



# Policy paper: South China Sea policy in the perspective of the United States and the perspective of China

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## ABSTRACT

This policy paper aims to propose policy options that the United States might choose regarding the situation in the South China Sea as well as options from China's own policies in addressing regional conflicts. The report will discuss policy recommendations, feasible policy options, state interests in the South China Sea and important background information of the area of concern. This research uses qualitative methods in this research using books, articles and journals as reference sources of research cited in accordance with the theme of this research which discusses the South China Sea dispute. While the approach used is a qualitative descriptive approach. The paper argues that the current US policy is holistic, thoughtful and reasonable. Any changes should be small and should follow the original principles defined in 1995 who has related to the conflict over claims in the South China Sea.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The South China Sea dispute arose after World War II when coastal states such as China, Vietnam and the Philippines fought over ownership of islands. Controversy developed when it was believed that the region held vast reserves of oil and natural gas. (Kebijakan Dalam Perspektif Amerika Serikat Dan Perspektif China, n.d.) The US Energy Information Administration estimates that there are approximately 14 trillion barrels of natural gas and sixteen to thirty-three billion barrels of oil in the South China Sea. (Lieser, 2021). This is equivalent to China's annual oil consumption, estimating that there are around 14 trillion barrels of natural gas and sixteen to thirty-three billion barrels of oil in the South China Sea (Lieser, 2021). This is equivalent to China's annual oil consumption.

The South China Sea has a geographical location in the Southeast Asia region which borders directly with the PRC (Macau and Hong Kong), the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Vietnam. Apart from its geographical location, the South China Sea also has around 250 islands which are predominantly uninhabited. This condition makes the South China Sea region unavoidable from conflicts between bordering countries or countries that have an interest in this area, such as the struggle for claims to an island to EEZ claims. One of the more heated conflicts is that China claims 90% of the natural resources in the South China Sea region, causing cons from many countries bordering the region. This began in 1974 and 1992 that China claimed Sparty Island and Paracel Island as its territory. China was the first country to discover and use the LCS islands and their resources during the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century

BC. The LCS was also included in the national borders during the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the 20th century, during the Qing dynasty, the government exercised jurisdiction over the Paracels. In the 1930s, the Chinese government attempted to put the islands in the LCS on the official map. China reclaimed the Spratlys from Japan after World War II. The South China Sea dispute, which has yet to reach the point of completion, is a regional security issue that can disrupt regional stability in the future. A binding and permanent solution is needed to a conflict-prone situation that disrupts the region's stability. The vulnerability of this conflict is based on several reasons in the struggle for the waters of the South China Sea, including that this region is a trade route that connects Europe, Asia, and America. Furthermore, this region has very abundant natural resources, namely, biodiversity, fisheries, other marine resources, and abundant natural gas and oil content. (Johnson D, 1997)

In the 1950s, China, India and Myanmar proposed a non-aggressive win-win coexistence arrangement. This became the basic principle of international law and continued to safeguard the interests of developing countries, resulting in a fair political and economic order. Historically, China held territorial sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction over 60 to 90 percent of the LCS. International law prohibits foreign military personnel from gathering information in the exclusive economic zone. (Melita Angelin Bidara, 2018)

In the 1980s, other claimant states took advantage of China by exploiting energy resources in the LCS, while China faced funding challenges and technological shortcomings. Competing countries drilled more than 1,000 oil wells and produced more oil and gas than China used. China's sovereign rights referring to the U-shaped line, which includes islands and other features in the LCS may have caused conflict between UNCLOS and China. However, Beijing claims the Nine Dash Line was published long before the international liberal order, so China's rights should not be nullified. In 2002, ASEAN countries agreed to establish a COC in the LCS. The rules stated in the draft outlined responsibilities and appropriate practices for each organization and/or party. The content of the framework remains confidential to the general public. However, statements from the 35th ASEAN Summit have reassured regional powers of China's intention to continue cooperation.

China's most aggressive actions in the LCS were naval clashes with Vietnam in 1974 in the Paracel Islands and in 1988 in the Spratly Islands. Since then, Beijing has been cautious in its use of force, and only limits its use when the risk to regional and global security is low. At the same time, China realizes that in this day and age, shipping protection cannot be done by itself, making it unlikely that a larger military conflict will occur. More recently, in 2016 the Philippines has expressed its willingness about the prospect of joint utilization of resources in the LCS. Although such enthusiasm will not resolve territorial and maritime disputes, it can trigger cooperation and initiate common interests. In addition, China and the US share similar views on the construction of international maritime order, as both have substantial territorial areas and long coastlines. If the power differential between the two countries can be reduced, it will be revealed that they share the same concept of rules on freedom of navigation and dispute settlement procedures.

The ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea was made to achieve peace and stability in the South China Sea. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers also formulated a Declaration of Action (DOC) on the South China Sea with the aim to foster mutual trust, cooperate in the maritime sector, conduct discussions and establish a formal and binding code of conduct. So far, disputes in the South China Sea can arise from interested countries, including the United States, which is known as a superpower, is also drawn to take part in order to strengthen trade cooperation with countries in the South China Sea region.

The United States argues that the LCS has an important role in international trade and shipping that must be maintained. America's participation is not necessarily without reason, as a superpower, the United States is involved in deciding the island disputes carried out by China on Spratly and Paracel Islands by using its foreign policies. However, this was not welcomed by China because according to them this made the South China Sea an international issue. The continuous rejection by China and the involvement of the United States in the peace of ASEAN countries and China, made the two superpowers want to dominate in the region. The United States and other countries argue that if China succeeds in increasing its strength then it becomes a threat to them, because with the provocative attitude that China often does will cause division and

destabilize the existing stability. The overlap that occurs now makes the United States or China conduct military exercises in the waters of the South China Sea as a form of preparation for war if it must be done. In addition to the LCS conflict, China also claims the Nine Dash Line or referred to as the Nine dotted lines which involves Indonesia because Indonesia's Natuna sea is on the Nine dotted lines. Therefore, the Indonesian government took the path of diplomacy which used its foreign policy to protect the region and other economic politics.

To make rational policy decisions, the US must understand China's intentions by evaluating the South China Sea disputes in terms of Beijing's overall foreign policy and strategic objectives. First, Beijing's primary concern is to maintain its territorial integrity to provide legitimacy to the regime. Second, China's intention in the South China Sea is to maintain a stable environment that can provide a suitable and friendly environment for international trade. (Yulima Rimapradesi; et.al, 2023). Therefore, the importance of the China Sea dispute is volatile and significant. So if many countries intervene but ignore the dispute, the dispute will slip down Beijing's political agenda. Conversely, if the US is over-involved in the dispute, Beijing will be at the top of the agenda of the dispute. Therefore, the importance of the South China Sea disputes fluctuates significantly in the bigger picture. The China Sea dispute is basically not on the political agenda of Beijing which is in the midst of stable external conditions. So the US should try to avoid actions that incite hostility and force Chinese leaders to retaliate harshly in response to rising nationalism among the Chinese people because it has an important role in the world of political influence.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses qualitative methods in this research using books, articles and journals as reference sources of research cited in accordance with the theme of this research which discusses the South China Sea dispute. While the approach used is a qualitative descriptive approach. The method used in this research is a qualitative method by focusing on correlational research. Correlational research aims to detect the extent to which variations in a factor are related to variations in one or more other factors based on the correlation coefficient.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Foreign Policy Patterns of China and the United State

The South China Sea is a conflict-prone water area because it is contested by several countries in the region such as China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. The South China Sea is a water area with abundant natural resources, including oil and other energy sources, which is one of the reasons for the struggle between these countries. With a strategic location that becomes a crossing route for international ships through the Malacca Strait, which is a connecting route between Europe - Asia - America is also one of the reasons for conflict in the South China Sea because countries that directly intersect such as Indonesia, Singapore, and even the United States have an interest in maintaining stability and security. And with the rapid economic growth in Asia, especially China, compared to the European region and the US with its declining economy, many other countries are trying to hold power control over the South China Sea. However, the involvement of the United States in the South China Sea dispute is not merely to control its natural resources, but to protect the region's stability around the South China Sea. The United States itself states that its involvement in the South China Sea dispute is only in an effort to maintain freedom of navigation of ships in international waters, maintain peace and seek to reduce the risk of disputes in the region. The United States' policy shift to 'high profile intervention' is also the reason why the United States has been drawn into this dispute..(Arief B. Darmawan dan G. Lintang Ndadari, 2017).

China's action in claiming an area to become its territory, China uses one of three methods, namely: Conduct a cooperation strategy that excludes the threat or use of any force and involves an offer to transfer control of the contested territory; Conduct an escalation strategy, which engages in coercive diplomacy to achieve a favorable outcome at the negotiating table or use force to seize the land of the intended territory; Adopt a delay strategy, which involves defending a country's claim to territory but not offering cooperation or using force. The essence is to defend existing claims in the dispute.

Since the establishment of the Chinese people (China) Beijing has implemented a delay strategy in managing its claims to the South China Sea where the delay was carried out by occupying YongXing Island in 1950. Occupation of the island, which is part of the Amphitrie group in the western part of the archipelago.

In 1974, Beijing pursued a strategy of delay towards the South Vietnamese government largely driven by the need to strengthen its position in the Amphitrie Group and to improve its naval capabilities in defense of its claims. With these actions, tensions continued to rise with China consolidating its control over the Paracels following a brief clash with South Vietnamese forces. Which China then consolidated its control following the Benrok. The confrontation over two fishing vessels saw China consolidate its control over the Paracels following a brief clash, after which China took the Crescent Group and finalized its occupation of the Paracels. Despite consolidating control, China's position remains weak despite its claim to the Spratly Islands.

The LCS is a contested area because of its strategic value as Sea Lines of Trade (SLOT) and Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) that connect the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, making it the busiest in the world. Half of the world's trade traffic is recorded through the region (Hari Utomo; Mitro Prihantoro dan Lena Adriana, 2017). In addition, the LCS also has economic value with natural resources in the form of oil and natural gas reserves. This strategic value has made each claimant state try to defend their respective national interests by carrying out various maneuvers, ranging from the launch of the nine dash line map by China, the filing of the Philippines' lawsuit against China to the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration, to assertive actions such as the construction of artificial islands and China's military presence in the LCS. The complexity of the LCS issue has even made great powers such as the United States (US) also "present" through its military power by increasing the frequency of Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOPS) activities to oppose China's expansion in the region.

No legal theory can solve all the territory or boundary disputes. Such disputes are generally too vital to a state's national interests to yield just because a legal rule, let alone a procedural one, has changed. However, it is equally true that countries engaged in such disputes continuously try to reinforce their legal positions by developing more evidence and invoking the rules of international law to their own advantage. Thus, a change in international law that would reinforce a party's position in a territorial dispute may have the practical effect of providing greater incentive for involved countries to resolve the dispute (Wendy N. Duong, 2007)

There are two elements that must be considered in choosing China's strategy in maintaining its position in the South China Sea. The first is the Diplomatic component and the second is the Administrative component. (M. Fravel, 2011) In addition, China also applies the existence of a secondary component in the delay strategy carried out, namely the military component. The use of the diplomatic component is done in several different ways, namely opening negotiations that call for bilateral talks.

The power used by China successfully supported the delay strategy because China knew that other claimants were reluctant to accept these terms, then China could buy time to consolidate its claims so as to prevent commercial activity in the disputed waters. The power was also successfully applied by China through the administrative component which was the creation of the Bureau of Fisheries Administration so that it could regulate law enforcement shipping in the waters around the Spratly islands where it enforced domestic fishing laws, the operation of salty vessels, hydrocarbon exploitation in disputed waters.

However, there are weaknesses in the implementation of China's strategy, namely the continued increase in tensions and clashes such as between the Chinese navy and South Vietnam. In this tension, China's position still remained weak, then when China shifted its strategy to escalation there was also a clash that killed 74 Vietnamese people.

### **The Implications that Occur as a Result of Regional Claims that Lead to Security Dilemma**

Currently, a sense of insecurity is felt in the region around the South China Sea. Claimant states are alarmed by China's growing military power in the region. Since the late 2000s, China has increased its patrols and activities in an effort to enforce its maritime rights within the nine-dash

line. These operations by China have raised alarm among other claimants who consider these activities a real threat to their maritime rights.

The theory commonly known as Offense-Defense Theory was coined by Stephen Van Evera, this also departs from the term security dilemma. Security Dilemma is a situation of an action or phenomenon between one country or several countries which affects the security of other countries, whether it is increasing security or weakening security, there are two basic strategies, namely offensive and defensive. Defensive is a strategy where countries try to defend their territories and resources that they already control. This defensive strategy also aims to make it impossible for other countries to control the territory of the defensive state. While offensive is a strategy where the state adds resources and potential military use that can even threaten other countries. (Robert Jervis, 1978).

With the existence of Offense-Defense Theory, the security dilemma will increase when offense dominates, which in turn can lead to sentiment between countries and even the possibility of war. While when defense dominates and excels, it can reduce the possibility of war because the country is more focused on defending itself. (Avidit Acharya & Kristopher W. Ramsay, 2013).

Security Dilemma can indeed be said to be very obvious in the Indo-Pacific, especially China, which is quite sentimental about the United States. China and other countries can consider that this is a threat and can affect the policies of China and other countries including Indonesia. And this can explain the causes when there will be more sentiment even if a war between countries occurs because of AUKUS. Every country in the region every country in the region is either pro or con against these two superpowers. Not to mention regional threat from North Korea which also has the power of long-range attacks and the country's nuclear program could even make security tensions that is even riskier (Koran Jakarta, n.d.)

China's status as a major country has made countries around the region relatively soft on China's actions. However, China's foreign policy strategy has so far been able to tame ASEAN solidarity. China's strategy to initiate economic growth through a bilateral approach in the form of the Belt and Road initiative to a number of ASEAN member states is a factor that has weakened ASEAN's collective strength in stemming China's expansion. China's expansion. The challenge to generate consensus for ASEAN requires collective strength to prevent internal divisions and external threats (Endah Rantau Itasari & Dewa Gede Sudika Mangku, 2020)

If the security dilemma conditions increase, it means that it signals a threat to the country, while in these conditions the country is doing defense superior to offense, this will ease the conditions of the dilemma and even the war. It can be said that this is the assumption of the state for self-defense due to a situation. This theory provides a new perspective in international politics that war can be prevented when defense is more dominant and profitable than offense through the offense-defense balance scheme. (Achaya & Ramsay, 2013)

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Since the 1990s, China has increased its military spending with double-digit increases almost every year. China's military budget has increased eightfold in 20 years. China also has the largest naval fleet in the world. Countries in Southeast Asia have also sought to improve their

military capabilities. Malaysia's defense spending has more than doubled since 2000. In March 2014, the Philippines purchased military infrastructure, worth at least USD 671 Million. The United States' post-2010 pivot to Asia, which has projected 50%-60% of US air and naval power to Asia, exacerbated the arms race in the region.

China's increase in military power is important to China, but causes anxiety for other countries. China firmly rejects the presence of external powers in Asia especially the involvement of the United States, Washington is considered the main obstacle for China to become famous in the region. China has also attempted to encourage its Southeast Asian neighbors to ignore China's threat theory by providing aid during regional financial crises and engaging in regional conflicts, also making security agreements to maintain stability in the region. However, the country's continued military buildup worries its neighbors. The smaller and weaker southeastern neighbors eventually adopted a balancing strategy in response to China by purchasing military infrastructure and forming alliances with the United States. They chose to balance China on the grounds of their territorial security especially the issue of territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Without a doubt, the increase in military power otherwise threatens China's interests and security in the region. This situation leads to a security dilemma between China and other South China Sea claimant countries. China's current strength is perceived as both an opportunity and a threat to some countries, leading many of China's neighbors to pursue a gradual tactical approach in engaging with China and to maintain a balancing option if engagement fails. (Andika, 2017)

China is still adamantly claiming ownership of the South China Sea. And the countries that intersect in the South China Sea also do not want to give in, this creates a situation of conflict dispute. Intervention by the United States has further exacerbated the existing conflict. Even after receiving demands to actively resolve the dispute, China continues to stick to the strategy of delay under the pretext of negotiations. This negotiation is just a mask used by China to get the attention of other countries that will see China as a good country and gain trust for countries, especially in the South China Sea region and also the United States. With ongoing negotiations, China is trying to maintain a balance point between its domestic foreign policy strategies. (Arief Bakhtiar Darmawan, 2018)

#### **Advice on Handling the South China Conflict**

However, according to China's maritime policy, Beijing has shown economic - diplomatic persuasion to convince its neighbors that there is no threat to territorial waters. On the contrary, the policy also shows strong assertiveness to safeguard sovereignty that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is concerned about because China's view of international law is incompatible with UNCLOS provisions on military arbitration with an operations approach. China's actions are a reaction to the same or more assertive steps from other countries. However, China has proposed various joint development schemes, namely with the Philippines and Vietnam to maintain peaceful and stable LCS waterways, to deepen good relations, and to reduce the increasingly strong competition with the US.

From China's perspective, its actions are largely a reaction to similar or more assertive moves from other claimant states. There is reason to be optimistic about the outcome taking a different turn as both powers declare nuclear deterrence and have interdependent interests. Nevertheless, competition is increasing, and unless states compromise or reach an understanding, a crisis remains on the horizon that provides problems and uncertainties. To avoid conflicts with other countries, what to do is as follows (Yuli Ari Sulistyani; et.al, 2021): Create joint development to exploit natural resources i.e. gas and oil; Cooperate in marine scientific research; Reaching consensus on electricity distribution with neighboring countries as well as with the U.S; Deal rationally with third-party disputes without involving UNCLOS or liberal international regimes; Continue Code of Conduct (COC) negotiations.

In the past ten years, the South China Sea has been in the spotlight of international maritime disputes, with many countries fighting over waters, islands and reefs in the South China Sea. There is little doubt that no country has attracted more attention than the People's Republic of China due to its extensive claims known as the Nine-dash line. In addition, China's growing naval capabilities and previous use of force over islands in the South China Sea pose a security threat to other littoral states in the region, such as Vietnam and the Philippines. Today, the United States'

policy on the South China Sea has remained consistent since its initial formulation in 1995 (The four pillars on which the policy is based are as follows: Oppose the use of threats of violence to settle competing claims; Enhance diplomatic efforts to resolve competing claims, taking into account the interests of all parties to help contribute to order and prosperity; Preserve the freedom of navigation of all ships and aircraft in the region; Take no position on the legal basis of competing claims over many features in the South China Sea.

The current US policy is holistically prudent and sensible, and the emphasis on compliance with international law and the Law of the Sea Convention puts the US on the international moral high ground. However, the reality is that China's implementation of the law could be more specific and multi-interpretive. This is because China only insists on all countries following international law, but needs to be more specific for others to understand the intentions of the US government.

Then there are policy options from the United States, namely: Helping Southeast Asian littoral states such as Vietna and the Philippines modernize their armies makes a regular Chinese invasion expensive and helps buy time for the US to intervene militarily in the event of war and patrol the LCS to maintain freedom of navigation; Its actions are usually to increase arms sales to Asian countries to help improve defense capabilities. This means requiring American arms companies to provide training to Asian soldiers to improve their capabilities; Proactive engagement in resolving sovereignty issues of ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines; Taking action to resolve the competing claims of various ASEAN countries is potentially the president for the next resolution with China, where resolution among ASEAN countries makes negotiations with China easier with the US. Which means Persuade Littoral ASEAN states the benefits of reconciling each other's claims outweigh the disadvantages and make a stronger negotiating position with China; Preventing China from using a much more assertive posture; Actions Drastically increase pressure on China to abandon its aggressive behavior toward neighboring littoral states in the South China Sea which means Expanding the Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines to include islands and land features contested by China and other ASEAN countries; substantially increase US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

The advantages of this option are evident by giving ASEAN countries a stronger position at the negotiating table with China. However, the viability of this option could be more questionable. First, as mentioned above, it deviates from the US policy of not taking a stand on competing claims in the South China Sea. Such a policy approach could trigger a Chinese invasion of the entire South China Sea and possible US allies, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, by force to prevent any form of reconciliation from taking place. Even if China only annexes islands in the region, the US will be placed in an undesirable political position. The absence of military intervention would imply intolerability. Taking sides also compromises the neutral stance the US has adopted for over twenty years. Second, the public reaction to the compromises made by each ASEAN country must be considered. Nationalists in each country may perceive the compromise as 'weak' and an attempt to overthrow the ruling government, causing greater regional political instability and potentially leading to civil war. Third, even if a deal is reached, if Vietnam manages to strengthen its position in the Spartlys, Beijing could be forced to seize the islands before Vietnam can take over.

The Asia-Pacific region is a highly strategic region economically and politically. As an island nation in Southeast Asia, the Philippines is strategically positioned. However, this strategic location also poses complex security challenges and has significant implications for the stability and security of the Philippines, leading to a security dilemma. The security dilemma is a situation where a country is caught in fear of potential threats from other countries, increasing their defense capabilities to ensure their own security. However, this can be interpreted as aggressive actions by other countries, which then react in the same way, increasing tensions and conflicts. The South China Sea is one of the conflict-prone areas in the Asia-Pacific Region, because many countries, especially major countries, have interests, in which the interests of each country, especially between major countries such as China and the United States, are at odds with each other, making it vulnerable to conflict between them. That makes the Philippines interesting among other Asia-Pacific countries with security dilemmas, because the Philippines has a dependency relationship

with the two major countries, where both countries have their own interests in the region, and try to exert their influence. (Azhar Fuad Nugraha, 2023)

Various policies made by claimant states towards the LCS dispute are inseparable from efforts to fight for their national interests. Regarding Indonesia's national interests, it is necessary to look at two interrelated things, namely the dynamics in the LCS dispute and the intersection in the North Natuna Sea. Although Indonesia is not included in the claimant states, the nine dash line claimed by China has intersected with Indonesia's national interests in the North Natuna Sea. Against this, it is then also related to Indonesia's economic interests. Referring to the Decree of the Indonesian Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries No. 47/2016, the Natuna Sea is rich in marine resources such as various types of fish and other marine biota.<sup>21</sup> In addition, other potential natural resources contained in the area are oil and natural gas content. The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM) noted that the East Natuna Block contains 36 million barrels of oil and 222 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas in place (IGIP), as well as 46 tcf of natural gas reserves. (Thomas, 2020)

Referring to the concept of national interest according to Nuechterlein, Indonesia's national interests in the North Natuna Sea include defense interests, economic interests, and world order interests. Indonesia's defense interests are related to territorial sovereignty. Then, economic interests are related to sovereign rights and special jurisdiction in the utilization of natural resources in the EEZ. Finally, world order interests to maintain regional security stability as an international trade and shipping route. (Yuli Ari Sulistyan, Andhini Citra Pertiwi, & Marina Ika Sari, 2021)

First, related to defense interests in order to maintain territorial sovereignty, it can be said that the LCS dispute is a "test" for Indonesia in defending its territory in the North Natuna Sea. Indonesia claims the waters as part of its sovereign territory by referring to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The legal basis then explicitly gives Indonesia the sovereign right to explore the natural resources contained therein. (Humphrey Wangke, 2020)

By looking at the dynamics of the deployment of military forces and the strategic value of the LCS region, Indonesia as part of ASEAN also has an obligation to help maintain security stability in the region. In addition, as a country whose territory is directly adjacent to the LCS, Indonesia has the potential to feel the impact directly if there is an escalation of conflict in the LCS region. Referring to these facts, maintaining security stability in the region both from major power competition and international shipping security are two of Indonesia's national interests related to the interests of the world order. (*world order interest*). (Andrias Darmayadi & Ervina Nabilah Purnamasari, 2022)

The US policy regarding the LCS includes first, emphasizing that the US is guided by the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal decision, which according to the Arbitral Tribunal, China's claims in the LCS are baseless. Second, it sent the aircraft carriers USS Nimitz and USS Reagan to participate in joint exercises in the LCS. Furthermore, the US also deployed B-25 and B1B nuclear-powered bombers to practice long-range strikes in the LCS. Joint exercises using powerful defense equipment are a deterrence for the US to make China aware of the US military presence in the LCS. By 2020, the number of US troop levels in the Asia Pacific will be 375,000 with a concentration of 60% of naval vessels and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of naval forces. (Mathieu Duchatel, 2020) China and the US conduct political and military maneuvers to exert influence in the region as part of a balance of power policy. China's policies in the LCS include building militarized artificial features in the Spratlys and seizing Scarborough Shoal. (Mathieu Duchatel, 2020). Building artificial islands and infrastructure, settling Chinese residents there with a representative center in Sansha City located on Woody Island, conducting military exercises in the LCS; and expelling ships from other countries exploring the claimed area.

Given the escalating tension in the LCS, Indonesia acts rationally in understanding geopolitics and determining geostrategy in the LCS. According to the President's Chief of Staff, Moeldoko, Indonesia will take a neutral position in the escalation in the LCS, especially related to balancing major powers, because both are strategic partners in realizing Indonesia's national interests. (Kusumasomantri, 2015)

#### 4. CONCLUSION

China has always changed their foreign policy according to the circumstances. The ability of Chinese leaders to adapt quickly to a changing world has a significant impact on their foreign policy. Therefore, it is important to understand the viable policy options in the South China Sea (SCS), which plays an important role in international trade. However, the controversy over territorial claims in the South China Sea and the intervention of the United States in the SCS conflict have caused barriers to international trade, which in turn threatens instability in the South China Sea region. However, in reality, the United States does not participate in the struggle for claims or control of natural resources because their main goal is to protect the stability of the region around the South China Sea. Not only the United States, Indonesia's Natuna Sea is also part of the debate about the struggle for claims between China and Indonesia.

To avoid these disputes, efforts can be made based on each country's perspective. Starting from China's perspective, where they must create joint development to exploit natural resources such as oil and gas due to increasing energy demand, cooperation in marine scientific research, handle third-party disputes rationally, reach consensus on electricity distribution with neighboring countries as well as with the US and continue code of conduct negotiations. The United States should also oppose the use of threats of force, increase diplomatic efforts in resolving competing claims and maintain the freedom of navigation of all vessels in the South China Sea region. It is indispensable for the United States to have a military foothold in Southeast Asia. However, this does not come without consequences. By increasing arms sales to Southeast Asia to help improve their defense capabilities but each individual request must be considered separately. However, it is undeniable that this will reduce ASEAN countries' dependence on US protection in the long run. Although the US should try to convince allies in the region that domestic interests should be prioritized, conflict with China is very difficult to justify. However, a policy or intervention from the US to prevent China from adopting a much more assertive posture and abandoning its aggressive behavior towards neighbors in the South China Sea is helpful.

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