

We affirm.

Our sole contention is that signing onto UNCLOS will curb creeping Chinese influence.

French of The Guardian in 2015 writes that China has engaged in a campaign to gradually assert its dominance and influence in the South China Sea as the regional hegemon. O'Rourke with the Congressional Research Service in 2018 writes that there is concern that, should China's interpretation of freedom of navigation gain traction, that there would be real restriction of American freedom of navigation.

The Brookings Institution in 2017 underscores that while the Trump Administration has been ambiguous about their position on a number of issues, they have had unwavering support for freedom of navigation. **Patrick of The Atlantic in 2012** explains that this is because upholding current interpretations of freedom of navigation defend American interests like military movement and trade flows.

There are three ways in which acceding to UNCLOS would enable the United States to defend, expand, and enforce the current definition of freedom of navigation.

First, by increasing American military presence in the region. Patrick in 2012 furthers that American military officials are firmly behind ratification of UNCLOS because it establishes clear rights, duties, and jurisdictions of maritime states. Securing the framework of military operations in the region is important because Pham of the East Asia Forum in 2018 underlines that US defense officials are also considering a more assertive program that could include longer patrols, more ships and closer surveillance of Chinese facilities. We contend that this expansion of US military activities is only possible if the US secures the foundational norms needed to protect its operations. A greater US military presence is critical because **Sharman in 2017** outlines that China ultimately would not emerge as the victor of any skirmish or conflict with the United States. He furthers that the likeliest case, therefore, is that China, with an understanding that this is true and that defeat would be unacceptable, would scale back its military projections in the region.

Second, by increasing positive diplomatic relations

Currently, the United States is relatively absent from the region, and that absence has given China a window of opportunity to exert its influence on smaller countries. Thayer of The Diplomat in 2018 highlights that countries like the Philippines are giving into Chinese coercion and coaxing. For example, Kuok in 2018 reports that Vietnam halted drilling operations following Chinese pressure because they felt they did not have the backing of Washington. Additionally, Azuma in 2017 corroborates that China has been capitalizing on the absence of the United States to coerce smaller nations into adopting its interpretation of freedom of navigation.

Broadly, Thayer also emphasizes that our allies in the region feel abandoned and are unable to resist China's sustained onslaught of coercion. The Council on Foreign Relations in 2017 writes that Southeast Asian nations, anxious to avoid becoming overly dependent on China, are calling for a greater US presence to hedge against China's overwhelming influence in the region.

Third, by playing by the same rules. As it stands, China is able to accuse the United States of hypocrisy, as the US attempts to champion freedom of navigation but has not acceded to UNCLOS. However, The National Interest in 2017 explains that China holds contradictory views on freedom of navigation but that the United States is unable to point out this hypocrisy without receiving criticism from China. Thus, accession would allow the United States to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with China and credibly demand change.

Curbing Chinese power in the region has two major impacts.

First, reassuring allies. The New York Times in 2014 writes that Southeast Asian nations have been rapidly building up their military arms because of a need to defend their territorial claims and sovereignty with respect to China.

This kind of build-up, however, can pack the powder keg and risk substantially increasing the likelihood and consequences for interstate war, which would suspend a significant amount of international trade and have a human cost.

Coming to the defense of our allies' sovereign claims reassures them that their military buildup is less necessary, reaffirming our commitment to them and thus reducing the chances for an accidental military engagement.

Second, bringing China to the negotiating table. Kuok in 2018 explains that China responds to coordinated pressure by abiding by the rule of law and also takes advantage of times when the world looks away. Kuok suggests that this is a major reason why the United States should accede to UNCLOS in order to create a coordinated international pressure campaign that compels China to follow norms rather than change them.

Thus, we affirm.