



EAS Background Paper

Committee: EAS

Topic: Maritime Security Challenges in the South China Sea (opium)

Written by: Sofia Lara and Regina Treviño

Moderator: Regina Treviño

Director: Sofia Lara

Letter to delegates

Dear delegates,

It's a pleasure to welcome you to this SPISMUN 2026. My name is Regina Treviño, and I'm honored to introduce myself as your moderator, along with your director, Sofia Lara.

Together we'll serve as your chair for SPISMUN 2026 in the EAS committee. We are both looking forward to new ideas and discussions.

As delegates, you will have the opportunity to debate important problems about the South China Sea. EAS plays a role in the important challenges in East Asia, like politics, security, and the economy. Your task will be to find solutions to make the South China Sea safer. It might be challenging, but the experience will be rewarding.

We hope that you have fun participating in this SPISMUN 2026 and exploring new ideas. See you soon delegates!

Sincerely,

Your EAS Chair.

History of committee

The East Asia Summit (EAS) committee was created in 2005 when leaders from different countries got together for the first time in a meeting in Kuala Lumpur, a city in Malaysia. The committee brought together leaders of 16 nations around Southeast Asia, East Asia, Oceania and South Asia, and after that it grew to 18 nations including Russia and the United States of America. Their main objective is to promote peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia. Leaders have meetings about strategic, political and economic issues of common interest, with the purpose of making Asia a better place.

Over the years the East Asia Summit has been working for 19 years since it was created. The organization has worked on many problems about Asia, but the main cases that have been working on are the peace and security, economic and trade, and sustainable development and climate, environment, and energy. About peace and security made free sailing and solving arguments. The economy and trade has been solved by helping countries in the region to work together and trade in a

fair way without scams. Sustainable development and climate, environment, and energy is a problem that has been worked on clean energy, protecting the environment and dealing with disasters. This shows that the south china sea is really important for many countries and the disputes aren't over yet.

History Of the topic

The South China Sea is used specifically for fishing, traveling, and valuable trade between countries. Over the years the sea has been facing serious issues such as smuggling drugs, territory, resources, sea routes, and arguments between countries. These problems have caused big conflicts and danger around Asia.

Since 2009, China has been working on its maritime security and claiming a safer sea where people can fish, travel, and trade with different countries safely. In 2022 the security of maritime trade in the South China Sea became tense because the USA and its allies went against China so it wouldn't control the South China Sea . Nowadays the sea is getting worse because of increasing its military and being more aggressive towards Vietnam and the Philippines, and this is making the South China Sea more tense and complicated.

China has always wanted to control the South China Sea, one of the reasons why China always gets into disputes with other countries. China has been in a lot of disputes with its neighbors, such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, and more countries. From 1895 to 2024, China and other countries have been fighting over the same problems, such as territory, resources, trade, and sea routes. These disputes are caused because China and other countries want to control parts of the sea, especially. The South China Sea is still a big problem because China and other countries continue fighting over control of the sea, territory, and resources.

Introduction to the topic

The South China Sea is a portion of the Pacific Ocean. It includes hundreds of small islands and reefs located within island chains, and it overlaps with territorial claims from countries like Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. It is rich in natural resources, and it is an essential trade route facilitating the flow of 64% of good discharge by 2022. The United Nations of Conference on Trade and Development estimated that over 21% of global trade transited through these waters in 2016. It amounted to \$3.37 trillion dollars. It is also home to fishing grounds, and more than half of the world's fishing vessels operate in this area.

As a result of the territorial claims, the South China Sea is one of the most sensitive regions in the world politically because of the different countries that claim territory, like Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines. Specifically, China is asserting sovereignty and claim over most of the maritime area in the South China Sea. In 1947, China issued a map that backs up its claims (nine dash line) that the claim over the sea goes back centuries, up to when Paracel and Spratly were part of its nation.

Vietnam and China have been in constant conflict over this since Vietnam disputes China's historical records, saying that it never claimed sovereignty over the islands before the 1940s, while Vietnam has

ruled over both Paracels and Spratlys since the 17th century. The Philippines claims geographical proximity to the Spratly Islands as the main claim for territory. Malaysia and Brunei claim that it falls within their economic zones but do not directly claim any certain islands.

Beyond only territorial claims, there have been serious disputes, mainly between China, Vietnam, and the Philippines. In 1974 China seized the parcels from Vietnam and killed more than 70 troops, and again in 1988 they clashed in the Spratlys, losing 60 sailors. There have been claims that the Chinese navy sabotaged a Vietnamese operation in 2012 that provoked anti china protests. In early 2012, China and the Philippines had a maritime standoff, and in early 2023, the Philippines claimed that Chinese vessels had been pointing lasers at Filipino boats to blind their crew and trying to close their path.

The South China Sea has been victim to not only territorial disputes but also security concerns such as drug trafficking and organized crime due to the reduced security from COVID-19. The MMEA executed a large-scale narcotics raid in which 112kg of drugs were extracted, while Hong Kong reported a 255% increase in contraband. The Philippines was combating smuggling operations, and Malaysia and Indonesia continued to fight illegal and unregulated fishing while also dealing with a spike in robberies at port.

Among these security concerns, there is opium. Which is a narcotic drug made from opium poppy plants. The main regions where it comes from are Mexico, Thailand, Afghanistan, and Laos. Opium drug traffickers often use sea routes to move it from South Asia to international markets, passing through China. Due to the territorial disputes and security concerns, they take advantage of the disputed waters and lack of cooperation between navies to pass through the South China Sea. The opium crisis has not been the first time through China, there was an opium crisis a while ago, around the late 18th century, and many Chinese citizens still struggle with addiction problems.

Key players :

China: China is very important in maritime issues, especially in the South China Sea. China has many organizations that work on safety, security, pollution prevention, and port and traffic management, each organization has its own leaders. Even though China is really important in its maritime issues, the way the organization works is not good because leaders don't communicate and don't get in an agreement to solve the maritime South China Sea issues.

Vietnam: China has become more aggressive in the South China Sea with the United States, Vietnam, and other countries. Vietnam is one of the most important countries that claim parts of the South China Sea. Vietnam's decisions and the way they react can cause many problems, like fights between countries.

The Philippines: The Philippines has an important role in the South China Sea because it is one of the countries that claim the territory of the South China Sea. The Philippines count on organizations that are in charge of the security and defense of the South China Sea, but due to the communication, the organizations haven't solved any of the disputes.

Malaysia: Malaysia collaborates with different countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam to keep the South China Sea in peace due to the opium trafficking, territory, trade, and more that can

cause serious problems in this sea. Malaysia has an organization that helps the sea to enforce laws, control solutions, and more. This is called the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA).

United States: The United States has a very important role in the maritime security of the South China Sea. It collaborates with countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia to maintain peace and solve illegal activities like opium and drug trafficking. Since 2017, the USA has spent more than 1.5 billion dollars to strengthen maritime security, train the coast guards, and protect the freedom of navigation at sea.

Cooperation within the UN:

Since the EAS is not a part of the UN, it cannot directly intervene with their actions, but it can help them by trying to provide support through other committees and organizations. Mainly the UN is trying to have peace in the South China Sea. The United Nations is using a law named UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea) to choose who will have control over it. In 1982 it set rules for territorial waters, exclusive economic zones, freedom of navigation, and rights over natural resources. In 2013 the Philippines asked for a trial against China, and in 2016 the court said that the affirmations of China were not legal and invalidated the nine dash line. It also ruled that China violated the Philippines rights, however. China rejected the ruling.

The UN also tried to help by providing legal frameworks through UNCLOS, they also promote peace. They also raised awareness to help them and facilitate discussion between member states on illegal problems like illegal fishing, drug trafficking by sea, weapons trading, and trafficking.

The UN promoted maritime security by diplomatic and legal cooperation. The IMO (International Maritime Organization) helped it by doing a drop of revelations, supporting training, and helping states to strengthened South China's water safety. Also, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) helps by doing routine law enforcement to prevent the crime of drug trafficking and train maritime police. They help by tracking criminal networks and enhance port security.

The UN ESCAP has promoted regional maritime cooperation and organized dialogues for shared management. They have also worked with marine environment protection and supported capacity building for coast guards and customs agencies.

Current status

In 2024 and 2025, China increased military presence, which caused an amplification of the dispute, and employed aggressive methods against the Philippines, such as the water cannon strikes and deadly crashes near Sandy Cay and Scarborough Shoal. These clashes have caused concerns about accidents and conflict among regional nations. This increased the disputes between the Philippines and at the same time, the conflicts with illegal fishing and piracy threats have caused incidents in Asian water to increase by more than 50% recently. This caused an economic downfall of about 1.8 billion dollars in one year. These problems affected a lot of communities in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Meanwhile, the government spends more on military operations and security. China has reclaimed reefs and built artificial islands that host military infrastructure where there are anti aircraft and anti ship missile systems to increase its power surrounding the sea. It is also resisting international rulings that don't benefit their claims while these tactics increase the risk of military escalation.

China continued to assert control over nearly the entire area despite the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling no legal basis for it. The Philippines and China have been having almost weekly conflict with each other involving water cannons, blocking manoeuvres, and collisions. China's large and aggressive coast guard overwhelms smaller states, allowing illegal activity to persist and weakening maritime law enforcement. These have allowed the increase of opium trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, and piracy. Furthermore, the conflict has gone beyond the Asian countries not the U.S. has gotten involved and conducts regular freedom of navigation operations. Also, various countries have heightened their military cooperation with Asian nations.

Guiding Questions

1. How does your country cooperate with other nations to prevent maritime conflicts?
2. How does maritime security affect your country's economy or trade relationships?
3. Does your country have partnerships with other nations to patrol or monitor the seas?
4. What are the main challenges your country faces due to this issue?
5. How does international cooperation help or hinder solving this problem?
6. What solutions could your country propose to improve the situation globally?
7. What threats does your country face from piracy, smuggling, or illegal fishing?

Quorum

1. China
2. Vietnam
3. Philippines
4. Indonesia
5. Thailand
6. Malaysia
7. Singapore
8. Cambodia
9. India
10. Japan
11. South Korea
12. Australia
13. New Zealand
14. México
15. Russia
16. United States
17. United Kingdom
18. France

19. Pakistan
20. Nigeria

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