JUNIOR ACADEMY MODEL UN XI

UNSC

TOPIC GUIDE

Aasiba Mohamed

Grace Zhou

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Esteemed Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for JAMUN XI. My name is Aasiba Mohamed, and I am beyond excited to be one of your chairs. I am currently a sophomore in Bergen County Academies, in the Academy for Medical Science and Technology, or AMST. A little about me: I love all things creative– painting, baking, crochet, you name it! In my spare time, I like to play volleyball with my friends, travel, sing, and read. I volunteer at a hospital, and an ambulance, which is something that I find very rewarding!

My journey with Model UN began just last year, surprisingly, at summer camp, where a fellow counselor persuaded me to join. Since then, I've been to numerous conferences, including those hosted by colleges, and even helped organize AMUN! MUN has been an enriching experience, one that nothing else has truly replicated. The thrill of debate, the challenge of diplomacy, and the excitement of collaboration all kept me unable to turn away. However, above all, MUN is a community. It brings together individuals from all over the world, each with unique perspectives and ideas. Over the years, I've met people from every corner of the world, just from MUN. The friendships formed, the strategy sessions, and the moments of both success and improvement take MUN from a simple club to an invaluable experience.

As we step into JAMUN XI, I encourage you all to embrace this opportunity. MUN has been a key asset in building my own self-confidence and public speaking skills, in learning how to make people listen to what I have to say. But, most importantly, it has shown me the value of listening, of knowing when to step back and truly understand different perspectives. Some of my closest friendships have formed through this club, and I hope this experience proves just as meaningful for you. Delegates, I know some of you may feel nervous about this committee. For that, I would like to remind you that I, too, was in your spot just a few months ago! I know what it's like to freeze up, to second-guess your points, and to worry about saying the wrong things. But, after many terrible speeches, I can only tell you this: you've got this! Ultimately, MUN is a place for growth, to learn something new. So whether this is your first time speaking in front of a crowd, or if it's your 50th conference, I hope you learn something new, something that goes beyond any award. The key is to take that first step, speak up, and embrace the experience. You'll be amazed at how much you grow by the end of the conference.

If you have any questions at all, MUN related or otherwise, please feel free to reach out at aasmoh27@bergen.org!

Best of luck to all delegates, and I'm looking forward to making this an incredible conference.

Regards,
Aasiba Mohamed
UNSC Co-Chair
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Dear Delegates,

Hello and welcome to the United Nations Security Council Committee (UNSC)! My name is Grace Zhou, and I am so excited to have you all as part of this committee for this year's conference. I am a sophomore in the Academy of Business and Finance (ABF) and BCA. I was never very outspoken growing up, however, during my freshman year of high school when I got to experience Model UN through staffing and moderating for various conferences and finally attending on as a delegate, I learned many indispensable skills that I am grateful to have as I pursue my newfound passion for public speaking. Through my first experiences with MUN, I was able to come out of my comfort zone of not only speaking in front of a group of people, but also extemporaneously, all while being able to socialize with and meet delegates from all around. I believe that a rewarding Model UN experience stems from not only individual development but also flourishing within a helpful community of delegates that are not simply there to win but also to help uplift other delegates and grow collectively as a unified body, representing the United Nations. I hope that each of you will have an amazing time at this year's JAMUN XI!

Outside of Model UN, I play competitive badminton as well as edit videos in my free time. I also have an incessant Miffy addiction. Furthermore, I am the Co-Founder of a student-led organization that blends areas of business and art, both topics I find very interesting as well as important to my personal development.

I hope that you all will be able to view this topic not only through a solely diplomatic stance but also by incorporating your passions and personalities through creative and engaging ideas to the committee. I encourage all delegates not to be intimidated or nervous by this experience, but rather excited to be on a committee where each and every one of you will be able to learn from one another and make friends that potentially will last in the long run. Overall, do not view this committee as something daunting or high-stakes; instead, as a chance to possibly discover a newfound passion for public speaking or international relations!

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out at grazho27@bergen.org.

I am excited to meet you all, and I wish you all the best of luck!

Best regards,
Grace Zhou
UNSC Co-Chair
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Committee Background:

Before we get into the specifics of the topic, we want to welcome all delegates to the UNSC. [1] The UNSC, or United Nations Security Council, is one of the six major organs established within the United Nations Charter. This committee was created after World War II, and is currently tasked with all issues regarding international peace/security, meaning it handles global crises, threats of war, sanctions, peacekeeping operations, and more. The Council consists of 15 members: 5 permanent members and 10 non-permanent members, all of whom send up representatives to discuss international issues. The 5 permanent members (commonly known as the P5) are the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China. These nations hold permanent seats within the UNSC, due to their role in winning World War II and shaping the post-war world order. The other, non-permanent members, are elected on a rotating basis to represent different regions of the world.

Historically, the UNSC has dealt with issues ranging from localized conflicts in times of civil wars to addressing nuclear non-proliferation and international terrorism. Its decisions and actions have played a central role in shaping the modern geopolitical landscape, making it one of the most powerful and influential bodies in the international system. The conflict addressed in today's committee mirrors previous cases the Council has engaged in–where disputes over territorial claims, maritime rights, and regional security have threatened to escalate into broader confrontations. As delegates, you are now challenged to find diplomatic and sustainable solutions to one such rising conflict, stepping into the roles of the 15 representatives tasked with this responsibility daily.

TOPIC:
The China-Philippines Dispute in the South China Sea

Topic Introduction

The South China Sea (or SCS), an arm of the western Pacific Ocean that borders the Southeast Asian mainland, has served as a key player in terms of trade and natural resources for major nations surrounding the Pacific coast, leading to both beneficial and detrimental results in a global sphere. With over 64% of the world's trade passing through this point, the South China Sea contributes around $3.37 trillion per year in global trade, serving a crucial role in worldwide economic development. Control of this sea means control of resources, territory, and overall influence over the Indo-Pacific region. Thus, any conflict between nations will serve as a detriment to not only regional but also global trade, hindering country relations as well as worldwide economics as a whole. While many nations have competing claims toward territory in this region, tensions between China and the Philippines have emerged as one of the most immediate and urgent challenges for the region and the world.

Topic History

The South China Sea has long served as a lifeline in terms of resources for coastal communities across Southeast Asia. It is rich in diverse marine life, oil and gas reserves, and crucial maritime routes, serving as one of the world's most contested areas. Spanning 2.5 million square kilometers, from the Pacific and Indian Ocean through the Strait of Malacca, it hosts nearly one-third of global shipping, bringing in over $3 trillion annually in global trade. Its fisheries not only provide critical food reserves for nations but also house species that are vital to global biodiversity, demonstrating the region's importance in economic and sustainable development. [2]

Topic History (Cont.)

Historically, the South China Sea was shared through informal agreements among surrounding nations primarily for fishing and navigation. However, in 1947, China introduced the controversial "Nine-Dash Line" – an unclear boundary covering most of the sea. Many nations reacted initially with limited resistance to this boundary, allowing it to occur. Tensions rose in the late 20th century, though, with increased international backlash as resource competition intensified drastically. Between 1970 and 1990, countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei began introducing their own claims to islands and reefs within the region, specifically the Paracel and Spratly Islands, dense in natural resources. The Spratly Islands alone host around 2.1 billion barrels of oil, increasing competition for these resources. [3]

Due to these assertions, tensions continued to rise in 2012, when China seized control of the Scarborough Shoal, an area used primarily by Filipino fishing communities. As a result, the Philippines responded by filing a case under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 2013, as an attempt to gain legal clarification of the seizure. Their major complaint was that China's historical claims through the "Nine-Dash Line" lacked a legal foundation. [4]

Initially, China justified its claims through century-old maps and records of fishing/navigation by Chinese sailors. Furthermore, other methods of evidence have been considered through Beijing's claims that, because it has historically used the South China Sea longer than the other nations, it has "historic rights" to the majority of the region. This connects to the notion China proposed on how it was a "historical archipelagic state," giving itself the right to extend its maritime control dispute, not even meeting the UNCLOS's definition of an archipelago (where a state is composed primarily of islands). [5]

Resulting actions in 2016 consisted of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) (an intergovernmental body in The Hague that resolves disputes under UNCLOS) ruling in favor of the Philippines while also condemning China's interference with Filipino fishing activities as well as its construction of artificial islands. Specifically, China's attempts to gain legal control over the South China Sea using claims on islands created by themselves. This escalated tensions further as following the outcome of the ruling, China rejected it and increased its military prescence in the region.

Topic History (Cont.)

The construction of these artificial islands, built by covering coral reefs with sand and reinforcing them with concrete, has posed immense environmental concerns in the region while strengthening China's control over its claims. For example, China now hosts many military assets such as airstrips, radars, missile systems, and many additional resources on these islands, backing their actions and the legitimacy of the islands through how they qualify as territory capable of generating territorial seas and even 200-nautical-mile EEZs. However, under UNCLOS, natural islands are able to generate these zones, but this rule does not extend to artificial islands. Despite these regulations, China has continued its activities, pushing the limits of EEZ law despite increasing criticism from other nations. [6]

Additionally, aside from the 2016 ruling, China has also raised concerns regarding ASEAN by hindering progress on the Code of Conduct (CoC) due to creating divisions between nations involved internally through its influence. Moreover, China has also blocked attempts to bring this issue fully into the UN Security Council despite the fact that many members have raised concerns about the situation in the past toward the General Assembly and the Secretary-General's office.

In terms of the international rulings and criticisms China has faced, it has continued to disregard the entire situation as "null and void" by citing its own laws and interpretations. This behavior has escalated to the point where nations such as the U.S., Japan, and certain EU members have gotten involved publicly. These nations have publicly rejected China's views on the situation, arguing that it not only undermines UNCLOS but also sets a very dangerous foundation for global sea disputes in the future.

For these reasons, a long-term resolution seems uncertain. The South China Sea dispute underscores the broader struggle for power in the Indo-Pacific, with nations vying for strategic control over one of the world's most critical maritime arteries. As military presence and economic interests continue to collide, the potential for escalation remains a pressing global concern, one that could reshape international trade, security policies, and regional stability for years to come.

Current Situation

Currently, global tensions are at an all-time high. In recent years, China has begun building artificial islands within the South China Sea, in hopes of increasing its power within the area. These islands were created by piling sand onto reefs, and then concreting them to create permanent structures. China has already fully militarized three out of the multiple islands it has built, housing Coast Guard Fleets there. Between 2023-2024, these Chinese fleets increased South China Sea patrols, with a notable spike in the middle of 2023. Chinese patrols in the South China Sea totaled 1,938 ship patrols in 2024, an increase of over 300 patrols as compared to 2023. [7] This increase in military involvement has also resulted in the Philippines stepping up naval patrols and air surveillance within the South China Sea, particularly in disputed areas such as the Spratly Islands. Since early 2023, military presence in the South China Sea has caused confrontations between these two nations. For example, recently, the Philippines accused the Chinese Coast Guard vessels of ramming and puncturing boats with knives, looting firearms, and destroying communication within the South Thomas Shoal. These issues cause major tensions within this area, and greatly impact world relations.

Beyond this, the artificial creation of islands within the South China Sea region has raised concerns regarding the environment. The inconsiderate creation of artificial islands is historically known to have long-term negative impacts to the surrounding area. Dredging works, often done before the building of islands, can cause considerable problems for marine ecosystems and habitats. For instance, increased turbidity in the water after island creation can block sunlight from reaching the underwater plants, which can disrupt food chains. Additionally, these islands can alter natural currents, causing shoreline erosion and increasing flooding in surrounding areas. [8] With China's artificial islands totaling around 3,000 acres, and plans to build more, experts worry about long-term environmental impacts, furthering the disapproval of China's actions.

Current Situation (Cont.)

As tensions continue to escalate, countries surrounding the South China Sea region are beginning to look for allies elsewhere. Countries including Pakistan, Cambodia, and various African nations have recently openly expressed their support for China, and its views within this dispute. The Philippines, on the other hand, is beginning to build strong alliances with the U.S., Japan, Australia, and other countries in Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. [9] For these international countries, the South China Sea dispute is more than just a simple disagreement–it's about ensuring that power does not decide borders, and that China is subject to the same rules as all other countries. Finally, organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (or, ASEAN) are starting to accelerate discussions regarding a Code of Conduct about the South China Sea. If passed, this binding agreement will require countries to remove any military forces within the area, possibly reducing tensions. Further, countries will be expected to work together on the development of South China Sea islands, creating a system where nations can share resources gained from this area. [10]

In conclusion, the situation in the South China Sea is becoming more serious every year. China's creation and militarization of artificial islands has not only led to rising military tension, but also caused major environmental damage. These actions are creating conflict with nearby countries, who are building new alliances to protect their interests. If countries don't find a way to work together, the issues in the South China Sea will inevitably affect the rest of the world too. Delegates thereby, should focus on understanding conflicting beliefs on this dispute, and look into solutions that can reduce current tensions.

Country/Delegate Policies

China:

China plays a crucial role in terms of the South China Sea dispute, with its stance determining major waves and directing the course of the situation. Since its introduction of the "Nine-Dash Line" in 1947, claiming a majority of the territory associated with the Sea, China has set unclear boundaries along with breaches of territory beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Country/Delegate Policies (Cont.)

Furthermore, China has rejected the 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), where it was convicted of claims with no legal basis under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Currently, China has increased its dominance in the region through its construction of fully militarized artificial islands where militia and ships patrol surrounding areas, often engaging in conflict with other nations' vessels, such as the Philippines. Overall, China's primary stance remains very defensive, while still lawful, however, many nations view its actions as a breach of international law and regional sovereignty. [11]

The Philippines:

The Philippines has had a major influence and impact on the situation, especially pertaining to areas such as the Scarborough Shoal and Spratly Islands, which are within the EEZ. In terms of its actions taken regarding the conflict, in 2013, it filed a case with the PCA to refute China's territorial claims. As a result, in 2016, the court ruled in favor of the Philippines, however, China refused to recognize the ruling. Thus, in recent years, the Philippines has continued to attempt to assert its rights under the UNCLOS while maintaining its economic relations with China. However, due to increasing confrontations, the Philippines has begun diversifying its trade partners, strengthening ties with the United States, Japan, Australia, and other regional nations. Finally, it has supported efforts from ASEAN to finalize a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea to remedy the conflict. [12]

East and Southeast Asia:

Other countries within close proximity with the South China Sea include Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei, each also with varying claims on different regions within the South China Sea, making them key players in terms of the dispute. They rely heavily on the South China Sea for resources, consisting mainly of fishing as well as trade routes. Due to the fact that these nations have varying relations with China, with Vietnam taking a more deterring stance toward China's actions and Brunei and Cambodia leaning towards a lesser response due to close ties with Beijing, ASEAN responses have been overall fragmented.

Country/Delegate Policies (Cont.)

Despite these differences, ASEAN as a whole has been working toward a comprehensive Code of Conduct with China to remedy the situation. Although there has been slow progress, many nations are in support of this agreement, as well as reduced military activity in the region. [13][14]

Europe:

The European Union has taken a very diplomatic approach to the dispute with member nations such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, releasing statements in support of the 2016 PCA ruling. Some other nations within the union have also contributed by deploying various vessels through the South China Sea to induce freedom of navigation. Although many nations involved within the EU do not have much interest in military aspects of the region, many continue to attempt to uphold peace through upholding UNCLOS and reducing tensions through advocating for diplomacy within the channels. [15]

The United States:

The United States has a major role in terms of the dispute despite its lack of geographic proximity and not being a claimant of land in the region. In terms of its stance, it has formally rejected China's "Nine-Dash Line" and challenges China's claims further through conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs). Furthermore, the United States has made official defense treaties with mutual benefit with the Philippines and has expanded its military presence in the region. Again, as it has no claims on territory within the region and tries to remain an unbiased party, it supports the 2016 PCA ruling and overall tries to promote a diplomatic approach toward the conflict. Finally, it is one of the most prominent external powers in terms of specifically pushing back Chinese militarization efforts within the region. [16]

Country/Delegate Policies (Cont.)

Africa and the Middle East:

Although African and Middle Eastern nations remain geographically distant from the dispute, many have advocated in support of China, especially those nations involved in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). For example, countries such as Pakistan, Cambodia, and other African nations have consistently supported China's position in the dispute, often driven by economic or infrastructure incentives and investments. On the other hand, those nations that have fewer economic ties with China have a more neutral response toward the dispute, overall taking a general support for international law rather than firmly advocating for a certain side. These positions are still relevant due to the fact that they may influence voting and negotiations within the UN if resolutions or sanctions are taken into consideration in the future. [17]

Potential Solutions

We encourage delegates of the UNSC to consider subjects about remedying the South China Sea conflict through military, sustainability, and economic aspects while preserving global peace. However, delegates should also attempt to implement their creative solutions that go beyond these topics. Specifically, chairs will be looking for thoughtful and innovative ideas that consider not only major countries involved in the conflict but also the world as a whole. Solutions should be creative while still retaining realistic aspects, with acknowledgement toward problems that could arise, such as veto power, alliances, and more. General examples of possible solutions could include working with the ASEAN Code of Conduct, escalating military expansion in the region, or sharing the use of resources equally among claimant nations. Sustainability is another major factor that should be considered within delegates' solutions, such as following the UN's SDG goals. Finally, as delegates are writing their working papers/draft resolutions, chairs urge them to again think about their solutions on an international basis by taking into account the wants and needs of the nations involved. This will allow for not only a resolution that remedies the immediate problem at hand, but also takes into account future situations that may arise.

Questions to Consider

- What loopholes or ambiguities in UNCLOS are being tested by China's artificial islands, and how might bringing awareness/clarity to these actions reduce conflict?
- To what extent does China's "archipelagic state" argument challenge contemporary maritime law interpretations? What are the global implications if these arguments are deemed as legitimate?
- How has the South China Sea dispute influenced divisions or unifications within ASEAN?
- What role should ASEAN play when facilitating the creation of the Code of Conduct within this dispute?
- How may the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) be addressed within the environmental harms artificial island construction poses? How can international groups or UN-led protection initiatives play a role in this?
- What is your country's take on resource-sharing or neutral zones as a way to remedy the dispute? Is this a realistic alternative?
- How can smaller or non-claimant nations help de-escalate the conflict through regulatory, economic, or environmental factors?
- What impact does militarization have on global supply chains? How can the UNSC address risks pertaining to the dispute without resorting to military action?
- How should future disputes like this be handled? How can future regulations be revised to bring clarity to situations like these?

Key Terms

- UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) – An international agreement defining nations' rights and responsibilities in the world's oceans. It includes rules for territorial waters, borders, and legality of water actions.
- EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) – A sea zone extending 200 nautical miles from a nation's coastline, granting rights to marine resources (like fishing and oil), but not full sovereignty.
- Nine-Dash Line – A loosely defined line used by China to assert its historical claim over the majority of the South China Sea.
- PCA – An international legal body that issued a 2016 ruling in favor of the Philippines, stating that China's Nine-Dash Line has no legal basis under UNCLOS.

Key Terms (Cont.)

- Freedom of Navigation – Naval operations conducted by the U.S. and other countries to challenge excessive maritime claims and assert navigation rights in international waters, particularly in the South China Sea.
- Artificial Islands/Militarization – Man-made islands created by piling sand onto coral reefs. China has used these islands to establish military facilities, raising international legal and environmental concerns.
- ASEAN – A regional organization working toward political and economic cooperation among Southeast Asian countries.

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