



SJA MUN III

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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL)

Mitigating Territorial Disputes and Advancing Maritime Security in the South
China Sea

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Letter from the Chairs

Welcome to the third iteration of SJAMUN and the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL).

Greetings delegates, my name is James Park, a junior at NLCS Jeju. It is an honor to serve as your Head Chair for the SPECPOL in the upcoming SJAMUN III. This year would mark my fifth year participating in MUN, and my fifth chairing experience. I understand that delivering speeches on the podium and interacting with delegates from other schools might be nerve-wracking or stressful for some. However, I hope you can overcome such pressure by using such aspects of MUN as an opportunity to not only boost your confidence in public speaking but also build new friendships. As the Head Chair of the committee, I will make sure to create an environment where everyone can speak freely and try my best to provide the best guidance for the delegates. I wish you luck in your preparation, and I look forward to meeting you all!

Greetings delegates! My name is Chris Choi, an 8th grader at KISJ. It is an honor to serve as your Deputy Chair for SPECPOL. This marks my second year on the MUN journey and my first time chairing in SJAMUN. Regarding the agenda that debates about Mitigating Territorial Disputes and Advancing Maritime Security in the South China Sea, I am truly excited to witness the great engagement and enthusiasm each delegate will build upon throughout the conference. Although participating in the MUN conference may be pressuring since it requires public speaking and communication skills, I hope that delegates step out of their comfort zone and speak passionately with a solution to tackle the issue. See you at the conference, and I sincerely wish you the best of luck!

Hello delegates! My name is Michaela Kang, and I am truly honored to be serving as your Associate Chair for SPECPOL in SJAMUN III. Being an 8th grader from KISJ, I have attended 6 conferences as a delegate in the years prior, and this will be my second time chairing. Although MUN may come across as a jarring and arduous activity to participate in– especially for first-time delegates– please note that MUN is an experience where you can take risks, and have fun. I look forward to hearing about all the unique solutions that you come up with, the spontaneous impromptu speeches crafted in mere minutes, and your enthusiastic demeanor when it comes to speaking in both mods and unmods. See you in September!

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact any of us via email below.

Best regards,

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Committee Introduction

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) is the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It was established in 1963 when the Special Political Committee and the Decolonization Committee were merged. Its primary aim was to assist and oversee the process of numerous territories around the world gaining independence from the colonial powers. Since then, SPECPOL has been holding the unique position among the six main committees of the General Assembly as it addresses a wide range of global affairs, from overseeing the worldwide decolonization to conducting various peacekeeping operations in regions with heightened political tension that often fall outside the mandates of other UN bodies.

Historically, SPECPOL was founded in the context of the post-World War II decolonization movement, when a wide range of territories around the world were freed from colonial rule. Upholding the values of self-determination across the globe, SPECPOL has facilitated the independence of over 80 former colonies, but SPECPOL continues to stay in charge of dealing with the issues concerning Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs) and implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples following the UNGA Resolution 1514. Beyond overseeing decolonization, SPECPOL addresses a wide range of special political issues, including multiple peacekeeping operations, the effects of atomic radiation, information discrimination, and even the governance and peaceful use of outer space and peace, to name but a few. For instance, in recent years, SPECPOL has provided humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping initiatives to the victims of the conflicts in the Gaza Strip, the Syrian Civil War, and the Russo-Ukrainian War.

In recent years, as the political tension in numerous parts of the world has arisen, the role of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee has become more important than ever. Even though SPECPOL does not have binding power, it can play a starring role in shaping diplomatic discourse, consensus-building, and emphasizing international norms on the political issues that threaten global peace and security.

Agenda Introduction

In recent years, the territorial disputes in the South China Sea have become an increasingly problematic issue for nations worldwide, particularly regarding China's dominance over many of the islands located near its territory. This resulted in heightened tensions between neighboring Southeast Asian countries, such as military escalation and political disagreements, notably the Philippines and Vietnam, to date.

China's claims of sovereignty over the sea, including its approximate 11 billion barrels of oil and over 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, have embittered contending nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and more. Since 1970, China has declared proprietorship over various islands located around the South China Sea, a predominant example being the Spratly Islands, which possess rich and natural resources as well as fishing areas. In addition to this, previous satellite images taken from the US have shown China's exponential growth in trying to reclaim land by trying to increase the size of islands physically, or trying to create a new one altogether, for the purpose of creating militarized zones. Still in the status quo, the tension between the nations involved in the South China Sea disputes is escalating. China's continuous acts to claim regional maritime sovereignty through land reclamation, to the extent of issuing military threats and endangering the lives of all the people living in Southeast Asian nations, are risking the peace and stability of the international community. This hinders all the progress made in the years prior.

Given the enlarging territorial disputes, the agenda seeks to explore a multilateral response to the tensions at hand. This emphasizes the need for diplomatic cooperation, the advancement of legal frameworks, and sustainable regional development to resolve the international geopolitical stress and advance maritime security in the South China Sea. Thus, this depicts the fact that this conflict isn't just a regional dispute, but an international dissension that impacts all nations. This highlights the need for international cooperation in order to address the agenda, as well as the need for diplomats to reach a peaceful consensus for all nations to pacify this conflict.

Key Terms

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

UNCLOS is an international agreement adopted in 1982 that defines the rights and responsibilities of each nation in the use of the world's oceans. The treaty stipulated the guidelines for territorial waters, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), and continental shelves. This is standing at the center of the disputes around the South China Sea, as many claims stem from the different interpretations of the UNCLOS.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is a sea zone demarcated by the agreement of UNCLOS in 1982. UNCLOS prescribed that the EEZ extends up to 200 nautical miles from a country's coastline, within which the state has exclusive rights to explore and exploit resources. Since countries are clustered in Southeast Asia, conflicting EEZ claims among South China Sea nations are the major source that fuels the decade-long disputes.

Nine-Dash Line

The Nine-Dash Line is a demarcation line used by the People's Republic of China to assert its extensive claims over most of the South China Sea. This claim overlaps with EEZs of other Southeast Asian nations and has been widely contested in international law.

Spratly Islands

The Spratly Islands are a group of islands and reefs in the South China Sea claimed wholly or partially by the countries, including China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. With rich resources and a geopolitical location, these islands stand at the center of the ongoing conflict over the East China Sea.

Parcel Islands

Also known as the Xisha Islands and the Hoàng Sa Archipelago, the Paracel Islands are an island chain in the South China Sea primarily disputed between China, Vietnam, and Taiwan. Its geographical location made the island to be considered a vital military and economic asset that can not only monitor any maritime activity in the South China Sea and deter foreign military actions but also reinforce their territorial claims. Even though China has occupied all the Paracel islands since 1974, disputes have yet to be mitigated.

Freedom of Navigation

Freedom of Navigation is a principle of international law that allows ships to sail through international waters without interference. The United States and other nations often conduct "Freedom of Navigation Operations" (FONOPs) in the South China Sea to challenge what they consider excessive maritime claims by China.

Historical Background

The origin of the ongoing disputes over the South China Sea dates back to early 20th-century colonial claims over island chains such as the Paracel and Spratly Islands. After World War II came to an end in 1947, the Republic of China postulated the Nine-Dash Line, claiming vast areas of the sea. Such a demarcation line was later adopted by the People's Republic of China, which still uses the line to justify its ownership of the sea.

However, as a territory claimed through the Nine-Dash Line overlaps with the maritime zones claimed by the Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan, tensions in the region have been escalating over the last few decades, particularly. Even though the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982 provided the legal framework for the maritime territories between neighboring countries, competing interpretations of maritime rights, particularly over Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) resulted in further confusion and disputes.

One major turning point was the Scarborough Shoal standoff in 2012, when Chinese and Philippine vessels engaged in a tense maritime conflict over fishing rights near the Spratly Islands. This incident marked a shift toward increased confrontation and spurred the Philippines to pursue legal actions. In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in favor of the Philippines, declaring China's Nine-Dash Line claims to be without legal basis under UNCLOS and criticizing China's artificial island-building for causing environmental harm. Although the ruling was legally binding, China refused to recognize or comply with it, further straining regional relations and challenging the authority of international law.

In recent years, China's large-scale land reclamation and militarization of features in the Spratly Islands have raised alarms among neighboring countries and global powers. These moves have prompted Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) by nations like the United States to challenge excessive maritime claims. The historical complexity of overlapping claims and legal ambiguity makes the South China Sea one of the most strategically significant and contested maritime regions in the world.

Current State of Affairs

The tension in the South China Sea has continued for a prolonged period, with increased conflict between China and the disputed nations. Particularly, China had aggressively acted towards the territory by dispatching coast guard patrols, exercising military power, and rejecting international maritime law. China had especially enforced coercion and persecution towards Philippine vessels and aircraft. China's unstable action threatens the security of the South China Sea.

Interest from China in the South China Sea originates from economic, historical, and commercial benefits. The South China Sea is a crucial trade route, with many international cargo vessels passing through the region, including ships from China. Thus, dominance over the region of the South China Sea is strategically important for its trade and economic development.

Moreover, control over the South China Sea enables China to emphasize its Naval power and potentially restrict other nations from any movement in the region. In addition, as the South China Sea is a geographically pivotal point between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, China can project military power to the U.S. and contaminant nations, which are crucial.

While the nations are negotiating on an ASEAN-Code of Conduct (COC) to resolve the tension, however, the progress is unhurried. Recently, numerous incidents occurred between China and other nations' cargo ships.

Hence, it is important for the global community to resolve the issue through peaceful measures to maximize the benefits of the South China Sea in the global trade economy and also global security.

Stances of Parties

Australia

About the agenda, Australia remains actively involved in the issue by voicing statements opposed to China's claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea. Australia has made it clear in the past that China's acts of exercising sovereignty over low-tide elevations are a matter of concern that is causing disquietude to all neighboring nations. The country went as far as voicing its disagreement to the UN, which reads: "Australia rejects China's claim to 'historic rights' or 'maritime rights and interests' as established in the long course of historical practice' in the South China Sea."

Bangladesh

Although the nation's stance remains neutral on the issue, Bangladesh supports the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea(UNCLOS), hence, wanting to find a balance between sovereignty and security in the future territorial governance under international law. Current Bangladesh-China correlations are built on the foundation of pragmatism, political accommodation, and strategic ambiguity, meaning that Bangladesh does not openly oppose China's acts, but does not fully support them either. The nation is caught in between rivalries–the Sino-Indian rivalry being the most recent to date– in the race to claim sovereignty not only in the South China Sea, but in the Pacific as well.

Brunei

China and Brunei have an extensive history of diplomatic relations, established approximately 30 years ago, and in the process of being deepened by political reliance. Brunei has remained mostly silent regarding the disputes in the South China Sea, not issuing many statements or arguments. Instead of involving itself in the dispute, Brunei has been focusing on implementing domestic-oriented policies. Brunei's subtle tactics in the escalating disputes can positively contribute to the integration of ASEAN or other maritime policies while remaining a neutral stance on the issue overall.

Cambodia

Cambodia and China maintain a strategic alliance, with China helping to upgrade Cambodian military facilities, while Cambodia helps China gain access to seaports. Many years ago, the Ream Naval Base–located in the Gulf of Thailand– became a potential outpost for the Chinese Navy, positioned conveniently near the South China Sea. China also influences Cambodia in many ways, which can be depicted in forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with which China is a comprehensive strategic partner. The nation stands in full support of China's national goals, which include many political motives, like claiming sovereignty over the South China Sea.

Canada

Canada, working closely alongside Australia, has been rallying forces to strengthen military and defense industry cooperation to counter China's growing influence in the South China Sea. After holding talks with the nation's Australian counterpart on August 8, the Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair accused China of trying to manipulate the international apparatus to advance its own goals and stated that the security of the Indo-Pacific region was being challenged. Moreover, Global Affairs Canada has issued many statements against the growing maritime disputes in the South China Sea, highlighting the need for all states to commit to previous agreements made in the 2002 *Declaration on the Conduct of All Parties in South China*.

China

China has had a long timeline of resolving maritime disputes, typically related to its territory. However, China has expanded claims on the South China Sea, supported by historical evidence such as the nation claiming the nine-dash line from Japan after World War II. Thus, China invokes the nine-dash line as the basis for territorial claims made in the South China Sea. China's desire to claim the ocean surrounding the region is one of the world's most prominent trade routes, providing both strategic and economic benefits.

France

In light of the maritime disputes, it was reported that France was siding with the other ASEAN nations against China's expanding claims over the South China Sea. The nation expressed grave concerns in relation to the incident in the South China Sea, which caused damage to many Philippine vessels, the Bureau of Fisheries, and the Aquatic Resources. France renews its call for respect of the UNCLOS and of freedom of navigation. Additionally, France is against any threat or use of force that is not under international law, and underscored the need to resolve disputes through dialogue.

Germany

At first, Germany only expressed concern over the growing tensions in the South China Seas and called for diplomats to gather to find a peaceful solution in line with international law, including UNCLOS. However, Germany's position has developed over the past years, with the nation lodging a diplomatic partnership with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and ASEAN member nations to reaffirm its legal position while respecting maritime areas in the South China Sea.

India

The nation has reiterated over many years its stance, which is aligned with freedom of navigation and overflight, unhindered lawful commerce, and adherence to international law for peace in the Indo-Pacific. India supports the belief that the upcoming code of conduct for the regulation of maritime activity in the South China Sea needs to be consistent with existing international law.

Indonesia

Although China continues to insist that Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around the Natuna Islands overlaps with the line, the Indonesian Foreign Ministry has rejected these claims, refusing to acknowledge that it has any overlapping jurisdiction with China. The Ministry of Indonesia has proposed an agreement in relation to the 'nine-dash claim' with China that would cover various aspects of economic cooperation. The trust generated between the nations would help push forward negotiations on the delayed ASEAN-China Code of Conduct for the South China Sea, which should be the main priority for the nation during the conference.

Japan

Despite not being a South China Sea littoral state, Japan has asserted that the nation is a stakeholder in the maritime disputes, including over maritime sovereign rights and access to remote physical features claimed by nations such as China, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The nation highlighted the importance of the South China Sea as a Sea Lane of Communication (SLOC) for providing a stake in how these disputes should be resolved.

Malaysia

Malaysia's stance on the agenda remains fixated and consistent, while unequivocally advocating for the nation's sovereignty, sovereign rights, and interests in its maritime areas in the South China Sea. Additionally, Malaysia firmly supports the view that resolving these disputes requires peaceful and constructive solutions that follow the universally recognized principles of international law established under the UNCLOS.

Myanmar

Myanmar, not directly related to the issue, has maintained a neutral stance while advocating for peace amidst the escalating conflict. Although the stance for the nation has been vague, it mostly remains aligned with the ASEAN view of the need for negotiations between ASEAN and China on a code of conduct regarding the South China Sea disputes.

New Zealand

New Zealand has remained "deeply concerned" about China's use of force to claim islands in the South China Sea. One particular concern was centered around Chinese efforts to prevent Philippine vessels from resupplying citizens in the islands. New Zealand also commented that "there is no legal basis for states to claim 'historic rights' concerning maritime areas in the South China Sea".

Thailand

Amidst the escalating disputes, Thailand conveyed support for peaceful solutions regarding maritime rights and the exercise of sovereignty rights. The Thai government called for "dialogue and diplomacy" in light of the increase in Chinese activities in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The Foreign Affairs Secretary also connotes that Thailand supports all peaceful

solutions that involve peace talks and diplomacy, and is willing to work with all relevant parties to maintain the peace of the South China Sea.

Pakistan

Although Pakistan is not directly involved in the South China Sea dispute, its geographical and political stance has led to close ties, resulting in Pakistan's prolonged support for China. The Pakistan government had supported China's claim on the South China Sea territory by showing commitment to the One-China principle and opposing Taiwan's independence. While Pakistan supports China, it also respects the collaborative effort by ASEAN countries and China to resolve the tension to maintain Asia maritime security. Pakistan presents a comprehensive stance on the agenda, encompassing China's relationship and efforts to maintain maritime security.

Philippines

Tension between the Philippines and China is rising due to disputes regarding the territorial claim in the South China Sea. Recently, China has shown aggressive action through enforcing coercion and persecution towards Philippine cargo vessels and aircraft. The ongoing conflict between the Chinese government and China's Nine-Dash Line claim, particularly in the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), is deteriorating, prompting a need for a solution. The South China Sea is crucial for the Philippines' economy due to its role as the most important shipping lane. While the Philippines is cooperating with the negotiations by ASEAN, the government is still concerned about the ongoing incidents with China during the negotiations. Hence, it seems that the Philippines will play a crucial role in voicing the agenda.

Republic of Korea

While South Korea is not directly involved in the South China Sea dispute, it is showing a keen interest in the territory due to heavy reliance on the region for maritime trade routes and energy imports. The South Korean government had made a vague statement regarding the issue in the South China Sea, and it pursued peaceful negotiations between the nations. As South Korea has a close relationship with the ASEAN group, it is expected that the country will support the negotiations between ASEAN and urge for a peaceful resolution.

Russia

Despite its non-involvement in the dispute, Russia plays a key role in the agenda with its relationship with intricate nations. Russia holds an alliance with China for a strategic partnership, but also holds close relationships with disputed nations against China, due to geographical proximity. With this complicated circumstance, Russia is maintaining a regional balance of power for both sides. Recognizing the complex approach, it is expected that Russia will contribute to a manageable solution.

Singapore

As a neutral nation on the agenda, Singapore isn't taking any formal action regarding the South China Sea dispute. Despite the close relationship with China, Singapore has shown a careful stance on the issue. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had stated that Singapore will not support sides from the involved countries. Hence, it is likely that Singapore will play a role as a part of neutral nation during the negotiation to resolve the tension.

Sri Lanka

Like Singapore, Sri Lanka generally maintains a neutral stance in the South China Sea dispute, but prioritizes its relationship with China. Since Sri Lanka has a high economic reliance on China, Sri Lanka supports China despite its neutrality. Sri Lanka prefers a peaceful solution to resolve the tension, emphasizing its neutrality and avoiding a clear stance. Sri Lanka also actively communicates with ASEAN involved nations, showing an attempt at regional security and a preference for maritime security.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been an active advocate amidst the South China Sea dispute, often endorsing the need for adhering to international law. With the coordinated support from Australia, Australian and British vessels have conducted a freedom of navigation operation in the region in an attempt to counter China's faulty claims over the ocean waterway. The UK has also been trying to follow the approach influenced by progressive realism to "cooperate where [they] can, and challenge where [they] must". The UK has been careful not to intensify the crisis but has intervened from time to time when necessary. Hence, the UK is voicing the need for an immediate solution to resolve the escalating dispute talks while trying to maintain the pragmatic relationship the nation has with China.

United States of America

In previous years, the South China Sea has become an area of competition between the United States(US), and China. China's combative actions demonstrated in the South China Sea—such as island militarization and building—have magnified the US's concerns regarding the disputes, as the US's allies also became closely involved in the disputes. The US is following the goals to fulfill the security commitments to Japan and the Philippines, seeing that maintaining a regional balance of power is beneficial to the US and its partners. In addition to this, the US has also looked towards finding ways to dissuade China from carrying out additional base-construction activities by defending the principles of peaceful resolution of disputes.

Vietnam

Vietnam, while asserting its sovereignty in the East Sea, has remained a strong advocate for peaceful solutions. It has sent diplomatic messages to China and the Philippines discouraging aggressive actions and urged all parties to respect its sovereignty, abide by international law, and help maintain regional peace.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution to relieve the longstanding tensions over the region is to shift the focus from ownership to cooperation by introducing joint resource development frameworks. This would involve mutual agreements to explore and exploit maritime resources while imposing stringent regulations on any form of military activities. In this regard, delegates may consider devising a multilateral framework where regional and external stakeholders, such as China, Vietnam, and the Philippines, participate under the supervision of regional intergovernmental initiatives such as ASEAN or even the different bodies of the United Nations. Delegates may also reflect on the past successes and failures of multilateral joint development, particularly the Malaysia-Thailand Joint Development Area (JDA) or the Japan–South Korea fisheries agreements.

Another possible solution is to establish a maritime security code of conduct. Over the last century, the tensions around the South China Sea have been heightened by the frequent confrontations between coast guards, fishing fleets, and naval forces. The code of conduct may include a real-time maritime incident reporting system and a commitment to stop militarizing unauthorized artificial islands. These could be facilitated without unnecessary conflicts under the supervision of regional frameworks such as the ASEAN Regional Forum or even the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA).

Questions to Consider

1. How can existing international frameworks, such as UNCLOS, be better enforced to reduce tensions in the South China Sea?
2. One of the many reasons the tension has persisted to this day is the lack of trust between regional stakeholders. What confidence-building measures can be introduced to improve trust among South China Sea stakeholders?
3. To what extent is it possible to create a solution that brings mutual benefits to all nations?
4. Is there any mechanism that can be implemented to maintain the peace of the South China Sea after agreements and treaties are enforced? If so, how can this serve as a long-term solution? And, what is the incentive factor for nations to commit to future agreements?
5. How can the progress of negotiations between the involved parties regarding the ASEAN Code of Conduct be accelerated?
6. How will the global agreement on the dispute influence the international trade market?
7. One of the possible solutions regarding the agenda is to introduce joint resource development frameworks. How can the member states ensure the peaceful activities in the South China Sea region?

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