

**ASIAN CAUCUS**  
**Topic B: De-escalating Tensions in the South  
China Sea**

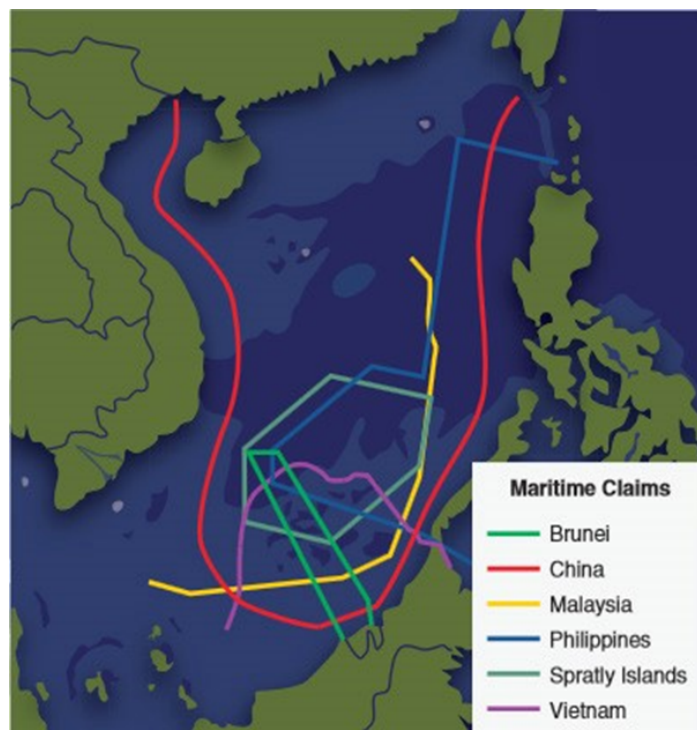
Chair: Justice Howard  
Vice-Chair: Leandro Campos  
SALMUN 2014

# INDEX

Background Information .....	3
Timeline.....	6
Key Terms .....	7
Guiding Questions .....	8
Further Research .....	9

## Background Information

The South China Sea is a body of water stretching from the Malacca Straits to Taiwan, neighboring the coasts of eight sovereign states: the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam. Six countries lay overlapping claims to the East and South China Seas, an area that is rich in



hydrocarbons and natural gas and through which trillions of dollars of global trade flow. As it seeks to expand its maritime presence, China has been met by growing assertiveness from regional claimants like Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines. The increasingly frequent standoffs span from the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, on China's eastern flank, to the long stretch of archipelagos in the South China Sea that comprise hundreds of islets. The U.S. pivot to Asia, involving renewed diplomatic activity and military redeployment, could signal Washington's heightened role in the disputes, which, if not managed wisely, could turn part of Asia's maritime regions from thriving trade channels into arenas of conflict.

China's maritime disputes span centuries. The tug-of-war over sovereignty of the Diaoyu/ Senkakus archipelagos in the East China Sea can be traced to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, while Japan's defeat in



World War II and Cold War geopolitics added complexity to claims over the islands. The fight over overlapping exclusive economic zones in the South China Sea has an equally complex chronology of events steeped in the turmoil of Southeast Asian history. Globalization—including extensive free trade pacts between claimants—and recent developments like the U.S. “pivot” to Asia have further connected the two disputes. As China's economic ascent facilitates growing military capabilities and assertiveness in both seas, other regional players are also experiencing their own rise in nationalism and military capability, and have exhibited greater willingness to stake territorial claims.

Like the Chinese, the Vietnamese claim can be traced back to ancient imperial times, when the Vietnamese emperors sent expeditions to the Paracel Islands. Since it was the French that incorporated the Spratly Island in their colonial empire, and not a neighbor, the Vietnamese see themselves as the rightful inheritors of the French colonial claim. After the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, the Vietnamese claimed both the Paracel and the Spratly islands since both are located in their territorial waters.

Currently, they occupy a large part of the Spratly islands, and have reinforced their military presence in the area to stress their claim.

The Philippine's claim is based on the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which includes an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which extends for 200 nautical miles and, naturally, the territorial waters which extend for 12 nautical miles from the coast's baseline. The waters are extremely valuable to the Philippines, who see in them a presence of oil and gas reserves, rich fishing grounds, and an important trade hub. Recently they have ratified treaties granting the United States renewed access to Philippine territory, for the establishment and fortification of military bases.

Malaysia and Brunei also lay claims to some of the disputed territory, relying mostly on their rights to and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that was agreed upon in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This gives them the 200 miles of their shores which reaches into several of the disputed areas.

## Timeline

*June 21, 1945:* Diaoyu/Senkaku islands come under US control

*September 8, 1951:* Treaty of San Francisco. Japan renounces all claims in the region, and becomes a military protectorate of the United States.

*1969:* UN report finds high probability of oil in East China Sea.

*January 19, 1974:* China claims Paracel Islands

*March 11, 1976:* Philippines discover oil field

*February 1979 – March 1979:* Sino-Vietnamese War

*March 14, 1988:* China sinks three Vietnamese ships over Spratly Archipelago after decade of calm

*January 1996:* Mischief Reef Incident → Three Chinese naval vessels fight a ninety-minute battle with a Philippine navy gunboat near Capones Island in the Mischief Reef

*January 1998:* China-US military agreement

*November 2002:* ASEAN and China code of conduct

*July 2010:* China becomes world's biggest energy consumer

*November 17, 2011:* Obama cites US strategic rebalancing to Asia-Pacific ("This is the future we seek in the Asia-Pacific—security, prosperity and dignity for all ... let there be no doubt: in the Asia-Pacific in the twenty-first century, the United States of America is all in." – President Barack Obama)

*2012:* Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposes "democratic security diamond" comprising Japan, the US, India and Australia

*April 8, 2012:* Scarborough Shoal Incident (Philippines dispatches warships to confront Chinese fishing boats)

*April 25, 2012:* Philippines and US conduct joint military drills

*June 2012:* Vietnam passes maritime law

*September 10, 2012:* Japan buys Diaoyu/Senkaku islands

*September 25, 2012:* China launches first aircraft carrier

*January 2013:* Japan increases defense budget

*April 28, 2014:* US and Philippines sign new defense pact

## Key Terms

**ASEAN** - a political and economic organisation of ten countries located in Southeast Asia which aims include accelerating economic growth, social progress, sociocultural evolution among its members, protection of regional peace and stability, and opportunities for member countries to discuss differences peacefully. Does not include China. Combined GDP is USD 2.6 trillion making it a force to be reckoned with.

**Scarborough Shoal** - a shoal located between the Macclesfield Bank and Luzon island in the Philippines in the South China Sea. It is a disputed territory claimed by the People's Republic of China, Republic of China (Taiwan), and the Philippines.

**Spratly Archipelago/Islands** - a disputed group of more than 750 reefs, islets, atolls, cays and islands in the South China Sea. No native islanders inhabit the islands which offer rich fishing grounds and may contain significant oil and natural gas reserves. Currently occupied by a number of military forces including the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia. Additionally, Brunei has claimed (but does not occupy) an exclusive economic zone in the southeastern part of the Spratlys.

**Paracel Islands** - a group of islands, reefs, banks and other maritime features in the South China Sea. It is controlled (and occupied) by the People's Republic of China, and also claimed by Taiwan (Republic of China) and Vietnam.

**United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** - international agreement that defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources.

**Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** - a sea zone prescribed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea over which state has special rights over the exploration and use of marine resources, including energy production from water and wind. It stretches from the baseline out to 200 nautical miles from its coast.

## Guiding Questions

- What economic variables need to be sorted out to scale down the conflict?
- What possible military solutions might insure peace? (i.e. better communication, committees, etc.)
- How does your resolution conflict with China's policy?
- How do you maneuver around a super power?
- Do you have American support?
- How might the US react to your policy?
- How far is your country willing to go?
- How does one determine which territorial claims are valid and legitimate? Should there be a new treaty to clearly establish such?



## Further Research

### **Great in-depth analysis**

<http://www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/chinas-maritime-disputes/p31345#!>

<http://www.cfr.org/world/armed-clash-south-china-sea/p27883>

### **News reports**

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349>

<http://www.cfr.org/>