**Involvement of the U.S. regarding Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea**

The Secretary of the Treasury is a member of the Presidential cabinet and is fifth in the presidential line of succession. The main role of the Secretary of the Treasury is to lead the United States Department of the Treasury,[[1]](#footnote-1) and its goal is to "promote economic prosperity and ensure the financial security of the United States".[[2]](#footnote-2) The current secretary is Steve Mnuchin.

During the meeting President Trump and China's Premier Xi in April of 2017, it was emphasized to China the importance of “adherence to international norms in the East and South China Seas."[[3]](#footnote-3) Since January 20th of 2017, the U.S. navy has conducted three "freedom of navigation"[[4]](#footnote-4) operations where a warship sailed within 12 miles of an artificial island built up by China; the international norm for territorial waters.

**Background Information and Past International Action Regarding Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea**

The maritime disputes in the South China Sea revolve around territory because of the resources that can be extracted. According to experts, there are around 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the area and 5.3 trillion U.S. dollars’ worth of trade passes through the sea every year.[[5]](#footnote-5) The two main disputed areas in the South China Sea are two occupied island chains; the Spratlys and Paracels.

On January of 2013, the Philippines formally initiated judgement of China claims in the South China Sea under the UN convention on the Law of the Sea with the International Tribunal at The Hague on the legality of China's nine-dotted line (Beijing's Claims in the South China Sea).[[6]](#footnote-6) The final ruling of the Tribunal was that China's claims to the islands were invalid, although the PRC refused to recognize the decision and the sovereignty remained an issue.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Proposed solutions**

In order to finally resolve the issue of the South China Sea, an organization called the South China Sea Committee (SCSC) with binding actions should be created that ensures that international law is being followed. Due to the numerous exclusive economic zone conflicts in the South China Sea, in order to set more definitive boundaries, the EEZ for its members should be limited to 100 nautical miles. This means every South Asian nation should have access to the wide variety of resources and freedom of navigation, and no country will have exclusive access to the two main contested island chains in the South China Sea.

Regarding the current military installations, all nations with bases on the Spratlys and Paracels should convert them to harbors capable of docking only commercial ships or convert them to non-military infrastructure. Nations can claim sovereignty to the island's where they have outposts, but other nations can exercise the freedom of navigation and are to extract natural resources from the area around other nations' outpost in the Spratlys and Paracels, and the EEZ for each nation will not extend to their bases.

To provide funds for increased naval spending, the U.S. has two main priorities. Firstly, in order to be able to manage and contain the Chinese threat in the South China Sea, the focus of U.S. international policy should be shifted from Europe to Asia. There are hundreds and tens of bases in Germany, Italy and Spain, and the original reason for the establishment of these outposts; the USSR, no longer exists. Moreover, increase in naval spending should be focused on improving the US's naval influence in South Asia. The U.S. could strengthen its naval garrison on the island of Guam, which is close to the South China Sea. As part of the NDAA for 2018, it would also be a very viable option to reestablish ports of call in Taiwan. The island nation's usefulness is that it can be used as a bargaining chip and a tool against China.

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