JUNIOR ACADEMY MODEL UN XII

ASEAN

TOPIC GUIDE

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Kayla Pietrocola

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letters from Chairs:
- Eva Kanneth 1
- Kayla Pietrocola 2

Introduction 3
Topic History 4
Current Situation 5
Country Policies 6
Potential Solutions 8
Questions to Consider 9
Bibliography 9

JUNIOR ACADEMY MODEL UNITED NATIONS

– Twelveth Annual Conference –

JAMUN XII SECRETARIAT

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to this year's Junior Academy Model United Nations Conference! I am pleased to serve as your chair for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations committee! My name is Eva Kanneth, and I am a freshman in the Academy of Business and Finance at BCA. Outside of MUN, I have competed at the DECA districts competition and am currently a part of the Engineering Smiles club. Outside of school, I love playing volleyball and gardening in my backyard.

I have taken the MUN elective offered at BCA, where I have developed a strong foundation in debate, diplomacy, and global issues. Since then, I have continued to seek out more opportunities in MUN and debate. Though I have not attended many conferences, I have always taken an interest in public speaking as I enjoy discussing my ideas with others. I am eager to continue building my skills in MUN and to contribute positively to this committee experience. I encourage you to be confident in your ideas, listen actively to others, and work together to find thoughtful solutions. MUN is as much about collaboration as it is about debate, and every voice in this committee matters.

I hope this committee helps you grow as a speaker, negotiator, and thinker. This is your chance to share ideas, learn from others, and engage in meaningful debate. Don't be afraid to take initiative, collaborate with your peers, and approach topics with an open mind. Let's make this a respectful, engaging, and memorable experience for everyone!

Eva Kanneth
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Welcome Delegates!

My name is Kayla Pietrocola, and I'll be your chair for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations committee at JAMUN XII! To tell you a little bit about myself, I am a freshman in the Business and Finance Academy at Bergen County Academies, who is currently a part of the MUN club and am doing JV debate. Also, I have been a staffer at a MUN conference and have attended the WAMUNC. I became interested in MUN because I enjoy public speaking and debating with my peers. Two fun facts about me are that I like to hike and that my favorite food is sushi!

As your chair, my goal is to create a welcoming and supportive environment that encourages collaboration amongst peers. I understand that you may feel pressured to do well and that speaking in front of others may be intimidating at first, but I assure you that you will become progressively more comfortable with sharing your ideas as you get more practice. Remember, this is a space for both learning and growth!

In this committee, we will be discussing important and relevant issues that require collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. I encourage all of you to be ready to discuss your ideas, but at the same time, stay open-minded to different perspectives. Whether you're new to MUN or have prior experience, what matters most is your willingness to participate and engage in discussion. I'm really looking forward to meeting you all and seeing your solutions in action!

Kayla Pietrocola
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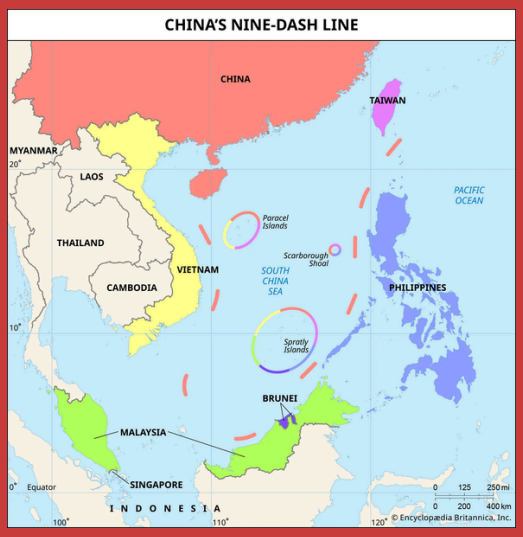
INTRODUCTION



Map of territorial disputes present in the South China Sea[1]

TOPIC: Militarization of the South China Sea: Navigating overlapping territorial claims

The South China Sea is a strategically important waterway that facilitates the flow of military movement and trade. Because of its geopolitical and economic value, many countries have claimed islands, reefs, and exclusive economic zones(EEZs) within the region. Over the past few decades, tensions involving the mass sovereignty assertions have increased around the Spratly Islands and the Second Thomas Shoal. Additionally, China has become more assertive in its territorial claims, as it consistently attempts to maintain its claimed historical rights over the region. China has done this by expanding its current islands, creating new islands, militarizing islands, and preventing intelligence-gathering operations and navigation operations, such as FONOPs, by the U.S., from taking place[2]. This has raised concerns about being able to freely navigate, and for both regional and global nations, including China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, the United States, and Japan[3].

Delegates are called to negotiate solutions that promote peace, uphold international law, and ensure the security of maritime routes, while balancing the interests of claimant and non-claimant states. Diplomatic, legal, and security dimensions must be considered when resolving the boiling disputes over territories in the South China Sea.

Topic History

The South China Sea has a long and complex history that is influenced by legacies, treaties, and evolving motives of regional powers. After the Spanish-American War, through the 1898 Treaty of Paris, Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States [8]. Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands remained under Spanish sovereignty until negotiations in 1900, when these territories were transferred to the United States through the Treaty of Washington. The Paracel Islands that were nearby were claimed by France in 1932 [8]. By 1939, when the Paracel and Spratly Islands fell under Japan's control, they proved strategically vital to Japanese military operations during World War II. Even as late as 1933, senior officials of the ROC were still unaware of the Spratly Islands' existence and did not have a desire to assert control over these territories [9].

[8]

After Japan's defeat in World War II, the Republic of China asserted its claim over the South China Sea and created the "eleven-dash line" in 1947 that was extended to near the coasts of several Southeast Asian nations [8].

The demarcation line included both the Spratlys and Paracels, which justified taking control over the islands. However, in 1949, the Chinese Civil War led to the establishment of the People's Republic of China, which adopted a "nine-dash line" to exclude Vietnam's territory. This was done in hopes of improving relations with North Vietnam [9]. China has since been able to claim the largest territorial position within the "nine-dash line," which extends hundreds of miles south and east from China's most southern province of Hainan [10]. Although this line first appeared on an official map published by the ROC in 1948, it does not have either a legal or a historical basis [9]. Unfortunately, this line has become the basis for ongoing confrontations and escalating geopolitical tension between the People's Republic of China and the Southeast Asian nations [9]. Critics say China has not been specific about what its claim includes and that the nine-dash line that appears on Chinese maps encompasses almost the entirety of the South China Sea without including coordinates [10].

[10]

Topic History (continued)

The ROC (Republic of China) and the PRC (People's Republic of China) maintain claims over the region along with other Southeast Asian nations. The discovery of petroleum resources in the 1970s increased interest in the South China Sea, including South Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, and other occupied islands.

Unfortunately, the emerging dynamics resulted in clashes between nations to acquire more control of the South China Sea. In 1974, the PRC seized Yagong Island and reefs in the Paracels from South Vietnam because of concern that they might fall under North Vietnamese influence. In 1988, PRC forces clashed with Vietnam in the Battle of Johnson South Reef. More conflicts arose as the establishment of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) introduced the concept of exclusive economic zones. In the 1980s, these economic zones made control over the South China Sea even more appealing. Since the 1990s, control over these territories has stabilized more, with China controlling all islands in the Paracels. In the Spratlys, Vietnam occupies 29 islands, the Philippines occupies eight, Malaysia occupies five, China occupies five, and Taiwan occupies one [8].

The current leadership of the PRC believes that as the Chinese economy grows, the country's military power will increase relative to their neighbours. Beijing assumes that resistance to claims in the South China Sea will soon wither. This stance is supported by a strong sense of Chinese nationalism to assert China's position as a major global power [9].

Vietnam disputes China's historical account of claiming sovereignty over the Paracels and Spratlys islands before the 1940s because of documents supporting that Vietnam actively ruled over both since the 17th Century [10]. Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and more nations also lay claim to their territories in the South China Sea. Over the years, these territorial disputes have led to tragic conflicts arising.

Current Situation

Even today, the South China Sea disputes remain unresolved as constant militarization and repeated maritime confrontations pose a threat to regional stability. The Philippines takes up the 2026 ASEAN chairmanship, as President Ferdinand "Bonbon" Marcos Jr(BBM) aims to continue attempting to make an agreement on a South China Sea Code of Conduct(COC). While his optimism remains high, it is unlikely that a solution will be reached soon due to several structural and political obstacles[4].

Firstly, the Philippines insists that the agreement should be legally binding and overseen through ASEAN-led mechanisms, a position that China firmly opposes[4][11]. This would mean restricting China's aggression in claiming territories in the South China Sea(EEZs) and recognizing international laws or norms[11]. China prefers a COC that "avoids external scrutiny"[11] and has more flexibility, which is why it has resisted the agreement.

Secondly, Beijing has suggested that countries be banned from holding joint military exercises with nations outside of Southeast Asia to limit the influence of outside powers in the South China Sea.

Current Situation (continued)

This is almost impossible given that many Southeast Asian nations rely on alliances with external countries for security[4]. Additionally, since there are 11 billion barrels of untapped oil[8] and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas[8], exploration of the South China Sea is attractive to claimant countries. Because of this, China has proposed limiting the ability of parties to explore the region for gas and oil to certain zones, which is also impractical as it threatens the economic, political, and energy interests of claimant states. Finally, claimant states, like the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei, hold overlapping claims over the South China Sea and have contrasting political wills and threat perceptions, making it difficult for ASEAN to create a common position on the South China Sea[4].

Another issue is the large number of China's maritime militia present, specifically it maintained an average of 241 vessels(both professional militia and civilian members) throughout 2025, demonstrating active militarization of the area. According to satellite imagery, these vessels were concentrated around Mischief Reef, Whitsun Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, and Subi Reef[5][6]. where they regularly operated near other countries' patrols. Their increased presence makes the risk of an accidental confrontation with the naval and coastguard forces of other climate states more likely, raising tensions and complicating efforts at de-escalation[5]. To add on, China has been upgrading radar, signals intelligence, and electronic warfare installations on its major Spratly islands(specifically Mischief, Fiery Cross, and Subi reefs). These facilities support intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance(ISR) systems to strengthen the military capabilities of China[6].

On January 30, 2026, ASEAN and China held the 25th Senior Officials' Meeting on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea(Som-DOC). During the meeting, officials reviewed how the DOC is being carried out, exchanged views on the current situation in the South China Sea, and decided to speed up negotiations on the COC so that agreements could be reached by the end of 2026. This meeting was followed by the 51st ASEAN-China Joint Working Group meeting, which continued discussions on the COC and visited the work plan for implementing the DOC in 2026[7].

Satellite imagery of Mischief Reef[5]

Country Policies

Indonesia

Indonesia is not considered a formal claimant in the South China Sea dispute, but Beijing's nine-dash line does overlap parts of the North Natuna Sea. This prompts Jakarta, Indonesia's capital, to assert its maritime sovereignty. Indonesia has increased patrols around the Natuna

Islands and pursued maritime boundary agreements with nations such as Vietnam to reinforce EEZs under UNCLOS, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea [12]. Jakarta generally avoids confrontation to emphasize a peaceful resolution and an ASEAN-led diplomacy.

Malaysia

Malaysia is a claimant state that overlaps claims in the Spratly Islands. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital, balances asserting its maritime rights along with maintaining strong ties to China [6]. This reflects Malaysia's significant economic dependence on China and underscores its policy of avoiding tension with China. Malaysia's policy emphasises regional stability and upholding UNCLOS.

Philippines

The Philippines has one of the most assertive stances among ASEAN members toward Chinese militarization in the South China Sea. The Philippines rejects Beijing's expansive nine-dash-line claims and relies on the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling, which invalidates China's claims (which China rejects). The Philippines has strengthened its coast guard and military presence in its claimed West Philippine Sea [13]. The Philippines actively pursues diplomatic and legal avenues that push for a legally binding ASEAN. The Philippines has also deepened defense cooperation with external partners, such as the United States, to prevent escalation.

Singapore

Singapore is not a claimant state in the South China Sea, but does strongly support freedom of navigation and peaceful dispute resolution. Singapore advocates within ASEAN for all parties to abide by UNCLOS as a framework for managing tensions. Singapore stresses concluding a substantive ASEAN-China Code of Conduct to reduce the risks of militarized incidents [14]. Singapore is acting as a neutral mediator and generally refrains from taking sides.

Thailand

Thailand has no territorial claims in the South China Sea, so Thailand promotes the peaceful settlement of disputes and acts as a neutral mediator. Thailand prioritizes diplomatic engagement and stability over militarization issues that may create tensions [14]. Thailand, unlike Singapore, is less vocal and avoids criticizing China's militarization.

Brunei

Brunei has a claim in the southern Spratly area and has generally taken a low-profile approach. Brunei emphasizes adhering to international law and avoiding military disputes. Brunei's policy reflects a small-state strategy of maintaining balanced relations with China and other powers [5]. Continuing, Brunei participates in ASEAN efforts to negotiate a Code of Conduct without foregrounding militarized escalation.

Vietnam

Vietnam is one of the most proactive ASEAN claimants that opposes China's militarization. Vietnam combines sustained maritime and military patrols

Country Policies (continued)

along with diplomatic protests against Chinese land reclamation, especially in the Paracel and Spratly Islands [15]. Vietnam also emphasises adherence to UNCLOS, but also expands defense cooperation with partners outside of ASEAN. Vietnam's policy underscores sovereignty defense while seeking international support.

Laos

Laos has no maritime territory and is not directly affected by South China Sea claims. Laos generally aligns with ASEAN's diplomatic approach instead of advocating for militarization [14]. Lao policy reflects a preference for non-interference and maintaining good relations with all parties.

Myanmar

Similar to Laos, Myanmar is not a direct claimant in the South China Sea. Myanmar's foreign policy tends to stress non-interference and regional stability, as well. The nation also generally avoids strong positions on maritime militarization [14].

Cambodia

Cambodia does not have territorial claims in the South China Sea, but still prioritizes its strong strategic and economic ties with China over challenging Beijing's militarization practices (16). Cambodia has actively blocked ASEAN consensus statements critical of China on multiple occasions.

Potential Solutions

Ensuring transparency and encouraging collaboration can become instrumental in peacefully resolving a complicated dispute like that of the South China Sea. To achieve this, delegates could consider establishing a formal "Incidents at Sea" agreement that sets clear communication protocols for when naval or coast guard vessels come within a set distance of each other. This type of framework could help reduce misunderstandings and lower the risk of unintended escalation. Another possible solution is the creation of a joint resource management zone that separates resource rights from sovereignty claims. This could allow claimant states to benefit economically without having to immediately resolve tensions. Delegates could also propose a moratorium on new construction or militarization in contested zones during active negotiations. These measures can help create a more stable environment and demonstrate commitment to de-escalation. Finally, delegates could form a regional coast guard cooperation framework focused purely on humanitarian missions like search and rescue, kept separate from military disputes. Focusing on shared challenges can foster collaboration while keeping these efforts separate from ongoing territorial disputes.

It is important to note that these suggestions are meant as general starting points, and delegates should not feel limited by them. They are encouraged to develop their own independent ideas, using diplomacy, collaboration, and creativity to address both regional

Potential Solutions (continued)

security challenges and economic interests. By doing so, delegates can propose solutions that balance the concerns of all involved and contribute to a more stable and cooperative South China Sea.

Questions to Consider

- How can claimant states reduce the risk of accidental confrontations in the South China Sea while still maintaining their territorial claims?
- What measures can be implemented to ensure that a potential Code of Conduct(COC) is effectively negotiated and enforced among all parties?
- How can nations balance their economic interests in oil, gas, and fisheries with the need to prevent regional tensions and conflict?
- What strategies can ASEAN use to encourage cooperation and build trust among claimant states?
- How should external powers or allies engage in the South China Sea to support security without escalating tensions?
- In what ways can transparency, communication, and information-sharing reduce the potential for maritime incidents in contested waters?
- How can claimant states address overlapping claims while still respecting sovereignty and international law to promote long-term stability and cooperation?

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