

## Asymmetric Diplomacy and Securitization in The South China Sea

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### ABSTRACT

The nine-dash line (NDL) based on "historical rights" has failed before the arbitration tribunal. However, China has turned the issue of who has the right to control the uninhabited islands in the South China Sea (SCS) into a security issue. This research explains that the control of economic resources by involving the military has ignored the international order and provoked an arms race in the region. The research method used a discourse analysis approach. The securitization of the South China Sea (SCS) conflict has encouraged the emergence of asymmetric diplomacy as a new strategy. This research find that China's activities have been successful, polarizing the solidarity of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), testing the effectiveness of international law, exploiting maritime potential, and expanding defense lines. Polarization between ASEAN members facing China has weakened regional strength; each country positions itself according to its national interests. On the other hand, Australia, Britain, and the United States (AUKUS) have developed a new military collaboration by exploiting the "security issues" of the SCS.

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### ABSTRAK

Sembilan garis putus-putus (NDL) berdasarkan "hak sejarah" telah gagal di hadapan pengadilan arbitrase. Namun, Tiongkok telah berhasil mengalihkan persoalan siapa yang berhak menguasai pulau-pulau tak berpenghuni di Laut Cina Selatan (LCS) dengan menjadikan persoalan keamanan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan bahwa penguasaan sumber daya ekonomi dengan melibatkan militer telah mengabaikan tatanan internasional dan memicu perlombaan senjata di kawasan. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan analisis wacana. Sekuritisasi konflik Laut Cina Selatan (LCS) mendorong munculnya diplomasi asimetris sebagai strategi baru. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kegiatan Tiongkok telah berhasil, mempolarisasi solidaritas Perhimpunan Bangsa-Bangsa Asia Tenggara (ASEAN), menguji efektivitas hukum internasional, memanfaatkan potensi maritim, dan memperluas garis pertahanan. Polarisasi antara anggota ASEAN dan Tiongkok telah melemahkan kekuatan regional; setiap negara memposisikan dirinya sesuai dengan kepentingan nasionalnya. Di sisi lain, Australia, Inggris, dan Amerika Serikat (AUKUS) mengembangkan kolaborasi militer baru dengan memanfaatkan "masalah keamanan" LCS.

## Introduction

Initially, maritime conflicts in the South China Sea (SCS) were caused by gaps between coastal countries such as China, India, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines and user countries such as the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. These conditions have triggered increased piracy at sea, with terrorist activities and the uncontrolled exploitation of marine resources. <sup>1</sup>The United States vs. China trade war continues with the COVID-19 pandemic, which shows a shift in power, at least in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which surpassed the economic growth of the United States. The implication is the increasing escalation of conflict in the South China Sea (SCS) region regarding the use of maritime areas and the invitation of more open clashes between military forces.<sup>2</sup> China's economic success under Xi Jinping's leadership has become a balanced competitor for the United States and its current allies for the control of maritime areas in the SCS region. The difference is that the United States still needs to ratify *the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS), which campaigned for the liberation of the use of sea routes. The United States and Allies adopted the *Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (FOIP) concept to update the concept of freedom of navigation.[3] Meanwhile, China ignored UNCLOS by creating a *nine-dash line*, building the city of Shansa, and, in early 2021, passing the China Coast Guard (CCG) Law to safeguard the island's security. This

<sup>1</sup> Rosenberg and Chung, "Maritime Security in the South China Sea: Coordinating Coastal and User State Priorities."

<sup>2</sup> Declaring, "Military Confrontation on."

law shifted the Armed Police to the Central Military Commission. Meanwhile, *the Coast Guard Corps of the Chinese People's Armed Police Force* (PAPCGC) is operating as usual to protect public interests. In this new law, Parliament allows *the Coast Guard* to arm and burn buildings on islands in the South China Sea.<sup>3</sup>

*The Nine Dash Line* (NDL) claims over the South China Sea (SCS) are unilaterally becoming stronger. Although it initially appeared only in *the Workshop on Handling Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea* in 1993, it was not widely ignored by many parties. Damos Dumoli Agusman, Secretary of the Directorate General of Law and International Treaties, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, was one of the conference participants who *asked for confirmation from the Chinese side*. At this point, the Chinese side stated, "It's up to you." *The Indonesian participants did not take it seriously because it had nothing to do with island ownership*. <sup>4</sup>*Indonesia sees this issue as regulated in UNCLOS*, and Indonesia has ratified it through Law Number 17 of 1985. Indonesia ignores the NDL even though some parties think it is siding with China.

*On the other hand, the Philippines submitted the case to the Arbitration Court in The Hague regarding the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)*. Court I determined that China had violated at least 14 provisions of the UNCLOS, including *the Collision Regulations* and one general rule of international law 1. One of the court's

<sup>3</sup> Guard, "China Plans to Ease Its Coast Guard Rules on Use of Force."

<sup>4</sup> Raja Eben Lumbanrau, "'China's Nine Dotted Line to Natuna Seems to Appear from the Sky.'"

decisions was that the NDL *made by China on historical grounds had no legal basis*,<sup>5</sup> *Nevertheless, they had implications for traditional rights when viewed from the principles of international law.*<sup>6</sup> *The existence of the UNCLOS has become a matter of debate among diplomats and academics in resolving the LCS.*

Understanding the development and transition of a new state power is increasingly complex. Of course, determining the most appropriate strategy will be increasingly complicated. International relations theory must build a solid framework for a more comprehensive global societal order.<sup>[8]</sup> An alternative understanding of the South China Sea (SCS) conflict problem is based on the Asymmetric Diplomacy and Securitization theory. Understand the term asymmetric by understanding "Asymmetric Warfare" first. Asymmetric war is a type of war strategy. The strategy considers threats from outside, one's strengths, and international regulations. <sup>7</sup>We are witnessing the impact of asymmetric warfare, and it is challenging to say that China is winning, but China's activities have triggered changes in strategy and international legal norms. Australia took advantage of this situation to build nuclear-powered submarines with the United States and Britain, with the uncertain target of confronting China.

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<sup>5</sup> Erickson et al., "China's South China Sea Claims Rejected."

<sup>6</sup> Zhiguo Gao and Bing Bing Jia, "The Nine Dash Lines in the South China Sea: History, Status, and Implications."

<sup>7</sup> Howard, "Strategic Approaches to International Relations."

'Asymmetric War' explains that unequal parties who wage war. Instruments of national power, such as economics and the military, are no longer valid. Asymmetric warfare is not an empirical category but rather a way to explain the logic of contemporary war. It is a new term to replace the old term, which is different from previous terms such as cold war, irregular war, and guerrilla. Asymmetric warfare activities can also be called "New War." This war differs from previous wars, such as terror, forced evictions, banditry, and rape. This new war investigates the situation further to adopt more appropriate policies.<sup>8</sup> The asymmetric warfare discussed in this article is the basis for understanding asymmetric diplomacy.

The term Asymmetric Diplomacy indicates diplomacy that will deal with conflicting, even unclear, conditions. It would be strange to suddenly use a term that has nothing to do with anything before it but refers to changes that have occurred, both in the nature and structure of the war or conflict, as well as the intended challenges.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in this new model of war, there is not only direct territorial gain from a military battle but also the impact of the activities of a large country that has shown its strength in breaking the provisions of tyranny and trying to reach a new agreement, through a process of cooperation and bargaining between parties, both privately and publicly.

Modern diplomacy has developed in various branches. Public diplomacy is concerned with selling policies, values, and the nation's image. Cultural diplomacy

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<sup>8</sup> Declaring, "Military Confrontation on."

<sup>9</sup> Andrabi, "New Wars, New Victims, and New Ways of Dealing with Them."

prioritizes the characteristics of society as represented by identity, philosophical values, history, and so on. Cultural diplomacy contrasts military diplomacy, which relies on hard power. <sup>10</sup>Diplomacy involving the military is known as Military Diplomacy and Defense Diplomacy. Defense diplomacy plays a role when civil institutions have to manage a country but involve military force. Scientific diplomacy is scientific collaboration for the benefit of technology and innovation.<sup>11</sup>

### Research Method

Discourse analysis in international relations studies, particularly in the case of South China Sea security, involves understanding and evaluating how language is used in that context. This study identifies these individuals' views, aims, interests, and strategies and understands how these narratives influence perceptions and decisions at the international level. Discourse analysis is an interpretive process that is open to multiple interpretations. Broad and diverse resources are needed to comprehensively understand complex issues such as South China Sea security in the context of international relations. Consider how South China Sea security issues relate to broader regional and global dynamics. How does this affect the balance of power or geopolitical dynamics?

Researchers perform three steps: 1) Identify Agents and Parties Involved: Determine the main actors involved in South

<sup>10</sup> Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy Soft Power in International Relations*.

<sup>11</sup>Andrabi, "New Wars, New Victimhood, and New Ways of Overcoming It."

China Sea security issues, including countries, international organizations, and non-state actors such as militant groups or nonprofit organizations. 2) Identify Data Sources: Collect documents and sources related to the study, including official statements from the government, diplomatic speeches, media articles, academic reports, and publications of non-governmental organizations. 3) Framing Analysis: Identify the framing or way of presenting information used in the text. Is this issue a territorial dispute, natural resource problem, or regional security problem?

### Result and Discussion

#### China's National Interests in the SCS Region and Implications for the Region

If the economic potential is not regulated by law and is not enforced by certain institutions that all actors obey, the economy becomes conflicted. The source of the SCS conflict is the legal position of coral women in its territory. China unilaterally claims coral reefs as traditional fishing areas through the NDL. For example, consider the perception of the Chinese community through officially circulated public media, which describes the will and character of the community regarding the EEZ. In this case, there is no public statement rejecting the existence of the EEZ. This means that UNCLOS 82 is an international legal framework that regulates maritime issues.

However, several parties regret that this concept only appeared after UNCLOS 1982 was discussed. Regardless of whether there are violations or not, China has physically controlled the SCS area and indirectly affected relations between countries in the SCS area. China's success in the SCS region can be described;

a Polarizing ASEAN Solidarity

There is no doubt about ASEAN's existence and strength in the Southeast Asia region, but ASEAN is divided with the securitization of the LCS. At the eighth ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh in 2002, China appeared more cooperative in responding to the parties' behaviors. It is recommended that the resolution of territorial and jurisdictional disputes be carried out peacefully, without using the assistance of other parties, through friendly negotiations by sovereign states in accordance with the principles of international law. However, in June 2016, after Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi's meeting in Kunming, China, the ASEAN foreign ministers issued a joint statement containing three important matters regarding the South China Sea. Both are concerned about the condition of the South China Sea; both reject the use of military force and resolve problems following international law.<sup>12</sup>

The South China Sea dispute, according to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, is not China's problem with ASEAN. Therefore, negotiations must be conducted between each ASEAN country and China. ASEAN must negotiate peacefully based on relevant documents and international law as a member country. According to the Prime Minister of Cambodia, the parties are implementing a declaration on the behavior of the parties in the South China Sea to prepare a Code of Conduct. The South China Sea conflict occurred between the claimant countries and China, not between ASEAN

<sup>12</sup> O'Neill, David. *ASEAN Conquest. South China Sea.*

and China.<sup>13</sup>

b. Testing the Effectiveness of International Law, UNCLOS 1982. *The nine-dotted line* has been circulating since 1993, but Indonesia has not responded to this claim. Indonesia emphasizes that this is not a problem because it was explicitly regulated in UNCLOS 1982. According to Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, if we declare a dispute, then the problem will be prolonged. Chinese fishermen are expected to leave Indonesia's EEZ until incidents since 2016 are considered normal. However, starting in 2019, Indonesia deployed military force, but Indonesia remained soft even though several Indonesian Navy ships seized Chinese fishing vessels escorted by its Coast Guard. Indonesia's soft attitude makes China consider Indonesia as its ally.<sup>14</sup>

In China's view, islands in the South China Sea cannot claim sovereignty or create any maritime zones. Small, uninhabited rocks are considered incapable of supporting human life, do not have the economic capacity to survive, and do not have a living culture, so they only have the right to the territorial sea and surrounding areas inhabited by human life. <sup>15</sup>China, on this occasion, built the island, but this is unacceptable in the view of international law. The South China Sea Arbitration Ruling of July 12, 2016, explains that the size of an island may be correlated with the availability

<sup>13</sup> Xinhua, "South China Sea Dispute Not between ASEAN, China, Cambodia PM Asia-Pacific China daily."

<sup>14</sup> Kartikasari, "The Image of Indonesia from China's Perspective on the South China Sea Dispute (Preliminary Study of China's Perceptions of Indonesia)."

<sup>15</sup> Robert Beckman, " Law of the Sea Conventions and Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea."

of water, food, living space, and resources because the size of economic life cannot replace the overall status of the feature. International law does not specify any minimum size a feature must have to be considered an island.<sup>16</sup>

c. China masters its marine potential. *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)* 80 70% of trade volume in Asia is transported by sea, one-third of which passes through the South China Sea. Nearly a quarter of world trade passes through the South China Sea. For this reason, surrounding countries must connect themselves to the South China Sea, the rest via the Strait of Malacca, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. Therefore, China is directly related to economic and security issues in the South China Sea. <sup>17</sup>According to United States Energy Information Administration estimates, the South China Sea holds 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and approximately 11 billion barrels of oil. At the same time, China's estimates are higher. The South China Sea fisheries sector can meet 10% of the world's fish needs.<sup>18</sup> China's claim to sovereignty, aggressive patrols of maritime security, and fishing fleets are supported by diplomatic and administrative efforts supported by China's increasingly powerful media. This agreement to improve relations benefits those who supported China's claim to Chinese dominance in the Southeast Asian region during the last few

months of 2012.<sup>19</sup>

According to Chinese geographer Wang Ying, *the nine-dashed line* is a clear "division" between the deep sea, China's domain, and Southeast Asia, which bears little resemblance to the continental shelf.<sup>20</sup> The involvement of the United States in the South China Sea conflict through *the Indo-Pacific Free and Open Strategy* has become a war drum for Southeast Asian countries, including Singapore because they live at the crossroads of various powers and must avoid being trapped between them — force or forced by natural choice, which needs to be clarified. <sup>21</sup>According to General Peng Guangqian, the PLA's top military strategist, the Deputy Secretary General of the Chinese National Security Forum, UNCLOS 82 does not have the authority to discuss sovereignty issues, and the NDL is not a sovereignty line.

d. Expanding China's Military Defense Line

The South China Sea is generally an arena for China's military campaigns — two-thirds of the South China Sea is in China's NDL. ZEEI-Natuna, although only a tiny part of the nine-dash line, completes China's defense line. By claiming ZEEI-Natuna, Indonesia is at a crossroads, whether to let China be or to go to war. If you go to war, do you support ASEAN countries or participate in the United States *Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy*? Until now, Indonesia has not involved any country in defending its

<sup>16</sup> (South China Sea Arbitration, Philippines v China, 2016)

<sup>17</sup> China Power, "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea? | China Power Projects."

<sup>18</sup> Amti.csis.org, "South China Sea Energy Exploration and Development | Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative."

<sup>19</sup> Sutter and Huang, "China Gains and Advances in the South China Sea."

<sup>20</sup> Beech, "The South China Sea: Where Does China Get Its Nine Dash Line? | time."

<sup>21</sup> Loong, "Asia's Endangered Century: America, China, and the Danger of Confrontation."

sovereignty but still positions itself as a "free and active" adherent. With this attitude, predicting whether Indonesia will side with America or China is difficult. Donald Trump was elected President of the United States in 2016, causing anxiety in many circles. It is as if Indonesia has not yet joined the Indo-Pacific and is an opponent of the United States, even though Indonesia has commitments to its neighboring countries, including Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

President Xi Jinping did not overreact to Donald Trump's policies but appeared friendly. For example, Xi Jinping's statement in front of German businesspeople at the Körber Foundation in 2014. President Xi Jinping said that the Chinese nation longs for peace. For more than 5,000 years, Chinese civilization has valued peace and sought friendship and harmony as an integral part of it. A warlike nation, no matter how great, will one day perish. Peace is essential. "Searching for harmony without uniformity" Replacing war with the gifts of jade and silk. China is one of the strongest countries in the world but has never resorted to confrontation or aggression. Achieving peaceful development has been China's mission for generations.<sup>23</sup>

However, Xi Jinping's statements in 2017 began to change. He conveyed this to the UN Office in Geneva in 2017, China's commitment to upholding world peace. Harmony without uniformity is Chinese

<sup>22</sup>Hanggu et al., "Indonesian Defense Diplomacy to Member Countries of the Five Power Defense Arrangements (Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and England) 2000 - 2017 Felicia."

<sup>23</sup> Jianping, "Speech by HE Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at the Körber Foundation."

culture passed down from generation to generation. The art of war is essential for a nation's survival or destruction. Everything must be done to prevent war, and the utmost care must be exercised in the case of war; peace is part of China's DNA. <sup>24</sup>In 2017, Jianping began to look ready to face the words of war. Shannon explained that China's foreign policy supports China's rise and is ready to face disputes peacefully and in any form.<sup>25</sup>

### **Securitization and the Future of the LCS**

The concerns of Chinese leaders for the United States to ensure regional security must be understood as China is in the process of identity construction. China wants to be more confident by strengthening its economy and military.<sup>26</sup> As part of Kenneth Waltz's development of structural realism theory, Mearsheimer's work explains the role of power and geography in world politics. Mearsheimer describes the defensive and open sides of Neorealism.<sup>27</sup> There are many criticisms of securitization theory, but it represents a type of securitization that depends on the critics' arguments, emphasis, and revisions.<sup>28</sup>

According to Chih Yuan Woon in his article entitled "Framing the " *Polar Silk*

<sup>24</sup> Xi, "Speech by Xi Jinping at the UN Office in Geneva."

<sup>25</sup> Rustandi, "South China Sea Dispute: ASEAN's Opportunity to Improve Its Policies to Achieve Resolution."

<sup>26</sup> Li, *China's Sea Power Aspirations and Strategic Behavior in the South China Sea from the Theoretical Perspective of Identity Construction (Global Power and Shift)*.

<sup>27</sup> Toft, "John J. Mearsheimer: An Offensive Realist between Geopolitics and Power."

<sup>28</sup> Balzacq et al., *What Theory - If Any - Is Securitization?*

Road" (冰上丝绸之路: *Critical geopolitics, Chinese scholars and the (Re) Positionings of China's Arctic interests*, " it is essential to see China's development from China's perspective — literature about how China's great program opened the old Silk Road connecting Asia and Europe.<sup>29</sup>

The strategic approach in international politics emphasizes the function of the state in maintaining the value system. When the value system is inadequate, society will look for something new. The new symbol may conflict with the old symbol but can combine the differences.<sup>30</sup>

Strategic theory is still considered appropriate for investigating new phenomena because strategic theory can understand them more clearly. Strategy theory frees us from the frames of thinking that limit our understanding.<sup>31</sup> The practice of strategic partnerships develops to search for meaning in global politics, criticize new phenomena, and embed new paradigms in various perspectives.<sup>32</sup>

According to the Head of the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla), Rear Admiral TNI Aan Kurnia, problems in the South China Sea have the potential for conflict with Indonesia; the potential for conflict is not in the context of territorial areas but in the jurisdiction of natural resource management. China is not concerned about sovereignty, but how the

islands are cared for, maintained, and utilized. Even though it does not violate island ownership rights, it does violate sovereign rights and exploits the economic potential of maritime sovereignty. When Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas clarified China's claims in 1995, the response of the Chinese Foreign Minister at that time, Qian Qichen, stated that China did not claim any of the islands in Natuna.<sup>33</sup>

China has welcomed AUKUS No. There is debate about what China and Indonesia cannot overcome, but competing countries China opened step. Development load military. This may indicate that other countries are making efforts to confront or compete with China's influence in the region.

## Conclusion

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<sup>29</sup> Woon, "Framing the 'Polar Silk Road' (冰上丝绸之路): Critical Geopolitics, Chinese Scholars, and the (Re)Positioning of China's Arctic Interests."

<sup>30</sup> Howard, "Strategic Approaches to International Relations."

<sup>31</sup> (MLR Smith, 1995)

<sup>32</sup> Czechowska et al., *Strategic Partnerships, International Politics, and IR Theory*.

<sup>33</sup> Kartikasari, "The Image of Indonesia from China's Perspective on the South China Sea Dispute (Preliminary Study of China's Perceptions of Indonesia)."

<sup>34</sup> Li, *China's Sea Power Aspirations and Strategic Behavior in the South China Sea from the Theoretical Perspective of Identity Construction (Global Power and Shift)*.

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<sup>36</sup> Balzacq et al., *What Theory - If Any - Is Securitization?*

<sup>37</sup> Woon, "Framing the 'Polar Silk Road' (冰上丝绸之路): Critical Geopolitics, Chinese Scholars, and the (Re)Positioning of China's Arctic Interests."

<sup>38</sup> Howard, "Strategic Approaches to International Relations."

<sup>39</sup> (MLR Smith, 1995)

<sup>40</sup> Czechowska et al., *Strategic Partnerships, International Politics, and IR Theory*.

<sup>41</sup> Kartikasari, "The Image of Indonesia from China's Perspective on the South China Sea Dispute (Preliminary Study of China's Perceptions of Indonesia)."

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