

# INDONESIA'S ROLE IN RESOLVING THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE: A CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT (COC) AND NATIONAL INTERESTS

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## **ABSTRAK**

Laut China Selatan merupakan salah satu kawasan yang memiliki potensi besar dalam aspek ekonomi dan geostrategi, yang mana kawasan ini menjadi jalur utama perdagangan dunia dengan pasokan atau cadangan sumber daya alam yang melimpah di dalamnya. Indonesia yang menjadi negara berpengaruh di kawasan memiliki beban untuk dapat menyelesaikan sengketa tersebut, termasuk dalam mempercepat penyusunan *code of conduct* yang diharapkan dapat menjadi solusi utama. Namun, dalam tindakan ini terdapat beberapa kepentingan yang dimiliki oleh Indonesia. Indonesia memiliki kepentingan yang dibagi menjadi tiga aspek dalam membantu penyelesaian konflik. Pertama, aspek pertahanan karena melihat konflik yang terjadi akan berdampak buruk pada keamanan maritim dan kedaulatan. Kedua, aspek ekonomi karena dengan konflik ini kegiatan perdagangan, investasi, dan eksplorasi sumber daya terganggu. Ketiga, aspek politik mengingat Indonesia terbebani untuk dapat menjaga harmonisasi hubungan di antara China dan negara yang bersengketa.

Kata Kunci: Laut China Selatan, Kepentingan, *Code of Conduct*, Sengketa

## **ABSTRACT**

*The South China Sea is a region with significant potential in both economic and geostrategic aspects, serving as a major global trade route with abundant natural resource reserves. As a key regional power, Indonesia bears the responsibility to contribute to the resolution of the dispute, including accelerating the drafting of a Code of Conduct, which is expected to be the primary solution. However, this action involves various interests for Indonesia. These interests can be divided into three aspects. First, the defense aspect, as the conflict poses a potential threat to maritime security and sovereignty. Second, is the economic aspect, where the conflict disrupts trade, investment*

*activities, and resource exploration. Third, the political aspect, where Indonesia is burdened with the task of maintaining harmonious relations between China and the disputing nations.*

*Keywords: South China Sea, National Interest, Code of Conduct, Dispute*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

The South China Sea holds immense significance for Indonesia. The region is not only one of the busiest international shipping routes, connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans, but it is also crucial economically and strategically for Indonesia. The South China Sea provides access to abundant natural resources, such as oil, gas, and fisheries, which are vital to Indonesia's economy, especially through the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surrounding the Natuna Islands. Stability in this region is essential to sustaining Indonesia's economy and ensuring access to these resources. In addition, the South China Sea is critical to Indonesia's maritime security, particularly in addressing non-traditional security threats such as piracy, smuggling, and other illegal activities that could disrupt national stability. Therefore, stability in the South China Sea directly impacts Indonesia's national welfare and security.

The maritime dispute in the South China Sea has a long and complex history, beginning with China's historical claims, which are represented by the "nine-dash line." These claims overlap with the maritime claims of several ASEAN countries, such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei. Tensions in the region frequently escalate due to these overlapping claims, resulting in military and civilian incidents that threaten regional peace and stability. China's increased military activities, including the construction of military facilities on disputed islands, have raised concerns among ASEAN nations and exacerbated the maritime security situation. Moreover, the involvement of external actors, such as the United States, has added to the complexity of the situation, influencing relationships between countries in the region and creating a broader geopolitical dynamic amid the conflict in the South China Sea.

ASEAN, as a regional organisation with member states that are directly involved in the disputes, has played a significant role in mediating the conflict and seeking peaceful solutions. Through ASEAN's mechanisms and the principles of the ASEAN Way, which emphasises non-intervention and consensus-building, ASEAN has sought to manage tensions in the South China Sea. One of the key steps in this regard was

the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC), signed in 2002. This declaration aimed to build trust and reduce tensions through dialogue and cooperation among the involved parties. However, efforts to develop a more comprehensive and legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC) have faced numerous challenges, including differences in the views of ASEAN countries and China on various substantive issues. The negotiation process for the CoC has often been stalled by divergent national interests and diplomatic strategies from the respective countries.

The effectiveness of the Code of Conduct (CoC) in reducing tensions and preventing the escalation of conflict in the South China Sea is crucial to regional stability. The CoC is expected to serve as an effective instrument for managing the conflict, fostering cooperation, and ensuring maritime security in the region. However, achieving this requires concrete steps and a strong commitment from all parties involved to ensure the CoC's effective and sustained implementation. Therefore, this study will delve deeper into how Indonesia, from a constructivist perspective, plays a role in the efforts to resolve the South China Sea conflict to the literature on international relations and improving Indonesia's foreign policy. Given the importance of the South China Sea to Indonesia, the complexity of the maritime claims conflict in the region, and the diplomatic efforts through the Code of Conduct (CoC), these form the crucial background for understanding Indonesia's interests in resolving the maritime claims in the South China Sea. This study will focus on analysing Indonesia's role in the process of negotiating and implementing the CoC, as well as its impact on regional stability and Indonesia's national interests. Finally, this research introduces the study titled "Indonesia's Role in Resolving the South China Sea Dispute: A Constructivist Analysis of the Code of Conduct (CoC) and National Interests."

## **Literature Review**

The article "*Indonesian National Interest in South China Sea Conflict Settlement*" written by Beny A. Tatara, Anastasya Sukma Kundhalini, Bisma Abdurachman, and Pujo Widodo, provides an in-depth analysis of Indonesia's national interests in the resolution of the South China Sea conflict. This research shows that Indonesia has three primary interests in the conflict: safeguarding national territorial integrity, securing economic resources, and protecting citizens' safety. Specifically, Indonesia employs diplomacy as its primary tool for managing its maritime claims. Indonesia consistently supports the principles of UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) and actively submits diplomatic protests against China's actions in the area. This article

emphasises that Indonesia's identity as a country supporting international law and peaceful resolutions plays a key role in its maritime policies. The norms and values upheld by Indonesia, such as its commitment to regional peace and stability, heavily influence its diplomatic approach to resolving this dispute.

The article "*The Conflict of South China Sea and Impact on Indonesia's National Interest*" by Qurotul 'Aini Septi Farida and Joko Setiyono from Diponegoro University adds further perspective regarding the impact of the South China Sea conflict on Indonesia's national interests. This research asserts that the South China Sea is a strategic region rich in natural resources, leading to territorial disputes between China and countries surrounding the South China Sea, including Indonesia. Farida and Setiyono stress that this dispute threatens Indonesia's sovereignty, particularly in the Natuna Islands area. They highlight the importance of a legal approach based on UNCLOS to protect Indonesia's national interests. This study also notes that, as a non-claimant state, Indonesia plays a mediating role in the conflict, striving to maintain security and freedom of international navigation in the region.

Adding to the complexity, the article "*Indonesia's South China Sea Dilemma: Between Neutrality and Self-Interest*" by Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto from Nanyang Technological University describes Indonesia's dilemma in balancing neutrality and national interest. Supriyanto emphasises that while Indonesia does not claim ownership of any islands in the South China Sea, its interests lie in the overlap between China's "nine-dash line" claim and Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near the Natuna Islands. Supriyanto notes that Indonesia strives to play the role of a neutral mediator in this dispute, but national interests and geopolitical realities often complicate this position. He highlights that although Indonesia advocates a diplomatic approach through ASEAN forums and maintains regional stability, there are growing concerns about China's maritime ambitions and their impact on Indonesia's security and sovereignty in the Natuna region.

The article "*The South China Sea Dispute and Regional Maritime Security: Indonesia's Perspective*" by Marsetio, Amarulla Octavian, Rudiyanto, Janet Dyah Ekawati, Gibson Kazan Gunawan, and Rajab Ritonga from the Indonesian Defence University presents Indonesia's perspective on the South China Sea dispute and regional maritime security. This research highlights the dynamic strategic environment in the region, including competition between major powers like China and the United States, and its implications for Indonesia.

Marsetio et al. stress that it is vital for Indonesia to have a comprehensive understanding of this dispute and its impact on regional maritime security, particularly in Indonesia's efforts to become a Global Maritime Fulcrum. The article also discusses China's island-building and reclamation activities, the role of the Chinese coast guard in the South China Sea dispute, and the Philippines' case in the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. Finally, the research discusses the implications for Indonesia and future agendas that need to be considered.

There is a clear common thread among the research of Tatara et al., Farida & Setiyono, Supriyanto, and Marsetio et al., regarding the emphasis on the importance of international law (UNCLOS) and diplomacy as the primary tools in Indonesia's maritime policies. All four studies underline Indonesia's role as a country that supports peaceful resolutions and regional stability. However, each study has a different focus: Tatara et al. highlight broader national interests, Farida & Setiyono focus on the direct threat to sovereignty in Natuna, Supriyanto discusses the dilemma between neutrality and national interest, and Marsetio et al. emphasise strategic dynamics and Indonesia's role as a Global Maritime Fulcrum.

The dynamic nature of Indonesia's national interests is evident in these four studies. Each study highlights how Indonesia's national interests continue to evolve and adapt in response to the challenges and changes in the South China Sea. The constructivist approach in these studies reinforces the understanding that Indonesia's identity and interests are shaped through social interaction and a commitment to international norms. The studies confirm that Indonesia's maritime policies are not only driven by material interests but also by its identity as a country that upholds international law and peace.

## **MAIN ARGUMENT**

National interests in the South China Sea involve efforts to maintain territorial integrity, maritime security, and access to the region's rich natural resources. The constructivist approach allows us to see how ASEAN norms and negotiations over the Code of Conduct (CoC) shape Indonesia's maritime identity and interests.

## **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Constructivism**

Constructivism as a theory did not emerge instantly within international relations studies. Constructivism arose as part of a critical approach that challenges

the validity of the positivist rational approach, which has flourished since the Renaissance. Epistemologically, Constructivism, along with other critical approaches like Post-Modernism, questions the dominance of positivism by criticising efforts to formulate objective claims and truth statements about the natural and social world that can be empirically verified.

Methodologically, constructivists reject the hegemony of a single scientific method and advocate for diverse approaches in the production of knowledge, emphasising the importance of interpretative strategies. Ontologically, they oppose the rationalist conception of nature and human action, instead emphasising the social construction of actors' identities and the significance of these identities in shaping interests and actions. Normatively, they reject the theorising of values without interpreting those values, denying its possibility, and call for the development of theories that are explicitly committed to exposing and ending structures of domination.

However, despite these commonalities, Constructivism has fundamental differences from Post-Modernism. Constructivism, also known as Modern Critical Theory by Price and Smit, firmly rejects the radicalism found in certain lines of thought. They developed a more moderate approach, referred to as minimal foundationalism by Hoffman. Constructivism acknowledges the interdependence of knowledge and the relationship between morality and power. Thus, Constructivism insists on a careful interpretation, separating rationality from irrationality, while giving priority to minimal ethics related to political action oriented towards freedom. In this framework, Post-Modernism completely rejects foundationalism and seeks to transform post-Renaissance thinking by highlighting that all attempts to claim knowledge and explain relationships between states always exclude alternative perspectives and instead reinforce dominance in those relationships.

As a philosophy of science, Constructivism introduces three basic assumptions: relativism, subjectivism, and openness. In the context of relativism, Constructivism is a thought process that emphasises flexibility and the constant search for new constructions. Within this framework, Constructivism views reality as something diverse and not fixed. Subjectivism is emphasised because of the belief that reality resides in the observer's mind, making subjective interaction the only way to understand that reality. Openness is the principle applied by Constructivism, in which synthesis is achieved through consensual dialogue with the aim of forming new paradigms, while

keeping communication channels open to ensure the process of construction is not hindered.

### **National Interests**

National interest is a central concept in the study of international relations, involving an understanding of a country's needs, goals, and aspirations in the global context. This concept defines not only how a state behaves on the international stage but also how it responds to internal and external challenges to ensure the survival, security, and well-being of its people.

According to Bidova, in "Theoretical and Legal Analysis of the Concept of National Interests," national interest is often associated with national security and a state's ability to protect its sovereignty, both internally and externally. Bidova highlights the importance of a strong legal system to support national interests, which includes the protection of individual rights, groups, and society as a whole.

Syaravina Lubis, in her article *"National Interest and National Identity Affect The Behaviour Of Foreign Policy,"* adds that a country's foreign policy is shaped by national interests and national identity. National identity often influences the formation of national interests and foreign policy. National identity includes collective memory, myths of origin, and shared culture, shaping a country's worldview on the international stage. An example of the influence of national identity on foreign policy can be seen in China and Japan. China's foreign policy is shaped by its Buddhist culture and understanding of impermanence, while Japan's anti-militarist identity, rooted in its war experiences, influenced its foreign policy during the 1990 Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq War. Robinson classifies national interests into several categories, such as primary, secondary, permanent, and variable. Primary interests involve security and survival, which are non-negotiable, while secondary interests include protecting citizens abroad. Permanent and variable interests can change according to dynamic international situations.

### **International Regime Theory**

International regime theory is an approach within the study of international relations that emphasises the importance of rules, norms, and institutions in regulating state behaviour on the global stage. International regimes can be defined as sets of principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures

that govern interactions between international actors in specific fields, such as the environment, trade, or security. This theory emerged as a response to traditional views that focused more on state power and interests.

The main characteristics of international regime theory include a focus on cooperation, norms and rules, and effectiveness. This theory highlights how states can cooperate to achieve common goals despite differing interests. International regimes enable states to address common problems through institutionalised cooperation. Furthermore, international regimes serve to create norms and rules that member states are expected to follow. These norms and rules help reduce uncertainty and conflict by providing a clear framework for international interaction. The effectiveness of international regimes is often the focus of research, with effectiveness being assessed by the regime's ability to achieve its goals, such as addressing global issues like trade, environmental protection, and security.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research employs a qualitative approach as the primary method, focusing on social phenomena occurring within society as the main research subjects. This approach explores various aspects of research such as viewpoints, motivations, activities, perspectives, and behaviour of people in depth using related methods. Qualitative methods are used to investigate, analyse, observe, and understand descriptively through events happening within society. Descriptive analysis aims to gather actual and real information, allowing the researcher to create a comprehensive depiction and analysis of the aspects related to the observed phenomena.

In essence, descriptive analysis is part of the qualitative approach, used to process data from relevant sources that will later be explained descriptively about the events or phenomena that occurred and presented in a report consisting of detailed descriptions. The research does not provide statistical explanations (numerical data processing), although the research could potentially use quantitative methods as an alternative approach. This study will examine three main variables: dependent, independent, and mediating variables.

### **a. Dependent Variable:**

#### **1) Maritime Stability and Security in the South China Sea**



- *Description* : Maritime stability and security in the South China Sea region, including conflict prevention and the promotion of maritime cooperation.

- *Measurement*: Success indicators of the implementation of the Code of Conduct (CoC), maritime incidents, and reports on regional stability from official sources.

**b. Independent Variables:**

**1) Indonesia's National Interests in the South China Sea**

- *Description*: Economic, political, and security aspects that form Indonesia's national interests in the South China Sea region.

- *Measurement*: Analysis of Indonesia's government policies, economic reports related to natural resources in the South China Sea, and data on maritime activities and national security.

**2) Indonesia's Diplomacy through ASEAN and the Code of Conduct (CoC)**

- *Description*: Indonesia's diplomatic efforts and its role in the negotiation and

- *Measurement*: Evaluation of diplomatic initiatives, negotiation outcomes of the CoC, and official reports from ASEAN and Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**c. Mediating Variable:**

**1) Norms and Identity in Constructivist Perspective**

- *Description*: Norms, identities, and ideas influencing Indonesia's foreign policy based on constructivist perspectives.

- *Measurement*: Analysis of diplomatic speeches, policy documents, and academic publications that reflect how norms and identity shape Indonesia's foreign policy.

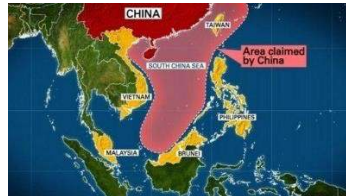
This research uses purposive sampling to ensure that the collected data is relevant to the research objectives. This method involves selecting policy documents, diplomatic speeches, and media reports that explicitly cover discussions on Indonesia's independent and active principles and its identity and norms on the international stage.

## **DISCUSSION**

The South China Sea is a semi-enclosed sea located on the margins of the Pacific Ocean, stretching from the Karimata Strait to the Malacca Strait and to the Taiwan Strait, covering an area of 35 million square kilometres. The South China Sea is a highly strategic region, bordered by various countries such as Brunei Darussalam, the

Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, and, of course, China itself. This situation has led to overlapping jurisdictions in claims over the area, significantly increasing the potential for conflict, making this one of the most strategically important geographical locations with its ongoing conflicts and disputes.

**Image 4.1: Map of the South China Sea Region**



*Source: Serambi News*

The conflict in the South China Sea originated when China claimed 95% of the sea's area, including several small islands. Tensions escalated when China deployed its military forces and constructed 1,300 hectares of infrastructure to strengthen its military presence in the South China Sea.

This situation primarily arose because of China's refusal to accept the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This rejection has resulted in overlapping claims between China and surrounding countries in certain areas of the South China Sea. Several neighbouring countries also claim parts of the South China Sea, referred to as "claimant states", including China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Brunei Darussalam. This dispute began when China attempted to claim the entire South China Sea as its territorial waters by issuing a map of the Nine-Dash Line, based on historical facts about China.

China recently updated its map of the South China Sea, adding an additional dashed line to make it ten dashes. This new claim includes areas east of Taiwan, further expanding China's claim to waters bordering the Philippines. It is also reported that China plans to control the entire Spratly Islands. Since the conflict began, China has had disputes with various countries over the Exclusive Economic Zones of Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia. The root cause of this issue remains China's insistence on its historical claim to the region, refusing to adhere to UNCLOS. In this matter, the Philippines and Malaysia have joined forces, bringing India into the issue, as it is believed that this area also overlaps with India's interests.

The United States- China conflict in the South China Sea is a manifestation of long-standing geopolitical power struggles between the world's two largest economies.

The South China Sea is not only strategic for global trade but also rich in natural resources such as fish and potential oil and gas reserves. The region is also of significant military value. China claims nearly the entire South China Sea through what is known as the "Nine-Dash Line", a demarcation that first appeared on maps in 1947. This claim includes numerous islands, atolls, and coral reefs, some of which have been developed by China into artificial islands capable of supporting military infrastructure. On August 28, 2023, about a week before the G20 Summit in India, China's Ministry of Natural Resources issued a new standard map (New Standard Map), which many observers referred to as the "Ten-Dash Line." This map includes the previously claimed "Nine-Dash Line" as part of China's territory and adds a new dash to the east of Taiwan. With this change, China is also claiming parts of Taiwan, India, and the Philippines.

Southeast Asian countries with overlapping claims have taken steps to assert their sovereignty, sometimes leading to confrontations with China. In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled that China's claims have no legal basis, a decision that Beijing rejected.

**Image 4.2: Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC)**



*Source: Alamy*

The South China Sea (SCS) has become a battleground for multiple countries because it is used as a global trade route. The SCS holds strategic value as a major Sea Line of Trade (SLOT) and Sea Line of Communication (SLOC), connecting the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

About 85% of China's energy imports and oil supplies for Japan and Korea pass through these waters. Additionally, 55% of India's goods pass through China, Japan, Korea, and the United States for trade with the Asia-Pacific region, making the SCS the busiest sea route in the world. Furthermore, the SCS has one of the world's richest marine ecosystems, with the highest biodiversity, providing the largest global seafood consumption for export and household use. The SCS also has significant economic value due to its abundant oil and natural gas reserves.

The strategic value of the SCS has motivated each claimant state to defend its national interests by various means, such as the Philippines' lawsuit against China at the Permanent Court of Arbitration, China's launch of the Nine-Dash Line map, and assertive actions such as China's artificial island-building and military presence in the SCS.

This has also attracted the attention of the United States, as a great power, to intervene in the SCS issue. The US has deployed its military forces to the SCS, increasing the frequency of its Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) to oppose China's expansion in the region.

### **The History and Indonesia's Leadership in Southeast Asia**

Indonesia has long been one of the most active members of ASEAN, a role proven through its participation in the organisation since its founding until now. Currently, we can easily see Indonesia's role as a facilitator of dialogue and conflict resolution among ASEAN members, supporting peaceful solutions, and promoting harmonious relations in the region.

Ultimately, the conflict in the South China Sea involves various countries, especially those bordering the disputed areas. ASEAN countries, such as Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, are the nations most involved in territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. As such, ASEAN, as an association, has significant interests in the region.

In efforts to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea, ASEAN foreign ministers issued the **ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea**, signed in Manila on July 22, 1992. The principles outlined in this declaration include the need for peaceful dispute resolution and cooperation in areas such as maritime safety and communication, marine environmental protection, coordination of search and rescue efforts, and combating piracy, armed robbery, and drug trafficking, which are major security issues in the region.

**Image 4.4: 44thAMM/PMC/18th ARF in Bali, 2011**



*Source: Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

In 2012, in response to differing views on the South China Sea situation, Indonesia's Foreign Minister conducted intensive diplomacy (shuttle diplomacy) with ASEAN foreign ministers to establish a common position. This effort led to the agreement on the **ASEAN's Six Point Principles on the South China Sea** on July 20, 2012. This document outlines the following principles:

- 1) The full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (2002);
- 2) The Guidelines for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (2011);
- 3) The early conclusion of a Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea;
- 4) Full respect for universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS);
- 5) The continued exercise of self-restraint and non-use of force by all parties; and
- 6) The peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

Indonesia, particularly through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the Geospatial Information Agency (BIG), has continued to offer good offices by acting as the Organising Committee for the **31st Workshop on Managing Potential Conflict in the South China Sea**, held from August 23 to 24, 2022, in Jakarta. This workshop was attended by 88 participants from 11 countries/entities, including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Chinese Taipei, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The 2022 workshop was enriched with presentations by experts focusing on the issue of sea level rise accompanied by land subsidence in coastal areas of the region. The workshop also noted proposals for technical training sessions, including the following:

- **Indonesia:** Capacity-building seminar addressing the impact of sea level rise;
- **China:** Training on ecosystem-based maritime management and joint research on blue carbon;
- **Chinese Taipei:** Ocean Network Education Workshop; and
- **Vietnam:** Research on coral reef resilience to human activities and climate change.

National identity and domestic political norms are key factors in resolving issues in international relations. Sugiarto Pramono and Andi Purwono explain two main ideas within this theory. First, the structure uniting humanity is shaped by shared ideas, rather than power and material alone. Second, the identity and interests of actors are determined by these shared ideas, not actions are shaped by social, political, economic, and cultural interactions, not just reasons and interests.

Another example of constructivism in international relations can be seen in the Korean Peninsula crisis, which could trigger open conflict between China and the United States. However, in this situation, China has cooperative security norms as a principle in its global diplomacy, preventing an open conflict by showing the use of ethics, philosophy of harmonisation, and peace.

The use of constructivism to examine the South China Sea dispute is done by analysing the identity and role played by China itself. In this case, China's dominant behaviour in the region can be seen as part of its identity formed through intense interaction with neighbouring countries. Moreover, Chinese leaders uphold the value and idea that China is a great nation, thus deserving of a respectful position. Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross argue that China's identity as a significant power is driven by its historical experience of being "humiliated" by Western nations, reinforcing its desire to regain an honourable status.

In the conflict between China and various countries in the South China Sea, particularly with the United States and Taiwan, a constructivist analysis reveals that these countries perceive China's rise as a real threat to the region, while countries like South Korea acknowledge China's status as a major nation without seeing it as a threat. Therefore, the notion of shared ideas remains dynamic and can vary between different actors facing specific issues. As long as China's "rise" remains non-aggressive and non-violent (without military engagement), the assumption that China's development poses a threat to the region will continue to change.

In the South China Sea conflict, China clearly has significant economic power as part of its identity. Furthermore, historical conditions underlie its occupation of the region. From a constructivist perspective, the conflict in the South China Sea is not merely about territorial disputes but also about a contest of ideas and identity among the countries involved,

where they construct narratives that strengthen their claims of "maritime sovereignty". In this context, China sees the South China Sea as a vast area that can be exploited, while other nations view it more narrowly, with specific boundaries.

As a result, various ideas promoting norms for resolving maritime disputes have emerged, such as the ASEAN Way principles of dialogue, negotiation, and consultation. China plays a dominant role in this framework. In the end, Indonesia adopts a hedging strategy to maintain economic relations with China while safeguarding its maritime sovereignty. Indonesia remains flexible, reflecting that its identity and interests are shaped and adapted according to its social interactions as an actor in the region.

### **Indonesia's Role in the Code of Conduct Framework in the South China Sea Dispute**

Indonesia has been regarded as a nation with significant responsibility in contributing to the resolution of the South China Sea dispute. This is not only because Indonesia is involved in territorial disputes, such as the Natuna Islands dispute with China, but also because Indonesia is the natural leader of ASEAN. Southeast Asian countries with territorial disputes in the South China Sea rely on Indonesia's leadership. Indonesia's role in this matter became more apparent during its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2011, when the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) began to implement joint programmes between ASEAN and China, including discussions on the development of a regional Code of Conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea. The CoC is expected to serve as an operational mechanism for conflict prevention and to establish effective behaviour regulations for all countries involved.

Indonesia has consistently reaffirmed its commitment to fostering a peaceful, safe, and stable environment in the South China Sea through diplomatic efforts. Indonesia's involvement in this process continues to evolve, especially since 2016 when it played a key role in promoting the drafting of the Code of Conduct. This includes policies such as plans for the construction of military bases and the naming of the North Natuna Sea. Through these initiatives, Indonesia has pushed China to agree on the **Framework of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea** during the 31st ASEAN Summit.

Through the CoC framework, Indonesia and ASEAN managed to push for the **Single Draft Negotiating Text** in November 2018. However, following provocations by China, Indonesia's political and security stance towards China has hardened, although its economic policies remain softer to preserve good relations.

Throughout these efforts, Southeast Asian countries have been guided by ASEAN Way principles, such as consultation, negotiation, and non-confrontation. These principles have become a regional identity for ASEAN, which is being reflected in the ongoing drafting of the Code of Conduct. The CoC is a technical document still being developed by both sides, with some technical matters yet to be resolved before the CoC can be fully implemented as a code of conduct. Aside from the CoC, Indonesia has also pursued other initiatives to help resolve the South China Sea conflict, such as promoting ASEAN's concept of building a regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific. This initiative has attracted partners like the United States, Russia, China, South Korea, Japan, and the European Union.

Indonesia's role in resolving the dispute has become even more prominent in 2023, when it chaired ASEAN. Rolliansyah Soemirat, Director for ASEAN Political and Security Cooperation, stated that Indonesia seeks to accelerate the CoC negotiation process in the South China Sea. Additionally, Indonesia has taken the initiative in drafting **guidelines** that will serve as a substantive reference, ensuring the effectiveness and implementation of the CoC. These guidelines, the first of their kind in history, summarise ASEAN-China aspirations to conclude the CoC negotiations within three years or less through intensive discussions on pending issues and proposed working methods to speed up and improve the effectiveness of the negotiations.

The CoC is expected to become a code of conduct that reflects norms, principles, and international rules aligned with international law, especially UNCLOS, with the aim of achieving a stable, safe, and peaceful South China Sea region. Indonesia remains committed to supporting **confidence-building measures (CBMs)** and reducing tensions to promote prosperity in the region while ensuring ASEAN centrality in the South China Sea issue. During Indonesia's chairmanship of ASEAN, the CoC negotiations successfully completed the **second reading**, or the second round of negotiations. This shows positive progress, which is expected to continue gaining momentum towards the CoC's agreement. Indonesia also hosted CoC negotiations between ASEAN and China in March. At the end of 2023, Indonesia plans to host the next round of CoC negotiations, contributing further to accelerating the ongoing process. Besides the CoC negotiations, Indonesia will continue to push for practical maritime cooperation between ASEAN and China in the South China Sea, enhancing mutual trust to support and maintain peace, security, and stability in the region.



## **Indonesia's Interests in Resolving the Maritime Conflict in the South China Sea**

This section discusses the underlying motivations behind Indonesia's involvement in assisting efforts to resolve the South China Sea conflict, specifically focusing on the national interests driving Indonesia to contribute to finding a solution for this regional dispute. The South China Sea is a crucial maritime route, accounting for one-third of global maritime traffic, with an annual trade value of USD 5 trillion. Besides being a major trade route, the South China Sea is also rich in natural resources, including fisheries and large oil and gas reserves, potentially the second-largest after Saudi Arabia, making it highly contested.

China bases its claim to these waters on historical grounds, asserting ownership over 95% of the area, and relies on the sea for 85% of its crude oil imports. China also claims several small islands and has developed 1,300 hectares of land to support military infrastructure, including airstrips capable of hosting bombers.

In the South China Sea conflict, Indonesia seeks to manage its diplomatic relations while protecting its sovereignty and national interests. Strategically, the South China Sea is close to the Natuna Islands, posing a serious risk to Indonesia's sovereignty, particularly concerning maritime security and economic stability. Maintaining regional stability is crucial for Indonesia, as it ensures the protection of its sovereignty and national interests in the South China Sea. This clearly highlights Indonesia's economic and security interests in the South China Sea.

The presence of foreign military forces in the South China Sea also poses a significant threat to escalating conflict in the region, potentially violating Indonesia's maritime interests, exacerbating tensions, and threatening national sovereignty. The South China Sea conflict also has economic implications due to disruptions in trade routes, which can result in economic costs and impact national economic growth.

## **CONCLUSION**

As ASEAN's natural leader, Indonesia appears to bear a significant responsibility in resolving the South China Sea dispute. Indonesia's interests in resolving the conflict can be categorised into three aspects. First, the **defence aspect**, where Indonesia views the involvement of various military forces as potentially detrimental to its sovereignty and military security. Second, the **economic aspect**, where trade routes, investments, and resource exploration are hindered by rising tensions in the region. Third, the **political aspect**, where the situation forces Indonesia to maintain good

relations among countries in the region, which is related to Indonesia's capacity as the leader of Southeast Asia.

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