



MCGSMUN 2025



Eye of The Hurricane

Joint Crisis Committee

Discussing China's involvement in Territorial Disputes with
Taiwan including the South China Sea

Letter from the Crisis Desk

It is my distinct pleasure to be serving as the Crisis Director for the Joint Crisis Committee at the MCGSMUN 25. This crisis committee will test your ability to respond quickly, effectively, and analytically. The agenda at hand features one of the most contentious flashpoints in modern geopolitics – the South China Sea.

The South China Sea is the world's most hotly debated nexus of geopolitical intricacy and intensified rivalry. China's sweeping claims of sovereignty over the sea—and the sea's estimated 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas—have antagonized competing claimants Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

In addition, the extended geography is impacted by the island of the Republic of China. On the eve of the People's Republic of China's 75th Anniversary, President Xi stated that “reunification” with Taiwan was inevitable, a fate that the United States has decided to challenge.

Could diplomacy succeed where real-world negotiations have faltered? Could we alter the course of this fated path towards conflict, or will this committee merely mirror the fractures of our time? The choices you make, the alliances you forge, and the crises you navigate will determine whether this Joint Crisis Committee escalates toward conflict or finds an unexpected path to stability.

I look forward to witnessing the ingenuity, resilience, and strategic acumen of the delegates in action, and I expect to match them with innovative crisis responses.

The attached document serves as a foundational reference for the agenda. It is not exhaustive, and I strongly encourage further research and deep engagement with the subject matter.

Let's see if you can rewrite the rules of the game.

Sincerely,
Raahat Verma
Crisis Director, MCGSMUN 25

Maritime Chessboard

Why does this chessboard matter?

The economic significance of the South China Sea cannot be overstated. As one of the busiest maritime routes in the world, it serves as a vital artery for international trade, facilitating the flow of 64% of total goods discharged worldwide in 2022. Any disruption to the free passage of ships through these waters would have far-reaching consequences for the global economy, affecting not only the countries directly involved in the dispute but also the broader international community.

It is also home to rich fishing grounds that provide for the livelihoods of millions of people across the region. More than half of the world's fishing vessels operate in this area. The South China Sea is underexplored because of territorial disputes. Most discovered oil and natural gas fields are in uncontested areas, close to the shorelines. Approximately 3.6 billion barrels of petroleum and other liquids and 40.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in proved and probable reserves are in the South China Sea.

After extensive geological surveys in 1968 and 1969, when a report published by the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East found “substantial energy deposits” in the seabed between Taiwan and Japan—the waters off the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The paper marked one of the first credible findings of hydrocarbon resources there, reigniting interest in the region. Although China did not previously dispute Japanese claims to the islands, it began to assert its own sovereignty over them in May 1970, after Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan held talks on joint energy exploration in the East China Sea.

Since the early 21st century, an aggressive campaign of land reclamation (frequently referred to as “island building”) by China has significantly increased the country's presence in the South China Sea. China has built military infrastructure, including naval bases and airstrips, on the reclaimed land. The Chinese also have sought to exercise their claims through nonmilitary means—for example, by sending massive fishing fleets into the EEZs of other countries.

A Brief History

1971

Okinawa Reversion Treaty

The United States and Japan signed the Okinawa Reversion Treaty, returning the Ryukyu Islands to Japan and reinforcing their security alliance. The treaty's boundaries included the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, but the Nixon administration remained neutral on their sovereignty, prioritizing military bases and ties with China. In response, both the PRC and ROC claimed the islands as historically Chinese, while Japan saw the treaty as reaffirming its sovereignty.

1974

China Claims Parcel Islands

A year after the Paris Peace Accords, which ended U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, Chinese forces occupied the western portion of the Paracel Islands, planting flags on several islands and seizing a South Vietnamese garrison. Vietnamese troops fled south and established the first permanent Vietnamese occupation of the Spratly Islands. Meanwhile, Beijing built a military installation, including an airfield and

artificial harbor, on Woody Island, the largest of the Paracels. After the fall of Saigon and the reunification of Vietnam, the newly formed Socialist Republic of Vietnam upheld the South's former claims to the Spratlys and Paracels. To this day, China maintains around one thousand troops in the Paracels.

1988

China Sinks Three Vietnamese Ships

After roughly a decade of relative calm in the South China Sea, China and Vietnam clashed on the Johnson Reef, marking China's first armed conflict over the Spratly archipelago. The Chinese navy sank three Vietnamese vessels, killing seventy-four sailors in one of the most serious military confrontations in the South China Sea. The incident occurred after Beijing, pursuing a more assertive stance in the area, established a physical presence on Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratlys in January 1987. In response, Vietnam occupied several reefs to monitor China's moves. The incident unfolded amid Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms of the 1980s, when Chinese economic activity began shifting to the coastal provinces, and maritime resources became increasingly prized as hydrocarbons are needed to sustain growth.

1992

China Passes Law on the Territorial Sea

China passed the Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone, which lays claim to the entire South China Sea based on its historical right to the area dating from the Western Han dynasty, which ruled between 200 BCE to nine CE. The law employs more generous methods of territorial determination that would not necessarily be recognized and justified by UNCLOS, signed a decade earlier. The move is seen by some as a bid by China to obtain greater maritime security for itself, as Beijing was one of the most active countries at UNCLOS in attempting to obstruct the United States and Soviet Union's efforts to secure freedom of navigation for warships.

1996

Mischief Reef Incident

Three Chinese naval vessels fought a ninety-minute battle with a Philippine navy gunboat near Capones Island in the Mischief Reef, part of the Spratly chain of islands claimed by the Philippines. The incident marked the first time China engaged in military confrontation with an ASEAN member other than Vietnam. The clash, which triggered a crisis in Sino-Philippine relations, revives U.S.-Philippine military ties; soon after the incident, U.S. Navy SEALs conducted a joint exercise with their Philippine counterparts on Palawan Island, although Philippine President Fidel Ramos denied that this is connected to Manila's row with Beijing. Tensions over the occupation subsided by midyear, when the Philippines and China signed a nonbinding code of conduct that calls for a peaceful resolution to the territorial dispute and the promotion of confidence-building measures.

2002

ASEAN and China Code of Conduct

China and the ten ASEAN states reached an agreement in Phnom Penh on the ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, a code of conduct that seeks to ease tensions and create guidelines for conflict resolution. The agreement came after six years of negotiations. Beijing had previously insisted on bilateral negotiations with claimants; China's signing marked the first time it accepts a multilateral approach to the issue. Though the declaration falls short of a binding code of conduct, as the Philippines had sought, it signalled China's recognition that such an agreement could work in its favor by limiting the risk of conflict in the area, which could involve the United States in the dispute.

2009

Malaysia, Vietnam Submit UN Claims

Malaysia and Vietnam filed a joint submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf to extend their continental shelves beyond the standard two hundred nautical miles from their coastlines, renewing friction over maritime sovereignty in the South China Sea. China viewed this as a challenge to its territorial claims and objects to the submission, saying it “has seriously infringed” on China’s “indisputable sovereignty” over the islands in the South China Sea. Vietnam’s claims are viewed as part of a campaign to bring the South China Sea issue to an international forum, beginning with a conference held in November 2009 in Hanoi.

2010

Chinese Boat Clashes With Japanese Coast Guard

A Chinese fishing boat collided with two Japanese Coast Guard vessels near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, prompting Japan to arrest the crew. Beijing protested the move, enforcing an unofficial embargo on rare earth minerals and arresting four Japanese businessmen for trespassing on a Chinese military facility. China also refused a meeting between Premier Wen Jiabao and Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan at the UN General Assembly. After two weeks of escalating tension, the two countries agreed to release their respective citizens. Diplomatic relations finally thawed when Japan’s prime minister and China’s premier met “coincidentally” on the side-lines of the Asia-Europe Meeting Summit in Brussels in October 2010. The incident underscored the fragility of the management of the territorial dispute and sparked debate over Japan’s ability to defend its interests in the face of China’s rise.

2011

Philippines Renames South China Sea

In response to a spate of skirmishes with Chinese vessels, the Philippine government began referring to the South China Sea as the West Philippine Sea in all official communications and in October 2012 signed an administrative order asserting its “inherent power and right to designate its maritime areas.” U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also began referring to the South China Sea as the West Philippine Sea, affirming in a November 2011 joint press conference with her Philippine counterpart the “vigor” of the two countries’ alliance, particularly “at a time when the Philippines is facing challenges to its territorial integrity” in the oceanic region.

2012

Scarborough Shoal Incident

Diplomatic relations between Manila and Beijing declined further after the Philippines dispatched a warship to confront Chinese fishing boats in the Scarborough Shoal, north of the Spratlys. China subsequently dispatched its surveillance vessels to protect its fishermen, and a two-month standoff ensued. As China quarantined some fruits from the Philippines and warned against tourism to the country. Philippine losses in banana exports in May 2012 are estimated at \$34 million. Bilateral talks stalled repeatedly over withdrawal from the shoal, and the Philippine government claimed it is pursuing various avenues, including ASEAN involvement, legal options under UNCLOS, and an appeal to the United States for a guarantee of assistance in the case of military confrontation. Beijing maintained regular patrols that prevent Philippine fisherman from accessing these waters.

2012

Japan Buys Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands & China Claims Territorial Sea Baselines

The government of Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda signs a contract, worth \$26 million, to purchase three of the five disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands from private landowner Kunioki Kurihara. In the subsequent weeks, some of the largest anti-Japanese protests since the countries normalized relations in 1972 erupt across China. In response to Japan's nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, Beijing declares territorial sea baselines around the land, announcing Chinese administration of the disputed islands and directly challenging Tokyo's control. The move ends what analysts consider the status quo of Japanese administration of the area. As a result, two of China's maritime agencies gain increased power over the waters and begin to increase their patrol in areas previously dominated by the Japan Coast Guard. In December, China submits to the UN an explanation of its claims to the disputed area in the East China Sea, arguing that "geological characteristics" show a natural prolongation of China's land territory. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urges both sides to let "cool heads" prevail amid the flare-up.

Taiwan Straits & the South China Sea

If the South China Sea is the world's most geopolitically intricate flashpoint, the Taiwan Straits is considered the surest way to World War III. But the connection between two Asian flashpoints is not always well understood. The Taiwan Strait holds special significance in China's broader maritime strategy, influencing its actions in the South China Sea. Tensions in the Taiwan Strait have historically driven China's military modernisation efforts and doctrinal adaptations, with the present emphasis on area denial and anti-access strategies, including naval blockades. The possibility that China ramps up pressure on ASEAN in the South China Sea to diminish US commitments in the Taiwan Straits remains high.

The region has gone through a transformative shift, with China's military modernisation and infrastructure development on disputed territories, in the security dynamics. China's increasing defence expenditure highlights its ambition – far louder than conciliatory words. The prospect of drawing in non-claimant countries such as Australia and India has also complicated the maritime disputes.

China's position regarding navigation in the Taiwan Strait demonstrates that the Chinese government rejects the notion that the Strait should be "used for international navigation", as defined by UNCLOS' article 37. Instead, China qualifies it as too narrow for high seas and considers waters of the Strait as constituting territorial sea, contiguous zone and EEZ. What remains unspoken is China's denial of the existence of a Taiwanese territorial sea, contiguous zone and EEZ. Still, recent patterns of Chinese military exercises targeting Taiwan have never violated Taiwan's declared 12 nautical miles zone - a tacit recognition of its de facto existence.

Preventing naval ships from exercising freedom of navigation in an EEZ inside the Strait pursues a simple goal: forcing all navies to consider that a Chinese maximalist EEZ regime applies to waters inside the Taiwan Strait. This is where the issue becomes tricky. Beyond China's lack of clarification on its claimed EEZ in that waterway, it conflates together two sub-issues to observers: the problem surrounding restrictions China seeks to impose on foreign naval vessels within its EEZ and its Taiwan policy. The latter seeks to deny the reality of Taiwan's effective exercise of sovereign rights in the territories it administers and to erase the effectiveness of Taiwan's sovereign administration of its own EEZ.

So,

Can you change the future?

What paths will you choose?

Will you come together or fracture the world order as we know it?

FREEZE DATE
December 31st, 2024

