

# South China Sea Young Leaders Program

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[All views expressed are not reflective of the organizations the participants are affiliated with.]

# Fostering Cooperation in the South China Sea: Challenges and Opportunities

# Objectives

- Initiatives to foster cooperation in the South China Sea.
- To create a forum for young researchers to further the relevant research on the South China Sea.
- Promoting dialogue between various countries and across multiple disciplines.

# Challenges for Cooperation in the South China Sea

- Disputes among claimant states.
- Lack of unity among ASEAN member states on how to settle the maritime disputes.
- South China Sea as a site of great power contestation.
- The differences in legal interpretation and application.
- Rising nationalism.
- Changing of the status quo.
  
- Given these challenges we identified two areas of cooperation:
  - Crisis management.
  - Confidence building.

# Political

- Acknowledge the existence of maritime disputes.
- Promote and encourage discussion at all governmental levels and multilateral levels.
- Managing tensions through existing regional forums and mechanisms.
- Enhancing civil/military communication.
- Self restraint with regard to legal grey areas.

# Military

- Demilitarization.
- Refrain from creating ADIZ or similar measures
- Enhance operational communication hotlines.
- Joint non-traditional security between claimants.

# Legal

- Finding a common understanding of UNCLOS.
- If unable to reach bilateral agreement then consider third party mechanisms.

# Joint development and exploration

➤ Fisheries

➤ Oil and Gas

➤ Marine Protection

➤ Climate change



# Conclusion

- If there is sufficient **political will** to put these ideas into practice, it could bolster a higher level of **cooperative spirit** in the region.
- China has been on a strong diplomatic outreach to Southeast Asia. Despite this outreach, there is still a perception and trust gap between China, Southeast Asia and the United States *which should be bridged by confidence building*.
- There is also a need to create a mechanism to manage and de-escalate tensions *in the case of crises*.
- Joint development could also help to build positive momentum to improve the political atmosphere, instead of focusing solely on the disputes.