

Houston Area Model United Nations Standard Committee

UNSC



Chair | Nolan Taarea

Topic B: Code Orange: Preventing the Escalation
of Tensions in the South China Sea

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Chair Letter

Salutations Delegates,

It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I'm Nolan Taarea, proud to be your chair for the United Nations Security Council!

Although I was born in Texas, I was raised for the majority of my life in Indonesia. Nonetheless, my first encounter with Model UN and how I fell in love actually started during my last year living there. As I enter Blinn this fall as a college freshman, I intend to continue my passion for MUN, attending all conferences accessible to me. Since I started, I've participated in 14 conferences as a delegate, and chaired a total of 5 committees, accumulating a total of 15 delegate awards. Although I'd brought no awards home from my very first conference, it truly was the people who convinced me it was worth staying in the community. As I explored many committees and countries, I had learned the true meaning behind becoming a good delegate and have decided to make it my mission to guide the beginners, and challenge the advanced.

The reason I chose to be a chair for the UNSC is because I've experienced first hand how competitive and professional most delegates are in all UNSC committees. It wouldn't be wrong to declare that y'all are the cream of the crop in this conference. The UNSC is strategic, research heavy, and requires meticulous work in both your solutions as well as carving your name in the council. If this is your first time in the UNSC, don't be afraid, because everyone has been there before, and chances are, you aren't the only one.

Ultimately, the only thing that will make your MUN experience a blast is if you make the most of your time in conference making friends, spending time with your friends, and enjoying the learning process of it all!

If you have any questions regarding procedure, tips, or about the UNSC overall, do not hesitate to ask!

Nolan Taarea
Chair of UNSC
ntaarea@gmail.com





Committee Background

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is a global body whose primary responsibility is for maintaining international peace & security, where they can meet whenever they believe peace is being threatened.

When a complaint concerning a threat to peace is presented to the council, it is the Council's action to first recommend that the parties attempt to reach an agreement by peaceful matters, to which The Council may:

- set forth principles for such an agreement;
- undertake investigation and mediation, in some cases;
- dispatch a mission;
- appoint special envoys; or
- request the Secretary-General to use his good offices to achieve a pacific settlement of the dispute.

When the dispute reaches a state of hostility, The Council's main concern is to bring them to an end as soon as possible, where The Council may:

- issue ceasefire directives that can help prevent an escalation of the conflict;
- dispatch military observers or a peacekeeping force to help reduce tensions, separate opposing forces and establish a calm in which peaceful settlements may be sought.

Beyond this The Council may opt for enforcement measures, including :

- economic sanctions, arms embargoes, financial penalties and restrictions, and travel bans;
- severance of diplomatic relations;
- blockade;
- or even collective military action.

A chief concern is to focus action on those responsible for the policies or practices condemned by the international community, while minimizing the impact of the measures taken on other parts of the population and the economy

COUNCIL HISTORY

Since the end of World War II, The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established to maintain international peace and security among all nations. Following the establishment of the UN Charter, the UNSC held its first session in January, 1946, where 15 member states would discuss plans and strategies in safeguarding international peace and security.

The UNSC, the United Nations principal crisis-management body, is empowered to impose binding obligations on all 193 member states to maintain international peace and security. The Security Council—comprising five permanent members and ten elected members—meets regularly to assess threats to international security including arms proliferation, civil wars, natural disasters, and terrorism. In response to peacekeeping missions, and, in certain instances, authorize the use of force.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The escalating tensions and rapid militarization in the South China Sea continue to spew chaos in the region, especially as maritime disputes reach a tipping point. Whether that friction erupted because of historic territorial claims, economic resource competition, or external power dynamics, it is clear that the issue is deeply rooted in overlapping legal and national interests. As of 2026, China has increased the militarization of its ports and airfields within the region by approximately 20%, bringing Southeast Asian nations to the edge of a high-risk maritime conflict. This isn't just about China. Claimants like Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, and their international allies are continuously trapped in a standoff, unable to run away from the mess of unresolved jurisdictional boundaries. Unfortunately, the issue is on high risk of disrupting international peace, and it would be irrational to assume UNCLOS alone can solve the problem. The UNSC must take action to identify feasible pathways, navigating the gray-zone nature of the conflict to prevent military escalation while respecting international law.



TOPIC B BACKGROUND

What started as island claims in the 1970s has now grown to become a serious issue of concern on international peace and security. For several years, a large part of the maritime landscape in the south china sea (SCS) was under the control of a nation whose goals were to solidify their regional borders. Unfortunately, this pursuit for territory became the very reason why bordering nations of the SCS now have to face overlapping territorial claims, naval distribution disruptions, as well as the pressure of being watched by a foreign nation within their borders. The unaddressed status quo ultimately led to the diplomatic tension across the sea, creating the optimal environment for maritime disputes to grow in order to challenge the maritime boundaries of neighboring states.

The Republic of China (ROC) brought more attention to the matter with the drawing of the “Nine dash line map” in 1947, which drew the borders of the SCS that are supposedly owned by the ROC.

The ROC's growing territorial control accelerated the exploration of the SCS, allowing the presence of hydrocarbon reserves to be revealed in the late 1960s. This discovery caught the attention of neighboring nations and has created the geopolitical contest we now see over the SCS.



Figure 1. The ROC's Nine Dash line

These economic interests became the very reason military fortresses emerged across the Spratly and Paracel Islands, with the ROC finally seizing control of the Paracel Islands after their confrontation with the Southern Vietnamese forces. Tensions then escalated again after the invasion of Chinese troops at the Vietnam borders of Johnson South Reef in 1979, establishing a quiet distrust between the two parties over land confrontation.



In 2002, members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) decided that this hostile environment had to be addressed. ASEAN states alongside China signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS with hopes to reestablish peace and trust and provide protection for the uninhabited reefs. Unfortunately, even despite these efforts, progress to resolving the conflict has reached a halt due to China's large scale land reclamations across the SCS.

The Philippines found the case to be extending for far long enough and officially submitted an international arbitration case under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 2013. The court ultimately concluded that the basis of historical rights to defend China's nine dash line did not prove to be sufficient legal evidence under international law. China refused to follow the court's verdict and continued to operate its installations and maritime activities across the undecided territories of the SCS.

STATUS QUO

The tension within the region stands unmediated even with over 20 years of proposed territory division, causing further escalation of the conflict in recent years. Late 2026 updates report that the Second Thomas Shoal and Sabina Shoal has slowly grown to become a clashing ground with the China Coast Guard (CCG) personnel deploying water cannons, blockades, and engaging in physical ramming against Philippine ships. Whether or not the encounter was an accident does not change the fact that it happened and it raises the concern of ASEAN members which in turn might cause a regional war to break out.

In September 2026, the PLA Southern Theater Command, one of the five joint theater commands of China's People's Liberation Army, made the decision to organize a joint naval and air combat exercise around Scarborough Shoal (Huangyan Dao). Their purpose in this operation was to deliver a warning against Philippine patrols. As the SCS grows to be an even more unfriendly environment, these sudden exercises end up acting more of an open invitation for war that forces neighboring countries to be on high alert to prevent accidental airspace or maritime invasions.



TOPIC B: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Given the time length of the conflict that has not died down, it has become a given that current efforts are ineffective and innovative measures must be taken in order to resolve the issue. Use these questions as a guide and key areas to cover in your solutions:

1. How should the UNSC define gray zone actions and what boundaries should be established in the case of the SCS?
2. Should the UNSC establish an independent body (e.g. UN Maritime Observation Mission (UNMOM)) to monitor and report gray zone interactions in high-risk zones like Scarborough Shoal?
3. Under what terms can the UNSC encourage a frozen status quo mandate to put a stop to all further island reclamation, artificial structure placement, and military airfield expansion? (Keep in mind the Council's mandate and available tools).
4. What role should regional organizations like ASEAN play in the conflict as mediators in comparison to immediate UNSC intervention?
5. In the event of a total breakdown of diplomatic talks, what specific UN Charter Chapter VI (Pacific Settlement of Disputes) steps should delegates propose before considering Chapter VII enforcement options?



TOPIC B APPENDIX & SOURCES

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