

## Conflict in South China Sea Between China and Philippines

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### Abstract

The South China Sea sovereignty dispute between China and the Philippines has been ongoing for decades, with tensions peaking after China took over Mischief Reef in 1995. The dispute involves overlapping claims over a strategic and resource-rich area, including oil, natural gas, and marine products. The method used in this research is library research, which is a method of collecting data through academic literature, journals, books, and relevant reference sources. The theory in this research is to explore International Conflict Theories & History of South China Sea. Which International Conflict Theories highlight the important role of conflict in driving social change, involves cross-border actors, and requires a comprehensive approach to prevention and resolution at the global level. The History of South China Sea covers important trade routes, countries' sovereignty claims, and centuries of geopolitical tensions due to economic and military interests. The South China Sea dispute involves multiple countries with overlapping territorial claims and resource interests. The conflict is fueled by huge economic potential, such as oil, gas and vital trade routes. Growing tensions, especially between China and the Philippines, require a careful diplomatic solution. To prevent a more dangerous escalation of the conflict, international cooperation is needed from each country involved as well as from outside to maintain and stabilize regional security in the South China Sea Region.

**Keywords:** international conflict, international cooperation, maritime security, territorial claims, natural resources

### Introduction

The Philippines controls nine posts in the Spratly Islands. The Spratly Islands, situated in the heart of South China Sea, are a contested group of land and maritime territories (Beatty, 2022; Reeves, 2019). Second Thomas Shoal, a submerged reef, has become a volatile flashpoint. Chinese ships have been attempting to hinder Philippine's attempts to reload the BRP Sierra Madre, an aging vessel intentionally grounded by the Philippine government in 1999 to reinforce its claim over the atoll, and now home to numerous soldiers. China, which also lays claim to the Shoal, first started disrupting this mission in 2014. However, tensions between the two nations over maritime issues have reached unprecedented levels of volatility in the past seven months (Haralambides, 2024). Chinese ships regularly ram Philippine supply vessels have been targeted using water gun, intermittently causing injuries to the seaman on vessel. Philippine's and Washington with Mutual Defense Treaty connects that growing naval conflict to the larger geopolitical rivalry between China and United States (Chao, 2023; Tow, 2020). As a result, the South China Sea has evolved into a

potential hotspot for strife, where direct confrontation between Washington and Beijing could occur (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 1). Strife between China and Philippine are escalating over territorial disputes in the SCS, especially at Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippines uses the BRP Sierra Madre to assert sovereignty, while China tries to block its supplies. The situation is made even more complex by the Mutual Defense Treaty, increasing the risk of confrontation between China and United States of America (USA) (Lippert et al., 2020).

Within recent years, Beijing have expanded its military strength and take a more aggressive approach in the South China Sea. A significant territorial dispute in 2012 drew attention, when Beijing effectively seizure of Scarborough Shoal, an atoll 220 km off the Philippine mainland and within Philippine's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), following a maritime conflict. In response, then-Philippine President Benigno Aquino filed a case against China's jurisdictional assert under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). On July 12, 2016, the head of the arbitral tribunal decide in favor of Manila, rejecting China's asserts to the waters covered by the "Nine Dash Line", which extends across most of the South China Sea (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 2). As China has become more aggressive in the SCS, jurisdictional conflict with the Philippines have intensified, particularly following China's seizure of Scarborough Shoal in 2012. An international tribunal under UNCLOS decide in favor of the Philippines in 2016, rebuff China's asserts to the sea area within the Nine-Dash Line (Leddy, 2021).

Manila have received defense and diplomatic support from several nations, notably Japan and Australia (Grønning, 2018). Despite its ongoing disputes involving Vietnam regarding sections of the South China Sea, the Philippines have discreetly collaborated with Hanoi and acquired naval defense hardware from India, swell their network of allies (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 3). The Philippines' efforts to strengthen its defense and diplomatic support amid conflict in the SCS. Manila is receiving support from countries like Japan and Australia, as well as establishing closer cooperation with Vietnam, despite territorial disputes (Baldauff, 2024; Grønning, 2018). In addition, the Philippines also secured maritime defense equipment from India, which shows that the country is actively seeking new partners to enhance its defense capacity. This reflects the Philippines' strategy of facing regional challenges and expanding its alliance network (Horigue et al., 2012; Kih, 2020).

Footage showing Chinese ships obstructing, ramming, and using water cannons against Philippine reload missions to Second Thomas Shoal have sparked extensive criticism both domestically and internationally (Massey, 2022; Villavando, 2024). These actions are widely seen as acts of intimidation. Against 2016 decision, China maintains that Manila is infringing on its waters, asserting that China exercise is significant restraint (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 3). International and domestic reactions to the aggressive actions of Chinese vessels obstructing Philippine supply missions to Second Thomas Shoal. China's bullying tactics have drawn widespread condemnation, reflecting Filipino discontent and global attention. Despite an arbitration ruling in favor of the Philippines in 2016, China remains

adamant that the Philippines violated its sovereignty, claiming that it had acted with the utmost restraint. This demonstrates the ongoing tension and complexity in the dynamics of the two countries' relationship.

Chinese vessels, including both government and non-government ships, navigate through regions where Filipino fishermen have historically operated, with areas like Scarborough Shoal also being sites of interaction. Major confrontations or accidents at sea can be highly perilous. If a Filipino or Chinese citizen were to die in such an incident, this could amplify chauvinism in both Philippine and China, increasing threat views from both parties. Should there be casualties on the Philippine side, Manila would expect its ally, the USA, to provide support in accordance with the Mutual Defense Treaty, chiefly following latest discussions on the topic with Washington. However, the nature of its support for the Philippines has not clarified by USA (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 3). Filipino fishermen are at risk due to the presence of Chinese vessels in their traditional territorial waters, including the Scarborough Shoal. Encounters that could lead to accidents at sea have the potential to fuel tensions and nationalist sentiments in both countries. In the event of casualties, the Philippines is expected to rely on support from the US under the Mutual Defense Treaty, although there is no certainty about the form of assistance that will be provided. This situation reflects the potential for greater conflict and uncertainty in international relations in the region.

In principle, both Beijing and Manila are willing to engage in negotiations. But the bilateral consultation mechanism, which is an attempt to build trust. Established in 2017 to address maritime issues between the two nations, the initiative has produced no significant outcomes. Meanwhile, talks have been underway between China and the Peru Sea Federation to create a Code of Conduct intended to ease conflict in the SCS by establishing norms and rules for conflicting parties. Having been in talks with China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) within over 20 years, it has come to a standstill (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 3). Although China and Manila are willing to negotiate, the shared consultation device established in 2017 to address maritime issues has made little progress. Additionally, attempt to create a Code of Conduct to ease conflict in the SCS have stalled, despite over two decades of discussions between ASEAN and China. This underscores the difficulties in reaching agreements and resolving regional tensions.

Though this approach may not be attractive to Beijing, that has disregarded the UNCLOS tribunal's ruling, fostering closer cooperation among the other claimant states still holds significance. Conferences in Manila as well as circumscribed capitals could tackle issues pertaining to the ongoing dispute, along with wider regional matters such as piscary. Amidst discussions on a regional Code of Conduct stalled, congenial nations could take this opportunity to establish common ground on key topic that the Code could address or promote regional confidence-building in the South China Sea (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 5). Emphasizing the significance of collaboration among claimant states in the SCS, regardless of China's dismissal of the UNCLOS tribunal's decision. Meetings in Manila and other regional capitals can address not only existing disputes, but also cross-cutting issues such as fisheries of

mutual interest. With regional Code of Conduct talks stalled, aligned countries can capitalize on this opportunity to build common positions, enhancing trust and cooperation in the region.

At present, countries like China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei Darussalam, and the Philippines are engaged in disputes over claims a portion of its waters. The government of the People's Republic of China asserts its rightful jurisdiction on South China Sea, citing the historical context of ancient China as depicted on maps of its sovereign boundaries (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 19). It states that tensions involving several countries, including China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei, and the Philippines, are claiming territory in the SCS. China, for its part, holds to historical claims that the waters are part of its sovereignty, based on maps of the region that reflect China's ancient history. This reflects the complexity of territorial disputes fueled by historical claims and geopolitical influence in the South China Sea area.

Following their independence out of the United States, the Philippines became interested in the Spratly Islands and submitted a declaration of ownership in 1946 to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Following autonomy, the Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs declared that the New Southern Islands (the Japanese designation for islands in the South China Sea) had been transferred of Tokyo over Manila (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 20). After achieving independence from the USA, Manila expressed interest in the Spratly Islands and submitted a declaration of ownership to the UNGA in 1946. This reflected Manila first step in solidifying asserts pointed dispute jurisdiction in the South China Sea.

A fishing boat proprietor named Tomas Cloma discovered and seized portions of the Spratly Islands, which were thereafter known as the Kalayaan Islands. He claimed these islands were terra nullius (land not owned by any country). Manila also supports its measures by referring to swiftness and the critical need for defense (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 21). Tomas Cloma's role in 1956 in discovering and occupying islands in the Spratly Islands, known as the Kalayaan Islands. By claiming the area as terra nullius, Cloma sought to assert that it was not under the sovereignty of any country. The Philippines also utilized the doctrines of immediacy and urgent necessity to support its claim, highlighting the importance of national defense in the context of territorial disputes. This shows how individual actions and principles of international law can influence each other in debates over sovereignty.

The Philippines asserts a similar sovereignty claim, using its geographic closeness to the Spratly Islands as the foundation for asserting ownership of portions of the archipelago (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 22). The Philippines asserts its sovereignty over certain areas of the Spratly Islands using geographical proximity as the main argument. This claim reflects the Philippines' strategy to strengthen its position in territorial disputes, emphasizing the importance of geography in determining sovereignty. This shows that physical aspects and location can serve a significant role in the dynamics of international relations as well as territorial disputes.

These tensions persisted for years and intensified during the 1990s, particularly between China and the Philippines. In 1995, China took independent control of the contested Mischief Reef, building octagonal huts that sparked significant protests from the other claimant nations. The Philippines subsequently lodged a formal complaint through the ASEAN. In 1996, the Philippines adopted a more aggressive approach by preventing Chinese vessels from accessing Scarborough Shoal and detaining Chinese fishermen multiple times. Scarborough Shoal, also referred to as Huangyan Island by China, is one of the disputed territories claimed by both nations. Located approximately 230 kilometers from the Philippines and 1,200 kilometers from China, the political tension over the area was intense in the 1990s. However, it later eased somewhat due to China's more flexible approach. China agreed to engage in bilateral discussions with ASEAN concerning the South China Sea conflict, within results about these discussions mainly documented on Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) in 2002 (Rahmmadinniyah & Yanuar, 2022, p. 110). The escalation of tensions between Philippines and China in the SCS, especially during the 1990s. Beijing's assert on Mischief Reef and its unilateral actions in building infrastructure in the area triggered strong reactions from the Philippines and other countries in the region. The Philippines began to show assertiveness by stopping Chinese ships approaching Scarborough Shoal and detaining Chinese fishermen, signaling a change in Manila's approach to maritime disputes. Despite rising tensions, there was a moment of decline when China showed a willingness to dialogue with ASEAN, supervene on the Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) in 2002. This shows that while conflict remains, there is also room for diplomacy and negotiation in addressing this complex issue.

### **METHODS**

A research library is a library that holds a vast collection of scientific study, expert judgement articles, original record documents, plus a range of both fiction and non-fiction works across various topics. Academic research libraries are usually linked to universities, although this is not always true. A few utmost renowned scholarly atheneum globally include Harvard University Library, the University of Toronto Library, the Beinecke Library at Yale University, and the Bodleian and Magdalen Libraries at Oxford University (Linda Hall Library, 2023). Research libraries play a vital role in supporting the development of science, as they provide access to high-quality academic materials. While they are generally affiliated with universities, such libraries can also stand alone and remain central.

Library information systems are essential for bibliotheca for the reason that they lay out access to a vast array of knowledge. These records could include searchable scholarly journal and abstract, along with other content types such as memo pad, tapes, dossier, and pictures. Alternative archive loads citation records but do not provide full-text retrieve to the materials (Linda Hall Library, 2023). Library databases form the backbone of research libraries, allowing users to efficiently browse and access a variety of information sources. The presence of various types of content in the database ensures that researchers can find relevant material, both in

full-text and citation reference form, thus facilitating in-depth and comprehensive research.

## **THEORY**

### **1. International Conflict Theory**

The struggle hypothesis that risen amid the 18th and 19th centuries could be viewed as a reaction to the development of two noteworthy insurgencies: democratization and industrialization. As a result, the development of modern conflict sociology, especially in the United States, was a reaction to the existing realities of conflict within American society. Furthermore, conflict sociology theory offers an option to the discontent with the configurational functionalist perspectives of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton, who perceive the community through the framework of consensus and integration. The conflict perspective on society has its roots in foundational thinkers such as Max Weber, Karl Marx, and George Simmel. Class struggle theory contend that social phenomena are intrinsic and that humans may need to drive change. Change, they contend, often requires being forced rather than waiting for societal consensus. As such, conflict plays a crucial role in driving dynamics in people's lives (Christiansen, 2020, p. 38). The development of conflict theory emerged as an alternative to structural functionalism analysis that emphasized consensus. By referring to classical thinkers, it shows that conflict is considered a natural and necessary social phenomenon to encourage change. In this view, conflict is seen as a driver of dynamics in society, which emphasizes the importance of dealing with and utilizing conflict to encourage social progress.

In the context of international conflicts, leaders are assessed based on their handling of disputes and wars. One example is the ongoing debate over Neville Chamberlain's legacy, particularly his policy of easing tensions, which enabled the Third Reich to extend into the Sudetenland. In the simplest terms, he was perceived as overly committed to peace or overly conciliatory to confront Hitler's early aggression. On the other hand, he was portrayed as ineffective and unprepared to confront the reality of German expansionism. This feeling probably contributed to Winston Churchill's ascent to power, earning him the nickname "Bulldog" for his reputation for resilience and strength. Although Churchill encountered difficulties in stopping the expansion of Nazi Germany, the contrasting political legacies of the two leaders highlight the consequences of failed foreign policies for those unable to overcome them (Christiansen, 2020, p. 19). An assessment of leaders in the context of international conflict, using Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill as examples. Chamberlain was criticized for his peace-first policies, which were seen as facilitating German expansion in Europe. He was portrayed as incompetent and unprepared for the Nazi threat. In contrast, Churchill, known for his steadfastness, was elevated to power as a response to Chamberlain's failings. Their differing political legacies highlight the consequences of an ineffective foreign policy and how it can alter a leader's place in history.

International conflicts and crises occur when a countries interests are jeopardized by external factors. These situations can vary from threats of violence to

the actual application of force to address the issue, often necessitating a leader to make decisions that greatly influence the trajectory of the conflict. Although leaders adopt different strategies to streamline decision-making during crises, they all face comparable difficulties in managing information (Christiansen, 2020, p. 79). The dynamics of international crises and conflict highlight how a nation's interests can be threatened by outside influence. In such situations, leaders must make crucial decisions that can shape the outcome of the conflict. Though leaders may use different methods to simplify decision-making, they all face similar challenges in managing information. Their decisions are crucial in handling crises and shaping conflict outcomes.

Conflict has become more active in the 21st century, impacting not only the parties directly engaged, but also those that engaged in conflict resolution. In addition to the state, many other entities are now part of the process. As a result, much of the focus is on preventing and resolving conflict through the involvement of national, regional, and supranational actors (Kazansky, 2020, p. 33). Today, conflicts are increasingly complex, involving actors beyond the state, such as non-governmental organizations and civil society groups. The multi-stakeholder approach to conflict prevention and resolution demonstrates the need for cross-border cooperation. This reflects the importance of collaboration between actors to produce more effective and sustainable solutions.

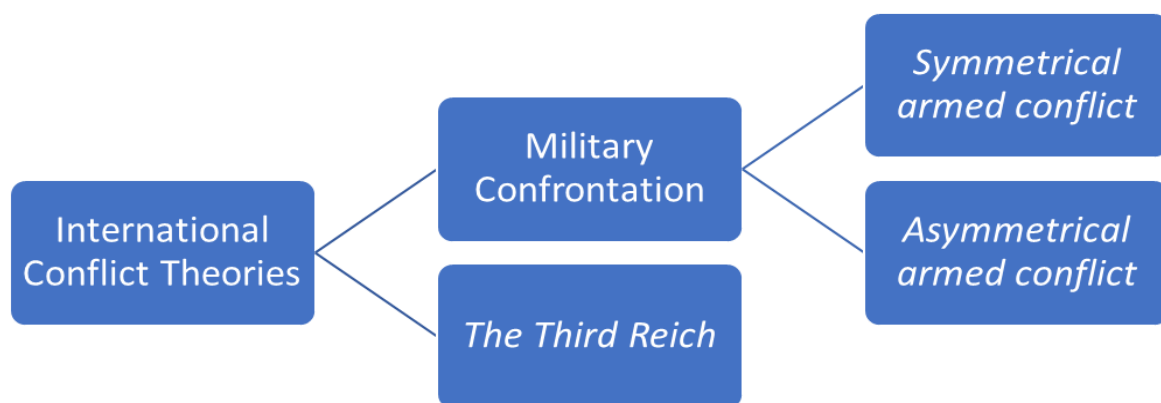
Conflict has been a constant throughout human history, and contemporary professional literature offers various approaches to defining it. It is a social phenomenon with a multifaceted definition. When studying, analyzing, and defining conflict, it is essential to take into account the structure, variety, and intricacy inherent in the concept. Generally, conflict (Latin: *conflictio*, German: *der Konflikt*) can be described as a conflict, different, friction, armed clash, or war. An alternative definition of conflict could be situations where individuals, groups, or nations are deeply divided. The core meaning of 'conflict' encompasses scenarios involving violence, disputes between countries, or instances where thoughts, feelings, opinions, and ideas are in opposition (Kazansky, 2020, p. 34). Conflict is an integral part of human history and reflects the complexity of social interaction. The diverse definitions of conflict show that it is not simply a physical clash, but also involves differences of opinion and disagreements that can arise in a variety of contexts. Understanding these nuances is important, as conflict can be a driver of social change, but it can also lead to harmful violence. Therefore, it is important to analyze conflict from multiple perspectives to identify causes and seek constructive solutions.

Not all conflicts qualify as political crises, but each crisis involves a situation of conflict. A critical situation typically arises from a dispute over a specific issue, during which stability shifts to instability, or certainty changes to uncertainty within a particular development process (Kazansky, 2020, p. 36). It is important to understand that while not all conflicts develop into political crises, every crisis has its roots in a state of conflict. Crises reflect a shift from stability to uncertainty, highlighting how important it is to address the issues that are the source of discord. Understanding these dynamics can help in identifying potential crises early and implementing

preventive measures to maintain stability in the development process.

Asymmetric armed conflict can also be defined as a significant military engagement between the military forces of the involved nation, league, or other organized teams (such as alliances or pacts). The outcome is typically straightforward to measure, such as by liberating or occupying territory, defeating or eliminating a known enemy, or achieving a specific objective. Unlike "symmetrical armed conflict," "asymmetrical armed conflict" refers to a minor, low-intensity military skirmish where the parties engaged vary significantly in power and strategies. These are typically a conflict where stronger external military force, such as a nation, federation, or teams, faces off against a weaker internal military force, which may be a governmental or non-governmental actor, within the territory where the conflict occurs (Kazansky, 2020, p. 44). This provides a clear understanding of the differences between asymmetric and symmetric armed conflicts. Therefore, understanding the characteristics of asymmetric conflicts is crucial to formulating appropriate policies and strategies for conflict management at the global level.

The use of violence to resolve tension and crisis within society represent utmost remarkable and intricate processes in international relations (Kazansky, 2020, p. 45). Conflict resolution in international relations is crucial, as violence not only affects the parties intricate but can also reshape global political, economic, and social dynamics. It requires action from states, international organizations, and civil society to find lasting peaceful solutions. A comprehensive approach, including diplomacy, mediation, and trust-building, is essential to prevent further violence and ensure stability.



**Figure 1.** International Conflict Theories

## 2. History of the South China Sea

The South China Sea area encompasses waters and landforms of Spratly Islands and Paracel islands, along with the Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Reef, stretching out of Taiwan Strait and the Malacca Strait to Singapore (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 19). The SCS is a high-priority region for global trade routes and raw deposit, particularly fossil fuel reserves. Disputes over sovereignty between neighboring countries like China, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam frequently result in heightened tensions in the region.

Owing prior to vibrant history of steersmanship and trade in the South China



Sea, preceded through various periods about territorial control, Nations both within and beyond the region have designated different names for the disputed area. In the majority of European languages, it referred as the South China Sea (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 19). The South China Sea has long been a key trade route for many countries, with European sailors naming it, reflecting the geopolitical tensions over sovereignty claims in this strategic area.

The People's Republic of China asserts sovereignty over the South China Sea as part of its territorial claims, citing the historical context of ancient China's territorial map (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 19). This assertion by Beijing's is a key part of its territorial stance in the region.

Both China and Taiwan, each asserting themselves as the legitimate heirs of Classical Chinese Empire, argue that chains of islets were known and used from the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century BC. Following the Han Dynasty, successive Chinese ruling dynasties including the Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing—used the two islands for various purposes, including economic interests (such as fisheries), military objectives, and scientific endeavors (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 27). China and Taiwan justify their claims to Paracel and Spratly Islands by citing a lengthy history of governance and use dating back to the Han Dynasty, highlighting the economic, military, and scientific contributions made by Chinese dynasties over time.

The conflicts regarding small islands in the South China Sea are often seen as unresolved. Six claimants Philippines, China (PRC), Brunei, Taiwan (ROC), Malaysia, and Vietnam all claims ownership and lay assert into a least of one islet, within some islets being challenge by up till five countries. These conflicting territorial claims are seen as the product of centuries of historical developments, and the majority of experts believe those analyzing, evaluating, and comparing the evidence for each assertion is an unfeasible endeavor (Hayton, 2022, p. 3). Disputes in the South China Sea reflect deep geopolitical complexities, where overlapping territorial claims make resolution seem difficult. Due to its long historical roots and difficult to unravel evidence, the conflict is highly sensitive, potentially exacerbating regional tensions without a clear solution.

The South China Sea features two main groups of compete islands.: the Paracel Islands (Hoang Sa in Vietnamese, Xisha in Chinese) up north and the Spratly Islands (Truong Sa in Vietnamese, Nansha in Chinese) to the south. Scarborough Shoal, located to the east, is contested only by the Philippines, China, and Taiwan, whereas situation of the Pratas Islands (Dongsha in Chinese), in the northeast, is a dispute between China and Taiwan. If these islands were absent, it would be easier to split the waters and assets of the South China Sea, much like what European nations accomplished hip to North Sea. Had in case the islets were bigger, just like the ones within the Mediterranean, their inhabitants could determine sovereignty based on self-determination. For instance, we recognize the Natuna Islands as part of Indonesia because their inhabitants claim ownership. The unfortunate reality of the South China Sea is that the small, contested islands are perfectly sized to spark conflicts. (Hayton, 2022, p. 3). The SCS conflict centers on small, contested islands like the Paracels,

Spratlys, and Scarborough Shoal. Without them, dividing the region's waters and resources would be easier. Unlike larger islands like Indonesia's Natuna, which have clear sovereignty, these small islets continue to spark conflicts.

Another issue is that Beijing, Taipei, Hanoi, and Manila assert ownership of entire island chains rather than individual features. China, for instance, claims all of Nanhai Zhudao, encompassing each zone inside the 'U-shaped line' its South China Sea maps since 1948 (Hayton, 2022, p. 3). The main challenge in this dispute is the overlapping claims of several states over the entire area, rather than based on specific features, which further complicates conflict resolution in the SCS region.

Without a break rejecting extensive assertions about sovereignty based on vague historical assertions and requiring concrete evidence of physical administrative actions, the ICJ offers South China Sea claimants a potential path to resolve their deadlock. Governments and their advisors do not require an exhaustive understanding former times of the South China Sea to determine authority. Instead, they merely require to assess proof of real actions of control and governance by different state entities (Hayton, 2022, p. 4). A practical approach focusing on tangible evidence of occupation and administration can help resolve the deadlock in South China Sea sovereignty assertion, bypassing vague also uncertain historical assertions.

The conflict in the South China Sea is no longer too intricate to settle, since the necessary evidence is accessible with widely accepted judicial norms exist. Given the current geopolitical context, Southeast Asian governments have a strong incentive to start formally acknowledging their occupations of the Spratly Islands (Hayton, 2022, p. 8). Given the available evidence and established legal principles, Southeast Asian nations are now in a position to take decisive action by formally recognizing their occupations, which could lead to a more stable and structured resolution of the SCS disputes.

The jurisdictional conflicts in the South China Sea involve multiple countries within overlapping claims. Over the past few years, China is often seen as the main instigator of these disputes. Although nations have historically the exact international boundaries of the region, China has progressively claimed exclusive economic and martial law over much of the South China Sea (Kenny, 2024). Beijing extensive assertions over in the South China Sea, covering nearly the entire zone, have heightened tensions, complicating attempts to achieve a peaceful settlement as other claimants feel threatened by its economic and military power.

China's extensive assertions in the South China Sea are vague regarding geographic coordinates and legal justification, contradicting the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The main nations impacted are Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, but the dispute also involves global powers like the United States, which aims to oppose China's increasing dominance (Kenny, 2024). The ambiguity surrounding of the Nine-Dash Line, among terms of geographic coordinates and legal justification, complicates the SCS disputes, particularly contradicts the UNCLOS. This issue involves not only the surrounding nations as well as outside forces such as the United States, which plays a crucial part in limiting Beijing's influence and its ambition.

In early 2020s, tensions rose, notably concerning China and the Philippines, resulting in combined naval exercises in the South China Sea amid the Philippines and the United States. During August 2023, China released an updated map, expanding its territorial claims Within the region. A 10th dash line is added to China's map, encompassing Taiwan and almost the whole Spratly Islands are hold as part of its jurisdiction. This revision was met with rejection from several countries (Kenny, 2024). Escalating conflicts in the South China Sea, fueled by Beijing's expanding asserts, highlight the growing nature of the dispute. The inclusion of the 10th China's Dash Line map, extending its assertion to Taiwan and the Spratly Islands, intensified such conflict. The rejection by other countries underscores this ongoing disagreements over these claims, remaining a key issue in the SCS.

### **Discussion**

The hegemony conflict at the core of tensions in the South China Sea between the Philippines and China has been ongoing for decades. However, China's maneuver in order to gain management of Mischief Reef (Eastward from the Spratly Islands) from Manila in 1995 changed the regarded equilibrium of power between the two nations and the area initiating a territorial conflict that has now worsened (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 2). Sovereignty conflict in the SCS between the Philippines and China have worsened, especially after China took over Mischief Reef in 1995. This action triggered an imbalance of power in the region, exacerbating long-standing territorial conflict.

Tensions at the South China Sea continue in the shape of disputes among Philippine maritime patrol and Chinese ships. Filipino fishermen face challenges in accessing their customary fishing areas, and Manila is unable to utilize the valuable oil and gas resources located in its EEZ that are its right according to international law. During March 2021, China's vessels gathered near Whitsun Reef, an uninhabited area in the South China Sea, raising concerns in Manila. Where high-ranking officials publicly criticized China's actions foremost in several periods (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 2). By highlighting constant tensions in the SCS, where Chinese vessels keep on confront the Philippine maritime patrol, blocking Filipino fishermen's access and abuse of raw material located within the EEZ of the Philippines. An incident in March 2021 around Whitsun Reef exacerbated the situation, prompting Manila to publicly criticize China's behavior after a long time.

The South China Sea serves as an essential route by which about a one-third of worldwide shipping passage. The European Union and the Philippines in March 2024, consented to restart talks on a free trade agreement, a month later, France declare discussions on a Visiting Forces Agreement with the Philippines (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 4). This emphasizes the major needs of the SCS as a waterway, where in March 2024, the negotiations on a FTA, demonstrating the Philippines' efforts to strengthen economic ties. In addition, France also announced talks on a VFA with the Philippines, signaling increased military and diplomatic cooperation between the two countries. This reflects the broader geopolitical dynamics in the region.

The South China Sea (SCS) conflict have been recognized as a key aspect of

conflict around the world. This unsettled matter has involved several nations, in addition to their competing geopolitical interests in asserting ownership of islands and territories within it. In addition to fighting over jurisdiction waters in the South China Sea, the nations engaged are also vying for rights on resources on the ocean floor, which may hold rich marine resources, energy, and minerals. The South China Sea conflict involves six stakeholders (referred to as claimant states), specifically China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei who concurrently assert their rights to territorial waters in the South China Sea. Consequently, conflicting claims and tensions are unavoidable (Rahmadinnayah & Yanuar, 2022, p. 110). The SCS conflict is a significant global topic involving multiple nations with competing geopolitical ambitions related to territorial claims. This ongoing dispute not only concerns territorial waters but also encompasses the pursuit of valuable resources beneath the sea, including marine life, energy, and minerals. Six claimant states are engaged in this complex rivalry, leading to inevitable tensions and overlapping claims in the region.

The assertion is intertwined with historical claims rooted in the 1947 Eleven-Dash Line map that encompassed the majority of the area, and a couple of years afterward the Nine-Dash Line map. The one-sided assertion is based on the historical by China in 1947, in which Kuomintang-China Party outline the South China Sea jurisdictional border line forming a U-line consisting of eleven dashes on the map called the Eleven-Dash Line, in 1953, two of the dashes, for political reasons, became eliminated from the map and replaced with nine dashes from the Communist Party called it Nine-Dash Line (Rahmadinnayah & Yanuar, 2022, p. 110). It highlights the transition from the Eleven-Dash Line, created by the Kuomintang-China Party in 1947, to the Nine-Dash Line established by the Communist Party in 1953. Political considerations had an impact on the dashes' modifications, which represented the historical background and intricacies of territorial claims made in the area.

80% of the food that the 500 million people who live in the Philippines get comes from the South China Sea, which also provides 25% of their protein needs. With an annual capture of 8 million metric tons of fish, the South China Sea is ranked 19th among piscage worldwide in terms of seafood production. Meanwhile, the South China Sea's economic potential additionally enhanced when, in the late 1960s, geological studies highlighted the potential for abundant fisheries, petroleum, and natural gas resources in the area. These seas are thought believed to hold 11 billion barrels of undiscovered oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 25). The SCS plays a crucial role in the sustenance of the Philippines, providing a sizeable segment of the populace's food and protein requirements. The economic prospects of the region were further boosted in the late 1960s. Current estimates suggest the presence of substantial natural gas reserves and undiscovered oil, highlighting the area's strategic economic significance.

Secondly, the financial potential and geopolitical significance of the South China Sea, including natural resources, have resulted in opposing jurisdictional assertions between ASEAN member and China. Concurrently, hydrocarbon gas in the

South China Sea is the most plentiful hydrocarbon resource. The majority of the gas in the South China Sea is being investigated by the Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 24). Conflict over territorial claims in the South China Sea arises from potential economic and geopolitical interests, particularly related to natural resources in the region. Hydrocarbon resources, especially natural gas, are the main focus as they are one of the most abundant in the area. Countries such as Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand are involved in hydrocarbon exploration, suggesting that dependence on natural resources could exacerbate interstate tensions in the area.

Moreover, the South China Sea has attracted significant interest from many major nations, as rough estimates suggest the fact that under its waters are 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and almost 7 billion barrels of crude oil. Considering that the SCS is the busiest exchange course globally, any nation that governs the area stands to gain substantial economic advantages, serving as a passage for merchant ships traveling from around the world (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 25) The SCS has emerged as a focal point for major countries due to its vast energy resources and its status as the busiest trade route in the world further enhances its strategic importance, offering significant economic benefits to any nation that asserts control over the region. This combination of natural resources and commercial significance makes the area a critical geopolitical interest.

Since the Aquino administration, Manila has tried to improve the capabilities of its maritime patrol. Considering that numerous vessels of additional claimant nations in the South China Sea are maritime patrol vessels, as well involved in naval conflict. A usual tactic to the establishing rules of engagement could assist in preventing error in the South China Sea (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 5). Explains how Manila's efforts to strengthen its coast guard capabilities since the Aquino administration, especially given the high presence of coast guard vessels from other nations asserts in the SCS. Adopting a clear catch up on rules of engagement can be an important step to prevent error and potential conflicts in the region. This reflects the need for better diplomacy and management of tensions in contested waters.

Member of European countries can also engage in collaborative efforts within Philippines and more ASEAN maritime patrol, to enhance fisheries surveillance and safeguarding sea boundaries and prevent theft at sea or illegal trade (International Crisis Group, 2024, p. 5). The involvement of European nations by working together reflects a strategic approach to ensuring the security of shared maritime resources and maintaining lawful activities in the region.

At present, various nations featuring the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei Darussalam, and Philippines are engaged in conflict efforts to asserts parts or every part of these waters (Matondang, Hardiyansyah, & Nababan, 2022, p. 19). Several nations vying for control of the resource-rich waters in the conflict of SCS. China and Taiwan are often at the forefront of claims over almost the entire region, while countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei additionally

possess asserts to portions of it. This rivalry often leads to diplomatic and military tensions, mainly due to the importance of trade routes, potential energy Maritime assets and reserves within the region.

### Conclusion

The South China Sea conflict reflects long-standing geopolitical tensions involving many assertion nations, including China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei, fighting over a strategic region rich in natural resources. Beijing's assertion, according on the historical Nine-Dash Line map, have exacerbated conflicts in the region, especially after its takeover of Mischief Reef in 1995 created an imbalance of power in the region, with a major focus on conflicts between China and the Philippines. Additionally, the region has great economic potential, with abundant resources of petroleum, hydrocarbon gas and fish stocks, establishing this as the center of attention for major powers and a vital international trade route. Confrontations between Chinese vessels and the Philippine coast guard, such as the one at Whitsun Reef in 2021, further exacerbate the situation, denying the Philippines access to resources within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The conflict also demonstrates the need for closer international cooperation, including with European countries, to strengthen maritime security and prevent illegal acts such as piracy and smuggling. Even so, resolving this dispute demands careful diplomacy, especially in managing tensions arising from overlapping territorial claims and access to resources contested by different parties.

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