

# COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

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## **Council on Foreign Relations**

*China's Maritime Disputes*

Teaching Notes

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What is at stake for the countries involved in the East and South China Sea disputes (China, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Brunei)?
2. How do China's maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas differ? How are they similar?
3. How have Beijing's policies regarding its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas shaped regional efforts to settle the disputes?
4. What are Japan's strategic interests in the East and South China Seas? How have these interests shaped Japan's approach to its own territorial claims?
5. What role does nationalism play in the disputed maritime regions? What role has nationalism played in the past in these areas?
6. Is armed conflict between China and its neighbors imminent?
7. Which of the preventive measures outlined in the InfoGuide have the potential to be the most effective, and why?
8. What are the United States' interests in the region? How have they shaped U.S. policy and security commitments to its allies?
9. What role could Washington play in easing regional tensions and facilitating greater cooperation among claimants? What role has it played in the past?

10. What would the ramifications be for the United States if armed conflict broke out in the region? Which crisis management measures outlined in the InfoGuide do you think the United States should pursue in the event of conflict, and why?
11. Should the United States become more involved, less involved, or maintain its current level of involvement in disputed maritime territories in Asia?
12. Would U.S. military intervention in China's maritime disputes ever be justified? If so, what would justify military action?

## Essay Questions

1. What are the historical underpinnings of the East and South China Sea disputes? How and why are they relevant today? Consider major energy discoveries, armed clashes, treaties and resolutions, and military agreements.
2. Discuss some of the policies for resolving the conflicts that have been, or are being, pursued in the region. Why have they not succeeded, and what measures might make them more successful going forward?
3. What role have international and regional organizations like the UN and ASEAN played in easing regional tensions surrounding the East and South China Sea disputes? What kind of power do these organizations have in resolving regional disputes? Based on your analysis, what do you think their roles should be going forward?
4. Discuss the greatest obstacles to settling the East and South China Sea disputes from the main players points of view. Identify the best course of action for preventing an escalation of conflict.
5. How do energy, trade, and political considerations drive tensions in the disputed territory? What are additional factors that contribute to the conflict?

## Activities and Assignments

High school teachers will find Common Core State Standards met by each activity below their descriptions. Definitions for each of the codes can be found at the end of this section.

### Policy Memorandum

Assign students to write a memorandum of two to three pages directed at high-level U.S. foreign policymakers in which they analyze the preventive measures described in the InfoGuide and recommend a policy that the United States should support to prevent China's maritime disputes from escalating into military conflict. The memo should include:

- An overview of the issue, including the rationale for why it deserves the United States' attention.
- An overview of the existing policies and policy discussions, along with an assessment of their pros and cons.

- A recommended policy.
- A rationale for why this is the best policy.
- Concrete steps to pursue this option.

Remind students that the policy memo should be concise, and should use facts to clearly and persuasively explain why the proposed policy is the best option.

For more guidance on writing a policy memo, direct students to <http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing/PublicPolicy.htm> and [http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media\\_items/policy-memo.original.pdf](http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/policy-memo.original.pdf).

*Common Core Standards: RH.9-10.1, RH.11-12.1, RH.11-12.2, RH.9-10.7, RH.11-12.7, RH.11-12.9, RH.11-12.10*

### **SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) Analysis**

Divide your class into small groups and assign each group one of the preventive measures outlined in the InfoGuide. Explain that a SWOT analysis is an exercise used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of a given idea. On flipchart paper, have each group prepare a SWOT analysis of their preventive measure by creating a matrix and listing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. When they are finished, hang the matrices on the wall and allow students to circulate and read each SWOT analysis. Conclude by leading a class discussion on the best policy option for the United States to pursue given these analyses.

*Common Core Standards: SL.9-10.1-6, SL.11-12.1-6, RH.11-12.7, RH.11-12.9*

### **Issue Brief**

Have students imagine that they are a staff member at the U.S. embassy in Beijing preparing for the arrival of a new ambassador, and that it is their job to bring him or her up to speed on current developments regarding China's maritime disputes by preparing an issue brief. Assign students to write a brief of three to five pages that provides an overview of the issue and highlights the relevant political, economic, and security considerations.

*Common Core Standards: RH.9-10.1, RH.11-12.1, RH.11-12.2, RH.9-10.7, RH.11-12.7, RH.11-12.9*

### **Op-ed**

Tell students to imagine that armed conflict is about to break out between China and Japan over disputes in the East China Sea. Assign students to write an op-ed on an argument of their choosing from the perspective of a Chinese, Japanese, or American citizen (e.g., a Chinese citizen on why China should avoid conflict with Japan, a Japanese citizen on why conflict is necessary, an American citizen on why the United States should intervene, etc.). The op-ed should clearly state the argument, use facts, particularly when backing up statements of opinion, and consider and address counterarguments. After students submit their assignments, disseminate them in class or upload them to your course management system. Have students read each other's op-eds for homework and come prepared to discuss as a class which were the most persuasive and why.

For more guidance on writing an op-ed, direct students to [http://www.theopedproject.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=68&Itemid=80](http://www.theopedproject.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=68&Itemid=80).

*Common Core Standards: SL.9-10.1-6, RH.11-12.7, RH.11-12.9*

### **Class Presentation**

Assign students individually or in groups to research and present on one of the historical events highlighted in the timeline. Class presentations should be brief and should discuss the details of the event and its significance for present day disputes. At the end of all the presentations, lead a full class discussion on how the events are connected and which had the greatest influence on the current tensions.

*Common Core Standards: SL.9-10.1-6, RH.11-12.7, RH.9-10.9, RH.11-12.9*

### **Role-play**

Assign students to represent different ASEAN actors who are involved in the South China Sea dispute and prepare for an in-class simulation of an ASEAN meeting on developing a framework for addressing the conflict. Students should familiarize themselves with their country's specific perspective on the issues involved and consider their country's strategic interests. They should also research the perspectives others will bring so they can be prepared for rebuttals. Allow students one week's time to prepare. Depending on the class size, this can be done as a full class or small group activity.

Have students conduct the role-play in class for the majority of the class period. Following the role-play, debrief with your class on issues that arose, the difficulties with resolving the disputes, and the best strategies for international bodies such as ASEAN to follow. Have students write a reflection memo for homework further delving into these topics.

*Common Core Standards: RH.9-10.1, RH.11-12.1, RH.11-12.7, RH.9-10.8, RH.9-10.9, RH.11-12.9*

### **Video Carousel Activity**

Prepare by writing one of the following questions on five pieces of paper:

- Richard N. Haass asks, "Can the diplomacy of the Asia-Pacific region handle these new pressures?" What are the new pressures he refers to, and what are the challenges that they present to diplomacy?
- What does Richard N. Haass mean when he says that "the danger is that twenty-first century Asia could begin to go the way of twentieth century Europe"? Do you agree that such a danger exists?
- What do you think is the likelihood that armed conflict will occur in the region, and why?
- How does China's rise influence these maritime disputes?
- What influenced the United States' pivot to Asia? How might this pivot affect the ways the United States responds to China's maritime disputes?

Place each sheet of paper at a different location around your classroom--ideally, this is done at five tables or desk groupings, but select any location where students can comfortably be involved in a discussion.

Part I: Start your class by asking students what they already know about China's maritime disputes and why these disputes are of concern to the United States. Tell students you will show a video that will explain the issue and its importance.

Part II: Play the InfoGuide's overview video.

Part III: Divide students into groups, and assign each group to one of the different locations around the classroom. Each group should have five minutes to discuss the question, after which they will rotate to the next location, and discuss the question found there. Repeat until each group has had time to discuss each question.

Part IV: End by facilitating a plenary discussion on why China's maritime disputes matter to the United States

*Common Core Standards: SL.9-10.1-6, RH.11-12.7, RH.11-12.9*

### **Primary Document Analysis**

Part I: Prior to class, ask students to research primary historical documents that justify a particular country's claim to a contested territory (you may wish to direct them to search [CFR's primary sources](#)). Ask them to prepare a one to two minute presentation on the document that they find most persuasive.

Part II: Allow students to present their research to the class. After all presentations are complete, divide students into groups that reflect conflicting arguments or issues addressed. Have them discuss with each other what makes one justification more persuasive than another.

Part III: For homework, ask students to write a reflection paper on what makes the evidence from a particular primary document more or less persuasive than a conflicting primary document. In their reflection, they should consider their particular selection vis-à-vis another student's selection, and to compare the strengths and weakness of those documents.

*Common Core Standards: SL.9-10.1-6, RH.9-10.1, RH.11-12.1, RH.11-12.2, RH.9-10.9, RH.11-12.9*

### **Crisis Response Debate**

In this activity, you will act as the president of the United States. Give the students the following prompt to prepare for the simulation activity:

*In an unfolding international crisis, reports have surfaced that a passenger ship flying a Philippines flag was just sunk by Chinese naval forces in the Spratlys. The number of deaths is unconfirmed, but the Philippine released a statement that there will be substantial consequences for China, while saying nothing more as to what that might entail. The president has called a group of political, economic, and military experts together to advise on what the U.S. response should be.*

*You will be divided into groups to craft a political, economic, or military response. Each group should come in with at least one proposal, supported by at least three pieces of evidence from credible sources (news, think tanks, academics, etc.) to debate in front of the other groups of advisers and the president.*

Note: You can adapt this activity by providing a prompt outlining a crisis in the East China Sea.

Part I: Divide students into three groups, each responsible for a political, economic, or military response. Give groups twenty minutes to prepare their policy proposals.

Part II: Allow each group fifteen minutes to present their proposals. Let them know that they might be interrupted by you, acting as the president, and encourage the other advisers to ask questions as well.

Part III: After hearing all of the presentations, allow each group five minutes to prepare and present a three minute closing response that argues for why their proposed response is the best to pursue.

Part IV: For homework, have students write an essay that justifies which policy option should be selected and why. Tell students they may also consider whether a combination of policy options would be best to deal with the crisis.

*Common Core Standards: SL.9-10.1-6, RH.9-10.1, RH.11-12.1, RH.9-10.7, RH.11-12.7, RH.9-10.8, RH.9-10.9, RH.11-12.9*

#### Description of Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1-6](#) and [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1-6](#): Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10/11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1](#) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1](#) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2](#) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.7](#) Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7](#) Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8](#) Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9](#) Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9](#) Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.10](#) By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Special thanks to the [National Forensic League](#) for contributing to the activities and providing the Common Core Standards coding.