



COMMUN X
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (UNGA)

SOUTH CHINA SEA CONFLICT

Background Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

Thank you for participating in this General Assembly on the South China Sea Conflict at COMMUN X. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is the main policy-making body of the United Nations, where member states meet in sessions, such as this one, to discuss international issues presented before the delegates. The purpose of this assembly is to discuss the geopolitical, social, economic, and ethical implications of the South China Sea Conflict, and how the United Nations of today can work towards finding a solution.

The South China Sea is a vital maritime region, rich in natural resources and critical to global trade and regional security. However, overlapping territorial claims by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei have led to escalating tensions. China's land reclamation, island-building, and confrontations in the region further challenge principles like freedom of navigation and international law. This conflict endangers regional stability and requires urgent diplomatic attention.

In order to be eligible for awards, and, more importantly, to make your experience at COMMUN as fun and rewarding as possible, **this committee requires each delegate to submit a position paper** detailing their country's position on the topics before the committee. For examples of previous position papers and other resources to aid your research, please visit [COMMUN's Resources Page](#). Position papers may be submitted to the chair through the email given below. Furthermore, we suggest that this background guide be read thoroughly and in the order written in order to ensure all delegates are prepared and excited to make the most of their time at COMMUN.

We can't wait to read and learn more about your country's position! If you have any questions or are confused by any part of the background guide, please feel free to email us!

Sincerely,

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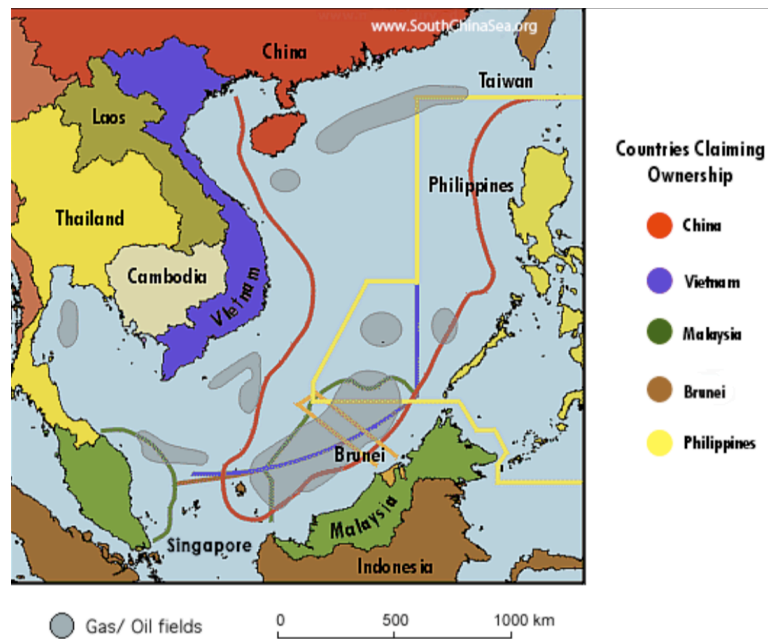
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IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

The following words appear throughout this guide and are important for your understanding of the South China Sea Conflict:

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The South China Sea (SCS) is an arm of the western pacific ocean that is situated in Southeast Asia. It is bordered to the north by the Chinese Mainland, to the east by the Malay Peninsula, and to the south and west by Borneo (The Island where Brunei is situated) and the Philippines, respectively.



The **Territorial Waters** of a country are the waters adjacent to its coastline, and are under the complete control of the state. Normally extending twelve nautical miles from the coast, a country has complete sovereignty over this region, including the airspace above and seabed below.

An **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** is a region of the ocean where a specific country has exclusive rights to explore, manage, and conserve natural resources, generate energy, and establish artificial islands and installations. A country's EEZ usually extends for 200 nautical miles past its coastline. Importantly a country cannot regulate transport or trade through its EEZ, though it does have the right to manage any economic activity in the area, which includes fishing, oil and gas extraction, and tourism.

¹ <https://www.southchinasea.org/maps/territorial-claims-maps/>

The **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** is a set of rules adopted by the UN in 1982, which established the legal framework for all activities in the World's oceans and seas (Delegates are not expected to review this quite lengthy document, but it may be referenced in Block Positions).

BACKGROUND

Brief History of the South China Sea Conflict:

The Conflict over the South China Sea, including territorial lines, rights to resources, and maritime trade routes, has significantly evolved over the last two centuries. Historically, predating modern conflict, the SCS has been treated mostly as a major maritime trade and communication route rather than a region under territorial control. European, Asian, and Indigenous powers alike utilised the SCS for navigation and commerce without asserting extensive control over specific islands, reefs, or channels of geopolitical interest. It was not until the early 20th century, with the rise of detailed mapping and demarcation of the SCS's geographical features, when the emergence of claims began. Before World War II, European colonial powers such as France, as well as nations near the region like China and Japan, began venturing initial territorial claims over certain islands. Following the Second World War, China began to assert control over many parts of the region, especially in islands suspected to provide recourse or political benefits, which they began to frequently occupy. Following the late 1950s, competition over territorial waters, islands, and other geographical features began to quickly escalate. Over the course of just a few years, Taiwan and China established permanent settlements and military outposts on several key land masses. Not long after, in 1974, the first modern military conflict over the islands began between China and South Vietnam. Known as the Battle of the Paracel Islands, the conflict resulted in China forcibly occupying and taking control over several contested islands. The recent discovery of upwards of an estimated 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and gas reserves in the region only served to escalate tensions in the region, and set the tone for continuing conflicts over territorial claims and the multinational rush to assert sovereignty.

Overview of Modern Conflict:

With tensions over the resources, features, and existence of overlapping claims higher and more relevant than ever, it is crucial to understand where these modern conflicts arose from. Following the Battle of the Paracel Islands, tensions once again rose between Vietnam and China in 1988 when both nations clashed over the Johnson Reef, resulting in the death of over 70 Vietnamese soldiers. This incident showcased the general theme of China's willingness to use force to solidify its claims. It also served as a warning to other claimants, such as Malaysia and the Philippines, to begin taking efforts to strengthen their own military outposts in the region.

Two key incentives stood out between all involved countries: first, to keep control and access to fishing rights, and second, to keep control and access over potential seabed oil and gas reserves. In the 90s, China began moving away from military confrontation and instead focused on expansions, such as constructing bunkers on contested land. The Philippines, caught off guard and unable to argue with China, sought support from fellow ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, defining much of the country alliances and blocs we see between countries today. Philippine's frustration with China also drew the United States' interest in the region, who began to vest interest in maintaining freedom of navigation over the region.

China's continued and contested expansion to further their economic security over untapped oil and gas reserves, strengthen their strategic control in order to project military power and build a buffer against U.S. backed allied forces, and grow their national sovereignty and prestige framed as reclaiming "historical rights" proved to be extremely alarming for nearby powers. The ramifications of these actions were large and the roots of the conflict today. In response to China's initiatives, ASEAN published the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, where all parties agreed to exercise avoid occupying uninhabited islands. However, as ASEAN declarations are non-binding, China continued to reclaim islands and other SCS regions. In recent years, the development of artificial islands and the continued militarization of key areas in the sea, such as the building of airstrips and military bases near crucial trading routes and oil reserves, has been criticized by many nations, South Asian and beyond.

Modern Legal Challenges and Advances:

In 2013, the dispute over territory was again escalated, this time before the Permanent Court of Arbitration under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This case aimed to challenge the legality of China's claimed maritime territory under international law, stating that their expansive claims were far beyond what was permissible. It also sought to clarify the maritime definitions of many features argued over in the region, as many countries wanted to define whether certain rocks/reefs counted as Islands and should be considered EEZs. For countries such as the Philippines, the incentive behind presenting this case was to secure and divide rights to fishing, oil, and other marine resources within a counties' lawful EEZ, and more broadly, limit China's growing presence. Many smaller SCS nations wished for a favorable ruling.

On July 12, 2016, an overwhelming majority voted in favor of the case, and declared that China's claims over the SCS were not permissible under UNCLOS, and that they could not claim certain features as EEZs. While it legally invalidated many of China's maritime claims and helped limit further disputes, it proved difficult to enforce. As the court held little power over China's government, they had little to no power to force China to comply. Since the ruling, frequent confrontations between Vietnamese, Philippine, and Chinese vessels have persisted. Similarly, the now involved US and its allies, such as nearby nations Japan and Australia,

increased their navigation operations freedom, increasing both their presence and the tensions in the region. In all, the UNCLOS ruling gave many ASEAN nations a tool to divide the SCS, but also showed that further international law and cooperation must be conducted cleverly and carefully.

ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN, was founded in 1967 with the goal of promoting stability, economic development, and cooperation within the SCS region and adjacent among its member states. Having been originally formed by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, ASEAN has since expanded to include Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Brunei. Members have agreed to remain out with other members' internal affairs. In regards to the SCS conflict, ASEAN's primary mission has been to reduce escalation, support a rules-based maritime order, and above all, maintain peace and promote non-violence, as in the case of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

ASEAN and its members have two crucial reasons to be involved in the SCS region. The first is to ensure, to the best of their ability, the protection of their rights to a share of the natural resources and territorial claims in the region. More specifically, this means rights to tapping and claiming some of the vast amount of oil and gas reserves. The second goal is to protect vital and shared trade routes utilized by nations across the world, not just countries in ASEAN or near the SCS.

Although ASEAN has faced some internal divisions, with some nations such as Cambodia or Laos having chosen to form close economic ties and many others having spoken out against China's economic activity in the SCS having made it difficult for them to create a legally binding Code of Conduct with China that would actually be enforceable, ASEAN still remains a powerful and important diplomatic forum. For nations that hold interest in the conflict but are not in close proximity, working with ASEAN is often seen as their ticket into the conversation regarding how to move forward in this conflict.

COUNTRY POSITIONS

While reading your country's positions below, performing your own research, and writing your position paper, consider these questions as guides to understand your country's stances and where you can collaborate with other delegates.

AUSTRALIA

Australia's economy and security are closely tied to the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. While not a claimant in the South China Sea disputes, Australia strongly advocates for freedom of navigation and adherence to international law, particularly in the 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Canberra has rejected China's claim of

'historic rights' within the nine-dash line and continues to push for peaceful resolutions in alignment with the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal ruling. Although Australia tends to avoid direct military provocations, such as conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) within contested area, it participates in joint naval exercises with allies like the United States and Japan, reflecting Australia's approach to upholding a rule of law in global order while balancing economic ties with China.

BANGLADESH

The Republic of Bangladesh, located on the Ganges Delta in Southern Asia, is the world's 8th most populous country, with nearly 173 million people. Economically, Bangladesh maintains significant ties with the United States, India, and China, although its recent alignment with China, highlighted by its membership in BRICS, suggests a growing shift in its foreign relations. This nuanced approach reflects Bangladesh's ongoing "balancing act" as it navigates its relationships with these major powers.

BHUTAN

The Kingdom of Bhutan, a small landlocked country located in Southern Asia and bordering India and China, has a population of just under 800,000. With an economy mainly based in agriculture, forestry and service, Bhutan has shown little economic interest in the South China Sea. However, with tensions rising over territorial disputes on the Chinese border, and the Kingdom's interest in maintaining close ties with India, Bhutan will have to carefully navigate this conflict in order to avoid further escalation with neighboring countries, and perhaps serve as a mediator between the different states involved in this maritime dispute.

BRUNEI

The small Southeast Asian country of Brunei, officially known as Brunei Darussalam, has an area of only 6,000 square kilometers and a population of only 500,000, making it the smallest country in Southeast Asia. However, due to its proximity to oil and gas reserves, Brunei boasts a very impressive GDP, with their Real GDP (Purchasing Power Parity) for 2023 estimated at nearly \$36 billion. Governed by a Sultanate (a form of absolute monarchy), the majority of its population lives along the coast and works for the government. Brunei claims an EEZ of roughly 200 nautical miles, overlapping with China's, Vietnam's, The Philippines', and Malaysia's claims. In the past, representatives of Brunei have also suggested that they also claim the Louisiana Reef, a land feature in the SCS also claimed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Given their economic reliance on fuel, the waters surrounding Brunei with their natural oil and gas reserves are critical for its economy. Thus, maintaining the stability of their maritime boundaries is of utmost importance for Brunei. Brunei is known to approach conflicts over

territory in the SCS peacefully and diplomatically, such as settling a disagreement over CSC claims with Malaysia in 2009 through non-violent negotiations and exchanging letters. Brunei has refrained from making strong public remarks about the SCS Conflict, instead choosing to publicly support an SCS Code of Conduct between ASEAN and China, suggesting they see maritime peace and de-escalation as the solution.

CANADA

Canada has strongly opposed China's provocative actions in the South China Sea, particularly those taken against Philippine vessels near Second Thomas Shoal on June 17, 2024. Canada has condemned the use of water cannons, dangerous maneuvers, and ramming by China, asserting that such actions violated China's obligations under international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Canada has expressed deep concern over reports of the Chinese boarding and towing Philippine vessels, highlighting the destabilizing effect of these actions on regional peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. Canada has affirmed its commitment to a rules-based international order, emphasizing the importance of resolving territorial disputes through dialogue rather than force or coercion.

CAMBODIA

Situated in Southeastern Asia between Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos, the Kingdom of Cambodia, ruled by a constitutional monarchy, has an area of 181,000 square kilometers and boasts a population of over 17 million people. Although Cambodia is home to large wealth disparity, their economy is one of the fastest growing in the world, largely due to tourism and clothing exports. Unlike its neighbors, the Kingdom of Cambodia does not directly claim any of the CSC as its own, meaning they are not actively involved in any maritime border disputes. However, due to their dependency on exports and tourism, their economy relies heavily on the stability of maritime trade routes that run through the CSC.

CHINA

The People's Republic of China, the most populous country in the world and a global economic powerhouse, plays a central role in the South China Sea conflict. Asserting sweeping territorial claims through its "nine-dash line," China has engaged in island-building, constructed military installations in the Spratly Islands, and deployed maritime forces to assert dominance over the region. These actions, aimed at solidifying control over vital shipping lanes and resource-rich areas, have drawn criticism and resistance from neighboring countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam. China's assertive stance reflects its broader strategy of regional influence and is a key point of contention in its strategic competition with the United States. China emphasizes its historical claims and sovereignty over the region, leveraging economic incentives and diplomatic outreach to gain support or deter opposition. It may use initiatives like

the Belt and Road Initiative to strengthen ties with nations in Southeast Asia, offering investments and infrastructure projects in exchange for muted criticism or cooperation. Additionally, China could frame its actions as defensive measures to protect its territorial integrity, while advocating for bilateral negotiations to resolve disputes, a strategy aimed at sidelining multilateral or international interventions that challenge its dominance.

FRANCE

Although not a claimant in the territorial disputes, France has offered concern about maintaining freedom of navigation and upholding international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). France has held a number of overseas territories in the Pacific, such as New Caledonia and French Polynesia, which are geographically close to the South China Sea. As a result, France has expressed strong support for the rule of law in maritime disputes and has conducted naval operations in the region to assert its commitment to freedom of navigation. Additionally, the French Navy's flagship warship, Vendemiaire, sailed alongside Philippine and US counterparts as part of the multilateral maritime exercise (MME) under Balikatan Exercises 2024. France has advocated for peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and international arbitration, while consistently opposing any unilateral actions that could escalate tensions in the region.

INDIA

Although not a claimant in the South China Sea disputes, India holds significant strategic and economic interests in the region. Wars in the region may threaten India's dominance in the Indian Ocean, and trade through the Malacca Strait is a key proponent of India's economic security. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Act East Policy furthered interest in the region given potential for economic integration and energy resources. Under Modi, India has increased their presence in the South China Sea conflict, volunteering resources to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) as pressure rises between Beijing and Manila. In 2019, India participated in joint exercises in the South China Sea alongside the United States, Japan, and the Philippines, cementing themselves as part of a growing coalition of countries becoming increasingly involved in the conflict.

INDONESIA

Indonesia, officially the Republic of Indonesia, the most populous country in Southeast Asia, consisting of numerous islands, with its capital, Jakarta, placed near the coast of Java. Indonesia has made a point of repeatedly asserting that it does not recognize China's claims over the South China Sea. After signing a maritime development deal with China in 2024 which appeared to acknowledge the 'nine-dash line' claim, Indonesia issued a joint statement with China asserting the powers reached common ground, which some deemed as a deviation from

long-standing Indonesian policy. Indonesia faces a delicate balancing act as it seeks Chinese financing for critical infrastructure projects, while defending its sovereignty over its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea. Recent interactions, such as the Chinese Coast Guard's seizure of a detained trawler within Indonesia's territorial waters, and Beijing's claim of "traditional fishing grounds," underscore the escalating challenge to Indonesia's territorial integrity and highlight their diplomatic and strategic dilemma.

JAPAN

Japan, an island country consisting in most parts of four main islands, has increasingly expressed concern over the South China Sea Conflict. In prior years, it has played a key role in establishing regional security frameworks such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (1994), the East Asian Summit (2005), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (2012), often balancing against China's SCS policies. In the past, Japan participated in naval exercises but avoided confrontation actions, refraining from joining Freedom of Navigation Operations and transferring lethal weapons to SCS states. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement in August of 2024 asserting their opposition to "any unilateral attempts to change the status quo," reflecting Japan's primary interest of maintaining peace and restricting use of force in the region. In October of 2024, China accused a Japanese fishing vessel of entering an area in the East China Sea illegally. As tensions increase and interactions like these continue to arise, Japan will face a critical decision: whether to maintain its traditional stance of peace through isolationism or to engage more actively in this conflict to protect economic interests.

LAOS

Laos is a landlocked country in the northeast of mainland Southeast Asia. A longstanding member of ASEAN, and the current chair, some have criticized Laos' "indebtedness to China" as an impediment towards "any efforts to resume negotiations over competing maritime claims in the South China Sea". In 2022, Laos was 14.5 billion U.S. dollars in debt, with Chinese debts accounting for about half of the external public debt stock in 2022 and for about half of external debt repayments scheduled for 2024-2027. In 2023, trade between China and Laos reached US\$7.09 billion, a 26.6% increase from US\$5.68 billion in 2022. Laos' exports rose 11% to US\$3.74 billion, while China's exports grew 48% to US\$3.35 billion. China remains the top investor in Laos, with US\$986 million invested in 17 projects in 2023—three times the US\$339 million in 30 projects from 2022. This trend suggests that China will soon surpass Thailand as Laos' primary trading partner. Given these developments, Laos should be expected to align more closely with China.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a Southeast Asian country situated on both sides of the South China Sea, divided into two regions: Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia on the island of Borneo. As a federal constitutional monarchy, it comprises 13 states and three federal territories. Peninsular Malaysia has maritime borders with Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia, while East Malaysia shares maritime boundaries with Brunei and the Philippines, positioning the country as a key player in the ongoing South China Sea conflict. In September of 2024, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim stated they would not halt oil and gas exploration in the South China Sea despite claims by Beijing that Malaysia was infringing on its territory. Malaysia's claims to ten maritime features in the southern Spratly Islands, seven of which it controls, place it at the center of overlapping disputes with Vietnam, China, and, to a lesser extent, the Philippines. These conflicts, rooted in competing claims to exclusive economic zones and continental shelf boundaries, have significant implications for sovereignty, regional stability, and resource access. Malaysia's control over key features like Swallow Reef and its oil- and gas-rich waters within contested zones are particularly relevant to the economic stakes of the South China Sea conflict. Tensions persist, particularly with China, which claims nearby features and waters under its nine-dash line, heightening the urgency for multilateral solutions through ASEAN and adherence to international law.

MYANMAR

Myanmar, officially the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, is the largest country by landmass in Southeast Asia. Myanmar's recent history has been marked by persistent conflict and military dominance. After the 1962 coup established a military dictatorship, attempts at democratization, including the 8888 Uprising in 1988, failed to dislodge the military's grip on power. Despite a nominal transition to civilian government in 2011 and the election of Aung San Suu Kyi's party in 2015, the military retained significant influence, and ethnic strife, particularly involving the Rohingya, drew international criticism. Following Aung San Suu Kyi's landslide victory in the 2020 election, the military staged another coup, arresting her and cracking down violently on widespread protests. The coup reignited civil war, with the military constantly accused of systemic human rights abuses. China has consistently offered support for the military rule in Myanmar, and offered hostility towards Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG). If China becomes a military presence in Myanmar's civil war, the bonds between Myanmar's sitting regime, led by Min Aung Hlaing, and China, will only strengthen. The delegate representing Myanmar should closely monitor the ongoing civil war and carefully assess how Myanmar's internal unrest, along with its relationship with China, may influence its interactions with other countries in this committee.

NEPAL

Nepal is a landlocked country along the Himalayan mountain ranges of Asia, bordered by India and Tibet. In 2016, one prominent Nepali political party voiced support for China's claim to the seas, blaming Western powers for attempting to maintain the hegemonic exploitation over Asian countries. China's relations with Nepal are shaped by strategic and economic goals, particularly concerning Tibet. Since the Dalai Lama's 1959 escape, China has pressured Nepal to prevent "Free Tibet" movements, wary of Indian and U.S. influence that could destabilize Tibet or challenge Beijing's authority. Nepal's strategic location makes it a focal point for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), competing with U.S.-led projects like the MCC, which emphasize transparency and regional cooperation. While the U.S. supports Nepal's infrastructure and ties with India, China's debt-based approach and lack of progress on BRI projects have raised concerns about its intentions, creating a trust deficit in recent years. Due to Nepal's strategic location and complex relationship with China, the delegate representing Nepal must navigate a careful balance between maintaining the essential diplomacy with China and fostering strategic partnerships with the Western world and other Asian nations.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Papua New Guinea (PNG) occupies the eastern half of New Guinea and nearby islands in Melanesia, north of Australia. Bordered by Indonesia to the west, Australia to the south, and the Solomon Islands to the east, its capital is Port Moresby. PNG's leadership has in the past been supportive of China's attempts to claim rights to the sea, though as the situation has progressed, PNG has taken a more pragmatic approach. In 2023, PNG signed a New Defense Cooperation Agreement and an Agreement Concerning Counter Illicit Transnational Maritime Activity Operations, cementing its relationship with the United States and the western world at large. However, PNG's Prime Minister James Marape has been certain to maintain positive relations with China as well, who it maintains strong trade relationships with. Stuck in between the continuing rivalry between the United States and China, PNG will have to balance these two relationships.

PHILIPPINES

The Philippines, an archipelago nation with strategic proximity to the South China Sea, is one of the most vocal challengers of China's expansive territorial claims. As a claimant to parts of the disputed Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal, the Philippines has sought to defend its maritime rights, often invoking the 2016 arbitral tribunal ruling that invalidated China's "nine-dash line" claims. While the Philippines has relied on its alliance with the United States for security and support, it also balances this relationship with efforts to maintain economic ties with China. This dual approach reflects its complex position as both a frontline state in the conflict and a nation reliant on regional stability for economic growth.

RUSSIA

Russia, the world's largest country by landmass, extends across the whole of northern Asia and the eastern third of Europe. Russia and China have increasingly emerged as informal allies, with both nations sharing negative attitudes towards the United States and other Western-allied powers. Russia is currently Southeast Asia's top defense supplier, Russia has also been a major player in the development of offshore energy resources in the South China Sea. Recently, a Russian submarine was passing through the South China Sea, prompting concern from some Western aligned countries. The delegate representing Russia should consider the significance of the effects of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war on Russian military capability and strategic thought.

SOUTH KOREA

South Korea is a key power in East Asia, bordered by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the north, the East Sea to the east, the East China Sea to the south, and the Yellow Sea to the west. In October of 2024, South Korea's president, Yoon Suk Yeol, pledged to support ASEAN countries and promoted the importance of maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea. However, South Korea is also a key trading partner of China, and maintains a border with North Korea, a country increasingly allied with China. South Korea must strike a balance between maintaining economic stability and continuing positive relations with democratic powers in East Asia and the West. The delegate representing South Korea should also be careful to monitor the internal politics of South Korea as the currently ongoing impeachment progresses.

SINGAPORE

Singapore is a city-state located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, acting as the port in Southeast Asia. In 2023, 74% of Singaporeans were ethnically Chinese, with the rest of the population largely consisting of Indian and Malay. This has resulted in pressures from China for Singapore to offer support during this conflict, though these have been largely ineffective given the attitudes of the new generation of Chinese Singaporeans. Singapore has maintained a diplomatic approach to the conflict.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is an island country located in the Indian ocean, which gained independence from Great Britain in 1948. China and Sri Lanka have enjoyed mixed relations—under the Rajapaksa family, which has maintained a varied political presence since the 2000s, Sri Lanka has been largely friendly towards China. However, under other rules, Sri Lanka has appeared

preferential to India. Given Sri Lanka's proximity to India and the threat posed by China, along with Sri Lanka's economic reliance on both New Delhi and Beijing, Sri Lanka must attempt to preserve these two relationships.

TAIWAN

Taiwan, officially known as the Republic of China (ROC), is an island nation located in East Asia, with a population of roughly 23 million people. It has a complex political status, with the People's Republic of China (PRC), claiming the entirety of Taiwan as a part of its territory. This is mirrored by Taiwan's own assertions of its sole sovereignty over all Chinese lands, which is represented by its identical claims in the SCS to the PRC. Despite its limited formal recognition and lack of membership in the UN at large, this committee has **unilaterally decided** to include representatives from its government in order to accurately represent the perspectives and interests of all states in the region.

In addition to maintaining claims over the Paracel, Spratly, and Pratas Islands, over the past several decades Taiwan also has built up a presence on Taiping Island, which it argues has a significant economic presence, and thus asserting that the island is entitled to a full 200 mile EEZ around the land mass, rather than simply a 12 mile radius of territorial waters, despite a ruling to the contrary. Recently, Taiwan has made a concerted effort to clarify its claims with regard to UNCLOS, and has launched a South China Sea Peace Initiative, which it hopes will help resolve the conflict in a nonviolent and cooperative manner.

THAILAND

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy located in mainland Southeast Asia. Thailand has supported "peaceful solutions through dialogue and diplomacy" as paramount to addressing the conflict. Thailand's desire to maintain positive relations with China and the United States, alongside continuing maritime ties with Manila underline their approach to addressing the conflict. While Thailand has in the past aligned mainly with the United States on matters of foreign policy, recent years have seen strengthened relations between China and Thailand, with China committing US\$ 1.7 billion to Thai projects and increasing exports and imports.

TIMOR LESTE

Timor-Leste, also known as East Timor, is an island country in the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands, occupying the eastern half of Timor. Timor-Leste became independent in 2002, after Portuguese colonization, Indonesian occupation, and United Nations transitional administration, and remains an incredibly poor country. Timor-Leste's position in the East Timor Sea conflict is focused on securing sovereignty over its maritime boundaries and accessing its fair share of resources. The oil-rich Timor Sea, separating Timor-Leste and Australia, lacks a permanent

boundary. Timor-Leste contends that the current arrangement, rooted in the Timor Sea Treaty, violates the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Timorese government has called for international arbitration, arguing that resources within 100 miles of its coastline, but nearly 300 miles from Australia, rightfully belong to Timor-Leste under the equidistance principle in UNCLOS. Despite tensions in the region, President José Ramos-Horta has emphasized that Timor-Leste will not take sides in the rivalry between the U.S. and China. He stated that the nation enjoys “exceptionally good” relations with both powers, as well as with Australia, Indonesia, and India. Addressing concerns about military cooperation with China, Ramos-Horta pointed out that the only countries with a military presence in Timor-Leste are Australia, the U.S., and Portugal. Recent developments include upgraded diplomatic ties between Timor-Leste and China, with agreements to enhance cooperation on infrastructure, agriculture, trade, and poverty reduction. Military and law enforcement collaboration, such as personnel training, joint exercises, and technology sharing, were also highlighted in a joint statement after Ramos-Horta’s meeting with President Xi Jinping. Australia has resisted negotiations over the Timor Sea dispute, prompting Timor-Leste to seek U.S. mediation. Timorese leaders have compared Australia’s actions to China’s in the South China Sea, urging U.S. involvement to encourage adherence to international law. They argue that resolving this dispute would strengthen U.S. moral authority in addressing global maritime conflicts and encourage allies like Australia to lead by example.

UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom (UK) has maintained an impartial position on sovereignty, however emphasizing the importance of adherence to international law, particularly UNCLOS, calling on both the Philippines and China to “respect its terms” in July of 2023. The UK subsequently condemned the “unsafe and escalatory tactics” employed by Chinese vessels, further voicing its support for long-term peace in the region.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has maintained a close relationship with China, as China has become the UAE’s second largest trading partner, exporting largely oil, in excess of \$60 billion in 2017. Given its economic reliance on China, the UAE has taken a cautious stance in the SCS conflict, avoiding direct confrontation with China while also considering its regional interests and relationships with other countries, such as the United States.

UNITED STATES

The United States has staunchly stood in opposition to China’s claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea, an area that, over the past 10 to 15 years, has become a focal point of

U.S.-China strategic competition. The US had committed to maintaining the status quo, asserting that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty is applicable to the Senkaku Islands due to Japan's administration of the islands. China's extensive island-building in the Spratly Islands and assertive maritime actions against neighbors like the Philippines and Vietnam have raised U.S. concerns about Beijing gaining effective control over this strategically and economically vital region. Chinese domination of the SCS, ECS, and Yellow Sea could significantly impact U.S. strategic and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific. Broader U.S. goals include maintaining a favorable regional balance of power, upholding freedom of navigation, fulfilling security commitments to allies like Japan and the Philippines. Specific objectives involve dissuading China from further militarization or island-building in the SCS, reducing pressure on Philippine-occupied areas, ensuring access for regional fishermen, and promoting adherence to international rulings like the 2016 arbitration award favoring the Philippines.

VIETNAM

Vietnam is a major claimant state in the South China Sea. Vietnam is a one-party state, whose party monopolises decision-making on policy, resulting in its South China Sea approach a high degree of consistency. In recent years, Vietnam has increased its building of islands in the SCS, largely in response to Chinese aggression. Vietnam asserts these actions are not an attempt to "stoke tensions" or "threaten or attack other claimants" but instead solely for development and defense purposes. Vietnam has also claimed Vietnamese fishermen have suffered assault from Chinese officials, underscoring the need for resolution, lest the most vulnerable of Vietnam's population continue to be targeted. Vietnam will continue seeking international support. Vietnam's prior support of the use of international law to resolve disputes suggests Vietnam may support a new binding code of conduct in the South China Sea to prevent further harm. The economic implications, particularly regarding fisheries and potential oil and gas reserves could result in domestic pressure.

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