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Territory and Military Alliances: Dominance of China in the South China Sea

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Strategic Importance of the South China Sea and Its Competing Claims

In the Western Pacific Ocean, lies the South China Sea which is half-closed. It has a 3.5 million square kilometer area. The South China Sea serves as a trade route as over \$3 trillion in trade passes through it every year which makes it one of the crucial maritime trade routes. The sea is heavily rich in marine life and it contains different species of fish that are consumed locally either preserved or fresh. South China Sea is naturally endowed with oil and natural resources which makes it a focal point for the competitive powers of the world. The oil and minerals from the South China Sea move into the North and food and manufactured goods move towards the South. The sea also contains many dangerous areas that are not well-crafted and nautical charts are being used there to alert about the sensitivity of such areas in the sea, especially around the [Spratly Islands](#).

Several conflicts have arisen due to the claim of the territories by different countries. China has been the primary driver of this conflict as it demands a substantial part of the sea, it demarcated the boundary since its formation by using a

U-shaped boundary line named as "Nine-Dash Line." China's claim for the Island of Taiwan by adding a 10th dash, but this map was rejected by several countries. [UNCLOS](#) has declared these claims by China as vague and defined that this boundary line is not legal. The USA is also a claimant state of the sea as it also wants to acquire it due to its maritime life significance. Hague ruling of 2016, in which the Philippines tribunal submitted the case to the Permanent Court of Arbitration that it is not a matter of who owns the South China Sea, but what counts is the legal boundaries. The arbitration was in the favor of Philippines and gave it a sweeping victory and declared the nine-dash line as illegal as it was already not acceptable by the UNCLOS.

Militarization and Rising Tensions in the South China Sea

China has militarized three islands in the sea, they are armed by anti-crafts and anti-ships, fighter jets, jamming, and laser pieces of equipment. China takes these actions to protect its sovereignty and has a defensive approach. China has sovereignty over some maritime areas such as Spratly islands. US has no claim over it, but has developed navy ships and aircraft in the South China Sea and also demands freedom of navigation to oversee the

activities that have been happening in the sea. Moreover, China is active in surveilling any activity done by the US that involves the South China Sea. On the other hand, the US's main objective is to avoid war by creating peace stability, and deterrence measures. The other parties include the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan also claim all and some parts of the sea. Recently, the Philippines and Japan held their first joint security setup to enhance security against China's growing pressure. Majorly, they enhanced the Philippines' navy capabilities and Japan's Maritime [Self-Defense Force](#) to create mutual commitments and ties for peace. Both states are long-lasting allies to the US to counter China's growing military buildup. All these lead to more escalation and create potential conflict in the South China Sea. Efforts from both sides are to acquire more legitimacy on the South China Sea which the world sees as a complex conflict.

The Path to Peace: Diplomatic Efforts and Future Prospects

Militarization of the South China Sea paves the way for future conflicts among the claimant states. For this reason, peaceful negotiations must come into play for the stability of the region. Recently, a statement came from Philippines Foreign affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo, he said that the Philippines is focused on prioritizing diplomatic efforts with China to resolve maritime tensions with China. He further said that peace and dialogue must prevail, and both state leaders must

come to the table to reconsider the decisions regarding future prosperity. The 9th meeting of the Bilateral Consultation mechanism was held in July in which Manalo gave his stance that the Philippines will not compromise on its territorial rights in the South China Sea. This statement came by connecting the dots with the [Hague ruling of 2016](#) that was in favor of the Philippines in which it was clearly depicted that China was doing unlawful activities within the Philippines waters. The US has proposed high-level US-China strategic diplomatic strategies to avert the political tensions between China and the ASEAN region. China, however, is not ready to give up on any part of the South China Sea as it claims it originally belongs to them regardless of any ruling.

In a nutshell, the South China Sea is a burning issue in the region as it conducts significant maritime activities and whoever possesses it will directly have dominance over the other claimant states. This is a long-run conflict and it still is not resolved to this date because none of the claimant states is ready to step back. Moreover, the US has also been very active in this conflict as the dominance of China in the region poses a security threat to the US and they would not want this for themselves. International organizations and governments of the claimant states should proceed without delay to find a fruitful solution that would be in favor of the region's stability. Any effort that is being made to adjudicate the conflict will eventually de-escalate it, and there will be room for betterment in the future.