

## **Overview of Indonesia's Role in the South China Sea Conflict**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to determine the process of resolving the South China Sea conflict by the Indonesian government, which until now has not been resolved due to overlapping claims by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Taiwan. The South China Sea conflict is heating up, causing concern and threats in the Asian region. Because the South China Sea is an international route, where the South China Sea is used as a shortcut by countries in the world. Because the South China Sea is a shortcut and connecting route for Asia, Europe and the Middle East, the South China Sea has a very important position for the world economy. If there is a conflict in the South China Sea it will greatly hamper the world economy. The data collection technique in this study was library research, in which the data were obtained from secondary data such as books, journals, news and so on that were related to the research being studied. This research refers more to the resolution of the South China Sea conflict by the Indonesian government.

**Keywords:** Conflict Resolution, South China Sea, Government of Indonesia



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### **INTRODUCTION**

The South China Sea is an international trade route located in the Pacific Ocean, which stretches from the Singapore Strait, Malacca Strait, Karimata Strait to the Taiwan Strait which has an area of approximately 3,500,000 square meters. The South China Sea has a very strategic role in the world because it is used as an international trade route, many ships in the world cross this sea to the countries in Southeast Asia and vice versa. Not only that, the South China Sea has very abundant natural wealth such as huge oil and natural gas reserves and various types of marine biota found in it, so that it can meet food needs (Asep Setiawan 2017: 34). Because in the South China Sea there are 10% of the world's total fish and 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic of natural gas, so the South China Sea is very strategic and very important for industrial and economic needs in the world (Budi Hermawan Bangun 2017: 32) (Candra & Saptatiningsih, 2023).

The South China Sea is a very strategic sea because it has a very important geopolitics for countries in the world. Because the South China Sea is the busiest shipping lane in the World because some of the Tengker ships and Cargo ships in parts of the World cross the South China Sea, with the aim of taking and delivering export-import goods and collecting crude oil. The place for taking the crude oil is to Southeast Asian countries, especially in Indonesia, which is delivered to various countries to meet industrial needs, especially in parts of European countries. The extraction of crude oil passes through the South China Sea, to the Malacca Strait and the Lombok Strait, more than 50% every day tankers and cargo ships pass through the South China Sea with the aim of delivering export-import goods and taking crude oil. Nearly 1.6 m<sup>3</sup> (10 million barrels) per day, tanker ships take crude oil that passes through the Malacca and Lombok Straits to the South China Sea. Not only crude oil and export-import goods are taken but also coal, nickel, gold and other natural resources that are delivered to various countries that pass through the South China Sea (Anna Yulia Hartati 2016: 13).

With huge reserves of oil and natural gas in the South China Sea, many countries in Southeast Asia are at odds with maritime territorial boundaries. Because the People's Republic of China (PRC) claims the South China Sea is its maritime territory, it has created enormous conflicts in Southeast Asia, especially countries directly adjacent to the South China Sea. Such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, and Taiwan. The People's Republic of China (PRC) claims almost the entire area of the South China Sea belongs to it, where the People's Republic of China (PRC) claims its boundaries based on the Imaginary line (Nine-dashed line). This imaginary line (Nine-dashed line) is a line drawn unilaterally by the Chinese government without going through a United Nations (UN) conference on the grounds that it is to mark the territory of its ancestors in the South China Sea. According to the People's Republic of China (PRC), the South China Sea was the territory of its ancestors, namely in the Han, Song, Manchu and Yuan Nasti with evidence of the discovery of ancient currency and in the form of ancient items, namely jars found around the Spratly and Paracel islands (Gerald Theodoros L. Toruan 2020 :113).

The People's Republic of China (PRC) also claims that around the 200th century BC, Chinese fishermen had explored the South China Sea, specifically the Spratly and Paracel islands. With evidence of the existence of settlements in the Han, Manchu, Song and Yuan Nasti as well as the discovery of ancient currency and warren of wares, for that reason the People's Republic of China (PRC) claims the entire South China Sea region is its state territory on the grounds of historical rights and the discovery of ancient goods. around the islands adjacent to the South China Sea (Budi Hermawan Bangun 2017: 30) (Arasit, 2023).

The following are some opinions of experts regarding the conflicts that occurred in the South China Sea: According to Hans J. Morgenthau, the national interest of a country is to pursue power, namely anything that can form and maintain control of a country. Meanwhile, according to Jack C Plano and Roy Olton, the national interest is the fundamental goal and the most decisive factor that guides decision makers in formulating foreign policy, national interest is a general conception, but is an element that is a very vital need for the state (Anna Yulia Hartati 2016 : 6) (Putri, 2023).

From the opinions of some of the experts above, we can conclude that until now the South China Sea conflict has not been resolved. The conflict involved 5 major Southeast Asian countries because in the South China Sea conflict it was not only the People's Republic of China (PRC) that claimed the South China Sea but there were 5 major countries that claimed ownership of the South China Sea including (Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei Darussalam), Of these several claims, there has been a very large conflict in Southeast Asia due to overlapping claims to ownership of the South China Sea between China, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Brunei Darussalam, but in these claims the most active and the most aggressive in the China Sea conflict South is the country of China, where this country claims almost the entire territory of the South China Sea is its sea area based on an imaginary line (Nine Dashed line) (Gerald Theosdoros 2020: 121) (Saputri, 2023).

The South China Sea Territorial Dispute was initiated by the Chinese government's claims in August 1951 when the Chinese prime minister Zhou Enlai declared South China Sea ownership of the Spratly and Paracel islands. The Chinese government's claim was based on documents issued by the Goumindang (Koumintang) regime led by Chiang Kai-shek at that time which controlled China. The document explains that the Spartly, Paracel and Pratas archipelago is the territory of the People's Republic of China (PRC), this claim is emphasized on the principle of historical rights (Gerald Theodoros L. Toruan 2020: 112).

Long before Chiang Kai-shek's claims of the People's Republic of China (PRC), it was argued that the territories and islands in the South China Sea were the territory of his

ancestors, namely the Han, Song, Manchu and Yuan nasti, and the People's Republic of China often brought up history and discoveries -ancient discoveries around the Spratly and Paracel islands adjacent to the South China Sea, for that reason the People's Republic of China (PRC) maintains its claim to ownership of the South China Sea. In fact, they use their military power to defend their claim to ownership of the South China Sea and the People's Republic of China (PRC) does not hesitate to take action against any foreign ships that pass through the South China Sea (Budi Hermawan Bangun 2017: 30) (Hidayat, 2023).

The determination and patience of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in defending its claim to ownership of the South China Sea has made them develop their military strength from sea, air and land. To support their claims in the South China Sea and take action against any foreign vessels passing through the South China Sea despite the United Nations (UN) condemning their claims. This issue has become a concern for Southeast Asian countries, especially the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, Taiwan and Malaysia which have conflicts with the People's Republic of China (PRC) over ownership of the South China Sea. Of course, in dealing with the South China Sea conflict, it requires a country that is neutral and does not side with any country, such as Indonesia. Because the problem of the South China Sea conflict is regarding overlapping claims to ownership of the South China Sea territory by the countries of Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Taiwan, the Philippines and the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Gerald Theodoros L. Toruan 2020: 121).

Indonesia is a country designated by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of The Sea (UNCLOS 82), to mediate between several countries that have conflicts in the South China Sea region. Indonesia's involvement in efforts to resolve the South China Sea conflict is not without reason. Indonesia also has its own interests in the South China Sea. contained in the fourth paragraph, namely participating in carrying out world order based on freedom, eternal peace and social justice. Because the South China Sea is an international trade route and is the busiest route in the world, because more than half of world trade sails through the South China Sea. Of course the South China Sea conflict greatly affects the stability of the Indonesian economy, because the South China Sea is a route that is often passed by Indonesia and other countries with the aim of delivering and taking export and import goods as well as delivery and collection of crude oil that is delivered to various countries that pass through it. South China Sea. So that Indonesia participates in resolving the South China Sea conflict, because the conflict that occurred in the South China Sea has disrupted Indonesia's national economic stability (Anna Yulia Hartati 2016: 13).

Indonesia's appointment in resolving the South China Sea conflict is not without reason. The reason why Indonesia was chosen as an intermediary country is because Indonesia is not a claimant state. Claimant state terminology always refers to disputes over title, namely about island ownership (maritime features). Indonesia does not claim the maritime features of the South China Sea which are disputed by claimants, namely the People's Republic of China (PRC), Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei Darussalam (Gerald Theodoros L. Toruan 2020: 122). As a major country in ASEAN, Indonesia has full responsibility in maintaining security stability in the Southeast Asia region, especially the conflicts that occurred in the South China Sea region. In addition, even though it is not a claimant country, the impact of the South China Sea conflict is very detrimental to Indonesia's economic stability. If an open war occurs in the South China Sea, it will greatly affect the lives of the Indonesian people, especially in the North Natuna Islands region which is directly adjacent to the South China Sea region (Budi Hermawan Bangun 2017: 26).

## **Literature Review**

The book written by Sodik, D.M (2016). Under the title International Law of the Sea and its regulations in Indonesia, this book contains the 1982 UNCLOS Sea law regulations, which discuss territorial boundaries and freedom of navigation in the High Seas. PARTHIANA I.W (2014), In this book explains the rules and history of the law of the Sea. This book also explains the 1982 UNCLOS regulations and the history of the establishment of the right of sea passage. Puspita D. (2017), in this book explains the same thing, namely regarding the provisions and international law of the sea.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

In this study the method used is Normative Juridical method. The Normative Juridical Method is a library research method in which researchers take research data through primary and secondary data. In this study, data analysis was carried out qualitatively with the aim of revealing how the Indonesian government's strategy is in resolving the South China Sea conflict.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Process of Settlement of the South China Sea Conflict by the Government of Indonesia**

The Indonesian government is optimistic that negotiating through ASEAN with the Chinese government regarding the code of conduct in the South China Sea can be completed within the next three years, starting from the high-level meeting between the two parties in Singapore in November 2018. This optimism was carried out by the Indonesian government through the agreement of each head of state at the November 2018 Summit. The single draft made by the Indonesian government was the negotiation of a code of conduct in the South China Sea (Single Draft South China Sea Code of Conduct Negotiating Text) in The code of ethics regulations are divided into five main focuses, namely: (1) the geographical scope of the South China Sea; (2) efforts to resolve disputes; (3) the obligation to cooperate in preserving the maritime environment; (4) the role of third parties in the South China Sea and; (5) legal status code of conduct (Gerald Theodoros 2020: 126).

The Indonesian government is taking an approach through the ASEAN regional approach in which Indonesia is used as a mediating country to resolve conflicts that occur in the South China Sea. ASEAN itself was formed with the aim of increasing regional peace and stability in the Southeast Asian region, in the face of conflict tensions that occurred in the South China Sea, on July 22, 1992 the Indonesian government together with ASEAN Member countries issued a decision on the ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea which was signed all ASEAN member countries. The principles regulated in this declaration emphasize the need for peaceful settlement of disputes and encourage countries that are members of ASEAN to explore cooperation related to the safety of maritime navigation and communication, namely protection of the marine environment, coordination of search and rescue. , efforts to combat crime and illicit drug trafficking that occur in the South China Sea region (Budi Hermawan Bangun, 2017).

### **The Indonesian Government's Efforts in Reconciling Conflicting Countries in the South China Sea**

On July 22, 1992, Indonesia succeeded in reconciling several conflicting countries in the South China Sea. By forming a declaration called (Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea/DOC) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Gerald Theodoros 2020: 119). The decision that was issued by the Indonesian government together with ASEAN on July 22, 1992

has produced results. Which in 2002 the Chinese government agreed to a declaration made by the Indonesian government with ASEAN, in which the declaration was signed by 10 ASEAN Foreign Ministers (Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea / DOC) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The contents of the DOC are as follows (Gerald Theodoros 2020: 119).

1. The governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China have reaffirmed the legal regulations contained in the UN Charter, UNCLOS 1982, TAC, and the principles of international law, apply as basic norms governing state-to-state relations.
2. The governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China reaffirm mutual respect and maintain commitments among countries to freedom of navigation and overflight over the South China Sea as determined by universally recognized international law, including UNCLOS 82.
3. The governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China have agreed to refrain from carrying out activities that escalate conflicts that could affect peace and stability in the South China Sea region, such as actions to inhabit uninhabited islands, coral reefs and etc.
4. The governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China build trust and mutual respect for one another in order to create peace in the South China Sea region.
5. The governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China resolve their territorial and jurisdictional disputes in peaceful ways, without using threats and use of force, through consultations and negotiations between countries involved in the conflict, in accordance with international law principles.
6. The governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China are ready to continue consultation and dialogue with disputing countries in the South China Sea region through modalities that must be agreed to by them, including regular consultations on declarations that have been formed with the aim of building closeness and transparency goodwill, building harmony, mutual understanding and cooperation, and facilitating peaceful conflict resolution between disputing countries in the South China Sea region.
7. The governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China agree to respect and comply with the declaration that has been jointly formed by the governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China.
8. Before there is a comprehensive and permanent resolution of the South China Sea conflict, the governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China have agreed to carry out exploration or carry out cooperative activities such as protection of the marine environment, marine scientific research, security of navigation and communications at sea, SAR operations, and combating transnational crime.
9. The governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China reiterate to interested parties in the South China Sea to apply a code of conduct in order to enhance regional peace and security stability in the South China Sea.

The governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China emphasized to other countries to respect the principles listed in the declaration that was formed by the governments of Indonesia, ASEAN and China. However, this peace did not last long in 2014-2016 China again made unilateral claims in the South China Sea and this country began to build artificial islands in the sea which are disputed by Southeast Asian countries. This bamboo curtain country is more aggressive than before, and does not hesitate to crack down on every ship that passes through the disputed South China Sea, air or sea (Peggy Puspa Haffsari, Yandry Kurniawan 2018: 57). Even China has dared to build artificial islands near the disputed sea, namely the Paracel and Spratly islands with the aim of showing that China has always been in the South China Sea. Here are some pictures of artificial islands made by China above the South China Sea, precisely in the Paracel and Spratly islands (<https://www.cnbcindonesia.com>).



**Figure 1. China's Artificial Islands**

Image Source <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com>

The picture above is an artificial island made by China above the South China Sea in the Spratly and Paracel islands which are disputed by several countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines and Taiwan. The island is not too far from Indonesia's North Natuna Islands. So that these islands are also a threat to Indonesia because they are close to the North Natuna Sea (<https://www.cnbcindonesia.com>).

This island was built by the Chinese government in 2014-2016 which has an area of approximately 3,200 hectares (13 square km). On this island there is a military base in the form of buildings, fighter planes and so on. This island is inhabited by about 5 million Chinese troops on the island. China continues to build military bases over the disputed South China Sea and continues to expand its historic claims in the South China Sea. From the construction of the artificial island, until now there has been no explanation from the Chinese side regarding the purpose of building the island. Because the existence of the island will trigger a very large conflict (<https://www.cnbcindonesia.com>).

From Indonesia's side, it continues to make peace efforts and negotiations through ASEAN. However, since President Jokowi's leadership, Indonesia has paid little attention to the South China Sea conflict. Bliu pays more attention to national interests and defends the national maritime because many foreign ships enter Indonesian waters illegally by fishing. And what's more, the Chinese state is starting to harass the North Natuna islands, because the North Natuna islands have enormous oil reserves so that the Chinese state is targeting them in all kinds of ways (Anna Yulia Hartati: 2016).

## **CONCLUSION**

The South China Sea is a strategic area where the South China Sea is used as an international shortcut. The South China Sea is used by many countries to conduct shipping with the aim of delivering export-import goods to various countries. The South China Sea is also a connecting route for countries in the world such as Asia, Europe, the Middle East and countries in the world. Not only that, the South China Sea has very abundant natural wealth such as oil and gas reserves, as well as various types of marine life found in the South China Sea, so that this sea is highly contested by several countries because it has very prominent potential. From several countries that are in conflict in the South China Sea, so far they have not found a bright spot where several of these countries are mutually claiming ownership of the South China Sea. Especially China, which claims the entire territory of the South China Sea, is its territory based on the Nine Dashed Line. China's claims have raised tensions in Asia, because there are several Asian countries that claim the South China Sea, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darusallam and Taiwan, which until now have not been able to find a bright spot because of the overlapping claims of several country.

The Indonesian government itself has attempted to reconcile several conflicting countries in the South China Sea. Indonesia itself has often conducted negotiations from time to time to reconcile several conflicting countries in the South China Sea. Indonesia has succeeded in making an agreement and code of ethics regarding the South China Sea conflict. Indonesia once formed a declaration called (Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea / DOC) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on July 22, 1992. And it was only approved by the conflicting countries in 2002 during the reign of President Megawati Soekarno Putri, in the code of ethics there are many agreements by countries that are in conflict in the South China Sea. However, this peace did not last long where in 2016 the Chinese government established an Artificial Island over the South China Sea. Near the disputed Spratly and Paracel islands, giving rise to tensions over several Asian countries that claim territory in the South China Sea. And even this artificial island also threatens Indonesia because it is not far from the North Natuna Sea. Indonesia itself does not claim maritime features in the South China Sea, but the impact of the South China Sea conflict affects the stability of the Indonesian economy. So that Indonesia participates in reconciling conflicting countries in the South China Sea.

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