

We affirm, Resolved: The United States should accede to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea without reservations.

Contention 1: Countering China

[Tong of the University of the Pacific in 2017](#) explains that by joining UNCLOS, the United States would “make waves and create an impression that will only grow over time because we become a leader as soon as we enter it,” allowing us to “properly reassert” ourselves as an “influential player, relevant leader, and active participant in the affairs of the ocean.”

This matters for three reasons.

Subpoint A: Maintaining Legal Stability

UNCLOS is currently on the brink of collapse. [Nevitt of UPenn in 2018](#) explains that thanks to China’s undermining of UNCLOS through the “continual disregard” of attempts at its enforcement, UNCLOS is now giving way to the law of “raw power and control.” In fact, [Freestone of George Washington University writes in 2013](#) that now, at least one-third of the members of UNCLOS are in breach of at least one significant provision of the treaty. This is dangerous because [Holmes of The Diplomat explains in 2014](#) that a written treaty can lose all meaning if its opponents deliberately undermine it.

The US joining UNCLOS solves for this instability. [Hawksley of Yale Global in 2016](#) confirms that the only way to keep the precedent of unlawfulness set by China from becoming a trend is by recognizing UNCLOS with all parties, including the United States.

Subpoint B: Regional Alliances

Acceding to UNCLOS helps our regional alliances by minimizing uncertainty. [The Asian Review writes in 2016](#) that the inconsistency in US foreign policy between what we say and what we do with regards to following UNCLOS concerns our regional allies, even leading to countries like the Philippines questioning the reliability of the US to the point where it is willing to pivot to China. According to [Woody of Business Insider in 2018](#), the Philippines has completed a political shift toward Beijing and is now even advocating for Chinese military outposts in the South China Sea. UNCLOS brings these allies back because [Chowdhury of the South China Morning Post explains in 2018](#) that allying with China isn’t an ideal situation for countries like the Philippines, but it’s a choice between a rock and a hard place.

[Salleh of the Diplomat in 2014](#) explains that China needs the allies that [the United States is losing thanks to UNCLOS] to achieve power parity with the U.S. [Leonardo concludes in 2017](#)

that there is no reason why U.S. officials should assume China will peacefully rise through the international system without leveraging the power that comes with being the hegemonic nation.

Subpoint C: Renegotiations

[The Financial Times in 2016](#) explain that if the U.S. did join UNCLOS, it would overcome the “we won't join until you join” standoff with China, allowing the two countries a chance to sit down and renegotiate the treaty, especially seeing as both the US and China agree that there are flaws. She concludes that finding agreement on new rules for the world’s waters would be the best way to avoid the escalation of US-China competition. Without US accession, there is no chance of the two countries working together, as China constantly calls the United States out on its non party status.

The impact is splintering the regional ASEAN cooperative - an economical and political alliance of 10 southeast asian countries. Bobby Anderson writes in 2017, “the political shadow of Chinese military power could prove sufficient to prevent any joint statements – not to mention collective action – by others in the region that might be construed as inimical to China’s interests”. The South China Morning Post explains in 2017 that “Beijing is stretching ties between countries in the region” by pulling some neighbours closer and ignoring others over “big issues like the South China Sea.” As a result of China making itself the central issue, “ASEAN is losing ... its centrality as its members must pay attention to China relations rather than the intra-Asean ones.” The ASEAN cooperative is critically important as Chheang Vannarith 2016 terminalizes that “a study by the Asian Development Bank has projected that with an appropriate policy matrix particularly to improve governance and promote innovation, ASEAN will triple its per capita income by 2030”

This is not without precedent - there have been three international conventions on sea laws since [UNCLOS's creation](#). For example, the most recent UNCLOS resulted in significant changes to the regulation of mining and drilling.