
CHINA'S AGGRESSIVE STANCE IN THE NORTH NATUNA REGION, INDONESIA DID WHAT?

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ABSTRACT:

Indonesia is an archipelagic country with a geopolitical understanding of wawasan nusantara perspective and mandates of the 1945 Constitution. This is the base of Indonesia's political policy in addressing the South China Sea conflict which is involving China and countries in Southeast Asia. Indonesia, even though it claims to be a non-climate state but it always giving full support to reach the solution. Unfortunately, concrete legal solution for the parties has still not been achieved till know, even though the Philippines has taken China to the Permanent Court of Arbitration. An important point in the problem of this research about what is the solution by Indonesia in responding to China's unilateral claim to ownership of the North Natuna Sea based on UNCLOS 1982? After conducting research and interviews with competent parties at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, it can be concluded that the efforts of Indonesia and ASEAN countries to create a Code of Conduct (CoC) with China is one of the best conflict management that can be done nowadays. Indonesia has gained many positive things by being actively involved in the CoC discussion process. The existence of the Natuna Sea area which holds a lot of potential for oil and gas, fisheries, and tourism is the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia which must be protected from other intervention.

Keywords: South China Sea Conflict, North Natuna Sea, UNCLOS 1982, Code of Conduct ASEAN

INTRODUCTION

The sea as a common heritage of mankind, a common heritage for mankind and every country, nation, has the right to utilize, explore and exploit measurably, existing resources according to their needs (Jaeckel et al., 2017). In its development, international law of the sea cannot be

separated from two important conceptions, namely:

- a) Res Communis, this concept states that the sea is the common property of the people of the world and therefore cannot be owned and taken by individual countries.
- b) Res nullius, in contrast to Res Communis, this concept states that the sea that no one

owns and therefore can be taken and owned by individual countries.

With the development of this perspective on the use and function of the sea, the more open the presence of conflict, along with the high importance of the sea itself. In this case, in addition to the rules regarding utilization, the mechanism for resolving marine disputes is also developing. Be it in the regional scope, region, and internationally. One of the seas that is a conflict in the world of international law today is the South China Sea.

In 1947, China, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-Shek, declared the 9-dash line covering almost the entire South China Sea as its territory (Hayton, 2019). And in 1951 it was reaffirmed by Zhou En-Lai about this claim, without including basic legal aspects in determining maritime boundaries (Fauzan et al., 2019). According to China, since 2000 years ago the South China Sea has been a shipping lane for them, and Beijing insists that it was China that discovered and occupied the Spratly Islands, supported by Chinese archaeological evidence from the Han Dynasty (206-220 BC).

In digital mapping, the area that is claimed by the Nine Dash Line in the South China Sea does not have a clear point and an exact point of measurement (Hsiao, 2020). The Nine Dash Line is just an imaginary line that can be drawn from any point without any legal basis, according to China's benefits and desires alone (Dutton, 2011). This of course is very detrimental to countries bordering the South China Sea that already have territorial areas based on UNCLOS 1982 and recognized by the UN (Beckman, 2013). This overlap occurs bordering the coastlines of the Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, and eastern Malaysia .

(Beckman, 2013) Countries that declare themselves as claimant states are countries that are bound in the ASEAN regional organization. We can see on the following map, how overlapping claims between China and the Nine Dash Line and the territorial seas of ASEAN countries:



Map 1.1. China's Nine Dash Line claims in the South China Sea

Source : I Made Andi Arsana, UGM Geodesy Observer

If the countries involved in the territorial conflict in the South China Sea still insist on territorial seizures on the basis of sovereignty and claimed boundaries in the region, then it is certain that they are actually building a roadmap to deadlock with the inevitable consequences of military conflict in the South China Sea. Indonesia as a country with the principle of active free foreign association, of course, does not want armed conflict in areas directly adjacent to Indonesia. Furthermore, countries outside the South China Sea region began to involve themselves and seek dispute resolution.

For example, the United States began stationing aircraft carriers of its armed forces in the South China Sea. This further complicates the conflict. The United States did this because it disagreed with China's claim to ownership of territorial areas in the South China Sea. As stated by the United States Department of Defense, the two aircraft carriers that sailed on January 23, 2022 will conduct a series of exercises, such

as anti-submarine warfare operations, air warfare operations and maritime interdiction operations, conducted in accordance with international law, and in cooperation with the Japanese Navy in the Philippine Sea. This activity of the United States militants has certainly provoked China's anger. The background of the United States doing this is also based on its economic interests in the South China Sea which the United States estimates has promising crude oil and natural gas potential, amounting to between 190 cubic T of natural gas, and 11 billion barrels of crude oil

The complexity of the conflict eventually provoked the United States to participate in the whirlpool of conflict by increasing the frequency of Freedom Of Navigation Operation (FONOPS) activities to oppose China's massive expansion in the region (Davidson et al., 2019). As the U.S. guided-missile destroyer USS Decatur passed 12 nautical miles from Gaven and Johnson reefs in the remote Spratly Islands as part of Free Of Navigation, a Chinese warship sailed within a few meters of the U.S. destroyer, warning it and forcing it to change course. While the United States ship sailed in the high seas area, and not the Chinese territorial sea. However, the shipping activities of ships on the grounds of Freedom Of Navigation are still carried out by the United States in the South China Sea region (Fravel, 2016).

In addition, China's provocative activities can be evidenced by the creation of artificial islands in the South China Sea, and China stationed more than 45 ships docked on Whitsun Reef, which is a disputed area (Poling et al., 2021). In addition, China also prohibits by threat other countries' vessels from fishing or sailing around its reclaimed islands. China is

increasingly aggressive by utilizing these reclaimed islands and hopes that the principle of effective occupation can be applied, so that its sovereignty over the islands and seas around the islands is recognized internationally. In international law, the construction of China's reclaimed islands in the South China Sea region does not violate the law, because according to UNCLOS 1982 article 60 paragraphs (1) to (8), recognizes in international law the existence of artificial islands or reclamation, with certain conditions. But politically, overlapping claims, and China's aggressive actions could trigger open war.

On the other hand, Chinese Minister of Defense Wei FengHe stated that, "We have owned the South China Sea since our ancestors, and we are not willing to lose even 1 inch of the South China Sea." It is on the basis of this understanding that China dares to carry out repressive and violent measures for anyone who dares to enter the sea area around the reclaimed island which according to them is its territory. The Indonesian state began to enter the range of this South China Sea conflict since 2010, where China claimed the northern area of the Natuna Islands, Riau Islands Province which is the waters of Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as stated in Law No. 5 of 1983 concerning the Exclusive Economic Zone.

In the northern region of the Natuna Islands, China argues that it has rights to the waters in the Natuna Islands on the basis of the Traditional Fishing Zone argument. The most fundamental article that has been violated by China against the Indonesian sea is Article 75 paragraphs (1) and (2) of UNCLOS 1982 which states:

Paragraph (1):

"Subject to the provisions of this Chapter, the outermost boundary line of

the exclusive economic zone and the delimitation line drawn pursuant to the provisions of article 74 shall be fixed on a map of sufficient scale or scales to determine where it is located, where preferably a list of geographical coordinate points, detailing the geodetic datum may replace the outermost boundary line or boundary lines.

Paragraph (2):

"The coastal state shall publish as appropriate a map or list of geographical coordinates and shall deposit one copy of each map to the Secretary-General of the United Nations"

The difference in legal basis in determining territorial boundaries in the Natuna Islands between Indonesia and China is a challenge for Indonesia in terms of maintaining its sovereign rights in the EEZ (Fauzan et al., 2019). The Chinese government claims that its fishing boats have the right to sail and their Coast Guard has the right to patrol freely in the Nine Dash Line area, while the Indonesian government does not recognize the Nine Dash Line and considers China to have violated Indonesia's EEZ in the North Natuna Sea

Understood further, the existence of the Nine Dash Line as an imaginary line claimed by China in the waters of the South China Sea, has no exact coordinate points, although China claims that it guides fishing rights within the line, or over the islands and rocks within it based on historical records in the country. Indonesia generally argues that under international law, any claim to maritime rights cannot be validated without reference to land (Beckman, 2013). One form of affirmation of the government's attitude towards ownership of the North Natuna sea area, President Joko Widodo had visited Natuna on January

8, 2020. During the visit, President Joko Widodo reiterated that the Natuna area belongs to Indonesia.

But after President Joko Widodo's visit to Natuna, there are still Chinese ships occupying the North Natuna sea area, which were observed totaling 30 ships, which were seen through a Boeing 737 AI-7301 maritime reconnaissance aircraft belonging to the TNI. In the end, the Commander of the Joint Command of Region I, instructed 3 warships to make an expulsion attempt. Chinese-owned fishing vessels are still often observed occupying the North Natuna Sea area and this incident has repeatedly occurred (Gunn, 2021). Based on the background of the above problems, it is very important to discuss further about how the solution is carried out by Indonesia in responding to China's unilateral claim to ownership of the North Natuna sea area based on UNCLOS 1982 and Indonesia's national interests?

RESEARCH METHODS

In conducting an analysis of the topic of conflict in the South China Sea, an empirical legal research typology design is used. Where this research can be referred to as field research, which will examine legal provisions that are the basis for resolving conflicts in the South China Sea, as well as policies that have been carried out or will be carried out by the parties in existing dispute resolution efforts. Observations are made by looking at the effectiveness of normative law implementation, in this case UNCLOS 1982, as a reference in conflict resolution. The approach taken in this study is a qualitative approach, where research produces

descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words from individuals and observed phenomena. Data is obtained through field research (Field Research), that is, data obtained from the first source. In this case, structured interviews have been conducted with competent parties at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, especially at the Directorate General of International Law and Treaties, in the Directorate of Regional Law and Treaties, where these speakers are people who are directly involved in efforts to discuss the South China Sea conflict between ASEAN and China.

With the design of this research approach, the phenomenon under study can be explored using various data, so it is expected to be able to present data and facts in accordance with international law more comprehensively. The process of analysis with data reduction, data presentation, and finally drawing conclusions is what is done after obtaining factual data, then conducting a literature study, and finally pouring the data from the analysis into the form of this scientific writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia does not open any opportunities for talks regarding the North Natuna Sea area with China (Wijaya, n.d.).

China's nine dash line claim targets the North Natuna Sea region. However, as a country that ratified UNCLOS in 1982, China

should understand that the North Natuna Sea area belongs to Indonesia. But on the other hand, the Indonesian government does not recognize the claims made by China, because Indonesia's position is legitimate and in accordance with international law (Beckman, 2013).

It is undeniable that the claims made by China are not just diplomatic notes, but actually carry out illegal fishing, ships enter without permission, with unclear intentions in the North Natuna sea area (Meyer et al., 2019). The reason China does this is none other than the historical claim that they have historical fishing rights in North Natuna, based on ancient maps (Meyer et al., 2019). Indonesia's position that rejects China's nine dash line claim is a basis for not opening talks on anything related to Indonesia's sovereignty in the North Natuna Sea (Dipua et al., 2020).

In 2017, to strengthen Indonesia's ownership position in the Natuna Sea, which was once still called the South China Sea, the government renamed it the North Natuna Sea (Simorangkir et al., 2023). It got a diplomatic note from Beijing, because they felt it belonged to China. But Indonesia did not respond, and until now continues to

use the name North Natuna Sea. Although until now, the name change has not been authorized to the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). Formally it has not been ratified because in 2002, IHO S-23 WG did not reach a formal agreement, considering there was a political dispute in naming the sea as an example of Japan Sea or East Sea, so the endorsement for the Natuna Sea has not been carried out, and the area of Indonesia's EEZ in the South China Sea is 648,000 km².

Indonesia presents arguments about the Natuna Sea for 3 main reasons, namely:

1) The Natuna Sea is entirely within the waters of the Indonesian Archipelagic Waters. This is related to PP 38 of 2002 and PP 37 of 2008 concerning the List of Geographical Coordinates of the Base Line Points of the Indonesian Archipelago which was deposited with the UN Secretary General in 2009.

2) The name Natuna has been used in the Sea map number 38 since 1951 and the use of local names is in accordance with the provisions of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). The name Natuna has also been used in the context of local government, namely Natuna Regency.

3) The use of the Natuna Sea has also been used in bilateral agreements between Indonesia and Malaysia on archipelagic regimes

Everything China does in North Natuna will be responded to by Indonesia as law enforcement in Indonesia's territorial seas. Indonesia will never open a discussion about feature ownership, because everything is clearly based on UNCLOS 1982. If Indonesia opens the opportunity to talk about features in North Natuna, then it seems to be an acknowledgment that this feature deserves to be a claim. The map made by China does not meet international map standards, because there is no date of issue, no datum, no coordinates, no base point, and Base line, and no explanation of the purpose and purpose of delineating the claim, whether based on claims from islands, sea, or both, and there is no explanation of how to connect the dashed line.

Furthermore, a director at China's South China Sea Research Institute said that:

"The issue of territorial sovereignty is core interest of every country in the world so as China. So China's claim in South China

Sea is comprised of those 2 parts, territorial sovereignty, and maritime rights, and interest claim in south china sea. So for China its important lies on both territorial sovereignty and maritime rights, including rights to exploring the maritime resources, natural resources, including fishing resources, and oil and gas natural resources”

From this statement, we can see how ambitious China is to control the SCS, including the North Natuna region (Meyer et al., 2019). The position of the North Natuna Sea that China claims as part of its own. As stated by the director of the Chinese research institute earlier, that China is very ambitious to be able to control North Natuna which is currently known to store gas and petroleum reserves that are estimated to be the largest in the world. Indonesia itself has been drilling for offshore oil called the Natuna Block, which caused China to feel annoyed and sent Navy ships to try to stop petroleum drilling operations in Natuna, which they said falls within the nine dash line, as shown in the following map



Map 4. 2. Oil and Gas Mining in Natuna Block

Source : <https://kkp.go.id>

Due to China's frequent violations in the North Natuna Sea region, the government has made Natuna a defense center on the outer line of the island. The central government concentrated on strengthening defenses by sending warships, surveillance planes, in the North Natuna sea area.

Law enforcement efforts that have been carried out by the Indonesian government in the North Natuna Sea are also based on laws that apply within the Indonesian national scope. Even the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution has also mandated to maintain world order. The message or decree by the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution is not limited to the domestic obligation to prosper the entire nation and the spilled blood of Indonesia but in the same breath includes

international obligations namely "participating in implementing world order based on independence, lasting peace and social justice.

Law number 6 of 1996, in Chapter V, article 24, paragraphs 1 to 3 has stated that:

1) The enforcement of sovereignty and law in Indonesian waters, the air space above it, the seabed and the land below including the natural resources contained therein and sanctions for violations thereof, shall be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, other international laws, and applicable laws and regulations.

2) Jurisdiction is the enforcement of sovereignty and law against foreign vessels passing through the territorial sea and waters of the Indonesian archipelago carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, other international laws, and applicable laws and regulations.

3) If necessary for the implementation of law enforcement as referred to in paragraph (1) and paragraph (2), a coordinating body may be established by Presidential Decree.

The basis for law enforcement was then strengthened again by Law number 32 of 2014, article 59 which states:

1) The enforcement of sovereignty and law in Indonesian waters, the seabed, and the land below, including the natural resources contained therein and sanctions for violations are carried out in accordance with the provisions of laws and regulations and international law.

2) Jurisdiction in the enforcement of sovereignty and law against foreign vessels passing through the territorial sea and waters of the Indonesian archipelago is exercised in accordance with the provisions of laws and regulations and international law.

3) In order to enforce law in territorial waters and jurisdictions, especially in carrying out security and safety patrols in Indonesian territorial waters and jurisdiction, the Maritime Security Agency was established.

This law became the basis for the formation of Bakamla, with its responsibility and obligation to maintain sovereignty and security in the waters. In the North Natuna sea area, the synergy between the Navy and Bakamla is the spearhead in maintaining

Indonesia's sovereignty and sovereign rights. Furthermore, in 2017, Presidential Decree No. 16 in Chapter V, Pillars of Indonesian Marine Policy, in point 5.2 has stated that:

"Defense, Security, Law Enforcement, and Safety at Sea"

Defense, security, law enforcement, and safety policies at sea aim to uphold sovereignty and law, maintain the territorial integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia and protect the entire nation and all Indonesian bloodshed from threats, challenges, obstacles, and disturbances in the sea area."

Indonesia's policy in maintaining sovereignty and sovereign rights is in accordance with existing rules, both nationally and internationally. Maximum efforts in maintaining security stability in the region, the country's national security, are a complete implementation of Indonesia's geopolitical views, in responding to conflicts that occur in the South China Sea, which targets the North Natuna Sea region.

The CoC discussion between Indonesia and ASEAN countries – China is a good faith, although G to G Indonesia will never open a dialogue on anything related

to the sovereignty of features in North Natuna. On the other hand, Indonesia continues to build solid cooperation with China, which was marked by the signing of the MoU on High Level Dialogue between the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, Wang Yi in Guiyang on June 5, 2021 which covers aspects of fairly broad cooperation.

3.1. The possibility of China building artificial islands in the North Natuna Sea area

China's ambition to immediately control and own the South China Sea is evidenced by its aggressiveness in building artificial islands in almost the entire Spratly and Paracel island clusters. Not only built artificial islands, but China also built military bases, airports, and fielded approximately 800,000 navies on its artificial islands. China strictly does not comply with and respect the results of the PCA's ruling on anything related to the sovereignty of features that have been declared property of the Philippines.

The reality of the Chinese government's choice of attitude should also

be a consideration and focus for the Indonesian government. It is not impossible, China will do the same in the North Natuna sea area. Moreover, currently, the Indonesian government already has offshore mining in the Natuna Block. This really angered the Chinese government, because they felt the right to own the water column feature in North Natuna.

In response to this, the source stated that:

"No one wants to be reclaimed here because he (PRC) recognizes that Natuna belongs to Indonesia. For overlapping maritime areas, it could be, but that we also have a clear position, that if there is something there, we will take firm action. Even if China does something, we can see that he is measured. Never what happened to Indonesia in the region, which caused casualties or how. So it will be very different from the Philippines with its fishermen on the Scarborough shore because there are indeed contested features, unlike the case with Indonesia. We and the Philippines are different, but we still have to be vigilant for our sovereign rights, for the continental shelf, and for its water column not to be exploited by others. If that happens, our

answer is law enforcement, not negotiating boundaries."

From the statement of the source, we can understand that for now, Indonesia is still lucky, because geographically, there is no possibility for China to build an artificial island that approaches or faces the North Natuna sea area. Never say never, that possibility will always be there, let alone we're talking about China, which in terms of technology, human resources, and funds, they have great potential for it. It is a great duty and responsibility for the government to be present as the front guard in the North Natuna sea area, to defend and safeguard all that is legally owned by Indonesia.

According to the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, the geological formation of the Natuna Sea (North) and South China Sea basins hundreds of millions of years ago, gave rise to oil and gas trap basins under the bottom of the Natuna (North) Sea and the South China Sea, and has a shallow depth, which connects to the deep bathymetry basin of the South China Sea, thus creating a unique torrential current. This also geographically causes China to find it impossible to build artificial

islands facing the North Natuna Sea area. This shallow and deep sea meeting also makes the North Natuna sea area rich in fish resources.

Seeing the absence of good faith from China to obey and respect the results of the PCA, of course this is a political blowback for the Chinese government itself. The world will judge that China is a lawless country. Of course they must have a counter to this rolling narrative. It could be that China's participation in the CoC discussion with ASEAN is only used as a means of face shaving and proving to the world, that China is a pro-law country. Although the sources described that China is trying to speed up the course of the CoC discussions, it remains firm that it will not lose the rights of the nine dash line.

In addition to trying to cover up the narrative of non-compliance with international law, China is also currently trying to justify the nine dash line claim, which international law can find loopholes to legitimize. As explained by the source, that:

"They will try to create an offshore archipelago, so they divide it into 4, there are 4, the Spratlys and Paracels which they

all name, are considered as archipelagos outside the land area. So they have the continent area, and have the archipelago area as well. So they assume, this is something that is not regulated in UNCLOS. They are trying to go beyond the UNCLOS, considering there is a development of International Law. This reasoning is more logical, although it remains contrary to UNCLOS. They are trying to create this even though it is outside UNCLOS altogether. And they also include from the UNCLOS Preamble that everything that is not regulated in this UNCLOS, govern by general international law. So they use these general fundamentals, to be able to categorize what they are doing as legal and look for justification. For example, there is also a hybrid island, if we open article 121 paragraph 3 it already explains how a maritime feature is considered an island, there is sustained human habitation, sustained economic life, and he (PRC) tries to create this definition from the nature of natural form, for example rock or what, built an island, where people can live, until finally it can meet the requirements of the article (rev. article 121 paragraph 3). And this they (PRC) assume that UNCLOS has not

addressed. And this they are looking for justification"

This Chinese mindset is also very dangerous for the continuity of peace with neighboring countries in the SCS. If we notice, if indeed the concept of nine dash line has existed for a long time, China should have spoken out when UNCLOS talks and discussions were underway. As for UNCLOS itself, the discussion is very long and long, because of the hope of nations so that the existing rules can be representative of the interests of each country in the world.

Although many things have been declared illegal and violate international legal rules, China is still trying to create new rules with the term offshore archipelago. Where they want legitimacy of ownership of territorial waters outside of the continental territory of their country. The resource person also explained that China does not hesitate to currently invite many professors, academics, and even lawyers to be able to provide a legal basis or point of view to be able to build opinions and narratives of the existence of the offshore archipelago.

This should also be a concern for Indonesia, because it could be that China is trying to enter their narrative to be accepted as development of international law. Although logically, it is no longer possible to open the Pandora's box of UNCLOS 1982 which already has a long way to go, ratified, and then suddenly will be changed only in the interest of one State which in reality greatly disrupts the stability of regional security with its policies. This will certainly not be easy, and will be taken for granted by the countries of the world. In other words, China must find other ways to legitimize its narrative, or retreat with a chivalrous spirit, realizing that there are rights of other countries that must be respected in addition to their country's geopolitical interests.

CONCLUSION

China rejects and does not respect the PCA's ruling regarding ownership of features that overlap with the Philippines in the South China Sea region. China's aggressiveness in the South China Sea has intensified with the development of artificial islands in the Philippine territory. China facilitates artificial islands with military bases, airports, and even sends a Navy to inhabit the artificial islands. China hopes that by carrying out effective

occupation on artificial islands in the South China Sea region, then under international law, they can have ownership rights to features.

China's repressive attitude towards anyone who tries to get close to its artificial islands in the South China Sea region is troubling to neighboring countries. The presence of third parties from outside the South China Sea region as a counterweight to China's arrogance, such as America and France. Third parties are present with Freedom Of Navigation in the South China Sea region. The existence of third parties is considered by China as a disturber to the stability of the security of the South China Sea region. Freedom Of Navigation is not something that is unlawful in international law, as long as it meets the conditions that have been regulated.

China's nine dash line claim targets the North Natuna Sea region. Even so, Indonesia will not open any discussion opportunities with China if it is related to the North Natuna sea area, because the legitimacy of feature ownership is clear and recognized by international law, that the Natuna island and North Natuna sea area belong to Indonesia. Illegal fishing from Chinese vessels often occurs in the North Natuna Sea region. Chinese coastguards often enter Indonesia's EEZ area to protect Chinese fishing boats that engage in illegal fishing.

Chinese coastguards often stay in the North Natuna Sea not for freedom of navigation, but patrol on the grounds that they are in China's territorial nine dash line.

Indonesia made Natuna a defense center by strengthening the fleet of the Indonesian Navy and Bakamla. Indonesia has offshore oil and natural gas mining in the Natuna Sea called the Natuna block. The potential of oil and natural gas in the North Natuna Sea area is very large, and China finds it very expensive to release the North Natuna Sea to Indonesia. All Indonesian policies in North Natuna are purely law enforcement. China is unlikely to develop artificial islands in the North Natuna Sea region, due to geographical factors that favor Indonesia. China's attempt to make the law in international law is related to its narrative of owning the South China Sea, with an Offshore Archipelago alibi, which is not regulated in the 1982 UNCLOS.

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First publication right:

Asian Journal of Engineering, Social and Health (AJESH)

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