

The Militarization of Artificial Islands in the South China Sea

United Nations Security Council

I. Introduction

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the main organs of the United Nations as it is known today. Founded in 1945, it is known to withhold the "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security." The committee consists of fifteen members - ten of which have a two-year term until a change in members, and five of which have a permanent seat in the Council (the United States, People's Republic of China, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, and the French Republic, namely). Reforms that the committee can push come in a large variety, ranging from economic and political sanctions to the imposition of military/peacekeeping operations. Being the most powerful committee in the UN as it is known today, the Security Council has more right over the exercise of resolutions proposed by other organs (in order to adhere to its purpose of maintaining global security); the five aforementioned permanent members also have the authority to 'veto' certain resolutions proposed by the Council as a whole if they so choose.

The topic that will be examined by the committee during this particular session is the creation and subsequent militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea. The Republic of China believes that its historically defined 'Nine-Dash Line' border - stretching all the way to Indochinese territory in the South China Sea (SCS) - should extend its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) be respected by other territories. Therefore, in the past five years, China has constructed artificial islands within this Nine-Dash Line zone, to take action basis their claim and further their resource obtainment and militarization. Speaking of the latter, China has built a variety of military bases along the Spratly Islands, an archipelago whose various parts are also the territory of Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines; however, it is in China's belief that Spratly belongs solely to it, and it has therefore begun militarization operations on overlapping territory. It has taken the nation only seven years to build upon over 3,000 sq. acres of territory in the SCS, and also fortify missile systems, military vessels, and living quarters for troops, all while possessing a rather questionable legitimacy to all of the aforementioned territories. The reason this is a problematic topic is that Chinese military and political tensions with the United States of America (U.S) have only aggravated; nations bordered by the South China Sea are also unhappy with China's attempt at establishing hegemony. Furthermore, the creation of these islands provides China with many more natural resources, posing economic and environmental risks that any power in the zone could face.

II. History and Description of the Issue

In order to structure a well-rounded debate and resolution, it is important to understand the context and special terms used to discuss the topic at hand. The Chinese Exclusive Economic

Guadalajara Model United Nations

American School Foundation of Guadalajara



Zone (EEZ) is all water surrounding the Chinese mainland border for up to 200 nautical miles, where the nation can safely claim natural resources and territory as their own; certain other restrictions exist for archipelagos and individual isles under the country's jurisdiction. An artificial island is created upon expanding upon an existing isle or reef and is completely surrounded by water. In the committee's case, territories such as the Spratly Islands at the core of the South China Sea are what China is using in order to expand its EEZ and spread its military force. It is estimated by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) that as of 2019, 11 billion barrels of oil can be found in the South China Sea, as well as 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. It was estimated in 2018 that over 5 trillion dollars, or 3.8 trillion euros of trade, was conducted in this area annually, with this amount only increasing with each year. It is crucial to correctly define EEZs in order to maintain the diplomacy between nations involved with the Sea and to fairly distribute each of their rights to territory on the basis of a modern, crystal clear treaty.

The chunk of the Sea that China believes falls under its jurisdiction is bordered by a demarcation known as the Nine-Dash Line, which is a line drawn on a 1947 map that - in the belief of both Chinese governments - gives the country a vague historical proof of their legitimate control over the region. Over 75 islets and reefs are engulfed by this 'line'. Countries such as the Philippines have already tried passing rulings under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to bring these historical claims to light, with little to no success. The Chinese government has refused to shed further clarity on the definition of this line after 2012 when it added the tenth dash to the line.

The artificial islands that have been constructed by China so far include the Mischief, Johnson, Subi, Fiery Cross, Gaven, Cuarteron, and Hughes Reefs; most of these Reefs are situated in or close to the Spratly island chain. Their average size is around 400 acres, or 0.63 square miles, which is a size that allows for the establishment of troops and military equipment and weapons. The biggest and most noteworthy of these reefs is Fiery Cross, plans for which consist of the construction of a military airstrip and a sea-berth weighing over 5 kilotons, along with further militarization. Condemnation efforts are being taken by the Chinese government to keep the US Navy and other surrounding forces away from the island; two U.S naval destroyers were sent to inspect Fiery Cross, only to be warned by the Chinese government for trespassing and forcibly sent away. The reason this is a problem is that it can heighten military tension between the United States and Chinese governments, even if the latter has no stake in the South China Sea.

The impacts that the conflict can have in the future are implicated in a variety of sectors and regions. Considering the former - in terms of politics and economics, the Chinese government is attempting to suppress its neighbors and other intervening nations - such as the United States and the United Kingdom - in a fashion that could result in a large imbalance in trade and violent conflict in the next five to ten years, according to Steve Bannon, chief strategist and United Nations spokesperson for the U.S. The construction could also negatively impact China itself, as environmental implications include the disruption of ecosystems including fish and larvae near the Spratly Islands, which could lead to species endangerment and further economic imbalances for all surrounding territories. Another dreadful environmental insinuation is that of the spread of over 96 square miles of excess sediment and debris that surround each constructed island underwater. The activity of dredging - i.e scooping material from seabeds such as the SCS - in order to construct the island also causes pollution and the artificial removal of said underwater ecosystems.



Nations at risk of suffering from these implications include China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and any other nation whose business falls in trading along the SCS. The United States and other territories could engage in conflict if further foreign intervention continues as well.

III. International Response and Bloc Analysis

The International Law Commission (ICM) of the UN decided to focus on maritime law in the 90s and thus decided to hold the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, an event held from 1958 to 1982 that was split into three different conferences. In 1982, members of the Conference decided upon the creation of a treaty known as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) whose guidelines are followed by governments today. The UNCLOS was responsible for the creation of EEZs and has shaped the maritime rights for every party/signatory affiliated with its creation for the 37 years of its existence. However, China is putting its historical claims before the UNCLOS, trying to defend its legitimacy through other means and violating the treaty.

On 12 July 2016, the Arbitral Tribunal in the South China Sea Arbitration issued a unanimous award to the Philippines for bringing its case against China's building of artificial islands along the Spratly Islands. During these tribunal sessions, the Philippines brought into question the Nine-Dash Line's historical accuracy and the UNCLOS EEZ assignments to each country near the South China Sea. China has rejected the ruling that was suggested by the Philippines and the court, but it may nonetheless be a stepping-stone on the way to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

IV. Committee Mission

The topic of discussion, as aforementioned, is the discussion of the militarization of these artificial islands being constructed in the South China Sea. As the purpose of the Security Council details, it is in this committee's best interest to resolve the conflict in the SCS in a fashion that maintains international peace and security, keeping in mind the power and limitations that the committee has as the primary organ of the UN. This can include modification of United Nations subsidiary organs and investments, peacekeeping forces and sanctioning of any sorts. It is in the best interest of all countries participating to make sure the permanent five members of the Security Council approve of your decision making during these sessions. Given that the Security Council is the primary peacekeeping body of the United Nations, it is of the utmost importance that the problem at hand is solved as quickly as possible in order to ensure the safety and security of all.

V. Annotated Links for Further Research

Guadalajara Model United Nations

American School Foundation of Guadalajara



General Country Research

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1988596/whats-chinas-nine-dash-line-and-why-has-it-created-so>

This article contains information about the Nine-Dash Line that China uses to prove that its territorial withholdings are historically and politically legitimate.

Committee Links

<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/>

The webpage above contains information about the UNSC and its power and uniqueness as compared to other organs of the United Nation. Here you can read about its mission and vision statements and the different powers P5 members have.

Topic Links

https://legal.un.org/diplomaticconferences/1958_los/

This link provides a direct summary of the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, curated by the United Nations itself. It also contains information about the Convention that was written during the conference, which withholds definitions of the special economic zones and other regulations for maritime trade and militarization.

VI. Works Cited

- Connor, Neil. "China Triggers New Storm over Military Build-up on Artificial Islands." *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group, 9 Jan. 2018,
www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/01/09/diplomatic-protests-china-shows-militarised-artificial-islands/?wgu=272965_16644_15757386851513_13d4b627a4&wgexpiry=1583514685&WT.mc_id=tmgoff_paff-4551_subsoffers_basic_planit&utm_source=tmgoff&utm_medium=tmgoff_paff-4551&utm_content=subsoffers_basic&utm_campaign=tmgoff_paff-4551_subsoffers_basic_planit.
- Frayser, Kevin. "China Builds New Military Facilities on South China Sea Islands: Think Tank." *CNBC*, CNBC, 30 June 2017,
www.cnbc.com/2017/06/30/china-builds-military-facilities-south-china-sea-islands.html.
- Lindley, Julian. "China's Fiery Cross." *Boulevard Extérieur*, Boulevard Extérieur, 10 Sept. 2014,
www.boulevard-exterieur.com/China-s-Fiery-Cross.html.
- McLaughlin, Elizabeth. "US Navy Destroyers Sail near Disputed Islands Claimed by China in South China Sea." *ABC News*, ABC News Network, 6 May 2019,
www.abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-navy-destroyers-sail-disputed-islands-claimed-china/story?id=62848215.
- Smith, Leland. "Evidence of Environmental Changes Caused by Chinese Island-Building." *Nature.com*, Springer Nature Limited, 28 Mar. 2019,
www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-41659-3.
- "United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea." *United Nations*, United Nations,
www.legal.un.org/diplomaticconferences/1958_los/.
- Zhen, Liu. "What's China's 'Nine-Dash Line' and Why Has It Created so Much Tension in the South China Sea?" *South China Morning Post*, South China Morning Post, 18 Sept. 2018,
www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1988596/whats-chinas-nine-dash-line-and-why-has-it-created-so.