

The South China Sea, ancient mercantile marine trade route, the 21st-century conflicts between the two great powers.

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Abstract

The South China Sea (SCS) was a part of the ancient maritime trade route from the 2nd century BC until the 19th century. It was flourish during England's mercantilism period (16th-18th century) and has become a part of the 21st century Belts and Roads Initiatives Maritime Route. Currently, the SCS is the conflict in the Asian region. It is also the area that maintains a regional balance of power between China and the United States and the US's alliances. This research is based on secondary data retrieving information from the summarizing and collating existing documents mostly from online sources with reliable references. This research aims to analyze the involvement of the US in the SCS's disputes and all disputed nations' reactions. In conclusion, the authors concluded that with a bully strategy, China will lose support from ASEAN and would delay its BRI success. And it would not be a good choice for the US to initiate any war in this region amid its current hegemonic instability.

Keywords: The South China Sea, Mercantilism, Belts and Roads Initiatives (BRI), Hegemonic instability.

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Introduction

In April 2021, the US and its Quad alliances conducted the maneuver drill in the SCS. Almost at the same period of time, China also conducts its navy and air-force drill. Many people may be suspicious of why the two great powers have to conduct their navy and air force maneuvers in the same sea. The Quad alliances consists of 4 countries which are the US, India, Australia and Japan. It is not the first time that The US and its allies conduct the maneuver drill in this region. So, the authors conduct this research to analyze the involvement of the US and China in The SCS because it is also a part of the maritime routes of Belts and Roads Initiatives. This article will start from the history related to the SCS from the past to the present. Its importance and how many countries are affected, and the US involvement may cause unintentional conflict. The authors reviewed many pieces of online literature and academic documents from 2003 to 2021. Except the reference of the UNCLOS international law in 1982. This research aims to analyze the involvement of the US in The SCS disputes and all disputed nations' reactions.

Literature Review

Since the 16th to 18th century, England's mercantilism period, mercantilism was an important economic system. All countries focused on the wealth of their nations. The state's authority magnified its exports and limited its imports to maximize the nation's trade surplus. In the past, gold and silver were important trade medium because there was no international currency that we have now. They spent a lot of gold for their marine forces to expand their kingdoms and seeking out new sources of raw materials. For more wealth of the nations, they widen their foreign freights to enlarged their foreign trades, which needs vigorous marine defense to secure them. The serious concern was that other countries might be wealthier and fire the attack. Resulting in, England, France, Portugal, and Spain were repeatedly in the midst of battle to monopolize the ocean. England was the most powerful and was the vital center of the UK commonwealth. England has a rather small number of raw materials than other countries. To expand its own prosperity, England initiated many economic policies to prevent the inhabitants of its colonies from purchasing any foreign merchandise. And established the motivation processes for its colonies to purchase England's products.

The first British trade regulation announced by England was “The Navigation Act of 1651” (BCW-project.org. (n.d.)), which aimed to terminate the foreign trade rival from the Dutch, allowed only English or colonial ships to trade with English colonies, and disallowed other countries' trade ships to conduct any business along its coast. This marked up an additional cost of goods for the colonists. The second was “The Staple Acts of 1663” (Siskin J.T. 2017), import goods from Europe, Asia, and Africa were mandatorily required to be shipped in England for tax payment before shipping out to their colonies in Africa, America, and other European countries. The third act was “The Sugar Act of 1764” (USHistory.org. (n.d.)), which increased taxes on refined sugar and molasses produced by other countries to monopolize its own West Indies sugar business. Resulting in a positive balance of income that strengthened British mercantilist prosperity. The over surplus of wealth from the 16th century was the outset of the mercantilism system, which had been disrespectful even today. Chinese goods such as tea, silks, and porcelain were extremely profitable for English merchants. Marine Silk route was the route that China shipped its exported products to England via the SCS. When Chinese trade ships arrived at England's port, all Chinese goods would be further monopolized exported to its colonies. China exchanged its goods with gold and silver, no other barter, caused England's shortage of gold and silver (Kenton, Will. 2020)

From the 2nd century BC until the 19th century (En.wikipedia.org. (n.d.)), historically, the South China Sea was a part of the ancient maritime trade route. It was flourish during England's mercantilism period (16th-18th century) (Kramer, L. 2021). The SCS took an essential role in China's Marine Silk Route. Commercial transaction ships traveled from China's eastern shore to bring goods to the nations around the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. Marine Silk Route is one of the oldest silk routes existing in the world. It was an important international trade route to Europe and North Africa during the 15th to 19th century. This route starts from Guangzhou, south of China to South Asia, West Asia, Europe and North Africa passing through the SCS, which dealt with transportation of silk and other Chinese goods such as tea, silks and porcelain etc. It is relevant to know that the Marine Silk Route started for general trade purposes. This name is called later because the extensive silk trading ships were passing through it. (Marineinsight.com. 2019) (National Army Museum. (n.d.)). This route was believed to that was used a long time before the well-known Chinese Silk trade route. During the Song dynasty of China (960 to 1279), China began constructing its own trade ships, resulting in the huge sea trade growth

expansion. Many seaports in China had become regional trade centers. The Ancient Maritime Silk Route linked China with Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Arabian Peninsula, Somalia, Egypt, and Europe. (Guan Chong, Kwa. 2016). The Chinese claim that the entire area of the SCS is theirs despite the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) international property law. **(See Figure 1)**



Figure 1: Official Chinese map of the South China Sea with the nine-dotted line

Ref: Adapted from Stein Tonnesson, "China and the South China Sea: A Peach Proposal"
Security Dialogue, Vol. 31, no. 3, September 2000

By referring to its historical connection with the maritime trading to the European region since in the 15th century, it has marked its territory with the nine-dash line that confines about 80-90% of the SCS (RecoN. 2019). There are several arguments over this Historical Right. First, one Chinese marine geographer argued that after the Chinese emperors shut its empire off from the seas during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), there is no other proof of the control of China over the SCS. Another argument from Kaplan was that most of the land features and islands within the SCS are world natural reserves. It is basically no people living on them. There is no proof of any nationalistic cultures and histories. So, it should not

belong to any Southeast Asia countries, Taiwan, or China (Shukla, S. 2020). The Nine-dash line map was done in 1947 (Wongsawat Kovit. 2021).

The Belt and Road Initiatives Maritime route is also similar to what it was in the past. (See figure 2 and 3)

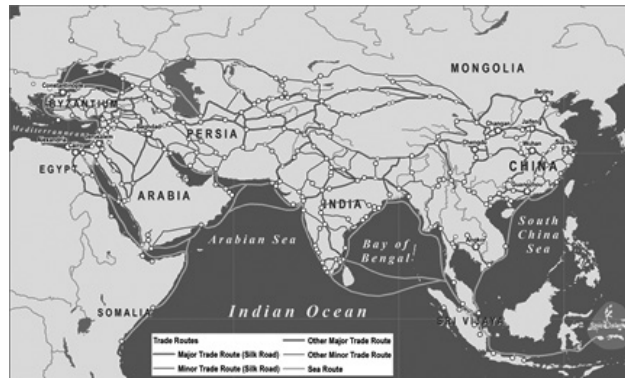


Figure 2: The Silk Roads and Arab Sea Route (11th to 12th Century)

Ref: <https://transportgeography.org/wp-content/uploads/Silk-Road.png>



Figure 3: China Belt and Road Initiative

Ref: The European Council on Foreign relations, ecfr.eu

The 21st century Maritime Silk Route connecting Coastal China to the Mediterranean via Singapore-Malaysia, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. (Mrisdustima. 2020). The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman. It is a geographical bottleneck and the main route for oil transportation from the Middle East. It is a diplomatically important area (Briney, A. 2020). The Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) is China's remarkable foreign policy that invests in infrastructure to

expand its trade across Asia and Africa. The Marine Silk Route will maintain its busiest shipping routes in the world. The BRI will strengthen China's trade with partners in Europe, Africa, and South Asia. The SCS has once again been active and has a vital role in the Pacific Ocean. China started the BRI project in 2013 whilst military infrastructures had been constructed on Spratly Islands in the SCS shortly after in 2014. People may be doubting that it is not just only China's prominent foreign policy initiatives (Harvard International Review. 2020). United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) are the two important pieces of information that should be understood before understand the SCS disputes. The objective of the UN in issuing the UNCLOS is to resolve all problems concerning the regulation of the sea for the essence of the complementary acknowledgment and collaboration. Regardful of the problems of ocean zone are subsequently correlated and need to be thought out as a whole (UN.org. 1982). United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), also considered as the fundamental principle of the Ocean (Pogies, R. J. C. 2017), was finalized in 1982. About the 17th century, Dutch developed a national seacoast rule which limited national boundaries for the freedom of seas not farther than 3 nautical miles from its coast, based on the trajectory of artillery hits, beyond that line belongs to the international. In the early 20th century, many nations slowly started drawing their own sea boundaries aiming for their fishery, mineral resources protection, and pollution controls, which needed the UN to solve the solution. UNCLOS establishes international property law of the sea that every nation has the right over its territory in the sea up to a ceiling, not over 12 nautical miles, started from baselines.

An Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is a principle also ratified by the UN in 1982, which includes a territory that covers either from the coastline of 3 to 12 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles. Not beyond these territories, each nation possesses and can exercise its exclusive fishing rights. (OECD. Org. 2003). The UNCLOS limits nation's coastline to a maximum of 12 nautical miles while the EEZ limits up to 200 nautical miles, which causes an overlap in the bottleneck of the SCS. When EEZ overlaps are claimed, UNCLOS leaves those issues to the associate states to solve their disparities via collaborative discussions and agreements. This overlap of EEZ is the cause of all disputes in the SCS.

From the UNCLOS statements, any nation may claim its right over different territories arising from islands, rock, and low tide elevations. (Pogies, R. J. C. 2017, p. 96).

(See Figure 4)

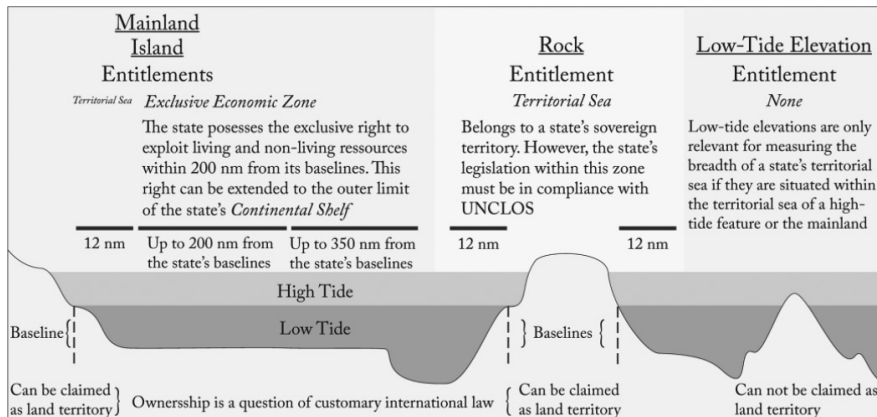


Figure 4: UNCLOS

Ref: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323906601>

Research Methodology

This research based on the secondary data research. The authors retrieved information from the summarizing and collated existing documents from many sources with reliable references, review pieces of literature and academic documents from 2011 to 2021. This manuscript analysis is based on "data triangulation" to validate the uniformity of the information from three sources, The US, China, and related countries. Data triangulation is a method of exploring data from numerous origins to certify consistency. (O'Donoghue & Punch. 2003. p. 78). And also done via the "standard content analysis" method (Bruce L. Berg. 2004, p. 265-295) is the method that presents the common implications and criticisms using the illustrative method so that the readers can see equipotential results that echo all related attributes. My article started with the importance of the SCS. The history related to the SCS from the past to the present. How many countries be affected, and when and why the US got involvement. The Potential for unintentional conflict. And lastly, the proposal of alternative solutions for the disputed cases.

Research Results

The SCS is one part of the Pacific Ocean, which is the largest and deepest ocean in the world cover more than 155 million square kilometers, and has a depth of around 4,000 meters (Oceanexplorer.noaa.gov, (n.d.)). The SCS area is 3.5 million square kilometers, is under a core

of international super-special interest (Wongsurawat, K. 2021) It is not only a large fishing area, accounting for 10% of the world's fishery, but also a major trade route. It is one of the busiest sea routes. One-third of the world's shipping freight passes through this area. On top of that, the SCS has proven oil reserves of 11 billion barrels and an estimated 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas (RecoN. 2019). It is mentioned in the media as being one of the main drivers of the conflict in the SCS. The two main points of dispute are the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands. The Spratly Islands was founded by Henry Spratly in 1791, spread through the southern part of the SCS, and include about 100 islets, sand bars, cay, reefs, and rocks. Mischief Reef is part of the Spratly Islands. Its name was to honor Heribert Mischief, one of Henry Spratly's crew members. This reef has been occupied and controlled by China since 1995 (Wang, B. 2016)

There are many coastline nations that claimed their rights over the South China Sea, which are seven reefs claimed by China, one Island plus one Shoal claimed by the Philippines, one Cay plus one Island claimed by Vietnam, and Itu island claimed by Taiwan. (Pogies, R. J. C. 2017, p. 98). **(See Figure 5)** The Pratas Island, Macclesfield Bank, and Reed Bank are mentioned as the disputed cases (Byjus.com. (n.d.)).



Figure 5: Permanent Court of Arbitration Award Status of Relevant Marine time features in the South China Sea

Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323906601>

Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Brunei claim only part of the sea which comes inside its exclusive special economic zones (Byjus.com. (n.d.)). There are so many others areas in the SCS that have been claimed with no respect to the UNCLOS rules, using its own historical record as a reference for its claims. These disputed countries are China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines. (See Figure 6 and 7)

#	Island name	in Atoll	Currently occupied by
1	Itu Aba Island	Tizard Bank	Taiwan (Taiping Island)
2	Thitu Island	Thitu Reefs	Philippines (Pagasa Island)
3	West York Island	West York Island	Philippines (Likas Island)
4	Spratly Island	Spratly Island	Vietnam (Trường Sa Island)
5	Northeast Cay	North Danger Reef	Philippines (Parola Island)
6	Southwest Cay	North Danger Reef	Vietnam (Song Tử Tây Island)
7	Sin Cowe Island	Union Banks	Vietnam (Sinh Tồn Island)
8	Nanshan Island	Nanshan Group	Philippines (Lawak Island)
9	Sand Cay	Tizard Bank	Vietnam (Sơn Ca Island)
10	Loaita Island	Loaita Bank	Philippines (Kota Island)
11	Swallow Reef	Swallow Reef	Malaysia (Layang-Layang Reef)
12	Namyit Island	Tizard Bank	Vietnam (Nam Yết Island)
13	Amboyna Cay	Amboyna Cay	Vietnam (An Bang Island)
14	Grierson Reef	Union Banks	Vietnam (Sinh Tồn Đông Island)
15	West London Reef	London Reefs	Vietnam (Đá Tây A Island)
16	Central London Reef	London Reefs	Vietnam (Trường Sa Đông Island)
17	Flat Island	Nanshan Group	Philippines (Patag Island)
18	Lankiam Cay	Loaita Bank	Philippines (Panata Island)

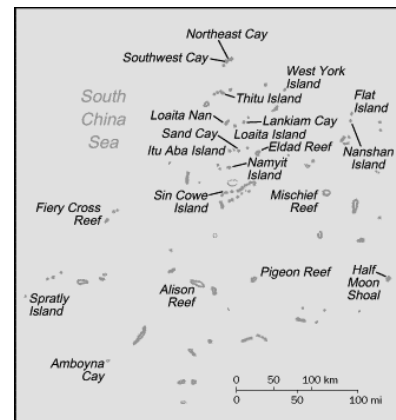


Figure 6: “Spratly Islands: the status and “ownership” of reefs” and map. **Figure 7:** South China Sea map showing Islands and Islets

Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spratly_Islands

Spratly Islands’ issues are related to the property on the islands and militaristic infrastructure of Mischief reef (Value of dissent. 2012). China had built small buildings in 1998 to confirm their claim but apparently to shelter fishermen (Hinkkanen. (n.d.)). Mischief reef is also claimed by the Taiwan, the Philippines, and Vietnam. China's possession of Mischief Reef gave rise to a political problem in Southeast Asia in 1999, especially with the Philippines. Mischief Reef and the Second Thomas Shoal, located 130 nautical miles and 105 nautical miles west of the Philippine Palawan Island respectively. It is 50 nautical miles from Malaysia and 1,000 nautical miles from China’s coast. The US declared that under UNCLOS international law James Shoal is not China’s territory. Despite the claim of China's nine-dash line. The US also does not take up the claims of the 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone by China. But when Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Taiwan claimed their ownership over the Spratly Islands, the US has restrained its continual reputation of non-intervention and did not take up state of affairs (Ketchell, M. 2020). The Paracel Islands is a second dispute island

in the SCS, situated in the north of the SCS, almost the same outlying from China and Vietnam. The distance from the coast of both countries is around 200 nautical miles from its coastline. China claims that Paracel Islands are a part of China's territory by referring to the reference of the 14th-century writings of the Song Dynasty. On the other hand, Vietnam also said that these Islands are also part of Vietnam territory with historical texts from at least the 15th-century evidence. Taiwan also claims that it is part of Taiwan's territory. With these conflicts, China and Vietnam fought over their territorial disputes in January 1974 (Wang, B. 2016). As a result, China acquired the whole disputed islands (Pham, N. 2014). (See Figure 8)



Figure 8: Disputed Islands in the SCS

Source: UNCLOS, CIA

Retrieved from: <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/South-China-Sea-map.jpg>

Red dotted line is a China's Claimed territorial waters, Light blue dotted line illustrates UNCLOS 200 nautical mile exclusive Zone, Black spots are the Disputed islands.

Many ASEAN members are involved in The SCS disputes. ASEAN issued a breadth of view declaration spotlighted the needfulness for China to expedite Code of Conduct for the SCS on June 26, 2020. The negotiating process with China has not yet reached an agreement. ASEAN does not want to aggravate the conflict between the two major powers in the SCS. To have the US involved in this negotiation process may not be beneficial for ASEAN. ASEAN members always have been cautious in responding to China due to their economic engagements. However, ASEAN has become more important to China for two reasons. The first is ASEAN overtook China's top trading position from the EU and the US, the second is the decline of its

exports to the major customer like the US from the US-China trade war. ASEAN members have their own thoughts in choosing either The US or China. The different impression has been accumulated during Trump's presidency, the ASEAN including India, Japan, and South Korea's confidence in getting support from the US is diminished. There are a few unsatisfied factors involved. The US-China trade war initiate by the US has been affected other countries as well. Follow by the negative impact on ASEAN countries' economies from the US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). A few years ago, the US has lowered interests in the Southeast Asian region, while China put more interest with higher support (Marjani, N. 2021).

Another component is the establishment of a Quad focus on the economy and security of the Pacific and Indian oceans. Its alliance is the US, India, Japan, and Australia initiated in 2007 and was inactive in 2009 because Australia walked out. Australia claimed that the Quad lost its power to get Japan's commitment, and India avoided being part of any initiative to restrain China. However, by 2017 Japan and India's situations and conditions had changed. Before Biden's presidency, China had a fierce controversy with India, confronting each other along their disputed border in the Himalayan region. And China imposed punitive mechanisms against Australian goods in 2020. So, when Biden organized a virtual conference on March 12, 2021, heads of four countries joined. Biden promised to grant India to expedite Covid-19 vaccines production and allocate them throughout Asia. The U.S. diplomacy in Asia was designed to strengthen companionships and create a conventional tackle to bargaining with China. China's opinion on Quad is the US try to initiate Cold War with China. Other nations noted that Quad has conflicts with its member's different interests, capacities, and connections with the current gigantic growth of the Chinese economy. Some nations were afraid that it could be converted into an Asian intergovernmental military alliance and would have inspired China's counterattack. With the fact that India is cautious not to interfere with China and is doubtful of previous China and Australia's close relationship. India has been successful in inviting Australia to join in the maneuver drill in the SCS in April 2021.

At the Quad virtual summit on March 12, 2021, The US promises to support the Covid-19 inoculations all over the Asian region, assurance of a free, open, inclusive, and flexible Indian and Pacific Ocean region, and showing an aspiration to act on global warming and fighting against the hijacker as well as to defend China's Belt and Road Initiative world risks (Marlow, I. 2021). The authors' point of view on Quad is that it has hidden agenda to deal with China's wealth and power.

China is not satisfied that Vietnam has proposed seven oil reserved areas in its SCS to India. India has completed the energy agreement with Brunei too. India has been worried about its trade stream security and interest in energy in the SCS. If China controls the SCS, India will get a direct negative effect. Because 55 % of Indian trade travel to the Strait of Malacca and further connects to the SCS. Any China's hostile action can drawback India's international trade proceeding through that sea. Therefore, India has concerned about assuring navigation freedom in that sea. (Byjus.com. (n.d.))

Indonesia does not accept China's nine dashes claim especially in the areas near Natuna Island, Indonesia has increased its military capabilities on Natuna Island, including in an area the overlapping with China's claims.

The Philippines found many of China's fishing boats in the SCS and recognizing them as marine warships. This causes a conflict and finally a breaking point between them (Kehoe, A. 2021). This disputed case between China and the Philippines over the Scarborough Reefs is around 160 nautical miles from the Philippines within its EEZ and around 800 nautical miles from China within its historical nine-dash lines claim but beyond its EEZ. The 2016 UNCLOS awards declaring that the Chinese claim is illegal. In the past, the US has restrained its continual reputation of non-intervention and did not take any state of affairs in the SCS disputed cases. Now the US taking side with the ASEAN, US State Department reported on 13 July 2020 agreeing with the UNCLOS award. And in August 2020, the US administration put twenty-four Chinese companies on the Blacklist because they were involved in constructing the artificial island-building in the disputed islands and reefs. China considered this action as a threatening and terrible disturbance of standard principle controlling of multinational relations (Saha, P. 2020). A Japanese writer Kohara Bonji wrote that the only technic to end China's aggravative activity is by demonstration of true power (Bonji, K. 2020). The authors think that the US plays a crucial role in fixing disputed cases in the SCS, not only because of its security alliance commitments with East Asia countries and several ASEAN countries such as the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, and Vietnam but also to maintain its great power.

Conclusion, Comments and Suggestions

The 2016 UNCLOS Arbitration Award has been accepted as a juridical basis for the marine engagement actions by nations in the SCS. It has provided enormously to the advancement of multinational maritime law. This law is contributed as a juristic ground for all disputed nations to review their judgments and intentions in the SCS. However, it creates several arguments on legitimate matters and the innovative lawful discourse on the SCS problems in different aspects (Thao H. Ng., Huong T.L. Ng. 2021).

The disputes in the SCS have negative consequences to the mutual collaboration amongst the ASEAN nations. It also creates trouble between China and ASEAN. There are many reasons behind the disputed cases. Most of the disputed cases are different territories claims over the sea or claims of the owner of the source of natural resources of different territories, country's fishery areas. The claim over the different islands makes it tough for other countries' trade ships to freely pass through it without worries. Lastly is the EEZ overlapping claims of different territories.

There are many ways to settle the SCS Dispute as follow, to prevent further economic deterioration or disruption, it is necessary for the nations who claim their territories in the SCS to stop raising or amplifying any disputed cases or their past interactions and working together for a mutual agreement or a consensus through a diplomatic approach. The past court judgment on sovereignty provoked retaliation and led to unnecessary war. There may be many alternative solutions for the disputes. First, to peacefully settle the conflicting claims, the disputed nations should voluntarily give up their hostile perspective with acceptance to search for a mutual agreement, even though they may need to share or let go of some of their disputed territories' sections. Second, according to the UNCLOS, all nations can claim their 200 nautical miles of the EEZ. By conforming to the UNCLOS fishery rules, thus, all nations involved in the SCS can also set the mutual agreement to allow free navigation in the SCS as same as the other international sea. Third, another possible alternative would be for the disputed nations to initiate conventional proprietary rights of the disputed territories stating that all the treasures and earnings from the SCS are fairly allocated among the coastline nations. Fourth, one more possibility, the claimants have to precisely map their territory's claims and entitled the unbiased bodies for arbitrating, predicated on the UNCLOS or any alternative appropriate multinational laws (Byjus.com. (n.d.)). Most of all, the authors would suggest the UN revisit the UNCLOS and EEZ for a new conclusion statement on the ownership or the benefit-sharing of the overlapping zone.

Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Brunei have submitted official complaints to the UN for China to comply with the 2016 UNCLOS award. They do not accept the Chinese nine-dash line claims by referencing its historic rights. That claim is not consistent with the international law of UNCLOS and the EEZ (Saha, P. 2020).

China had proposed a bilateral negotiation with the disputed nations, but no nation accepted. Each of them is afraid of China's great power and avoids confrontation with China. They were afraid of unfair negotiation, especially on benefit-sharing. They prefer the arbitration method rather than bilateral discussion. The authors' opinion is that if China insisted on a bully strategy, China might lose support from ASEAN. And might delay its Belts and Roads Initiatives Maritime Route success because SCS is the starting point of this route. China should compromise by proposing a mutual benefit agreement or offering compensation.

Fixing the dispute turns out to be very critical nowadays because it is affecting more than half of worldwide trading and world oil transportation. One-third of world trade transportation passed through the SCS. The SCS is the midpoint between Asia and Europe. The huge amount of oil transportation from Europe to East Asia that passes through the SCS is more than 6 times the amount that passes through the Suez Canal, 17 times through the Panama Canal. Besides, about 80 percent of China's crude oil imports, 30 percent of South Korea's, and 60 percent of Japan's and Taiwan's energy supplies come through the SCS. The energy consumption is expected to double by 2030 (CNAS. Org. 2011). The ASEAN has been engaging in unlocking the disputed cases, but no conclusion has been finalized yet.

To overcome China's power in this region, the US and other regional powers should increase their economic engagements with Southeast Asian countries. Another notification is that the ignorance of Southeast Asian countries, Quad may not gain ASEAN's support (Marjani, N. 2021). The US military has been silently transferred from the Middle East and Europe to Asia. At present, the US guarantees no violation in the SCS. The US wants to check the readiness of China's military and wants to control China's over claims of the SCS. There are several signals that the SCS may shift to be an armed forces zone. It is time for the ASEAN countries to take a firm position by themselves refrain from taking sides. The Quad maneuver is one of the signals. The US gathered allies in the Indo-Pacific region Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and India joining in the naval maneuvers in April 2021 (Wongsurawat, K. 2021). When the Quad conducted its drill, China's responsive action was by conducting its navy and air forces drill at the same place almost at the same

period of time. The authors' opinion is that there will be no serious battle emerge in the ASEAN region. Instead, the coastline countries will increase their military budgets for warships to show their marine potential to compete for natural resources claims or fighting for fair resources allocations.

The SCS and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are two extremely disputatious topics between the US and China. The intensification of the US stand point on the SCS indicates an attempt to create an alliances and companions to counteract with China and supporting the Philippines and Malaysia to be at the forefront of to defend Chinese infringement. In the eyes of China, its efforts in the SCS have been a success. China had built artificial islands on several reefs in the Spratly Islands. There are constructions for military purposes on the islands, including 3,000-meter-long runways, piers, hangars, weapons depots, missile launch bases, and radar stations in 2016 (Wongsurawat, K. 2021). China was successful in exploiting and surveying oil reserves under Vietnam's exclusive economic zones. Besides, it can secure access to the fishery zones in the SCS. However, if China gets the same outcomes without international sanctions, China may increase the similar capacity for the BRI. The US and its alliances can foresee more Chinese military alliance bases in the BRI project. The history may repeat itself when compare the SCS disputes to the case of England governed the seas in its mercantilism period in the 16th to 18th century.

Currently, China has become an emerging hegemon. China should keep good partisans with ASEAN countries. Knowing that America is a direct competitor to its superpower. Countries that had problems with China will go on to partner with the US. And the US would take over its alliance. From the research information, China had many disputation issues with ASEAN countries on the South China Sea. The authors thought that China would have its own reasons for taking these risks that can infer to a few reasons. Firstly, China is an economic world factory where it requires oil to be domestic energy. 80% of oil travel through the South China Sea that is why China wants to occupy the sea lane in the south China Sea. Secondly, China counts Taiwan as part of its country. If China lacks control or no power in the South China Sea, it will be a risk for its national and military security allow the US to raise navy forces to help Taiwan fight against it. Thirdly, the South China Sea is a huge source of subterranean natural energy. Occupying the Southern China Sea will also make it possible to have the right to use those subterranean energies.

The authors' suggestion for any researchers who are interested in the international political economy is to pursue whether the UN will revise the 200 nautical miles EEZ range or the UNCLOS rules in the future or not. Or the economic reason behind Japan, Australia, Germany, and India's involvement in the Quad.

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