-asia-policies>.
- Derek, He Xiaoheng. “The Taiwan Factor in the Clarification of China’s U-Shaped Line.” E-International Relations, January 16, 2021. <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/01/16/the-taiwan-factor-in-the-clarification-of-chinas-u-shaped-line/>.
- Diep, Vo Ngoc. “Vietnam’s Note Verbale on the South China Sea.” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, May 5, 2020. <https://amti.csis.org/vietnams-note-verbale-on-the-south-china-sea/>.
- Green, Michael, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, and Jake Douglas. “Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff.” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, June 27, 2017. <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-scarborough-standoff/>.
- Harun, Ruhana. “Aukus, the South China Sea Dispute and Regional Peace and Stability In ...” Antalya Diplomacy Forum, February 2022. <https://antalyadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Aukus-The-South-China-Sea-Dispute-and-Regional-Peace-And-Stability-in-The-Indo-Pacific.pdf>.
- Joseph. “The South China Sea Disputes and the Pivot to Asia.” The Geopolitics, July 31, 2018. <https://thegeopolitics.com/the-south-china-sea-disputes-and-the-pivot-to-asia/>.

## **Official Documents**

- “Chronological Lists of UNCLOS.” United Nations. Accessed April 10, 2023. [https://www.un.org/Depts/los/reference\\_files/chronological\\_lists\\_of\\_ratifications.htm](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/reference_files/chronological_lists_of_ratifications.htm).
- “Defense Cooperation Between the United States and the Philippines.” Department of States, April 28, 2014. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/14-625-Philippines-Defense-Cooperation.pdf>.

“FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME XVII, CHINA, 1969–1972.” U.S. Department of State. Accessed April 26, 2023.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>.

“Resolution of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of the Approval of the Declaration of the Government on China’s Territorial Sea.” AsianLII, September 4, 1958.

<http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/rotscotnpcotaotdotgocts1338/>.

“South China Sea Arbitration Ruling: What Happened and What's next?” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, July 12, 2016.

<https://www.uscc.gov/research/south-china-sea-arbitration-ruling-what-happened-and-whats-next>.

“The South China Sea Arbitration (the Republic of Philippines V. the People's Republic of China).” Permanent Court of Arbitration. Accessed April 29, 2023. <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/7/>.

“The South China Sea Arbitration: The Republic of the Philippines V. The People's Republic of China.” Permanent Court of Arbitration, July 12, 2016.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304338093\\_The\\_South\\_China\\_Sea\\_Arbitration\\_on\\_The\\_Philippines\\_v\\_China\\_Assessment\\_of\\_the\\_Award\\_on\\_Jurisdiction\\_and\\_Admissibility](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304338093_The_South_China_Sea_Arbitration_on_The_Philippines_v_China_Assessment_of_the_Award_on_Jurisdiction_and_Admissibility).

“United Nation General Assembly Twenty-Second Session.” Static.un.org. Accessed April 29, 2023.

[https://static.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/pardo\\_ga1967.pdf](https://static.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/pardo_ga1967.pdf).

“Vietnam’s Note Verbale No. 22/CH-2020 Submitted to the United Nation,’ Unofficial Translation.” United Nation, March 30, 2020.

[https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/mys\\_12\\_12\\_2019/VN20200330\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/mys_12_12_2019/VN20200330_ENG.pdf).

Arbitral Tribunal. “In the Matter of the South China Sea Arbitration.” Permanent Court of Arbitration, July 12, 2016. <https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Award.pdf>.

ASEAN Document. “2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.”

National University of Singapore, November 4, 2002. <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2002-Declaration-on-the-Conduct-of-Parties-in-the-South-China-Sea.pdf>.

Nguyen, Dong Manh. “Settlement of Disputes under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea The Case of the South China Sea Dispute .” UN.org, December 2005.

[https://www.un.org/depts/los/nippon/unnff\\_programme\\_home/fellows\\_pages/fellows\\_papers/nguyen\\_0506\\_vietnam.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/nippon/unnff_programme_home/fellows_pages/fellows_papers/nguyen_0506_vietnam.pdf).

Official Gazette, “Presidential Decree No. 1596, s. 1978,” President of the Philippines, signed June 11, 1978, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1978/06/11/presidential-decree-no-1596-s-1978/>.

United Nation. “UN Convention on the Law of the”, December 10, 1982, Accessed April 5, 2023. [https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf)

## Reports

Baumert, Kevin and Brian Melchior. Rep. *Limits in the Sea*, no.143, United States Department of State Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, 2014. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/LIS-143.pdf>

Department of Defense. Rep. *The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy: Achieving U.S. National Security Objectives in a Changing Environment*, NO. ADA627122, Defense Technical Information Center, 2015.

Djalal, Hasjim. Rep. *South China Sea Island Disputes* . National University of Singapore, Jakarta, 2000. <https://lkcnhm.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/app/uploads/2017/04/s08rbz009-021.pdf>

Freund, Eleanor. Rep. *Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea*. Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2018.



- Gompert, David C., Astrid Stuth Cevallos, and Cristina L. Garafola. Rep. “War with China: Thinking through the Unthinkable”, *RAND cooperation*, Santa Monica, California, 2016.  
[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1100/RR1140/RAND\\_RR1140.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1100/RR1140/RAND_RR1140.pdf)
- Hao, Su. Rep. *China’s Positions and Interests in the South China Sea: A Rational Choices in Its Cooperative Policies*. Washington: Center for Strategic and international studies , 2011.
- Hughes, Shane D. Rep. *The Quad: A Mature Counterbalance in the South China Sea*. Fort Belvoir: DEFENSE TECHNICAL INFORMATION CENTER, 2022.
- Joyner, Christopher. Rep. *The Spratly Islands Dispute in the South China Sea: Problems, Policies, and Prospects for Diplomatic Accommodation*. JSTOR, 1999.
- Kreuzer, Peter. Rep. *Facing China: Crises or Peaceful Coexistence in the South China Sea*. JSTOR, January 2015. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep14484.5>.
- Laimou-Maniati, Irini. Rep., *The Management of the Sea Lanes of Communication in South East Asia and the ASEAN Regional Forum’s Performance*, ETH Zürich, n.d.  
<https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/23243/Management%20of%20the%20Sea%20Lanes%20of%20Communication%20in%20SE%20Asia.pdf>.
- Lamb, Robert D., Sadika Hameed, and Kathryn Mixon. Rep. *South Asia Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns*. Washington: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.
- Meyer, Stanley. Rep. *Incident at Mischief Reef: Implications for the Philippines, China, and the United States*. Fort Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 1996.
- Rep: *Competing Claims in the South China Sea: Potential Paths Forward and Implications for the United States*. The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), November 5, 2018. <https://www.nbr.org/event/competing-claims-in-the-south-china-sea-potential-paths-forward-and-implications-for-the-united-states/>.

Ronald O'Rourke, rep: "U.S.-China strategic competition in South and East China Seas: Background and issues for Congress." Committee of Congress R42784 (2023), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42784.pdf>.

Rosen, Mark. Rep. *Philippine Claims in the South China Sea: A Legal Analysis*. CNA Analysis And Soultion, 2014. [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA\\_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008435.pdf](https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008435.pdf)

SCSPI. "Rep: An Incomplete Report on US Military Activities in the South China Sea in 2021." South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative, April 1, 2022. <http://www.scspi.org/en/yjbg/incomplete-report-us-military-activities-south-china-sea-2021>.

Sokolsky, Richard, Angel Rabasa, and Richard Neu. Essay. In *The Role of Southeast Asia in U.S. Strategy toward China*, 5–15. Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2000.

Xinbo, Wu. Rep. *Sino-US Strategic Competition and Asia-Pacific Security*. JSTOR, 2019.

## Web sources

"China Has Fully Militarized Three Islands in South China Sea, US Admiral Says." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, March 21, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/china-has-fully-militarized-three-islands-in-south-china-sea-us-admiral-says>.

"China Just Overtook Us as the World's Largest Economy, IMF Says." The Christian Science Monitor, October 8, 2014. <https://www.csmonitor.com/Business/Latest-News-Wires/2014/1008/China-just-overtook-US-as-the-world-s-largest-economy-IMF-says>.

"China Military Spending/Defense Budget 1989-2023." MacroTrends. Accessed June 8, 2023. <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CHN/china/military-spending-defense-budget>.

“China’s Militarization in the South China Sea Violates Vietnam’s Territory.” Vietnam Law & Legal Forum , April 8, 2022. <https://vietnamlawmagazine.vn/chinas-militarization-in-the-south-china-sea-violates-vietnams-territory-48479.html>.

“Discussion between Liu Shaoqi and Le Duan.” Discussion between Liu Shaoqi and Le Duan | Wilson Center Digital Archive, November 20, 2011. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/discussion-between-liu-shaoqi-and-le-duan>.

“How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?” ChinaPower Project, January 25, 2021. <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

“More than 30% of Global Maritime Crude Oil Trade Moves through the South China Sea.” U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), August 2018. <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=36952>.

“Press Briefing by NSA for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes and Admiral Robert Willard, U.S. Pacific Command.” National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration, November 13, 2011. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/13/press-briefing-nsa-strategic-communications-ben-rhodes-and-admiral-rober>.

“Press Release: U.S. Building Maritime Capacity in Southeast Asia.” National Archives and Records Administration, November 17, 2015. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/17/fact-sheet-us-building-maritime-capacity-southeast-asia>.

“Press Release on The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of the Philippines v. The People’s Republic of China).” Permanent Court of Arbitration, July 12, 2016. <https://docs.pca-cpa.org/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Press-Release-No-11-English.pdf>.

“Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament.” National Archives and Records Administration, November 17, 2011. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>.

“South China Sea Analysis Brief.” International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), February 7, 2013. [https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South\\_China\\_Sea](https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South_China_Sea).

“South China Sea Regional Hotspot.” Dryad Global. Accessed May 22, 2023. <https://dg.dryadglobal.com/south-china-sea2>.

“SOUTH CHINA SEA.” International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), October 15, 2019. [https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South\\_China\\_Sea](https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South_China_Sea).

“U.S. Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea - United States Department of State.” U.S. Department of State, December 1, 2020. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-position-on-maritime-claims-in-the-south-china-sea/index.html>.

“U.S.’s Kerry Says China Action in Seas Dispute ‘Provocative.’” Reuters, May 13, 2014. <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-kerry-china/u-s-s-kerry-says-china-action-in-seas-dispute-provocative-idUKKBN0DT0H520140513>.

“Vietnam Rebukes China, Philippines over South China Sea Conduct.” Reuters, May 18, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/vietnam-rebuked-china-philippines-over-south-china-sea-conduct-2023-05-18/>.

Associated Press. “Biden Budget Includes Billions for Pacific Islands in Bid to ‘out-Compete’ China.” The Guardian, March 10, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/10/biden-budget-includes-billions-for-pacific-islands-in-bid-to-out-compete-china>.

Associated Press. “China Has Fully Militarized Three Islands in South China Sea, US Admiral Says.” The Guardian, March 21, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/china-has-fully-militarized-three-islands-in-south-china-sea-us-admiral-says>.

Cobus, Pete. “South China Sea: Conflict and Diplomacy on the High Seas.” Recent Claimants | South China Sea | Conflict and Diplomacy on the High Seas, December 29, 2016. <https://projects.voanews.com/south-china-sea/recent/>.

CSIS. Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, December 14, 2022. <https://amti.csis.org/>.

Daiss, Tim. "How Oil Drives the South China Sea Conflict." OilPrice.com, March 14, 2018. Accessed March 1, 2023, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/How-Oil-Drives-The-South-China-Sea-Conflict.htm>.

Department of Defense. "U.S. Security Cooperation with Vietnam - United States Department of State." U.S. Department of State, April 11, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-vietnam/>.

Department of State. "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific - U.S. Department of State." US Department of State, November 4, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

Department of State. "U.S. Security Cooperation with the Philippines - United States Department of State." U.S. Department of State, October 7, 2022. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-the-philippines/>.

Mangosing, Frances. "Exclusive: New Photos Show China Is Nearly Done with Its Militarization of South China Sea." Inquirer.net, February 5, 2018. <https://www.inquirer.net/specials/exclusive-china-militarization-south-china-sea/>.

Pompeo, Michael. "U.S. Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea." U.S. Department of State, December 1, 2020. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-position-on-maritime-claims-in-the-south-china-sea/index.html>.

Vuving, Alex. "OpEd: Force Buildup in the South China Sea: The Myth of an Arms Race." Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, October 14, 2017. <https://dkiapcss.edu/oped-force-buildup-in-the-south-china-sea-the-myth-of-an-arms-race/>.

Wahal, Anya. "On International Treaties, the United States Refuses to Play Ball." Council on Foreign Relations, January 7, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/international-treaties-united-states-refuses-play-ball#:~:text=UN%20Convention%20on%20the%20Law%20of%20the%20Sea&text=The%20United%20States%20did%20not%20ratify%20UNCLOS%20because%20of%20fears,seas%20to%20the%20United%20Nations>.

Wei, Li. "Defense Ministry Spokesperson Remarks on US Warship's Illegal Entry into Waters off China's Xisha Islands." Ministry of National Defense, March 24, 2023.  
[http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News\\_213114/NewsRelease/16211781.html](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/NewsRelease/16211781.html).

Yi, Wang. "It Is Political Arrogance and Legal Prejudice to Pressure China over South China Sea Arbitration." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, April 22, 2016.  
[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/gjhdq\\_665435/2675\\_665437/2696\\_663396/2698\\_663400/201604/t20160426\\_510808.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2696_663396/2698_663400/201604/t20160426_510808.html).