



University of  
**Nottingham**

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

***(DE)SECURITISATION AS PHILIPPINE RESPONSES  
TO THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTES***

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Thesis submitted  
to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2024

## Acknowledgements

As I reflect on my journey, now four and a half years into my PhD, it has become increasingly clear to me that this pursuit entails much more than simply earning an academic degree. While the end goal holds undeniable significance, the path itself is fraught with obstacles that demand not just persistence and creativity, but also patience and self-compassion. I vividly recall one of my mentors pointing out that pursuing a doctorate is inherently challenging, but doing so amidst a pandemic and social restrictions adds an extra layer of complexity. Yet, despite these challenges, my determination to succeed has never wavered, for I have always considered this endeavour as *mission*.

Fortunately, I have not had to traverse this path alone. To all who have supported me: my beloved family, dear friends; my superiors, brother Jesuits from both the Philippine and British Provinces, as well as the countless others I have encountered along the way; my supervisors, Dr Pauline Eadie and Dr Jon Sullivan; my examiners, Prof David Gill and Dr Tom Smith from the University of Portsmouth; peers, professors, the dedicated staff of the University of Nottingham School of Politics and International Relations, as well as my academic network beyond UoN; and my Pinoy family-friends in Notts – I extend my deepest gratitude. And to the God who calls and empowers, and brings all good work to completion: Here I am, Lord, send me!

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## **Abstract**

Over the last three decades, the Philippines has grappled with challenges to its sovereignty, security, and prosperity in response to China's claims in the South China Sea (SCS) based on historical rights. This thesis explores the Philippines' strategy for managing what it perceives as persistent threats from China's maritime assertions. Notably, mainstream IR theories (un)consciously overlook the dynamic interplay between international and internal politics shaping Philippine strategy. In response, the research adopts the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory, offering an alternative social constructivist approach to understanding global affairs.

The study analyses maritime incidents from 1995 until 2022, focusing on how the perceived existential dangers led to securitizing Philippine policy discourses. Employing process tracing, the project further examines one specific case – the alleged ramming, sinking, and abandoning of a Philippine fishing boat near the Reed Bank in 2019. Only in this incident did the Philippine response deviate by favouring China as it opted to “de-securitise” the issue. The thesis claims that underlying patron-client relations among actors facilitate the mechanism derived from the securitisation framework. The thesis concludes with an assessment of the theoretical framework, the methodology and methods employed, and the empirical data analysed throughout this research.

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **Research Questions**

This thesis explores the Philippines' foreign policy responses to the South China Sea (SCS) disputes. The study seeks to address two main research questions; the first is an empirical question:

(A) What explains the strategies employed by the Philippines from 1995 to 2022, with particular emphasis on the China-centric approach during the Duterte administration, despite ongoing Chinese encroachments in the SCS and the SCS Arbitration decision favourable to the Philippines?

Responding to this research question, the thesis argues that a securitisation framework based on the Copenhagen School's Securitisation Theory explains the Philippine foreign policy. The first part of this study compares eight maritime incidents from 1995 until the end of Rodrigo Duterte's presidential term in 2022 based on how an existential threat (Chinese intrusions in the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf) led to the outcome (a securitising Philippine foreign policy decision). Using a process tracing technique, the second part of this project further investigates one of the cases, the June 2019 alleged ramming, sinking, and abandoning of a Philippine fishing boat in the vicinity of the Recto Bank or Reed Bank, as internationally known. Only regarding this episode did the Philippine response to the Chinese threat



arguably favour China; instead of securitising measures, the Philippine government opted to “de-securitise” the issue.

Furthermore, this research claims that an underlying structure of patron-client relations among political actors (influencers, decision-makers, audience) facilitated the causal process derived from the securitisation framework. Patron-client relationships develop between individuals or groups with unequal status involving a mutual exchange of benefits. In the context of interactions between international and internal political agents and structures, domestic factors played a significant role in shaping the Philippines’ foreign policy decisions following the 2019 Reed Bank incident.

The second research question assesses the theoretical framework:

(B) To what extent does the securitisation framework offer insights into understanding the Philippines’ foreign policy response to the SCS disputes?

This second research question delves into two secondary questions:

(1) What advantages does applying the securitisation framework bring to analysing the Philippines’ actions in the maritime dispute?

(2) Conversely, what limitations are inherent in the securitisation explanation, and how might these deficiencies be effectively addressed?

As a comprehensive analytical tool, the thesis claims that securitisation framework enables a comparative study of cases, assessment of causal mechanisms, and consideration of enabling

conditions. The thesis concludes by evaluating the theoretical framework, the methods employed, as well as the empirical data analysed in this research. While acknowledging its contributions, the thesis recognises and addresses the inherent limitations of this framework by proposing remedies to mitigate them.

## **Background**

The South China Sea (SCS) is a semi-enclosed region in the western Pacific Ocean where coastal states contend with competing territorial claims and overlapping maritime interests. China regards the SCS as an integral part of its territory and asserts sovereignty over nearly the entire area, citing its historical rights. Nevertheless, China's sovereignty claims face challenges from neighbouring countries and territories that invoke international law, notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), an agreement of which China is a signatory. Among its many aspects, UNCLOS provides a structured framework for delineating various maritime zones, offering clarity in maritime jurisdiction.

Despite the established rules governing the oceans and the use of their resources, the past three decades have witnessed the Philippines grappling with effectively addressing maritime intrusions and challenges to its sovereignty and sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea (WPS), encompassing the Philippines' territorial sea, EEZ, and CS. This thesis adopts a securitisation approach to explore the Philippines' strategy to managing China's assertions in the WPS, which the Philippines views as

ongoing threats to territorial integrity, maritime security, and economic well-being.

### **Problem Statement**

A comprehensive analysis of the Philippine responses to the SCS disputes is crucial, considering various aspects of the multidimensional conflict. Firstly, contrary to common belief, the SCS disputes extend beyond military-political aspects to include economic and environmental concerns. Recognising this multifaceted nature of the disputes is essential. The Copenhagen School's Securitisation Theory incorporates the different security aspects of the maritime row.

Secondly, the thesis accounts for the shifts in Philippine foreign policy responses to the SCS disputes amid a consistent international geopolitical and institutional landscape. To contextualise the Philippine approach within the broader dynamics of the SCS disputes, the study examines several consistent scope conditions, elaborated upon in the Literature Review chapter. China's persistent and aggressive actions within the WPS were fundamental. Chinese assertiveness did only set the stage for the maritime incidents but also significantly influenced how various actors, including the Philippines, navigated the maritime row. Additionally, the cautious stance adopted by the US, despite its treaty commitments as a partner of the Philippines, had a profound impact. This prudent approach by the US limited the options available to the Philippines in responding effectively to the incident.

The lack of cohesive action within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regarding the SCS disputes with China was another enduring scope condition. This lack of unity within ASEAN influenced the Philippines' response and broader regional dynamics. Moreover, despite international legal mechanisms such as UNCLOS and the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Tribunal Award favouring the Philippines, Chinese incursions in the WPS persisted, highlighting the limitations of these instruments in shaping behaviour in contested maritime areas.

These scope conditions collectively formed the contextual backdrop within which the Philippine government formulated its response to the maritime incident. While present, these historical conditions were not the primary drivers of the Philippine response. Instead, the thesis argues that domestic politics played a pivotal role.

Finally, President Rodrigo Duterte's advocacy for an independent foreign policy in response to the SCS disputes is puzzling. During his presidency from 30 June 2016 to 30 June 2022, Duterte pursued an "independent" Philippine foreign policy strategy towards greater autonomy from the US and a pronounced inclination towards China. This marked a departure from the Philippines' historical reliance on the US as a conventional ally, as illustrated by Duterte's decision to distance the Philippines from US military activities. Simultaneously, Duterte's recognition of China's economic impact and potential to shape regional dynamics influenced his China-centric approach. Duterte also aimed to mitigate potential conflicts with China by opting for diplomatic channels and negotiations over military confrontation. He asserted that the

Philippines, a smaller power, lacked practical viability in engaging in military conflict with China, particularly within the contentious SCS disputes. Duterte's foreign policy approach to the SCS disputes echoed the timeless adage in global affairs, "...the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Thucydides, 2017, p. 269), driven by what he considered a pragmatic assessment of the geopolitical landscape.

Duterte's approach diverged from the previous administration's, which resorted to legal channels and international backing to challenge China's aggressive claims. The preceding Philippine government led by Benigno Aquino III brought China to court based on UNCLOS, which both states had ratified. In his opening speech during the commencement of the SCS Arbitration on 7 July 2015, Albert Del Rosario, who was then serving as the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), underscored the Philippines' adherence to the international rules-based order. Del Rosario emphasised the importance of UNCLOS, which grants equality among states, sets clear rules for ocean use, navigation, and sovereignty, facilitates fair dispute resolution, and enables weaker states to challenge stronger ones based on principles and law rather than mere power. The Philippines' case against China sought resolutions on some aspects of the SCS disputes, including China's exercise of "historic rights" within its so-called "nine-dash line" claim in the SCS and China's unlawful actions infringed upon the Philippines' UNCLOS-based sovereign rights. Del Rosario, thus, articulated an alternative approach to global affairs: "Principles trump power; that law triumphs over force; and that right prevails over might" (PCA, 2013a, p. 12).

Academic scholars have commonly applied established International Relations (IR) theories to interpret the Philippines' divergent foreign policy responses to Chinese incursions in the WPS. Neorealism, for instance, assesses state behaviour through the lens of power dynamics and national interests, offering insights into the Philippines' efforts to balance China's growing influence while safeguarding its interests. However, the policies pursued by the Duterte administration raise questions about the potential compromise of the country's national interests.

Neoliberalism, another IR approach, focuses on the role of international institutions and agreements in shaping state behaviours. Scholars within this paradigm examine the Philippines' engagement with regional organisations and international legal mechanisms, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and UNCLOS, in shaping its strategies for addressing the SCS disputes. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this legal approach is uncertain, as it hinges on both parties' willingness to enforce the settlement. China's dismissal of the SCS Arbitration (Award), favourable to the Philippines, proves that no higher authority can ensure compliance with international law. If one party is unwilling to comply, the other may need to explore alternative methods to encourage them to do so.

This thesis contends that prevailing IR perspectives often overlook the intricate interplay between international and internal politics guiding the Philippines' strategy. In response to this limited perspective on global affairs, this research introduces the securitisation framework as an alternative social constructivist approach to international relations.

Securitization Theory, initially developed by the Copenhagen School, concerns the process of threat construction and the corresponding response by decision-makers, which was influenced by functional actors and legitimised by the audience.

### **Geographic Setting**

The SCS (Figure 1.1 below) boasts a complex and strategically significant geographical configuration spanning an expansive area of 3.5 million square kilometres (RP, 2014a, p. 17). Starting from the northern boundary and progressing clockwise, the SCS is surrounded by various coastal stretches of seven countries – China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam (RP, 2014a, p. 17-18). China's southern coastline, including the islands of Hainan and Taiwan, marks the border to the north. To the east, the sea is enclosed by the main islands of the Philippines, such as the Batan Islands, Babuyan Islands, Luzon, and Mindoro. Philippine islands, including Busuanga, Culion, Linapacan, and Palawan, form a natural boundary, separating the SCS from the Sulu Sea to the southeast. Continuing south-westward, the SCS is encompassed by the island of Borneo, bordered by Malaysia and Brunei. To the south, it opens into the Java Sea through Indonesian islands off Sumatra's coast. Transitioning northward, the SCS touches Singapore's coasts and the Malacca Strait entrance. It then follows the Malay Peninsula of Malaysia, eventually merging with the Gulf of Thailand and the southern shore of Vietnam. Its western boundary is defined by Vietnam's coastline, culminating at the Gulf of Tonkin.



Figure 1.1 – The SCS (RP, 2014, “Figure 2.1”)



The SCS harbours hundreds of small islets, rocks, and reefs, grouped into five distinct clusters, with the Pratas Islands, Paracel Islands, Macclesfield Bank, and Scarborough Shoal constituting the Northern Sector (RP, 2014a, p. 19). Their locations are depicted in Figure 1.2 below. Of these features, the only one whose adjacent waters are claimed by both the Philippines and China is Scarborough Shoal. Approximately 170 nautical miles to the east of Macclesfield Bank and 300 nautical miles southeast of the Paracels lies Scarborough Shoal, a feature known in the Philippines as Bajo de Masinloc or Panatag Shoal, and in China as Huáng yán Dǎo (黄岩岛). Located approximately 118 nautical miles from the Philippine coast at Luzon, it is a submerged reef that, at six locations, protrudes slightly above sea level at high tide.

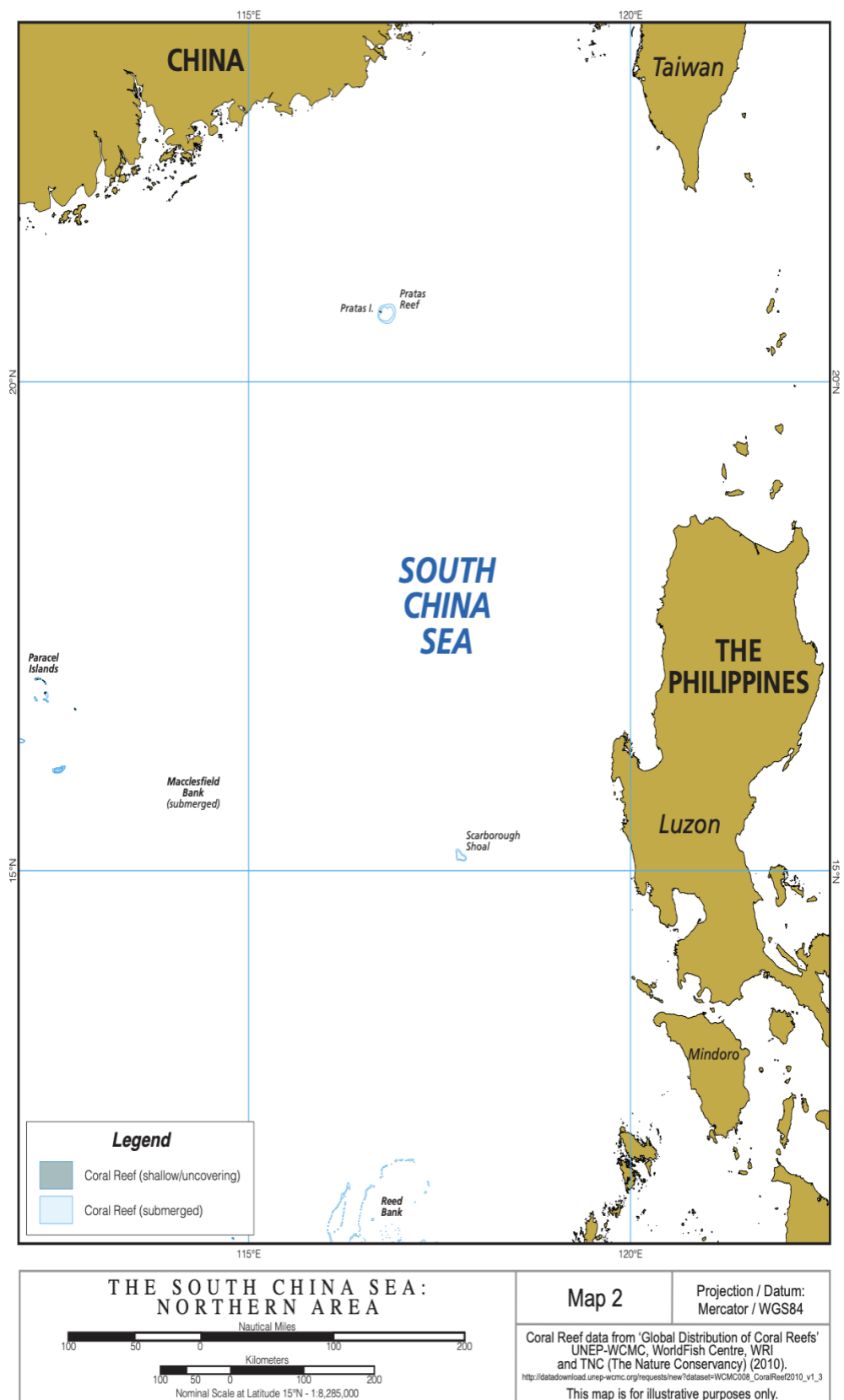


Figure 1.2 – SCS Northern Sector (PCA, 2016a, p. 123)

The largest group of maritime features in the SCS lies in the Southern Sector (Figure 1.3) and is known internationally as the Spratly Islands or simply the Spratlys. Collectively, these islands are called the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) in the Philippines and China as the Nánshā Qúndǎo (南沙群島) (RP, 2014a, p. 20). They include over 600 reefs, islets, shoals, and rocky protrusions, most lying between 7 and 12 degrees North latitude and 112 and 116 degrees East longitude. Studies show that, with few exceptions, the Spratly Islands are either permanently submerged or submerged at high tide (Hancox & Prescott, 1995). They are scattered over approximately 240,000 square kilometres, but their collective land territory above water at high tide covers no more than 8 square kilometres (Schofield, 2009, pp. 7-9). The relevant features of the Spratlys included in the comparative study of this thesis are Mischief Reef (Panganiban Reef; Měijì Jiāo 美济礁), Second Thomas Shoal (Ayungin Shoal; Ren'ai Jiāo 仁爱礁), and Whitsun Reef (Julian Felipe Reef; Niú è Jiāo 牛轭礁), which is the northeast extreme limit of the Union Bank. While the Reed Bank (also known as Recto Bank or Lǐyuè Tān 礼乐滩) falls outside the Spratly Islands, the 2019 maritime incident that occurred there is a unique case that warrants thorough investigation.

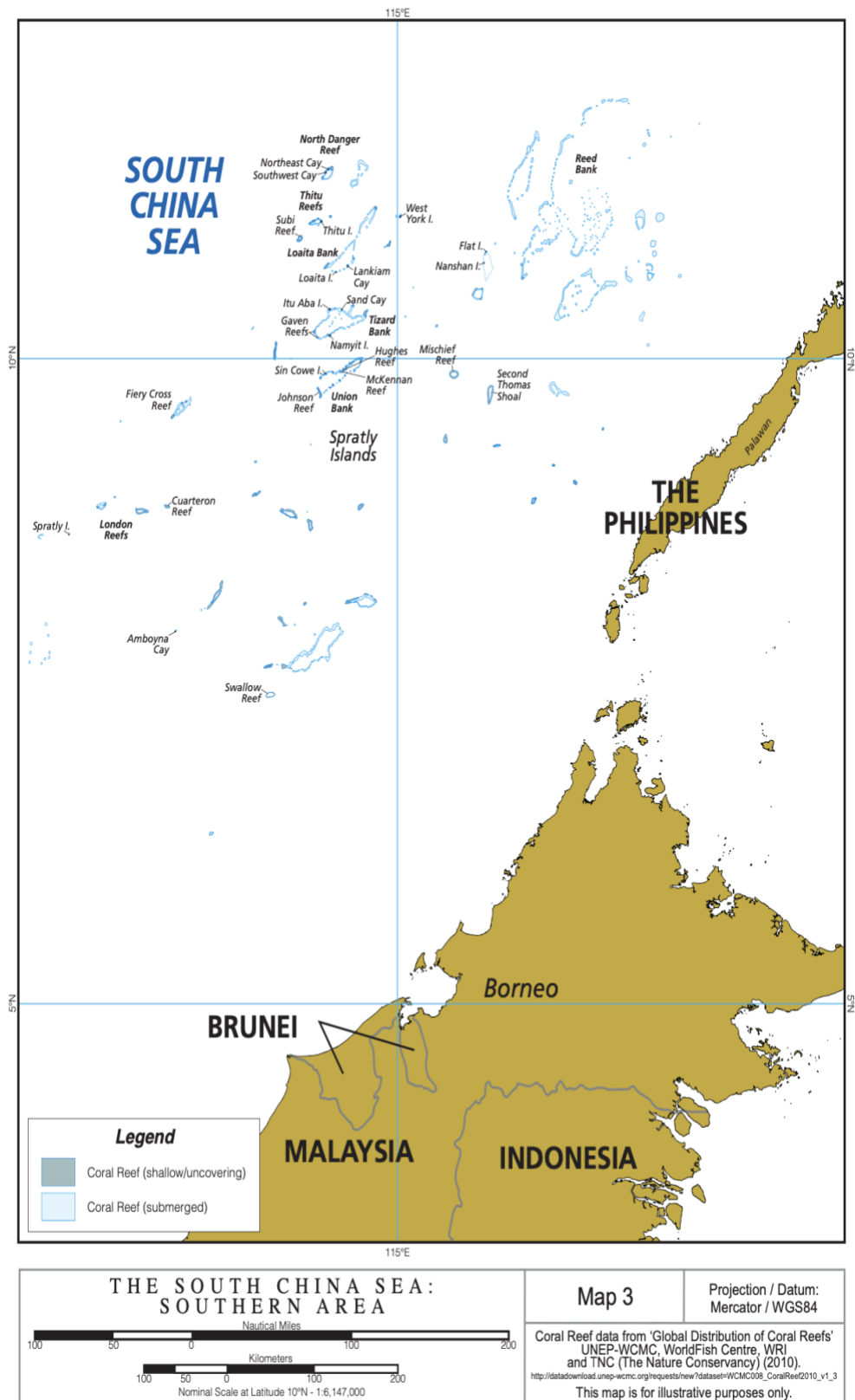


Figure 1.3 – SCS Southern Sector (PCA, 2016a, p. 125)

## **Significance of the SCS**

The SCS plays a pivotal role in regional dynamics and global affairs, deriving its significance from multifaceted economic, environmental, geopolitical, and strategic factors. Collaborative endeavours among regional and international stakeholders are imperative to safeguard the SCS as a space for economic cooperation, sustainable development, and maritime security.

At the heart of the SCS lies a critical maritime crossroads that interconnects major economies and vital trade routes. In 2016, it was reported that approximately one-third of the world's maritime trade, valued at USD 13.4 trillion annually (CSIS, 2021), traverses these waters, facilitating the transportation of crucial resources like oil and natural gas (US DoD, 2022; Dunn & Barden, 2018). Consequently, the SCS stands among the busiest and strategically vital waterways globally (Hastey & Romaniuk, 2021). Unhindered access to these routes is fundamental for the economic growth and security of nations reliant on maritime trade.

Beyond its role as an economic hub, the SCS is an ecological treasure trove, boasting diverse ecosystems and serving as an ecological hotspot of immense significance (Ma et al., 2023). The region's waters host a wide array of marine species, many unique to the area and integral to the overall health of the planet's ecosystems. Rich fisheries in the SCS support the livelihoods of more than 3.7 million people in the region, contributing to food security (Poling, 2019). Additionally, the SCS is believed to harbour substantial oil, natural gas, and mineral reserves beneath its waters,

potentially influencing global energy markets and regional economies (Macaraig & Fenton, 2021).

Despite its economic and ecological importance, the delicate balance of the SCS's marine ecology is under severe threat. Pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction significantly pressure the region's fragile ecosystem (Sumaila et al., 2021). These environmental challenges have far-reaching consequences, affecting not only local communities dependent on the sea for their livelihoods but also casting a dark shadow over the well-being of the global environment.

Finally, the SCS has evolved into a substantial geopolitical focal point, primarily due to the strategic interests of major global powers, including China and the US, alongside various regional actors. China's assertive actions in the region, marked by extensive land reclamation, construction of military facilities on contested features, and asserting its "nine-dash line" territorial claims, have raised concerns among neighbouring nations and drawn the international community's attention.

Thus, recognising the critical significance of the SCS for both the Philippines and China underscores the urgent need for judicious diplomatic engagement and conflict resolution. Balancing economic interests, territorial integrity, and regional stability necessitates multilateral efforts and strict adherence to international law, particularly UNCLOS. Given the intricate dynamics of the sea, finding common ground between these two nations and other stakeholders is essential to ensuring that the SCS remains a space for cooperation rather than confrontation, ultimately benefiting the entire region.

## **Overlapping Claims**

The SCS has consistently been a contentious focal point, fuelling enduring disputes among Southeast and East Asian nations and territories. One of the most contentious aspects of this multifaceted issue is the overlapping claims between the Philippines and China. These disputes predominantly revolve around contested maritime features, historical rights, and questions of sovereignty (Carpio 2017).

The development of the Philippines' maritime claims and jurisdiction in its surrounding waters unfolds through legislative acts and proclamations. The initial assertion of rights came with the 1949 Republic Act (RA) 387, where the country claimed petroleum and natural gas resources within its territorial waters and CS. Subsequent milestones include RA 3046 in 1961, which defined the territorial sea and baselines, and Presidential Proclamation 370 in 1968, formalising jurisdiction over the CS. The 1973 Constitution delineated the nation's territory, encompassing the territorial sea, airspace, subsoil, seabed, insular shelves, submarine areas, and internal waters – defined as “the waters around, between, and connecting the islands of the archipelago”.

In 1978, Presidential Decree 1599 established a 200-nautical-mile EEZ in alignment with UNCLOS negotiations. The Philippines signed UNCLOS in 1982, demonstrating its commitment by being among the first nations to ratify it in 1984. However, complete domestic alignment was achieved in 2009 with RA 9522, which conformed baselines and maritime zones to UNCLOS principles. The Philippine Supreme Court affirmed the law's constitutionality in 2011, cementing compliance with UNCLOS. Since

2009, the Philippines' archipelagic baselines and 200-nautical-mile EEZ have adhered to UNCLOS, with an approved CS claim in the Benham Rise region to the north. Notwithstanding these advancements, the limits of the continental shelf to the west of the archipelago remain undefined.

China's maritime claims in the SCS have also undergone significant developments. In 1958, China proclaimed a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea claim based on straight baselines, encompassing the mainland, coastal islands, Taiwan, and surrounding territories such as Pratas, Paracel, Macclesfield Bank, and the Spratly Islands. This proclamation explicitly highlighted China's emphasis on sovereignty over insular features (PRC, 1958). Before the 1958 Declaration, China had no official maritime territory claims (Greenfield, 1992; Yahuda, 2013).

Reaffirmed in 1992 and 1998, the 1958 declaration gained additional validation in 1996 when China ratified UNCLOS, confirming its "sovereign rights and jurisdiction" over a 200-nautical-mile EEZ and CS (PRC, 1996). In 2009, China asserted its claims through two *Notes Verbales* submitted to the UN, asserting "indisputable sovereignty" over islands and adjacent waters. This declaration was accompanied by introducing the controversial "nine-dash line" map, enclosing a significant portion of the SCS (PMPRC, 2009a; 2009b).

The nine-dash line significance lies in China's expansive assertion, leading to disputes over overlaps in EEZs and CSs with neighbouring states, particularly the Philippines. This intricate scenario, depicted in Figure 1.4, has had international implications for regional stability and peaceful



maritime resource management, highlighting the complexities and tensions arising from China's evolving maritime claims in the SCS.



Figure 1.4 – Intersecting Claims between the Philippines and China in the SCS (RP, 2014, “Figure 3.4”)

## **Unresolved Disputes Leading to the SCS Arbitration Award in 2016**

Between 1995 and the issuance of the SCS Arbitration Award in 2016, the Philippines and China were entangled in a series of contentious events and negotiations. Following the departure of the US military bases from the Philippines in 1992, China initiated actions that would set the stage for a protracted dispute. These actions included the construction of artificial islands on Mischief Reef and raising Chinese flags in disputed areas in 1995. Alarmed by these territorial claims and perceived violations of the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the SCS, the Philippines raised objections. However, China maintained that its activities were intended for civilian purposes. Tensions continued to escalate as China further developed artificial islands between 1998 and 1999.

Another crucial flashpoint emerged at Scarborough Shoal, a strategically significant feature in the Northern Sector of the SCS. In 2012, a confrontation ensued when the Philippines attempted to arrest Chinese fishermen, leading to a standoff and China's takeover of the shoal. Exhausting all diplomatic avenues and eventually recognising the limitations of bilateral negotiations, the Philippines pursued legal avenues, initiating arbitration proceedings under UNCLOS in 2013. China vehemently rejected the arbitration process, contesting its jurisdiction and refusing to participate.

The 2016 PCA Tribunal Award marked a pivotal moment in the SCS disputes. The ruling favoured the Philippines by invalidating China's expansive "nine-dash line" claim and clarifying that historical claims did not confer sovereignty rights over SCS resources. Despite China's steadfast

rejection of the arbitration process and the tribunal's decision, it acknowledged the role of international law in resolving maritime disputes, underscoring the importance of UNCLOS in managing such contentious issues. Nevertheless, as of 2023, the Award had not been fully implemented, leaving the intricate and volatile dynamics of the SCS unresolved.

### **An Alternative Explanation: Securitization Theory**

This thesis argues that foreign policy is only meaningful for a state if all stakeholders collectively respond to the geopolitical and economic external environment and the internal historical and socio-cultural context. In the case of the Duterte administration's strategies on the SCS disputes, the influence of factors within the Philippines, often overlooked by mainstream IR theories, emerges as a crucial explanatory element. While system-level approaches, particularly those rooted in power-based analyses, are informative, they fail to elucidate international affairs comprehensively. Foreign policy analysis must incorporate sub-systemic or domestic-level factors, examining the self-contained system of the state and the intricate interplay among its significant mechanisms and scope conditions.

This study adopts an alternative perspective within IR, employing a "social constructivist" approach. This theoretical framework emphasises aspects of foreign relations that other approaches tend to neglect (Onuf, 1989). According to social constructivism, the significance of social phenomena is derived from the meaning attributed to them by mutually

dependent actors, transcending the mere pursuit of benefits by influential actors. Political actors are guided by a “logic of appropriateness” that legitimises their actions and decisions by aligning them with their identity, which is shaped and shared within their social context (March & Olsen, 1989). This means that political actors exercise their agency, which may not always align with rational calculations and can be influenced by factors beyond the conventional anarchical structure of the international system.

This study advocates a social constructivist interpretation of security in line with the Copenhagen School’s Securitization Theory, revolving around threat construction and the corresponding responses shaped through discourse. According to Securitization Theory, the “securitising actor” (such as the president, parliament, or foreign office) communicates and establishes security through a “speech act”. This act determines which existential threats (“referent objects”) are addressed and for whom (“the audience”). However, the audience is not merely passive spectators; they play an active role by either legitimising or rejecting the authority’s intervention through their support or opposition to emergency measures. Within this framework, the audience becomes a pivotal element in securitisation, enabling the creation of shared security meanings and policy choices. The influence of what the Copenhagen School terms “functional actors” (stakeholders beyond the audience) on policymakers’ decisions is also examined in the framework. This perspective renders securitisation “intersubjective and socially constructed”, distinct from an objective fact or a purely subjective creation.

Another significant facet of the securitisation framework is “de-securitisation”, where an issue that was previously securitized shifts from requiring emergency measures to re-entering the realm of “normal politics”. This research project delves into de-securitisation within the context of the Duterte government’s foreign policy response to China’s aggression in the WPS. The thesis aims to explore Philippine foreign policy as a securitising manoeuvre that initially led to an assertive legal strategy garnering international community support, only to revert to diplomatic relations with China in response to a specific maritime incident.

## **Original Contribution**

The first distinctive aspect of this thesis is its emphasis on the intricacies of the SCS disputes between the Philippines and China, which inherently possess a multifaceted nature. The disputes involve territorial claims, maritime resources, regional security dynamics, environmental concerns, and interactions with international institutions. To comprehensively grasp these issues, a research approach that is both holistic and adaptable is essential. By weaving together various strands of information and analysis, the study explores the diplomatic manoeuvrings of a smaller power dealing with a more dominant state and the intricacies of such an engagement.

Thus, this research reorganises previously understood Philippine foreign policy responses to the SCS disputes. The evolving nature of international relations in the context of the SCS disputes, marked by geopolitical shifts, international legal conflicts, and changing alliances,

demands a constant reassessment of traditional frameworks in explaining the SCS conflicts. What may have been conventional wisdom or an established basis for Philippine foreign policy might become outdated or insufficient in explaining contemporary global affairs. As such, this research aims to critically assess and reconfigure prior assumptions and interpretations to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the Philippines' responses to the maritime row. The empirical contribution here is two-fold: first, it unveils the complex layers within Philippines-China relations, and second, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the broader tapestry of regional power dynamics.

This thesis also breaks new ground by not only restructuring previously understood complex experiences but also by examining them through the lens of the securitisation framework. The research project's theoretical underpinning examines and refines the Copenhagen School's framework for understanding (de)securitisation. Applying this framework to analysing Philippine foreign policy concerning the SCS disputes, a previously unexplored context, enables a more nuanced understanding of how security concerns emerge and evolve.

By shifting the analytical lens from conventional state-centric or institutionalist perspectives, the study underscores the social construction of foreign policy, wherein the interplay of internal and external agents and structures significantly shapes policy decisions. This approach posits that foreign policy is not a mere reflection of objective geopolitical realities but a complex interplay of human agency, systemic historical legacies, and contemporary exigencies. Consequently, the research bridges gaps in the

existing body of knowledge, going beyond presenting an alternative perspective to providing an all-encompassing exposition of the Philippines' foreign policy.

By advocating for the credibility and applicability of both Discourse Analysis and Process Tracing within the securitisation context, this study significantly contributes to ongoing methodological discussions. This thesis champions Discourse Analysis as a robust approach for scrutinising qualitative data within the securitisation framework. Aligned with the foundational principles of post-structuralism upheld by the Copenhagen School, the research seamlessly integrates (Interpretivist) Process Tracing in the analysis. The chosen methodology sheds light on the intricate interplay between theory and practical application, transforming it into a powerful tool for delving into the complexities of (de)securitisation processes. Consequently, the thesis not only offers valuable insights into the intricacies of the Philippines' foreign policy in the SCS disputes and refines theoretical frameworks but also enhances understanding of the various approaches, processes, and techniques employed in securitisation analysis.

## **Thesis Outline**

Following this introductory chapter, the literature review in Chapter 2 explores the factors shaping Philippine foreign policy. An aspect previously overlooked, the chapter claims that domestic structural factors contributing to the Philippine strategy warrant attention. The literature review advances the notion that an underlying patron-client relational



structure embedded in the nation's political and economic landscape offers valuable insights into understanding Duterte's strategic approach. Ultimately, the chapter illuminates the intricate interplay between global and local political-economic actors alongside dependency relations within and outside the state, collectively impacting foreign policy decision-making. The securitisation framework highlighting domestic factors emerges as a crucial analytical lens in deciphering the complexities of the Philippine case within the broader geopolitical landscape.

In Chapter 3, the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory takes centre stage, providing a lens through which international relations can be understood from the viewpoint of the party confronting threats. In the context of the Philippines-China SCS disputes, it focuses on the smaller power, the Philippines. The chapter aims to assess various strands of the Securitization Theory and present a unified framework of assumptions that will guide this research. The overarching goal is to establish a comprehensive securitisation framework as the foundational basis for this specific investigation into the Philippines' responses to the maritime conflict.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodological design, methods used, and the selected data to be analysed in this research. This research examines the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes spanning 1995 to 2022, employing comparative and single case study approaches. The methodology and methods chapter is divided into two segments, aligning with the cross-case and within-case analysis chapters.

Chapter 5 investigates China's actions in the SCS from 1995 to 2016, which were perceived by the Philippines as existential threats and met with securitizing responses. These maritime incidents had a detrimental impact on the Philippines' sovereignty, territorial integrity, and sovereign rights under UNCLOS. Over these two decades, the Philippines consistently securitised incursions into the WPS.

This chapter addresses security matters under three of the five security sectors recognised by the Copenhagen School. The initial sector concentrates on military security, encompassing three security issues. Section A discusses China's construction activities at Mischief Reef, which contravened UNCLOS provisions governing the construction, operation, and utilisation of artificial islands, installations, and structures while infringing upon the exclusive rights of the Philippines. Section B examines the confrontational behaviour of Chinese vessels towards Philippine vessels navigating in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal. The Philippines have argued that these actions go against the rules outlined in UNCLOS and the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea. Section C explores China's unlawful actions at the Second Thomas Shoal during the SCS arbitration proceedings, including threats to remove the Philippine presence there and hindrance of Philippine vessels attempting to deliver essential supplies to stationed nationals.

Section D analyses an economic security issue: China's interference with the Philippines' exercise of sovereign rights over the living and non-living resources within its EEZ and CS. This section also exposes how China obstructed the Philippines' fishing rights in its EEZ and disrupted the

traditional livelihoods of Filipino fishermen at Scarborough Shoal. Lastly, Section E considers the Copenhagen School's environmental sector, addressing China's responsibility for the damage inflicted upon the unique and delicate ecosystems at Mischief Reef, Scarborough Shoal, and Second Thomas Shoal, all in violation of China's obligations under UNCLOS and the sovereign rights of the Philippines.

Chapter 6 examines how the Philippines, under the Duterte administration, dealt with the disputes in the SCS. Before Duterte, the government took an aggressive approach towards China, resulting in a favourable ruling from the Tribunal on the SCS Arbitration. However, Duterte's administration shifted its strategy to engage China in bilateral discussions, but tensions between the two countries remained, causing setbacks in their relationship. The chapter explores three incidents that occurred during Duterte's term: the sinking of a Philippine fishing boat in Reed Bank in June 2019, the swarming of Chinese vessels in Whitsun Reef in March 2021, and the harassment of resupply missions to BRP Sierra Madre in Second Thomas Shoal in November 2021.

Chapter 7 focuses on the Philippine policy response to the maritime event near the Reed Bank on 9 June 2019. This chapter argues that the reported collision that caused the Philippine fishing vessel FBca Gem-Ver 1 to sink and the abandonment of 22 Filipino fishermen on the sea posed a significant threat. However, the Philippine policy responses to this maritime incident were primarily friendly to China. Despite the continuous threats in the SCS since 1995, it was only during this specific maritime incident that the Philippine government decided to de-securitise the issue.

Chapter 8 expounds on how Securitization Theory offers significant insights into the Philippines' foreign policy on the SCS disputes from 1995 until 2022. As a comprehensive analytical tool, the securitisation framework enables a comparative study of cases, assessment of causal mechanisms, and consideration of enabling conditions.

The concluding chapter critically evaluates the theoretical framework, the methodology and methods employed, and the empirical data analysed throughout this research. Despite its undeniable value, it is imperative to recognise and address the inherent limitations of this framework. Offering a balanced perspective, the thesis concludes by summarising the key points discussed, presenting recommendations for further research, and highlighting its contribution and relevance to the broader field of critical security studies.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This literature review explores how academic scholars explain the Philippines' approach to the SCS disputes. To effectively organise and analyse the multifaceted factors influencing Philippine foreign policy, this chapter employs Putnam's two-level games (1988) and engages with Hay's (2002) structure-agency debate. Adopting this structured approach highlights a critical aspect that previous research has often neglected: the significance of domestic structural explanations in understanding the Philippine strategy and its pivotal role in determining the nation's stance in the maritime conflict.

Following the organisation of various factors influencing the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes, this chapter systematically discusses the four groups of factors identified in the academic literature regarding Philippine foreign policy: (1) international agents; (2) the dual asymmetric structure in the international system; (3) international governmental institutions; and (4) domestic political actors. The chapter suggests that an underlying patron-client relational structure within the country's political landscape can offer valuable insights into the Philippines' strategy. Ultimately, this literature review underscores the dynamic interplay between global and local political-economic actors and the web of dependency relationships, both external and internal to the

state. These factors collectively shape the decision-making processes in the Philippines' responses to the maritime row.

### **Two-level Games**

Various IR theories and foreign policy analysis approaches recognise the intricate interplay between a state's conduct within the international system and its domestic political landscape (da Conceicao-Heldt & Mello, 2017; Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2012; Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Fearon, 1998; Moravcsik, 1993; Putnam, 1988). In his seminal work on the concept of "two-level games", Putnam (1988) posits that national governments grapple with the dual challenge of mitigating the adverse effects of the international system while simultaneously striving to garner political support from their local constituents. Therefore, this literature review explores external and internal factors influencing the Philippines' strategic choices.

Several local scholars have adopted the two-level approach within the context of Philippine foreign policy regarding the maritime disputes. De Castro (2016a; 2016b) affirms that the Philippines engages with other maritime powers, such as the US and Japan, in response to China's contentious nine-dash-line claim over the SCS. However, De Castro (2017; 2018) claims that the country's pivot towards China is primarily rooted in domestic politics. Heydarian (2017a; 2017b) contends that the evolution of Philippine foreign policy reflects the dynamics of geopolitics in the external environment and the preferences of the nation's ruling elite. While Baviera (2016a; 2016b) acknowledges the influence of systemic factors in

shaping policy responses to the SCS disputes, she underscores the substantial impact of local politics on the Philippines' various strategic orientations. Baviera (2012; 2014; 2016b; 2018) explores the role of state-level factors such as political culture, competing interest groups, public opinion, and regime legitimacy in guiding Philippine foreign policy. Magcamit (2018; 2019) posits that President Duterte's foreign policy has been moulded by a complex interplay of global system dynamics and unit-level factors, encompassing government perceptions, state-society relations, and the nature of domestic institutions. Applying a burden-sharing perspective, Manantan (2019) identifies the interplay of systemic incentives and pressures within the Asia-Pacific region and the internal variables represented by the Duterte administration's calculated approach toward the US and China. This intricate blend of systemic motivations and internal constraints has ultimately led to a strategy that accommodates China's assertiveness in exchange for aid while simultaneously relegating American interests and influence to a secondary role in Philippine foreign policy.

### **Conduct versus Context**

Political phenomena, including the intricacies of foreign policy decision-making, have been comprehensively analysed through the dynamic interplay of agency and structure (Hay, 1995; 1999; 2002). Scholars often diverge in their emphasis, with some highlighting the considerable agency of political actors in shaping events. In contrast, others underscore the inherent constraints imposed by socio-political

structures, both internal and external to the state. The debate between these two perspectives often becomes a tug-of-war, with one camp favouring structural factors as paramount; at the same time, the other downplays the significance of agential factors and vice versa. To strike a balance, this literature review advocates the perspective that delves into the intricate relationship between the actions of key actors and the contextual structures they operate within, providing a nuanced understanding of how the Philippines formulates its strategic responses to the SCS disputes.

Within the mainstream realist literature, the SCS conflict is predominantly explained as a manifestation of the intricate power dynamics between the US and China (CRS, 2021). Regilme (2018) explores the multifaceted motivations of these two global powers as they navigate the SCS conflict. On the one hand, China's ascendancy as a dominant economic player and its political party's domestic legitimacy significantly influences its approach to the SCS (Morton, 2016). On the other hand, despite its geographical distance from the region, the US has become a security guarantor in Southeast Asia, complicating its pursuit of broader global governance cooperation with China. While Regilme explores various facets of this power dynamic, Raditio (2019) highlights the security dilemma, which defines the intricate relations between the US, its regional allies, and China.

However, based on Shiping Tang's (2009, 2010) characterisation of a security dilemma, the SCS disputes between the Philippines and China are not instances of a security dilemma. Building upon the work of Herbert



Butterfield (1951), John Herz (1951), and Robert Jervis (1976, 1978), Tang (2009) proposes a critically examined and comprehensive definition of the concept of the security dilemma by highlighting its eight major aspects. Tang's (2009, p. 595) rigorous definition links anarchy to the security dilemma and then to war: anarchy generates uncertainty; uncertainty leads to fear; fear then leads to power competition; power competition activates a (dormant) security dilemma; and the activated security dilemma leads to war through a spiral. Among these eight key aspects, Tang claims that three are essential features of the security dilemma: (1) anarchy (which leads to uncertainty, fear, and the need for self-help for survival or security), (2) a lack of malign intentions on both sides, and (3) some accumulation of power (including offensive capabilities). Other aspects are either consequences or regulators of the security dilemma, and they are neither sufficient nor necessary for the rise and continuation of the security dilemma. These three key attributes make a situation a genuine security dilemma.

Tang (2009, p. 598) further claims that because anarchy and some accumulation of power are usually, if not always, present, this leaves a lack of malign intentions as the most critical ingredient for identifying whether a situation is a genuine security dilemma. When one or two sides in a situation is malign (that is, intentionally threatening), it is not a genuine security dilemma even if it has all other aspects.

Applying Tang's analysis of the security dilemma in the context of the SCS disputes, one fundamental scope condition was China's persistent and assertive actions within the WPS. The consistent nature of China's

behaviour served as a backdrop that significantly influenced the dynamics of the situation. This ongoing assertiveness has set the stage for the maritime incident and shaped how various actors, including the Philippines, responded to the unfolding events. Thus, based on Tang's (2009, 2010) characterisation of a security dilemma, the SCS disputes between the Philippines and China were not instances of a security dilemma.

In response to the US-China rivalry in the region, Goh (2006; 2016) characterises the behaviour of the Philippines and other Southeast Asian states as "hedging", adopting a blend of balancing strategies and bandwagoning policies in navigating the regional power competition. Banlaoi (2016; 2020) and Suorsa and Thompson (2017) affirm that the Philippines employs a hedging strategy, bolstering its security alliance with the US while concurrently engaging China on economic and political fronts. On the structural front, Womack (2010; 2016) advances the concept of an underlying asymmetric structure that small states navigate within the anarchic international system. Building on Womack's theory of asymmetric IR, Chiang (2017) and Hendler (2018) contend that a dual asymmetric structure effectively explains shifts in Philippine foreign policy between the US and China.

The literature review also delves into the impact (or lack thereof) of international institutions, particularly UNCLOS and ASEAN, on Philippine responses to the SCS disputes. This thesis distinguishes between international norms and international institutions, highlighting their respective roles in shaping state behaviour and the dynamics of the

international system. International norms, as defined by Wendt (1999), encompass shared expectations, beliefs, and standards of behaviour guiding interactions among states and other international actors. These norms, spanning areas such as security, sovereignty, human rights, environmental protection, and humanitarian intervention, wield significant influence despite being informal and unwritten. Through processes of socialisation and interaction among states, they shape state behaviour.

Conversely, international institutions, outlined by March and Olsen (1998), are formal organisations or frameworks established by states to facilitate cooperation, manage conflicts, and govern aspects of international relations. Finnemore (1996) emphasises the pivotal role of international organisations and institutions in shaping and disseminating norms. These institutions, ranging from intergovernmental organizations like the UN and its agencies to regional bodies like ASEAN, provide rules, procedures, and mechanisms for interaction among states and other actors. They serve as forums for negotiation, decision-making, and collective action, contributing to the stabilisation of the international system and the resolution of common challenges.

However, despite the legal framework provided by UNCLOS and the 2016 PCA Tribunal Award favouring the Philippines, Chinese incursions in the WPS persisted. This observation underscores the limitations of international legal instruments in shaping behaviour in contested maritime areas. Furthermore, the lack of cohesive action within ASEAN regarding the SCS disputes with China remains a persistent challenge.

ASEAN's inability to present a united front in addressing regional challenges, including the WPS issue, has influenced Philippine responses and broader regional dynamics. Thus, the review underscores the limitations of the legal-institutionalist approach in resolving the SCS disputes, primarily the challenge of enforcing the SCS Arbitration Award, as well as the institutional weaknesses within ASEAN, characterised by its non-interference stance and consensus-driven decision-making processes, which have influenced President Duterte's adoption of China-friendly policies (De Castro, 2020; Weatherbee, 2015).

In the realm of domestic determinants, this literature review duly acknowledges the pivotal role of the chief executive, who, according to the 1987 Philippine Constitution, serves as the primary architect of the country's foreign policy. In probing the factors that mould Philippine presidencies over the years, Thomson (2018; 2014) delineates three distinct analysis frameworks. The presidential style or voluntarist approach emphasises political agency and posits that the personal qualities of leaders significantly shape decision-making. In contrast, the patron-client approach contextualises the presidency within the patronage system's demands (Kimura, 2018; Sidel, 2018; Lande, 1965; 1967). The third approach, the relational approach, developed by Thomson through applying Skowronek's (1997) theory of presidential performance to the Philippine context, posits that ideologies, interest groups, and institutions drive the presidency. Thomson argues that the Philippine presidency is influenced by relatable and believable campaign narratives, the presence of key electoral strategic groups, and institutional instability due to the

potential for civilian-led protests with the backing of the military. This literature review comprehensively examines the factors articulated within these three frameworks, elucidating the intricacies that underpin the Philippine presidency.

### **The Copenhagen School**

Thomson's analysis seamlessly integrates with the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory, which serves as the framework for this literature review's organisation of the domestic determinants underlying Duterte's strategic approach. The Securitisation framework, as advocated by influential scholars like Waever (1995) and Balzacq (2011a), endeavours to elucidate how an existential threat instigates securitising or de-securitising actions contingent on a complex interplay of immediate and remote contextual factors.

The Copenhagen School postulates that the decision-making process in foreign policy hinges on the interactions of three essential agents involved in (de)securitisation: (1) influential actors, (2) the holder of power, and (3) the audience. The influence wielded by prominent actors often moulds the decisions of authorities. In the case of adapting Duterte's strategy, these influential agents encompass a diverse array of stakeholders, including defence and maritime law enforcement agencies, provincial and municipal governments, fisherfolk, fishing companies, the energy sector, other business conglomerates, the Chinese-Filipino community, and epistemic communities (Baviera, 2016b).

In this context, the power-holder is President Duterte, who formulates and enforces security policies in response to perceived existential threats to the welfare of his constituents. Duterte's foreign policy decision-making is markedly impacted by his attributes and experiences, as elaborated upon by Kaarbo (2021), including his prior experiences, on-the-job learning, and the influence of being in a position of authority, as discussed by Heydarian (2018). Ultimately, the public plays a pivotal role in legitimising or contesting the authority's interventions through their support or opposition to emergency measures.

The extent of public backing is evaluated through comprehensive surveys conducted by Social Weather Stations and Pulse Asia, two renowned social survey institutions in the Philippines. These surveys provide valuable insights into the dynamics of public sentiment and their impact on Duterte's security policies. In summary, this literature review effectively integrates Thomson's insights with the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory, elucidating the interplay of influential actors, the powerholder, and the public in shaping Duterte's foreign policy decisions, with due consideration to both proximate and distal contextual factors.

### **A More Complete Picture**

The diverse array of external and internal factors, further categorised into agents and structures, is summarised in Table 2.1 below.

		PUTNAM'S TWO-LEVEL GAMES		
		International System	Domestic Environment	
STRUCTURE- AGENCY DEBATE	Political Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Hedging between US and China</i></li> <li>• <i>IGOs: UN, PCA, ASEAN</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Interest Groups</i></li> <li>• <i><u>Power-holder</u></i></li> <li>• <i>Public</i></li> </ul>	THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL
	Underlying Context	<i>Dual Asymmetric structures</i>	<i>Patron-client Relations</i>	

Table 2.1 – Drivers of Philippine Foreign Policy toward the SCS Disputes

The academic literature has yet to explore the intricate patron-client relational structure within local politics as a contributing determinant of the Duterte strategy. The Philippines grapples with the SCS disputes within the framework of asymmetric relationships both on the global stage (by pragmatically shifting allegiances between the US and China) and in domestic politics, where the president assumes the role of a strongman, populist patron, delivering support to an array of stakeholder-clients. More than merely underscoring a gap in the literature by identifying structures of dependency as key drivers of Philippine foreign policy, this review of current literature asserts that the dynamic interplay between agents and structures, whether from external or internal sources, comprehensively elucidates the causal mechanism underpinning the Duterte strategy in response to the Chinese threat in the SCS.

Understanding foreign policy decision-making is an inherently intricate process, demanding a comprehensive explanation that accounts

for many contributing factors. This research aspires to achieve precisely that, offering no less than a comprehensive understanding of the intricate mechanisms that have culminated in the Philippine strategy in the context of the maritime conflict.

### **Hedging, the Small-state Strategy**

Feng and He (2018a) emphasise that the SCS tensions can be distilled into two primary catalysts: China's assertive actions in the SCS and the US' strategic pivot toward Asia, commonly referred to as the rebalance strategy. Consequently, Southeast Asian nations have adopted a nuanced blend of balancing and containment strategies alongside bandwagoning policies to navigate the region's complex dynamics of great power politics (Goh, 2006; 2016). This strategy, articulated by Goh as "hedging" or "strategic diplomacy" (Goh & Prantl, 2017), entails a set of approaches aimed at avoiding the need to commit to one side or the other in a scenario where states find themselves unable to make straightforward choices. Instead, they cultivate a middle ground that precludes or postpones the necessity of aligning with one side at the apparent expense of the other (Goh, 2006). Hedging necessitates ongoing tactical adjustments to position oneself amidst the competition between two dominant powers; it does not entail an outright zero-sum game where one must definitively choose one side over the other, as posited by Suorsa and Thompson (2017).

In the case of the Philippines under Duterte, there is an apparent political distancing from the US while concurrently engaging with China, particularly to secure short-term economic benefits. However, the spectre



of uncertainty shrouding China's ascent as a global superpower, coupled with its assertive actions in the WPS, has compelled the Philippines to preserve its pragmatic treaty alliance with the US. Scholars identify several critical issues related to the competition between the US and China that shed light on the Duterte government's pivot toward China-centric policies in response to the SCS disputes.

### **Faltered "Pivot to Asia", "America First", US and Allies' SCS Policies**

The US has long been a proponent of the rules-based international order, advocating for states to enjoy the benefits of a peaceful world while also emphasising their responsibility as stakeholders in maintaining such an order. In the face of escalating Chinese assertiveness in the SCS region, former US President Barack Obama crafted the Asia Pacific rebalance strategy, which sought to address various concerns, with a particular focus on maritime cooperation and economic integration. However, Fu and Wu (2016) argue that the US's "Pivot to Asia" inadvertently heightened tensions in the SCS. Despite this, the US adopted a seemingly contradictory stance of neutrality concerning conflicting claims to sovereignty within the SCS (Fravel, 2014). This neutrality became evident following the 2012 maritime confrontation between the Philippines and China at the Scarborough Shoal when the US refrained from unequivocally expressing support for the Philippines in the event of a military clash with China (Batongbacal, 2014). Exploiting what appeared to be a lack of commitment from the US to defend the Philippines in the SCS, President Duterte strategically pivoted towards an independent foreign policy (Heydarian,

2018). Thus, the Duterte government repeatedly insisted that the Philippines seek a peaceful settlement with China to avoid getting trapped in an unwinnable conflict without external help.

President Donald Trump took office with an apparent belief that the post-war international system of building up a broad and diverse coalition of like-minded partners had failed the US altogether. Instead of pursuing its global leadership through the liberal international order, the Trump government advanced US economic and strategic interests using American unilateral leverage (Strating, 2020). Over time, the US government's little attention to the SCS dispute faded. Since January 2017, the US has overwhelmingly focused on protecting the US military's right and ability to exercise freedom of navigation and overflight in the SCS (Strating, 2020). This suggested that the Trump government defined its involvement in the SCS much more narrowly than the Obama administration. That Trump dropped any mention of the SCS disputes and the UNCLOS in his trip to Asia in November 2017 confirmed wavering American interest in the issue.

Changing tune in July 2020, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo issued the "US Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea", which supplemented the 1995 "US Policy on the SCS" (US State Department, 2020). The 2020 US policy aligned the US position with the PCA's 2016 decision rejecting China's nine-dash-line claims in the SCS based on historical rights. President Joe Biden's government has continued to pressure China to abide by the rules-based maritime order, as reflected in State Secretary Anthony Blinken's address to the UN Security Council in August 2021 (US State Department, 2021a). In November 2021, the US

affirmed that “an armed attack on Philippine public vessels in the SCS would invoke US mutual defence commitments” (US State Department, 2021b). While the revised US rhetoric on the SCS is a welcome change, Pedrozo (2022) claims not only that “they do not go far enough” but are bound to fail like other SCS policies of US governments in the past.

The US and its allies in the Indo-Pacific, collectively called the Quad – Australia, Japan, and India, and the US – repeatedly affirm shared interests and commitment to maritime issues, with the SCS as a strategic focus. However, the Quad is a diplomatic partnership (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024), not a political-military alliance. Thus, despite diplomatic statements, the Quad has taken minimal action in the maritime domain, especially in influencing SCS dynamics. A comparative analysis of interests, stakes, and power projection capacity reveals India’s divergence in prioritising the status quo of the rules-based maritime order (Bradford & Emmers, 2024). India’s reluctance hinders coordinated Quad activities and positions the Quad as a secondary player in the disputes. These developments have been alarming for smaller states like the Philippines that depend on US leadership and the support of American allies amid the growing competition in the region.

### **China’s Persistent Assertiveness**

In contrast to the US’s diminishing commitment to the SCS, China holds many stakes in the contested waters. According to Raditio (2019), valuable natural resources such as hydrocarbons and fisheries play a significant role in China’s development and modernisation, contributing to

the strategic importance of the SCS. Moreover, the security of sea routes in the SCS extends beyond Chinese territorial boundaries, directly impacting China's interests in the global economy. China must exert comprehensive control over the SCS to ensure the security of its vital commercial hubs (Zhang, 2018). Additionally, China's geopolitical claims in the SCS hold considerable relevance, as China views the island chain within the SCS as a boundary against access by other nations. This move bolsters its naval power aspirations (Raditio, 2019). China's actions in the SCS are also seen as a strategic challenge to the US regional primacy, effectively pushing the US away from the regional theatre of operations (Feng & He, 2018b). China's assertiveness in the SCS directly challenges the US security commitments in the Asia Pacific (White, 2014). Considering these crucial national interests, Glaser (2015) argues that China's foreign policy in the SCS is a deliberate and well-coordinated national strategy to achieve control over the SCS.

In contrast to this unitary agent-driven framework that explains China's foreign policy, Jakobson (2014) suggests that domestic politics play a pivotal role in shaping China's SCS strategy. For Jakobson, bureaucratic infighting among various "myriad maritime security actors", each pursuing its interests, impacts China's increasingly pluralistic decision-making process. These actors encompass the military, local governments, and public and private resource companies. Zhang (2018) provides a typology that frames the Chinese strategy by categorising these actors into pragmatists, hardliners, and moderates. These groups claim to safeguard China's national interests but lack consensus on where China's core

interests lie, whether its regional stability and support from neighbouring nations, material power capabilities, or political influence and authority.

Pragmatists seek to protect reasonable Chinese sovereignty and maritime rights in the region while maintaining good relations with the international community. On the opposite end of the spectrum, hardliners aim to maximise Chinese rights by transforming China into an aggressive and isolationist great power. Moderates are willing to accept reasonable compromises in the SCS disputes to uphold the narrative of China as a responsible rising power. Zhou (2016) asserts that pragmatists substantially influenced top-level decision-making more since the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident. The Duterte government negotiated with the Chinese pragmatic group, which has been more open to an amicable resolution to the SCS disputes. Therefore, the Duterte administration would have found an opportunity to shift Philippine foreign policy from a hostile to a more diplomatic engagement with China.

### **Development Aid Through China's Belt and Road Initiative**

Economically, the US had been relatively inactive in the global infrastructure market, a sector where China had showcased its capacity to contribute significantly, mainly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which supports projects in Africa and Asia. This China-led global system pledges to champion development, infrastructure, and financial connectivity worldwide. Consequently, China's BRI has garnered considerable appeal from the Philippines and other regional states (Sevilla, 2018).

While the interpretation of the BRI may vary among different countries, its goal of enhancing connectivity aligns harmoniously with President Duterte's major infrastructure program, "Build, Build, Build". Consequently, the Philippines and China inked a memorandum of understanding on Belt and Road Cooperation during President Xi Jinping's visit to Manila in 2018 (Ranada, 2018; Vergara, 2018). Furthermore, Duterte participated in Beijing's first and second BRI forums in 2017 and 2019, respectively. Since these events, twelve infrastructure projects have entered the implementation phase, with an additional four in the project development stage, signifying China's progressively substantial role in Philippine infrastructure development (Pitlo, 2021). Thus, China's aid and investment deals presented an enticing alternative, particularly in light of the US's apparent reluctance to engage in economic matters, catalysing the shift in Philippine foreign policy. By seizing the opportunities offered by China, the Philippines affirms the hedging strategy that many other Southeast Asian countries have long implemented in their engagements with these two great powers.

### **A Unified Rational Political Agent**

While the hedging framework aids in understanding the Philippines' China-centric foreign policy toward the maritime disputes, it falls short in explaining the underlying causes of policy adoption, as it primarily offers an account of these policies. At best, hedging elucidates foreign policy by highlighting a small state's pursuit of what is deemed best for its interests. Another assumption of this IR approach is that strategic

thinking exists behind the Philippines' political and security policies concerning the superpowers. Whether a significant global player or a small nation positioned amidst great powers, the state is assumed to act as a singular and rational political entity.

However, Baviera (2017) challenges the notion that the Philippine pivot-to-China policy resulted from deliberate planning alone, as she argues that other unforeseeable circumstances significantly influenced the Duterte administration's strategy. These unforeseen developments, well beyond Duterte's control, played a role, discrediting the idea that the China-friendly policy was solely a product of deliberate decision-making. Baviera points to three critical events that contributed to the shift in foreign policies preferred by both the Philippines and China: (1) the favourable arbitration ruling, which encouraged the possibility of international lawfare in addressing future disputes; (2) the two consecutive US administrations maintaining a cautious stance in committing to military engagement in the event of an escalated conflict with China; and (3) the launch of the BRI. Baviera contends that if these key factors were seen as a "spate of good fortune for Duterte, China, too, owes its serendipity for the opportunity to step back from the brink and change its course" (2017, p. 16). Therefore, the pivot-to-China strategy cannot be solely attributed to rational decision-making by a small state, as other uncontrollable factors also facilitated this shift.

Beyond the discussions by Goh and Banlaoi, the reasons small states like the Philippines engage in hedging are explained by Chiang (2017) and Hendler (2018), who adapt Womack's (2016) "Asymmetric Relations

Theory". While Goh and Banlaoi focus on categorising the Philippines' responses to a rising power like China into discrete strategies, they do not delve into the systemic reasons that prompt states to alter their strategies. Chiang and Hendler, on the other hand, introduce the concept of a double asymmetric structure to elucidate shifts in Philippine foreign policy between the US and China. They argue that Duterte's foreign policy can be explained by an external international structure rooted in a three-way unequal power dynamic. In contrast, Goh and Banlaoi attribute it primarily to utility-maximising decisions made by the state as the political agent.

### **Double Asymmetric Relations**

Regional states such as the Philippines struggle to navigate the international (dis)order, showcasing a global competition between two great powers. This dual asymmetric structure places the Philippines in the precarious position of closely monitoring the intentions and actions of both the US and China. At the same time, the interests of the smaller states often receive minimal attention from the more significant powers. In essence, smaller states' foreign policy formulation and execution become subsumed within the broader context of the US-China rivalry. The concept of dual structural asymmetry, based on Womack's Model of Asymmetric Relations between highly unequal states, offers valuable insights into the triangular relations between the Philippines, the US, and China, ultimately shaping Duterte's China-friendly policies.



Womack's theoretical model posits that a bilateral state relationship is asymmetric when there is a discernible and relatively stable disparity in the capabilities of the involved states, even though the gap need not be overwhelmingly large (Womack, 2016, p. 7). Womack employs demographic disparities, such as population, and economic disparities, like Gross National Income, for convenient comparisons. The smaller state is notably more exposed to interactions in such an asymmetric relationship due to the capability gap. However, the larger state cannot unilaterally dictate the terms of the relationship (Womack, 2016, p. 10). The smaller state cannot merely challenge the larger state with a reasonable hope of victory and is proportionally more vulnerable in peaceful interactions.

Nevertheless, the smaller state can resist the larger state's unilateral preferences beyond what the larger state is willing to commit to enforce its preferences. The larger state may attempt to exert control but becomes frustrated by the smaller state's resistance. Consequently, the model of asymmetric relations does not entail complete subjugation of the smaller state by the larger one; it manifests when the stronger side cannot achieve such dominance.

Chiang (2017) adapts Womack's theoretical model to interpret the Philippines' relations with two more powerful states, the US and China. Chiang posits that Southeast Asian countries are ensnared within a "Double-Asymmetric Structure" characterised by an external environment influenced by two equally significant asymmetries (2017, p. 6). The rivalry between the US and China poses an inherent challenge to the smaller states within this unequal triangular relationship. Hendler (2018) illustrates this

framework by tracing the pendulum of Philippine foreign policy oscillating between the two great powers over the past three decades. This oscillation reflects (1) the closure of US military bases in the Philippines in 1992; (2) negotiations for another military agreement in 1998 in response to Chinese naval activities in the WPS in 1995 and 1997; (3) China's diplomatic efforts to aid Southeast Asian economies during the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997; (4) the Philippine government's equi-balancing strategy in 2001 following the events of 9/11 and the Global War on Terror; (5) the withdrawal of Filipino support for American troops in Iraq in 2004 and deepening engagement with China, culminating in the first "golden age of partnership" during the remainder of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's term; (7) China's assertion of the nine-dash line claim in the SCS in 2009, which Aquino III's administration contested throughout its term; and finally, (8) Duterte's ascension to power, marking another shift in the direction of the pendulum.

As Philippine foreign policy fluctuates, it only partially aligns with a single great power. For both Chiang (2017) and Hendler (2018), this is not merely a result of the small state's pursuit of its national interests but is also due to the inherent challenges posed by the burdensome condition of small states ensnared within the overarching context of two asymmetric relationships. This condition reflects the structure of anarchy within the international system, where small states, considered unitary rational actors seeking to maximise their expected utility, find themselves entrapped.

## **Contradicting Small-state Behaviour**

Magcamit (2018) presents a compelling challenge to the neorealist interpretation of Philippine foreign policy within a rational state navigating between two competing superpowers. Magcamit argues that the preferences of Philippine foreign policy directly contradict two key characteristics commonly associated with the strategic behaviour of small powers. The first of these characteristics is that vulnerable nations typically favour the status quo and prefer to work within the existing international order rather than attempting to subvert or revise it (Archer et al., 2014; Magcamit, 2016; 2018; 2019; Domingo-Almase, 2018). The second characteristic involves small states' tendency to support international laws and institutions, as these instruments reduce the cost of managing global affairs and offer protection against external pressure exerted by dominant states (Magcamit, 2016; 2018; 2019).

However, the Duterte administration's more practical choice is to prioritise economic relations with the rising power, China, rather than address geopolitical concerns and threats in the SCS with the support of existing international structures. Nevertheless, the foreign policies pursued by the Duterte administration raise concerns about the compromise of the country's national interests. For instance, by setting aside the implementation of the PCA Tribunal Award, the Philippines has seemingly conceded its sovereignty claim in the SCS (De Castro, 2018; Baviera, 2017; Heydarian, 2017b; 2018). Similarly, by tolerating China's sustained large-scale reclamation and construction of artificial islands in the WPS, the Philippines has permitted the degradation of the marine

environment and the depletion of fish stocks in the entire SCS (PCA, 2016a; 2016b). Other commentators also highlight that by accepting Chinese commercial loans instead of Japanese concessional loans offered as Official Development Aid, the Duterte government has exposed the Philippines to higher interest rates and potential future debt traps (Valencia, 2018a; 2018b). Additionally, by permitting Chinese offshore gambling operations, the Philippines has accommodated Chinese migrant workers in the country, potentially prioritising them over the millions of Filipino workers forced to seek jobs abroad (Parrocha, 2019; Mourdoukoutas, 2018).

These China-centric policies raise concerns as they do not appear to benefit the Philippines in the short or long term. These inconsistencies in using the neorealist framework to interpret Philippine foreign policies are evident because they do not align with what the state claims to stand for – its national interest, state identity, and vision to transform the country into a prosperous middle-class society, to end poverty by 2040 (NSC-OP-RP, 2017; 2018; NEDA, 2016; 2017a).

## **International Cooperation**

In addition to the traditional balance-of-power dynamics and the inherent structure of the anarchic international system, scholars also recognise the impact of intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) in shaping the Philippines' approach to the SCS disputes. However, the Philippines' decision to set aside the PCA Award in favour of direct negotiations with China reflects a shifting stance away from reliance on international institutions. This move can be seen as a response to the limitations and

challenges posed by these organisations. The failure to implement the PCA ruling, despite the legal basis provided by UNCLOS, highlights the constraints and difficulties associated with enforcing international arbitration outcomes. Additionally, ASEAN's non-invasive approach in addressing the SCS disputes may have led the Philippines to pursue alternative strategies that it believes would be more effective in safeguarding its interests.

### **Leveraging the PCA Tribunal Award**

Introducing a burden-sharing analytical approach based on Olsen's theory, Manantan (2019) argues that by strategically utilising the "China card" and de-emphasising the arbitration case, the Philippines has successfully negotiated concessions from the US and China. Olsen's (1965) theory explores the equitable distribution of costs among stakeholders when the benefits of collaboration exceed the expenses incurred. This concept is particularly relevant at the international level, where providing valuable public goods, such as security, often necessitates cooperation among multiple states, as no single nation can provide these goods unilaterally (Thielemann, 2003). Furthermore, Olsen contends that more prominent and powerful allies tend to shoulder a disproportionate share of the responsibility for providing public goods in any burden-sharing arrangement. At the same time, smaller partners tend to "free ride" on the contributions of major powers. Manantan's argument suggests that smaller allies can mitigate their free-riding tendencies by leveraging external actors as an alternative source of support.

By pivoting towards China, the Philippines, under Duterte's leadership, took steps to reduce its overreliance on the US for public goods and security. Therefore, by strategically employing the "China card" within the context of increasing US-China power competition, the Duterte administration managed to secure benefits and support from both superpowers to its advantage. This approach has allowed the Philippines to reaffirm its strategic significance within the Philippines-US alliance while reaping more visible rewards from Chinese foreign aid and investment commitments.

However, the Philippines' China-friendly policy appears to be rooted in short-term diplomatic and economic considerations rather than representing a permanent or profound strategic realignment away from the US. Nevertheless, the Duterte administration's ability to adopt a Sino-centric policy was facilitated by the favourable PCA Award, which provided a degree of diplomatic leverage in the complex dynamics of the SCS disputes.

### **The Impracticability of the Legal-Institutionalist Approach**

Domingo-Almase (2017a) notes that the international legal battle over the SCS disputes not only revealed the ideals and intended outcomes of the arbitration process; it also exposed China's non-participation in the proceedings and its refusal to recognise the Tribunal's jurisdiction over what China considered an issue of territorial sovereignty. From China's perspective, the rules-based international order is seen as a mechanism aimed at constraining the rise of a potential Asian power that could

challenge Western global leadership. In a perfectly regulated world order, the legal process might be expected to yield the predictable result of compliance and adherence to international law. However, in the actual operation of an anarchic international political system, the enforcement of an adjudicated ruling remains a complex challenge, especially for smaller states, whose dependence on international legal rulings alone cannot match the determination of great powers to pursue their interests (Domingo-Almase, 2017b).

The legal approach relies on the parties involved to enforce the settlement independently, and obtaining a legal victory is not synonymous with achieving an effective resolution. China's rejection of the Tribunal's ruling underscores the fundamental reality that no higher authority can compel states to abide by international law. Without one party's willingness to comply, the other party must explore alternative means to induce adherence. Initially, the Philippines attempted to mobilise international support to elevate the reputational cost of China's rejection of the rule of law. However, Duterte ultimately decided to set aside the Tribunal Award in favour of improving bilateral relations with China in the hope that this approach would eventually foster a regional environment more conducive to compliance. The experience of the Philippines illustrates that the legal approach to dispute resolution does not definitively resolve conflicts between states.

Despite the significance of the Arbitration Award in clarifying the issues at hand, disputes in the SCS continue to persist in the absence of the political will and commitment of all parties involved. At the same time, the

ruling provides a crucial step toward potential dispute settlement in the SCS, the importance of political realities in conjunction with the legal approach. Regardless of the comprehensiveness of the ruling, disputes will persist unless all parties are genuinely committed to reaching a negotiated settlement. In this context, the response of the newly inaugurated Duterte administration, which called for sobriety and self-restraint immediately after the PCA's Award was released, reflects the recognition that, without the support of key regional allies, including the US, Japan, and other Southeast Asian claimant-states, the Philippines would face significant challenges in implementing the ruling.

### **The ASEAN's Principle of Non-interference**

In addition to the UN, the ASEAN represents another IGO that could have influenced the Philippines' response to the SCS disputes. However, the discord within ASEAN member states regarding sovereignty issues, particularly concerning the SCS, hindered the IGO's ability to issue a unified communique during its Ministerial Meeting in Cambodia in July 2012. This instance bared the internal divisions among ASEAN nations concerning the maritime disputes (Rustandi, 2016). Eventually, the "watered-down joint statement" from the meeting further underscored ASEAN's lack of consensus and unity on the SCS issue (Campbell, 2016; Connor, 2016). Efforts to forge a collective response against China's territorial encroachments yielded limited success, as countries that were economically dependent on China remained hesitant to take a more confrontational stance. Meanwhile, despite their reservations about



China's activities in the SCS, other ASEAN member states opted for a neutral or cautious approach regarding the Philippines' more assertive position.

Also, the ASEAN's institutional structure and principles were not explicitly designed to resolve territorial and sovereignty disputes. While the organisation adheres to foundational principles such as mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality, and interdependence, another core tenet of ASEAN is "non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN member states" (ASEAN, 2018). This principle of non-interference has led scholars like Beeson (2016) to question whether ASEAN could effectively develop a collective response to the challenges posed by China's actions in the SCS. Given the constraints posed by the non-interference principle and its member states' divergent interests, the Duterte administration may have been further inclined to adopt a China-friendly stance, especially in light of the relatively non-confrontational position taken by the ASEAN.

## **Considering Domestic Politics**

As previously discussed, the Philippine strategy vis-à-vis China exhibits a pattern of oscillation between engagement and deterrence and between reliance on and independence from the US. These erratic shifts in Philippine foreign policy underscore the complexities of small-power politics and reflect the often-turbulent nature of domestic politics in the Philippines (Heydarian, 2017b). Within domestic politics, a diverse array of actors, each pursuing their interests, play a role in shaping foreign policy

decisions. These actors include politicians, bureaucrats, organised groups, think tanks, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and they engage in deliberation and decision-making processes within domestic political institutions (da Conceição-Heldt & Mello, 2017). In addition to these political agents, domestic public opinion and “audience costs” represent another crucial political constraint on national government representatives involved in international negotiations (Fearon, 1998).

This section delves into the influence of political agents within the Philippine state on the Duterte administration’s strategy concerning the SCS disputes. Specifically, three key groups are examined: (1) local interest groups and stakeholders, (2) the decision-maker, and (3) the Filipino public. These three categories align with distinct approaches to comprehending foreign policy decision-making: the society-centred, state-centred, and public opinion approaches. Furthermore, they correspond to the three sets of political actors that shape the securitisation process outlined by the Copenhagen School.

### **Functional Actors**

In the Copenhagen School framework, functional actors significantly affect security decisions, and they are distinct from the powerholder and the recipients of securitising measures (Buzan et al., 1998). Floyd (2020a; 2020b) highlights three features of functional actors in securitisation studies: (1) functional actors seek to influence securitisation by endorsing or rejecting policies; (2) due to freedom of speech, functional actors are likely to be higher in number in liberal

democracies than in autocracies; and (3) lobbying does not automatically translate into success. In the military sector, while functional actors such as public intellectuals and academics object to securitising measures because of the possibility of war, defence industries and capable armed forces are likely to endorse securitisation.

Society-centred approaches focus on the competition among local interest groups, for instance, coalitions of business and labour groups, to explain political economy (Hiscox, 2002; Moravcsik, 1993; Frieden, 1988; Gourevitch, 1986). On the one hand, some academics claim that those who lose from trade liberalisation are more likely to organise than those who benefit from it (Bailey & Weingast, 1997; Goldstein, 1998). On the other hand, Rogowski (1987; 1989) illustrates how those who benefit from a particular policy push for its implementation. Regardless of sector, those who gain from policy expand their political influence as they organise themselves to advance their interest effectively. Interest groups that shape policy are those who benefit from the policies themselves.

Baviera (2016b) discusses a similar domestic political process. Baviera examines how domestic stakeholders were affected by the country's foreign policy decisions and how different interest groups influenced the Aquino administration's foreign policy. These stakeholders would have attempted to influence the Duterte strategy in various ways and degrees. Instead of focusing on individuals, Baviera considers sectoral groups and organisations or institutions, which she classifies into three groups: governmental agencies and local governments, the private sector, and civil society.

The SCS disputes arise from the country's overlapping territorial and maritime jurisdiction claims with those of other countries. Thus, the organs of government tasked to defend those claims, protect sovereignty and territorial integrity, and assert control and jurisdiction over claimed areas are the "front liners" in implementing foreign policy decisions (Baviera, 2016b). The Philippine Navy, the Philippine Coast Guard, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and the Philippine National Police-Maritime Group are vital in defending territorial and maritime claims, safeguarding sovereignty, and asserting jurisdiction. They are at the forefront of foreign policy implementation concerning these claims, covering areas such as the Kalayaan Island Group and the Philippine EEZ. These agencies address various challenges, from illegal fishing to unauthorised foreign vessel presence.

Another interest group that Baviera (2016b) explores is the local governments of the constituencies affected by the maritime disputes, which include Kalayaan municipality, Masinloc, and Infanta. These territorial disputes have impacted local economies, which heavily rely on fishing and coastal activities in places like Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands. Despite this, many local leaders have remained silent on the issue, potentially influenced by economic interests like Chinese investments.

Floyd (2020b) claims that securitisation takes the form of state protectionism, which safeguards local industries in the economic sector. Thus, more than any stakeholder, the fisheries sector has been a pressure point in Philippine-Chinese relations because of the sector's impact on the

economy, food security, livelihood, safety, and security of Filipinos (Baviera, 2016b). The large-scale reclamation and militarisation by China have negatively affected the coral reef environment, causing harm to marine species. In response, Philippine fisherfolk communities and commercial fishing companies lobby their interests with national authorities. These groups, along with marine conservation organisations, function as influential actors in environmental security.

The energy dimension of the WPS territorial disputes has been an important concern for the Philippines because its energy sector still needs to be explored (Baviera, 2016b). Energy stakeholders include the national government, the Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC), private investors, and international oil companies. Disagreements over adherence to state laws stalled talks related to oil development and mining cooperation. Issues like Chinese bans on Philippine bananas due to phytosanitary standards, Chinese investments in the Philippines, and travel advisories had implications for various sectors.

“Epistemic communities”, composed of experts such as marine scientists, environmentalists, international law scholars, international relations scholars, and security analysts, play a pivotal role in translating their research into policy interventions, as highlighted in Baviera’s research (2016b). Domingo-Almase (2017a) further underscores the significance of these knowledge-based communities in shaping policy by revealing the role of the Philippine Council for Foreign Relations (PCFR), a policy think tank, in the Duterte strategy. In September 2016, the PCFR organised a ground-breaking meeting with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister

Liu and other diplomats and representatives from policy think tanks. This meeting marked a transformative moment in Philippines-China relations, with both parties concurring on the need for continued bilateral growth and the potential for collaborative actions to foster peace and progress in the region. According to Domingo-Almase, though the gathering was unofficial, it significantly influenced steering policy discourse and shaping the relationship between the Philippines and China.

Finally, within civil society, the Chinese-Filipino community represents another stakeholder in the SCS disputes. These individuals often avoid discussing these contentious issues due to their intricate identities and affiliations. Further empirical studies are imperative to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of these disputes on this sensitive sector and its implications for the nation's social fabric.

This exploration of domestic political dynamics affecting the Philippines' approach to the SCS disputes reveals a complex web of interactions among various stakeholders. Baviera's analysis of previous administrations sheds light on how different interest groups influenced foreign policy. These insights extend to the Duterte strategy, where sectoral groups and institutions classified into governmental agencies and local governments, the private sector, and civil society have played distinct yet significant roles.

### **The Power-holder**

Leadership and individual characteristics play a pivotal role in shaping a nation's foreign policy, which is particularly evident in the case

of the Philippines (Bojang, 2018). This section explores the multifaceted factors that have led to the development of the Philippine Sino-centric foreign policy, drawing from Thomson's presidential-style approach (Thomson, 2014; 2018), which emphasises the critical role of personal qualities in influencing the performance of national leaders, including the Philippine president as the leading architect of foreign policy.

Duterte's leadership, personal experiences, ideological background, strongman populism, and small-state rhetoric have shaped the Philippines' China-friendly policy. His anti-American sentiments and a complex set of personal experiences have driven his scepticism towards the US. Adding to this, his populist style and strongman image contribute to his unconventional foreign policy decisions. Lastly, a small-state strategy provides insights into the country's self-perception and its impact on its foreign policy. These factors offer an understanding of the Philippines' foreign policy orientation based on the chief executive.

Duterte's consistent anti-American stance finds its roots in his tenure as Davao City's Mayor (Heydarian, 2018). His unconventional approach was evident in decisions like blocking joint Philippine-American military exercises in 2007 and denying American armed forces access to the city's airport for drone operations. His antipathy towards the US can be attributed to personal experiences. Firstly, he faced an alleged rejection of his visa application to America between 1998 and 2001, when he travelled as a Congressman with a diplomatic passport. The interrogation by immigration officers at Los Angeles International Airport left a lasting impact. Another incident involved Michael Meiring, an American treasure

hunter and suspected CIA agent, who was swiftly removed from the Philippines after a hotel bombing in Davao City in 2002. This incident left Duterte deeply suspicious of American intentions in Mindanao (Tordecillas, 2016). For Duterte, the US was seen more as a contributor to conflict than a trusted ally (Moss, 2016).

Heydarian (2018) also considers the influence of ideology on Duterte's foreign policy mindset. Duterte's formative years during the Vietnam War era, marked by global anti-American and anti-imperialist sentiment, contributed to his scepticism about American intentions in the Philippines. His reluctance to leave his hometown and discomfort among the national elite, who often held favourable views of the US, shaped his unique perspective. Given his personal history, Duterte's China-centric strategy appears less surprising (Heydarian, 2018).

Duterte's Sino-centric foreign policy can also be understood through his populist leadership style. Termed "Dutertismo", this approach emphasises projecting a tough, no-nonsense demeanour and rejecting the political elite and their institutions (David, 2015; 2016a; 2016b). Duterte's audacious move to pivot toward China rather than the US and set aside international legal victories showcased his strongman-like leadership. For his followers, rational governance was less crucial than a symbol of hope, and Duterte aimed to establish himself as a "patron-strongman" domestically and on the world stage (Kreuzer, 2020; Magcamit & Arugay, 2017a; 2017b). The populist element in Duterte's response to the SCS disputes reflects the ongoing Filipino "struggle for autonomy" (Heydarian, 2018, p. 53). This populist politics bypasses traditional political



intermediaries, with leaders directly engaging with the people, tapping into their fears and hopes, and making grand promises for change (Putzel, 2018). Domestically, this approach emerged as a reaction to corruption, failed governance promises, and rising inequality, challenging the US-led liberal-democratic system (Heydarian, 2017a).

Domingo-Almase (2019) presents the concept of the Philippines adopting a “small-state strategy” to explain Duterte’s responses to SCS disputes. Her analysis employs Thorhallsson’s (2018) multifunctional framework, which categorises states based on fixed size, sovereignty size, political size, economic size, perceptual size, and preference size. The Philippines aligns with a “small-state security syndrome”, acknowledging its weak military and corrupt bureaucracy in the National Security Strategy (NSS) 2018 (Domingo-Almase, 2018; Thorhallsson, 2018). Domingo-Almase (2017a) follows a “constructive realist” approach based on official state discourse. While it assumes that states are rational actors responding to their perceived relative power in the international system, this approach does not fully explain why the Philippines adopted strategies that deviate from the expected rational decisions of weaker nations, ultimately failing to advance its national interests (Fierke, 2016). A combination of factors, including Duterte’s leadership style, personal experiences, ideological background, strongman populism, and small-state rhetoric, has collectively driven the transformation of the Philippines’ foreign policy towards a China-centric orientation.

## **The Audience**

Securitization Theory claims that security threats and corresponding (de)securitising actions are constructed intersubjectively through the involvement of influential actors, decision-makers, and the audience. An innovation of the Copenhagen School is recognising that the public has a role in legitimising policies. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that the concept of the audience has been neglected in securitisation studies (Williams, 2011; Salter, 2008; 2011). Cote (2016) underscores that for the audience to contribute effectively to the securitisation process, the public must act as an active political agent rather than merely a passive recipient of (de)securitising policies. In the case of the Philippines, public opinion and key strategic groups hold substantial sway in the country's political landscape. While public sentiment and these influential groups can impact foreign policy and political decisions, Duterte, benefiting from significant support, faced a diminished risk of being ousted through nonviolent means during his presidency.

Public opinion is a significant driver of foreign policy in democratic states (da Conceição-Heldt & Mello, 2017; Mello, 2017). Democracies are bound to consider the people's will (Russett & Oneal, 2001) due to the potential political costs of disregarding popular sentiment during their term (Tomz et al., 2018). Voters in democracies typically oppose war due to its human and financial toll (Tomz & Weeks, 2013). According to democratic peace theory, democracies engage in wars only for widely supported liberal reasons (Doyle, 1983). As a result, public support becomes a crucial prerequisite for major foreign policy decisions, including

participation in conflicts. However, as Buzan (1974) notes, public opinion, on its own, seldom decisively tips the scales in favour or against military actions. Policymakers may occasionally overlook public sentiment, but when public opinion aligns with opposition from political groups, it can significantly constrain decision-makers.

Fortunately, during Duterte's initial year in office, he achieved the highest trust and performance ratings compared to his predecessors, as reported by two major social survey institutions in the Philippines (Holmes, 2017). In December 2016, Pulse Asia (2017a) survey results revealed that Duterte maintained "very high" approval and trust ratings six months into his presidency despite the challenges to his administration. The Fourth Quarter 2016 Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey indicated that Duterte received a "very good" net satisfaction performance rating. He faced political risks despite Duterte's pivot towards China and away from the US. A January 2017 Pulse Asia Survey ranked China among the countries least trusted by Filipinos, and a March 2017 SWS Survey confirmed negative trust ratings for China (Vitug, 2018). However, not only did most Filipinos not consider the SCS disputes an urgent national issue, but the Duterte government's management of the maritime row received high approval from the public. This public indifference and continued support for Duterte's China-friendly policy on the SCS conflict reinforced his approach.

Moreover, even if surveys capture current trends accurately, incumbent administrations must also consider critical groups that have led peaceful uprisings against past Philippine presidents. Thomson (2014) and

Teehankee (2017) recognise four such key groups that politicians found themselves facing potential challenges – (1) big business, (2) the Catholic Church, (3) civil society activists, and (4) the military. These extra-electoral strategic groups became politicised during the dictatorial regime of President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and emerged empowered with the restoration of democracy in 1986. The private sector holds the key to development, making its support crucial to any government's economic success. The Catholic Church became a significant independent factor after it became politicised in response to the Marcos Sr. dictatorship. Civil society is the most volatile and vulnerable to co-optation by the government and the elite. Although the loudest and the most easily mobilised, civil society alone cannot make their unfavourable president resign. This contrasts with the military, which is often the slowest to act but is most decisive and effective when it intervenes in overthrowing an incumbent administration.

These groups have extensive networks to mobilise supporters for or against an incumbent president through nonviolent demonstrations or military intervention. Hence, the loyalty of these strategic groups has been crucial to each president's success in post-Marcos Sr. Philippines. The Philippine presidency may be considered strong due to its discretionary budgetary powers but is vulnerable to extra-constitutional threats (Thomson, 2014). Strategic groups may unite against a sitting president through a people-power revolution supported by the military, which happened twice in the Philippines, ousting Marcos Sr. and Joseph Estrada in 2001. Thus, every sitting Philippine president post-Marcos Sr. has to

convince these groups to manage the country (Thomson, 2014; Teehankee, 2017). While Duterte had to cater to these critical groups, being ousted through a people-power revolt was not a significant concern for a well-supported president like Duterte.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review discussed the external and internal factors further classified as political agents and underlying structures of the Philippine foreign policy response to the SCS conflicts. Mainstream IR literature explains the Duterte strategy based on the security-political-economic rivalry between major regional powers, the US and China. The overarching narrative of the SCS disputes often gets distilled into the broader competition between these two superpowers. For a relatively smaller power like the Philippines, situated between these two influential actors, navigating the anarchic international system entails a continuous process of strategic adjustment to manage the ever-shifting balance of power.

Nevertheless, while the external environment undoubtedly establishes the backdrop for the Philippine hedging response to the maritime disputes, foreign policy is ultimately shaped and constructed within the state. Consequently, this chapter also explored the intricate decision-making mechanism within the Philippines according to academic scholars. By applying the securitisation framework to the Philippine context, the chapter identified three categories of local political actors that have profoundly influenced the Duterte administration's response to the

SCS disputes: stakeholders who have evolved into lobbying groups, the chief executive and his advisers, and the electorate.

Moreover, the interplay among these diverse political agents did not occur in isolation but within a specific set of domestic conditions and structures. While the literature explored the roles of various local actors in shaping the Duterte strategy, the domestic political structure must be addressed. This thesis argues that incorporating the patron-client relationship framework was pivotal to fully elucidate the causal mechanism behind the adoption and execution of de-securitisation policies by the Duterte government in response to the persistent threat posed by China in the SCS. Chapter 8, the Discussion chapter, will provide further analysis of the Philippine strategy, mainly focusing on the internal political structure and its dependency dynamics.

Ultimately, the interplay among all these factors explains the causal process that leads to a (de)securitisation response to the perceived threat from China in the SCS. The forthcoming chapters on theory and methodology-methods will explore the causal process of (de)securitisation and the research design in more detail.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Underpinnings**

### **Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, the literature review discussed the drivers of Philippine foreign policy responses to the SCS conflicts, exposing the limitations of mainstream IR theories in explaining the nuances of the multifaceted maritime disputes. Consequently, Chapter 2 introduced the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory as a social constructivist approach, advancing a more insightful lens for understanding the complexities of global affairs.

This chapter embarks on a comprehensive exploration of Securitization Theory and its direct applicability to the thesis, providing a distinctive IR approach. In contrast to mainstream theories, Securitization Theory shifts the analytical focus from the powerful political actor to the entity perceiving itself as facing an immediate threat. In the context of the SCS disputes between the Philippines and China, this perspective directs attention towards the smaller power, namely the Philippines. The primary aim of this chapter is not to add to the existing literature on securitisation but to consolidate diverse approaches into an integrated securitisation framework. This incorporated framework serves as the foundational structure for unravelling the nuanced responses of the Philippines to the maritime conflict.

The two conceptual frameworks underpinning this thesis are encapsulated in the terms "Securitization Theory" and "(de)securitisation".

The first framework, the theoretical structure, is Securitization Theory, introduced to IR through Ole Waever's (1989) working paper. An initial examination of securitization is found in Waever's seminal chapter, "Securitization and Desecuritization" (1995), as well as in the foundational work, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, by the founders of the Copenhagen School in 1998. Securitization involves framing an issue as an existential threat through the specific linguistic form of the speech act. Critical evaluations and clarifications regarding Securitization Theory have contributed to its conceptual advancements, establishing the groundwork for the second framework.

The second conceptual framework, discussed in the subsequent section, revolves around "(de)securitisation", a concise term for the complementary concepts of "securitisation/de-securitisation". (De)securitisation involves the dynamic intersubjective process of responding to specific incidents or sequences of events, whether perceived as external threats or not. Thierry Balzacq's edited book, *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (2011), explores this sociological strand of securitisation. Balzacq's work, enriched by Stefano Guzzini's insights in *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe: Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises* (2012) and Guzzini's assertion that securitisation is a causal mechanism (2011), collectively constitute the second theoretical framework of the thesis. The integrated sociological-causal securitisation framework enhances the depth and sophistication of the analytical framework employed in this research.



Thus, a nuanced spectrum of approaches to securitisation emerges, organised into two primary strands: the philosophical-linguistic strand based on the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory and Balzacq's sociological variant. Both strands play crucial roles in shaping the framework of this research project, presenting a dual-conceptual framework approach. This chapter concludes by emphasising the critical interconnection between the two theoretical frameworks and the research methods employed in this thesis – Discourse Analysis and Process Tracing. The succeeding chapter will present a detailed discussion of applying these methods incorporated in the theoretical frameworks.

### **Theoretical Framework based on the Copenhagen School**

The term "Copenhagen School" was coined by Bill McSweeney in a critical review essay, which initiated a series of academic exchanges between McSweeney and Buzan and Waever (McSweeney, 1996; Buzan & Waever, 1997; McSweeney, 1998). According to Waever (2004), the Copenhagen School primarily refers to the work conducted by the European Security Research Group at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) since 1985. In 1998, the Copenhagen School published the pivotal work *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, widely acknowledged for formulating the theory's foundational premises. While the Copenhagen School encompasses various concepts like securitization, sectors, and regional security complexes, the concept of securitization distinguishes the school most prominently (Waever, 2004, p. 8). The

authors drew heavily on Waever's earlier working paper for COPRI and "Securitization and Desecuritization", a chapter in Lipschutz's (1995) edited volume, to conceptualise securitization.

Securitization Theory aligns with an alternative IR approach, "(social) constructivism". This approach considers elements of foreign relations often disregarded by realist approaches (Onuf, 1989). According to Onuf, social constructivism transcends the mere optimisation of benefits pursued by neo(classical) realism. It delves into ideas, norms, and shared values within society to understand political and social phenomena. Consequently, the significance of any social phenomenon is derived from the meanings mutually dependent subjects attribute. These agents, be they individuals, groups, or states, are guided by a "logic of appropriateness", legitimising their actions and decisions by aligning them with an identity that is both shaped and shared within their social context (March & Olsen, 1989). Wendt's (1992) foundational social constructivist article, "Anarchy is What States Make of It", underscores the intersubjective process through which identities and interests shape state interactions, moving beyond purely rational behaviours. The Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory, as a social constructivist IR approach, provides a valuable framework for understanding international relations and the multifaceted dynamics of security concerns in our contemporary world.

The Copenhagen School has made at least two significant contributions to security studies. Firstly, it broadened the conventional understanding of security beyond the confines of the political and military sectors while remaining anchored in the core concept. The first two

subsequent subsections delve into this comprehensive view of security as the primary feature of Securitization Theory and de-securitization as the preferred long-term resolution of the Copenhagen School. Secondly, the Copenhagen School introduced a “constructivist operational method” to discern when specific issues attain the status of security concerns (Nyman, 2013, p. 52). The following subsections, Subsections 3 to 6, covering the speech act, the intersubjectivity of the securitisation process, the resulting emergency measures, and the different levels of analysis, further elucidate the social constructivist aspects of Securitization Theory.

However, Securitization Theory has not been immune to criticism, catalysing a vibrant and evolving research landscape (Balzacq et al., 2016). Extensive academic inquiries have probed a range of conceptual aspects of the framework (Balzacq, 2005; 2011; McDonald, 2008; Pram & Petersen, 2011; Williams, 2011; Stritzel, 2007). Subsections 7-11 focus on conceptual developments within Securitization Theory that hold relevance for the frameworks employed in the thesis, highlighting the dynamic nature of the field and its responses to scholarly critique. These include securitization as praxis, emphasis on the audience and functional actors, the applicability of Securitization Theory outside of the Western context, and its association with foreign policy analysis.

### **Comprehensive yet Consistent Concept of Security**

Buzan et al. revolutionise the understanding of security in international relations by asserting that “security is about survival” (1998, p. 21), redefining security as a defensive response to encompass all

imminent and significant risks. In doing so, the Copenhagen School, in contrast to traditional security studies, known as “strategic studies”, broadens the scope of security analysis. Strategic studies primarily focus on political-military risks, such as territorial integrity, sovereignty issues, and occasionally ideology. In contrast, proponents of the *new* security framework incorporate economic (well-being, extreme poverty), societal (migration, national identity, freedom of religion), and environmental concerns (survival of species, pollution, and the dire effects of climate change) into the realm of security. Additionally, sectors like health (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic, HIV-AIDS crisis, Ebola outbreaks), food, energy, and cyber security may be considered separate security domains due to their contemporary relevance. The underlying principle behind this expansion of the security agenda is that the “referent object” of security is not confined solely to the state but extends to the individuals and groups constituting the state’s population.

Buzan et al. (1998) dedicate a complete chapter to each of the five security “sectors” they identified: military, political, economic, social, and environmental. Each sector may have distinct “referent objects” contingent on the specific security discourse. These sectors represent different interpretations of “existential threat” in five distinct thematic areas but need not be mutually exclusive. For instance, in the military sector, threats are directed towards the state and its military apparatus; in the political sector, threats target sovereignty and ideology; in the economic sector, individuals or economic classes, businesses and even states are in danger; in the societal sector, threats generally impact nations, culture, and

religions; and in the environmental sector, risks jeopardise the survival of individual species, habitats, and the planetary climate, all of which can be considered existential security issues.

The Copenhagen School illustrates how security can transcend various sectors without undermining the essence of the concept. The more inclusive understanding of security responds to the narrowing field of security studies and rejects the criticism that the progressive broadening agenda compromises the intellectual coherence of security. The debate between “wide” versus “narrow” security concepts emerged from dissatisfaction with the Cold War’s focus on traditional security studies, dominated by military and nuclear concerns. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the emergence of economic and environmental agendas in international relations (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). In comparison, the 1990s brought concerns related to identity issues and transnational crime, further propelling the broadening of security studies. The Copenhagen School offers a framework integrating traditionalist and more comprehensive security perspectives.

However, the increased scope of security studies eventually sparked a backlash that aimed to restrict the field to issues directly related to the threat or use of force. The primary objection against the Copenhagen School’s expanded notion of security was the perception that it rendered the concept intellectually incoherent (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 2). This argument primarily emanated from traditionalists who questioned the definition of security if it encompassed everything. Strategic studies were particularly concerned about how the meaning of security might erode due

to this all-encompassing approach. In response, the Copenhagen School asserted that its more comprehensive concept of security remained true to its inherent nature: safeguarding against existential risk. By expanding the domain of security studies to include different sectors and regions, security studies can effectively address all security issues significant to individuals, societies, and states across the globe. Hence, the agenda of security studies can expand without compromising the intellectual coherence of the field.

Eventually, applying the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory to security studies depends on whether security scholars acknowledge the limitations of their conventional understanding of security. This thesis recognises that a comprehensive discussion of pressing security issues worldwide is necessary. Thus, this research employs Securitization Theory to examine the SCS disputes between the Philippines and China, going beyond the military dimensions of the maritime conflict and considering economic and environmental security concerns.

### **De-securitization**

The Copenhagen School challenges the conventional notion of security, which often assumes that increasing security is always better. This perspective can be problematic, especially when dealing with complex issues like environmental concerns, identity politics, or religious matters. In contrast, the Copenhagen School presents an alternative perspective, defining security as a negative outcome that suggests a failure to address issues through regular political processes. According to this school of

thought, politics should ideally function without elevating existential threats beyond the ordinary political sphere.

In response to this challenge, de-securitization emerges as the preferred long-term solution for the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998). It involves a process of redefining issues, moving them away from security concerns, and disentangling them from the cycle of threats and defence. De-securitization is the way forward, particularly in contexts like conflict resolution, where it offers an alternative to the perpetuation of securitization and the pursuit of heightened security measures. De-securitization represents a paradigm shift in security discourse, involving addressing the issue through regular political processes and non-coercive means. Achieving this transformation often requires consensus among various actors, including policymakers, civil society, and the public.

The second part of this thesis explores the Philippine government's response to the 2019 ramming and sinking incident near Reed Bank. This incident stands out as an exception in the context of the SCS disputes, as the Duterte government chose to de-securitize the issue rather than securitize it. The Duterte administration de-escalated this maritime incident by challenging its classification as a security threat and advocating a return to normal bilateral diplomatic relations with China.

### **Security as Illocutionary (Speech) Act**

One central argument of Securitization Theory is that no issue is automatically recognised as a security concern in international relations. Waever (1995) challenges a fundamental tenet of traditional security:

security is an objective reality that exists independently of language and is accessible irrespective of linguistic constructs. According to the Copenhagen School, a particular event or series of incidents becomes a security issue when authorities designate it as a threat to the existence of a specific entity, not because it inherently constitutes an objective danger to the referent object. Consequently, a security issue cannot be analytically defined in isolation from framing the issue as an existential threat. This is why, for the Copenhagen School, security is described as a “self-referential practice” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 24).

Waeuver (1995) introduces the concept of security as a “speech act”, drawing from John Austin’s (1975) insights on Speech Act Theory. This perspective posits that the process of threat construction and the corresponding response in international relations are fundamentally shaped by discourse. Within Austin’s framework, when a speaker articulates a statement, they engage in three distinct acts. The first of these acts is the “locutionary act”, where the speaker presents a statement regarding a particular subject, often involving “constatives”. Constatives are linguistic expressions that convey descriptions of the state of reality, and they are subject to assessment as either being true or false (or even nonsensical). However, beyond the realm of constatives exist statements known as “performatives” that transcend mere description. When performatives are spoken, they prompt the speaker to initiate either the second type of speech act, the “perlocutionary act”, designed to evoke specific effects on the listener, or the third kind, the “illocutionary act”, aimed at conveying a specific force or meaning. In this third context, the



“illocutionary” force takes centre stage, representing the foundational speech act that does not rely on the impact it may have on the recipient.

Nonetheless, the speech act must consistently adhere to “felicity conditions”, indicating that it should be appropriately employed within specific contextual circumstances. Austin’s work (1975) illustrates that certain actions, such as professing vows, making a bet, or naming a ship, are instantly actualised once the statement is pronounced, provided the relevant felicity conditions are met. These conditions can differ for each type of act; for example, naming a ship mandates that the person naming it possesses the necessary authority to do so.

Hence, the Copenhagen School’s approach to security studies departs from the prevalent realist perspective in international relations and embraces a poststructuralist mindset that emphasises the transformative power of language, often referred to as the “social magic” of discourse (Balzacq, 2011, p. 1). This perspective asserts that security is not an objective fact but rather an outcome of language and discourse, emphasising the illocutionary role of speech acts in defining and securitising issues in international relations.

### **Securitization as Intersubjective**

The Copenhagen School delves into the intricacies of what constitutes successful securitization. It begins with the “securitising actor”, often a key figure in the government, such as the president, parliament, or foreign office, who employs a “speech act” to communicate and establish the urgency of existential threats, which can be a particular incident or

series of events. This speech act is critical in shaping how these threats are responded to and determining which entities, known as “referent objects”, are involved in the security discourse. However, the target “audience” is not merely passive observers in this process. They play a dynamic role by either endorsing or opposing the authority’s invocation of emergency measures. Their support or rejection influences the legitimacy of the security intervention. The audience, therefore, forms an integral component of Securitization Theory, as it facilitates the development of shared security understandings and the selection of policy responses (Cote, 2015).

Another vital element to consider when analysing security within this framework is the impact of what the Copenhagen School calls “functional actors”. These functional actors, distinct from the audience, influence policymakers’ decision-making process. This perspective makes the securitisation process inherently “intersubjective and socially constructed” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 31), emphasising that security is neither an entirely objective fact nor a purely subjective creation (Cote, 2014, p. 1).

Elaborations of Securitization Theory delve further into the social construction aspect of the framework, offering critiques of the Copenhagen School’s emphasis on the performativity of the speech act. This chapter aims to provide a more comprehensive examination of the audience and functional actors within securitisation studies in the subsequent section dedicated to developing this concept. This in-depth analysis underscores the dynamic and multifaceted nature of security within an intersubjective

framework, where it is jointly constructed through the interaction of various actors rather than being an absolute or solely subjective determination.

### **Special Politics Legitimising Securitising Measure**

The Copenhagen School formally defines “security” as “the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 23). Security threats are considered unique because they warrant using extraordinary measures to address them. When a state representative invokes the term “security”, they essentially declare an emergency, asserting the right to employ any necessary means to thwart a looming threat (Buzan et al., 1998; Waever, 1989). By labelling an impending issue as a security concern, the securitising agent identifies the issue as a potential threat and claims the prerogative to address it using extraordinary methods to ensure the survival of the referent object, often the state itself. However, a successful instance of securitization does not necessarily require the immediate implementation of emergency measures. The primary goal is merely to present the incident as a significant threat, creating an opportunity to legitimise extraordinary actions or steps that would not typically be permissible within normal politics.

Nonetheless, securitization intensifies political debate instead of completely removing an issue from normal politics. Consequently, this unique form of politics has yet to be defined. The concept of “special

politics” appears closely linked to a tripartite classification system, distinguishing (1) non-political issues outside the scope of state involvement, (2) political issues, which constitute the domain of regular politics, and (3) security issues, which fall into the realm of “special politics” necessitating non-democratic decision-making due to survival imperatives (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 29).

Notably, most empirical studies on securitization have predominantly focused on Western contexts, implicitly assuming democratic political systems as the political norm. In this sense, securitization is perceived as a means of moving issues beyond the democratic processes. However, non-democratic states also grapple with security issues. Addressing the social construction of security issues in authoritarian regimes and understanding the concept of “special politics” within autocratic systems is another critical facet of the Copenhagen School’s Securitization Theory. This aspect will be explored further in the following section, particularly concerning securitization in non-Western contexts.

### **Levels of Analysis**

IR scholars commonly employ a framework of five primary levels of analysis: the international system, the regional system, units, subunits, and individuals. However, this traditional characterisation is often criticised for its limited scope, particularly in failing to account for two pivotal elements: the audience and the context. These elements are integral to the securitisation process and should not be disregarded. Therefore,

Securitization Theory, as put forth by the Copenhagen School, offers a distinctive perspective on these levels. Rather than treating them as independent theories, the Copenhagen School considers them valuable tools for identifying and comprehending the key actors, referent objects, and the dynamics operating within the security domain. The subsequent discussion on the sociological strand of Securitization Theory delves further into the concept of the audience and the contextual factors that mould the securitisation process.

Inclusivity distinguishes the Copenhagen School's approach, which considers various settings in analysing security issues. This inclusivity facilitates the recognition of multiple "levels of analysis" that extend beyond the traditional confines of state-centric security. These levels span from the international level, which encompasses global concerns such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to the regional level, addressing issues like the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts and the migrant crisis in Europe. Furthermore, the framework encompasses security concerns confined within specific countries or regions, such as the Armenian genocide, wildfires in California and Victoria, and rainforest fires in the Amazon. Finally, this approach delves into the individual level, examining matters like human rights violations arising from the Philippine government's war on drugs.

By broadening the scope of security studies to encompass various sectors and regions, the Copenhagen School ensures comprehensive coverage of all significant security issues affecting individuals, societies,

and states across the globe. To exemplify this approach, the analysis within this thesis, centred on the Philippines, spans the Asia-Pacific region, with a particular focus on East and Southeast Asia, extending to specific Philippine government agencies, businesses, media, academia, and the public. This holistic approach underscores the versatility and inclusivity of the Copenhagen School's security framework, which aims to address security issues from both global and local perspectives.

### **Speech Act versus Practice**

Critiques of the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory often focus on the speech act as the central element of analysis, as the framework posits that understanding securitization requires an examination of discourse. However, scholars have raised a significant critique, arguing that the performative power of a speech act cannot be fully grasped in isolation and should instead be situated within broader contextual structures (Stritzel, 2014).

In response to this criticism, subsequent developments within Securitization Theory have acknowledged the importance of practices, context, and power relations (Balzacq, 2011). Rather than reducing securitization to a mere speech act, Kaunert and Yakubov (2017) propose a more comprehensive perspective, viewing securitization as a strategic or pragmatic practice within specific circumstances. Scholars have further emphasised that an exclusive focus on the speech act fails to adequately consider non-verbal actions and practices, such as body language and

visual representations in the media, significantly influencing the securitisation process (Balzacq, 2011).

Moreover, the theory's strong emphasis on the speech act encounters challenges when applied to contexts beyond the scope of traditional Western democracies, where what Hansen calls a "silent security dilemma" may emerge (2000, p. 287). In such situations, individuals, including prominent public figures, may lack "the ability to actively express societal security concerns" due to systemic restrictions on free speech or the fear of reprisals from adversaries (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 12).

Consequently, scholars argue that for Securitization Theory to have broad empirical relevance, the semantic repertoire of security should encompass both textual meaning (knowledge acquired through language, both written and spoken) and cultural meaning (knowledge historically derived from past interactions and situations) (Balzacq, 2005). This recognition underscores the necessity for a more comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to securitization that can accommodate diverse socio-political conditions and forms of expression.

## **The Audience**

Another area of contention within Securitization Theory centres on the concept of the audience. Critics posit that the role played by the audience in the analytical process lacks precision and clarity (Leonard & Kaunert, 2011). To address this criticism, Vuori (2008) suggests viewing the audience as a multifaceted entity whose nature depends on the specific

purpose of the securitizing act. In practical terms, a securitizing act can be directed at different audiences, contingent on the securitising actor's objectives. These objectives may include persuading the political elite to gain public support or capturing international attention (Roe, 2008; Salter, 2008). In the context of this thesis, adopting Vuori's analytical framework becomes essential for a comprehensive understanding of Philippine responses toward the maritime row.

The ambiguity surrounding the concept of the audience is closely linked to the ongoing debate about whether threats are subjectively or intersubjectively constructed. On the one hand, the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory emphasises the illocutionary aspect of speech acts, suggesting that a securitising actor subjectively constructs the threat perception. On the other hand, it becomes evident that the threat perception is not considered securitised until it achieves intersubjective recognition as a threat, meaning until the audience acknowledges it. This highlights the significance of the perlocutionary aspect, which deals with the effects of the securitising act. Thus, critics assert that the Copenhagen School has not sufficiently addressed this aspect of the framework; they call for a more nuanced examination of context and the interaction between the securitising actor and the audience in further developing the securitisation framework.

### **Functional Actors**

There has also been a gap in explicit discussions regarding the role of functional actors in Securitization Theory. According to the Copenhagen



School, functional actors are defined as “actors who affect the dynamics of a sector but are neither the referent object nor the actor initiating security claims on behalf of the referent object; instead, they significantly influence decisions in the realm of security” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 36). This conceptualisation, however, introduces ambiguity surrounding the relevance of functional actors. Floyd, thus, highlights that this concept has had limited development since its introduction (Floyd, 2021).

The sector-specific “functional actors” identified by the Copenhagen School do not appear to have distinct roles; instead, their roles often overlap with those of the audience. However, the Copenhagen School suggests a unique function for functional actors when they assume the role of “veto actors” during securitisation (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 89). In the context of securitisation studies, the term “veto actors” does not refer to actors with formal, legal, or constitutional powers of disapproval. Instead, it pertains to the concept of audiences who, as actors, legitimise securitisation through implicit and, at times, explicit consent (Olesker, 2018; Salter, 2011; Roe, 2008). Floyd (2021) contends that, in securitisation, the only actual audiences are the referent object and the one posing a threat because both can be the recipients of securitizing speech acts. Consequently, audiences are not confined to specific, rigidly defined groups, and their veto influence is limited, as securitising actors frequently override their objections in the name of security.

Floyd (2021) argues that functional actors in securitisation can adopt various roles, including gatekeepers, (de-)legitimators, epistemic communities, rebels, and champions. This multifaceted perspective on

functional actors becomes especially significant in the context of securitisation, where scholars acknowledge the crucial role of the audience. Recognising functional actors allows scholars to actively participate in the securitisation process, particularly when they do not represent the referent object or the threatening actor. Thus, think tanks and academic institutions may also be considered functional actors. This thesis recognises the diverse roles of functional actors, aiming to capture a nuanced understanding of how different entities shape and influence security narratives.

### **Eurocentrism versus Securitization in the Non-West**

Critics have validly expressed concerns about the theory's Eurocentric orientation and its potential to impose limitations that may hinder its practical application. Bilgin (2011) highlights debates centred on the applicability and effectiveness of Securitization Theory in regions marked by complex non-Western state-society dynamics. Ilgit and Klotz (2014) underscore a critical question regarding whether Securitization Theory can "successfully travel" when subjected to empirical testing. Wilkinson (2007) suggests that the theory might be confined within a "Westphalian straitjacket", implying that it may struggle to account for or address security dynamics beyond the traditional state-centric and sovereignty-based model.

However, the limitations of Securitization Theory based on inherent design deficiencies do not restrict its application beyond the European context. Instead, with its reflexive nature, Securitization Theory emerges

as a framework well-suited for analysing various threat constructions and policies across diverse settings. Furthermore, the seeming bias inherent in this theory can incentivise the study of non-Western cases, focusing on potential limitations stemming from Western-centric assumptions (Greenwood & Waever, 2013).

Empirical literature attests to the versatility of Securitization Theory, demonstrating its effectiveness in analysing diverse security issues and involving various actors. Sjostedt (2017) underscores this adaptability by affirming the theory's capacity to address various security concerns, including military and non-military. Caballero-Anthony et al. (2016) apply the framework to the Asian context in their edited volume, *Non-Traditional Security in Asia: Dilemmas in Securitization*. In this volume, they explore how (de)securitisation operates conceptually and empirically in the Asian setting, with Caballero-Anthony's "Modified (Copenhagen School) Framework" offering a holistic and context-specific approach (Caballero-Anthony et al., 2016, pp. 6-8). This research employs Securitization Theory while also critically assessing its applicability in non-Western contexts, specifically in the case of the Philippines.

### **Securitization Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis**

Another aspect of Securitization Theory is its convergence with Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). According to Cote (2014), this alignment has facilitated the integration of Securitization Theory into the broader FPA framework, focusing on decision-making processes, albeit applied to different dimensions. While securitization predominantly focuses on

constructing and deconstructing security threats, FPA addresses a broader range of foreign policy issues, covering diverse aspects such as diplomacy, trade and finance, and international relations (Beach, 2012). The Copenhagen School's expansive interpretation of the security concept has broadened the framework to include economic and environmental concerns, aligning with the scope of FPA. Cote (2014) adds that both fields recognise the inherently political nature of decision-making. Securitization Theory underscores the political aspect of defining and addressing security threats, while FPA acknowledges that political dynamics, the interests of various actors, and power struggles influence foreign policy decisions.

Examining how language frames issues and shapes policy is another shared focal point between these two fields. Securitization Theory analyses the speech act in framing security issues and garnering support for policy measures. Within FPA, framing serves as a tool to mould and communicate foreign policy decisions. While Securitization Theory is grounded in the critical and constructivist tradition, often favouring interpretive methodologies (Balzacq, 2011b), FPA demonstrates flexibility by having the capacity to integrate positivist and post-positivist approaches, as White (1999) and Doty (1993) claim.

While Securitization Theory adopts an actor-centric perspective, concentrating on specific actors in the securitisation process, FPA can encompass both systemic and actor-centric viewpoints. According to Sjostedt (2017), this dual perspective creates reciprocal learning opportunities. On the one hand, Securitization Theory stands to gain from FPA by exploring how actors operate within systemic constraints and

understanding the repercussions of their decisions on international relations. On the other hand, Securitization Theory's constructivist and often critical approach to security offers valuable insights that can enhance the field of FPA. This thesis thus incorporates structural analysis, complementing Securitization Theory's focus on the intersubjective construction of threats by political agents.

To summarise, the Copenhagen School's contributions to security studies are twofold. Firstly, it extends the traditional conception of security, promoting de-securitization as a favoured long-term resolution. Secondly, it introduces a social constructivist approach to IR by considering elements like speech acts, intersubjectivity, emergency measures beyond normal politics, and various levels of analysis. Despite its merits, Securitization Theory faces criticism, responses to which shape a dynamic research landscape. Consequently, the prior discussions delved into conceptual developments of Securitization Theory, addressing concerns such as securitization as praxis, the role of the audience and functional actors, applicability beyond the Western context, and its connection to foreign policy analysis. These aspects collectively inform the analysis of the first part of this research. The subsequent section explores the second framework underpinning this research.

## **Integrated Sociological-Causal Securitisation Framework**

In analysing the complex phenomenon of securitisation, this research draws upon the contributions of Balzacq (2011a) and Guzzini

(2012), weaving their perspectives into a unified sociological-causal framework, the second theoretical framework used in this thesis. Balzacq introduces an innovative analytical framework with a “sociological twist” distinct from the Copenhagen School’s speech act model of security. Balzacq characterises the Copenhagen School’s perspective as “philosophical”, rooted in the philosophy of language, and emphasising speech acts as illocutionary acts. While insightful, this focus falls short of providing a comprehensive understanding of the dimensions involved in the emergence and evolution of security issues. Combining Balzacq’s sociological variant with Guzzini’s (2011) perspective on securitisation as a causal mechanism, this thesis extensively explores securitisation processes, from their inception to their downstream consequences. The (sociological-causal) securitisation framework not only deepens the understanding of securitisation but also broadens insights into its far-reaching implications in security studies.

Balzacq (2011a) acknowledges that the Securitization Theory and securitisation framework represent “ideal types” in critical security studies, implying that practical applications of securitisation frameworks rarely conform precisely to one or the other. Thus, Balzacq advocates for research to draw from philosophical and sociological insights. Following this recommendation, this thesis adopts a comprehensive approach by integrating elements from both frameworks. The Copenhagen School’s framework is initially employed for a comparative case analysis. Subsequently, the securitisation framework is utilised for an in-depth within-case analysis. This hybrid approach allows for a more nuanced and

holistic exploration of securitisation processes, encompassing both the performative aspects of speech acts and the broader sociological-causal dynamics underpinning the construction of security issues.

### **Balzacq's Criticisms and Core Assumptions**

Balzacq's (2005, pp. 172-173; 2011a, pp. 1-3) framework challenges conventional views on securitisation by addressing key distinctions between philosophical and sociological perspectives. Firstly, Balzacq advocates for perlocutionary speech acts, diverging from the illocutionary emphasis of the Copenhagen School. This shift recognises security as more than a performative act; it considers the impact on the audience, emphasising the nuanced consequences of labelling issues as security concerns. In (de)securitisation, the perlocutionary effect gauges the agent's success through the audience's support or rejection.

Building on this, another assumption of the sociological perspective highlights the complexity of security discourses, emphasising an "intersubjective process" (Balzacq, 2011a, p. 2). Unlike the philosophical view that portrays the audience as passive, the sociological approach sees the audience as dynamic contributors to narrative co-creation. Securitisation's legitimacy hinges on gaining endorsement from an "empowering audience", extending beyond the general public and adapting to socio-historical contexts.

Lastly, Balzacq's sociological viewpoint rejects the predetermined criteria of the philosophical approach and considers securitisation as a dynamic, context-dependent process. The relationship between agency

and context extends beyond speech act success, encompassing more prominent contextual factors shaped by past experiences and current circumstances. This perspective underscores that securitisation involves more than declaring something a security issue through speech acts; it engages an active audience and a network of interconnected practices and processes, shaping the perception of a threat and guiding the response. Thus, Balzacq's sociological securitisation framework provides a nuanced perspective on securitisation, incorporating perlocutionary speech acts, recognising the dynamic role of the audience, and acknowledging the broader, evolving context.

### **Degree of Congruence and Causal Adequacy**

Examining degrees of congruence involving the level of alignment of various factors provides nuanced perspectives on the intricate and multifaceted nature of securitisation dynamics. This analytical approach explores the interplay of different factors, such as the strategies employed by securitising actors, the audience's frame of reference, and the immediate context, to discern the extent of their convergence. Balzacq emphasises that analysing the degree of congruence among these concurrent forces better guides attempts to comprehend securitisation processes.

Balzacq (2011a) critiques the pursuit of causal determinacy, which seeks a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship by identifying a singular cause as the exclusive source of a securitised issue. The challenge of identifying a precise causal link as the exclusive source of a securitised



issue underscores the necessity of investigating congruence. Balzacq, thus, advocates for a paradigm shift towards understanding securitisation through the lens of degrees of congruence. Recognising the congruence of activities among political entities within the mechanism is not mere causal determinacy but a pursuit of causal accuracy.

The following section responds to Balzacq's emphasis on degrees of congruence over causal determinacy by integrating Guzzini's concept of securitisation as a causal mechanism. This approach views securitisation not only as a process of framing a particular issue as a security threat but also as a mechanism for causing action or policy change. The fusion of Balzacq's sociological strand of securitisation with Guzzini's causal mechanism perspective offers a holistic understanding, examining both discursive and practical dimensions of securitisation. This comprehensive approach connects the complexities of framing an issue as a security threat with subsequent political and policy consequences, enhancing the analysis of securitisation processes.

### **Guzzini's Non-Positivist Causality**

Stefano Guzzini's (2011) seminal work, "Securitisation as Causal Mechanism", significantly contributes to the interpretivist understanding of securitisation as a process mechanism. Guzzini argues that Securitization Theory relies on causal mechanisms that do not neatly fit within the positivist framework. Thus, Guzzini introduces a distinct explanatory approach that aligns with the underlying post-structuralist

and constructivist principles embedded in many of the Copenhagen School's empirical analyses.

At the core of Guzzini's argument is Jon Elster's definition of social mechanisms. Elster characterises mechanisms as "frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences" (1998, p. 45; 2007, p. 36). Mechanisms are instrumental configurations of factors that happen with sufficient frequency to be easily identifiable. Nonetheless, the initiation of these organisations of elements and their results are uncertain.

The debate surrounding non-positivist causal mechanisms involves whether causality relies on constant conjunctions and regular associations or an integral connection between a cause (X) and its effect (Y). While Hume emphasised criteria such as contiguity in space and time, temporal succession, and regular conjunction for causal relationships (Holland, 1986; King et al., 1994), a mechanistic understanding of causality emphasises the theoretical transmission of causal forces that link X to Y (Bogen, 2005). In analysing mechanisms, scholars articulate an "explanatory knowledge" (Salmon, 1998), which describes the operations of the mechanism producing a result. In summary, Guzzini reinforces the empirical relevance of Securitization Theory by understanding securitisation through causal mechanisms. This approach aligns with the Copenhagen School's commitment to a post-positivist meta-theory, which emphasises the interpretive and process-oriented nature of securitisation analysis and, thus, contributes to a more nuanced understanding of security dynamics (Balzacq, 2011a; Guzzini, 2012).

## **One Mechanism for Securitisation and De-securitisation**

Guzzini's (2015) exploration in "A Dual History of Securitisation" underscores the foundational role of de-securitization in developing Securitization Theory. Guzzini's historical analysis acknowledges that Securitization Theory is rooted in the Cold War era when nuclear disarmament discussions gained prominence. During this period, the focus was on de-securitisation – efforts to de-escalate tensions and remove issues from the security realm. This historical context laid the groundwork for understanding how issues were securitised, de-securitised, or moved between security and non-security spheres.

Guzzini (2015) argues that de-securitisation is not merely a reactive process but an integral component of the broader discourse on security politics. By examining instances where issues were successfully de-securitised during the Cold War, Guzzini claims that scholars began to recognise that the boundary between security and non-security is fluid and subject to political processes. De-securitisation demonstrates that security is a socially constructed concept, challenging its fixed and objective nature. This realisation forms the basis of Securitization Theory, which explains how issues are securitised through speech acts.

Guzzini's perspective highlights that securitisation and de-securitisation both rely on the persuasive and performative nature of language and discourse to shape security perceptions and agendas. In securitisation, speech acts are performative, framing an issue as a security threat and convincing the audience of the need for urgent measures. De-securitisation, conversely, involves reversing this outcome, using speech

acts to remove the security framing and argue against exceptional measures. The common thread in both processes lies in the performative power of speech acts and the role of discourse in shaping the understanding of issues. The process of framing an issue as a security threat or dismantling that framing involves similar causal mechanisms at its core. Whether one is trying to create a sense of urgency or alleviate fears, how the message is communicated impacts how it is received and acted upon.

The merging of sociological and causal perspectives within the study of securitisation is a dynamic approach that combines the strengths of both frameworks. This social-causal integration involves acknowledging the social construction of security issues while recognising the causal mechanisms that drive tangible outcomes. The integrated approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of how securitisation unfolds – from the initial framing of an issue as a security threat to the subsequent causal mechanisms that lead to real-world consequences. Recognising that securitisation processes vary in different contexts, the integrated approach considers both sociological nuances and the empirical complexities of causal relationships.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed Securitization Theory's two primary strands, the Copenhagen School and the sociological variant. Nevertheless, this thesis adopts an integrative approach, employing both strands to enhance its analytical depth. The first part of this research draws upon the

Copenhagen School's framework to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of various incursions in the WPS. This analytical lens facilitates exploring how security issues manifest within the Philippines' responses to each instance of China's assertion. The primary method employed in this section is Discourse Analysis, which unveils consistent findings, except for an instance where the Philippines opted to de-securitise rather than securitise the issue.

The second part of the empirical investigation focuses on this deviant case, utilising the sociological-causal variant of securitisation. Integrating sociological and causal approaches within the study of securitisation seeks to offer a nuanced and comprehensive framework. It bridges the gap between social constructivist approaches and causal mechanisms, providing a more adaptable and grounded analysis of security processes in diverse contexts. The second part of the research employs Process Tracing to delve deeper into this deviant case's unique dynamics.

By employing these two distinct yet complementary theoretical frameworks, this research aims to comprehensively understand the securitisation processes as the Philippines responds to the SCS disputes. A detailed discussion of the research methodology and methods is presented in the subsequent chapter, offering insights into this study's analytical rigour and depth.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods**

### **Introduction**

This chapter delves into the research design, the methods used, and the selected dataset in analysing the Philippines' approaches to the SCS disputes. The discussion centres around employing a combination of comparative and single-case studies and applying Discourse Analysis and Process Tracing to study qualitative evidence. Chapter 3 laid the foundation for exploring the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory and the sociological-causal strand of securitisation as analytical frameworks. These frameworks weave through subsequent cross-case and within-case analysis chapters, providing a comprehensive lens for understanding the complexities of the Philippines' responses to the maritime row.

Dedicated to cross-case analysis, Chapters 5 and 6 employ Discourse Analysis to analyse how the Philippines countered China's assertions in the WPS. Chapter 5 covers the first Chinese incursion in 1995 up to the PCA Tribunal Award in 2016, drawing on data from the Philippines' written submissions and SCS Arbitration hearings. Chapter 6 examines the Duterte administration's handling of the maritime row post-PCA ruling, emphasising the dynamics of Duterte's diplomatic approach despite the international legal victory.

The narrative shifts in Chapter 7, focusing on the 2019 ramming incident in the Reed Bank. Using Process Tracing, the chapter untangles the

causal links between persistent Chinese assertions and the evolution of China-friendly foreign policies. The data analysed in Chapters 6 and 7 are drawn from diverse sources, including government documents, video interviews, surveys, and media reports. These chapters scrutinise the responses and shed light on the socio-political implications of the Philippines' reactions to the persistent Chinese threat.

This chapter culminates by integrating the empirical background, theoretical underpinnings, research methodology, and methods, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the Philippines' complex engagement with the SCS disputes during the past three decades.

## **Comparing Cases through Discourse Analysis**

The cross-case analysis chapters investigate the Philippines' responses to existential threats in the SCS from 1995 to 2022, employing Discourse Analysis. The focal point of comparison is the Philippines' decision to securitise the episodes of China's encroachment in the WPS. This section discusses (1) Discourse Analysis as a method for examining qualitative data within the securitisation framework, (2) an overview of the data to be analysed in Chapters 5 and 6, and (3) a detailed exploration of the process of applying Discourse Analysis in the analytical chapters of this thesis.

## **Discourse Analysis in Securitization**

Discourse Analysis is a distinct method employed in various fields of study. Van Dijk (1997; 2015) recognises the historical roots of Discourse

Analysis in classical rhetoric and its contemporary integration with diverse disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and politics. Fundamentally, Discourse Analysis analyses language use within its social context, exploring how communication influences and reflects social realities. Beyond being a neutral tool for communication, Discourse Analysis treats language as practices embedded into the fabric of society. This means that language cannot be fully understood in isolation but within the broader scope of the social sciences. Van Dijk (2015) asserts that a thorough understanding of meaning within discourse demands an analysis that considers the contextual nuances in which texts manifest.

While acknowledging the profound impact of context on discourse, Discourse Analysis also explores the active role of language in constructing social phenomena. Fairclough (2015) argues that language is not a passive medium but a dynamic form of social action. To illustrate, individuals and groups use discourse to negotiate and solidify their social identities. Gee (2014) emphasises that discourse serves as a resource for identity construction, influencing both self-awareness and perceptions of others. This thesis uses Discourse Analysis to explore speech acts in threat construction as the Philippines' response to the conflict in the SCS. Through speech acts, actors frame an issue as a security concern, justifying exceptional measures or responses.

More importantly, (Critical) Discourse Analysis recognises the intricate relationship between language, power, and ideology embedded within texts. Scholars like Foucault (1972), van Dijk (2015), and Wodak and Meyer (2015) posit that language functions as a tool for the exercise of



power in reinforcement or confronting hierarchy, exclusion, and division in society. This awareness highlights discourse's role in preserving or challenging power dynamics embedded in social interactions, for instance, within the securitisation mechanism analysed in the deviant case in Chapter 7 and the following Discussion Chapter, Chapter 8.

### ***The Copenhagen School's Discourse Analysis***

Within security studies where research methodology is a crucial concern (Aradau et al., 2014; Salter & Mutlu, 2013; Shepherd, 2013), the securitisation framework has a strong inclination toward (Critical) Discourse Analysis (Hansen, 2013; Balzacq, 2011b). The Copenhagen School asserts that Discourse Analysis is the "obvious method to study cases of securitization" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 176). This preference for Discourse Analysis aligns with interpretivism and the post-structural commitment of Securitization Theory, where security is not an inherent or objective quality, but a construct shaped within the realm of discourse (Cote, 2014). Discourse Analysis emphasises the role of language, specifically through the speech act, in constructing and responding to security threats.

Buzan et al. further simplify the approach to using Discourse Analysis in securitization by advising researchers to "read, looking for arguments that take the rhetorical and logical form defined here as security" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 177). Thus, according to the Copenhagen School, securitization scholars must pay attention to the persuasive language and the coherent reasoning presented in the speech act being

examined. These are crucial for understanding how actors consider and communicate that a particular issue should be treated as a security concern.

The Copenhagen School defines the text and, accordingly, the specific case to be examined in securitization studies – these are situated within the securitising community. Within a society that legitimises securitization, the political agents engaged in framing a dangerous situation as such are inclined to invoke this authority when needed. The Copenhagen School claims that the speech act is so compelling that “it is against its nature to be hidden” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 177). Hence, instances of securitization naturally emerge over time, eliminating the need for an exhaustive examination of all texts, particularly those with ambiguous implications.

Aligned with the Copenhagen School’s preferred framework of doing Discourse Analysis, this thesis investigates instances of securitization, specifically, the Philippines’ responses to existential threats posed by China, spanning from its initial incursion in the WPS in February 1995 to the conclusion of the most recent Philippine administration in June 2022. Chapters 5 and 6 examine all securitization cases during this period, covering the military, economic, and environmental security aspects of the SCS disputes through the lens of the Securitization Theory. Chapter 5 sheds light on security issues brought by the Philippines before the SCS Arbitration Tribunal, while Chapter 6 explores existential threats met during the Duterte government’s tenure. Through this comparative analysis, the thesis unravels how the Philippines navigates security

challenges in the WPS and how the Copenhagen School's theoretical framework elucidates its responses.

Nevertheless, while the Copenhagen School highlight Discourse Analysis as its primary method, alternative methodological options are available. Within the sociological-causal securitisation framework, a comprehensive analysis necessitates examining the interaction of political agents, considering scope conditions, and exploring various other aspects inherent in the mechanism. This approach is discussed in the following section of this chapter and employed in the within-case analysis in Chapter 7.

### ***Discourse Analysis, according to Balzacq***

Understanding securitisation processes involves a crucial consideration of analytical techniques. Balzacq (2011b) outlines four essential methods: Discourse Analysis, Ethnographic Research, Process Tracing, and Content Analysis. Balzacq distinguishes between Content Analysis, which focuses on the text as an independent entity, and Discourse Analysis, which focuses on the text's situated and social aspects. In other words, Discourse Analysis views the text as emerging from an intersubjective context.

While not exhaustive, these methods offer promising avenues for constructing a comprehensive framework. While each method may capture the fundamental aspects of securitisation, Balzacq argues that employing them together can yield a more nuanced understanding of a security issue's beginning and further development. Following this

perspective, this thesis embraces two distinct methods: Discourse Analysis in the comparative study in Chapters 5 and 6 and a Process Tracing approach for the subsequent case study in Chapter 7. This methodological choice aims to leverage the strengths of each approach, fostering a more holistic and insightful exploration of securitization dynamics.

Furthermore, Balzacq (2011b) asserts the importance of adhering to fundamental steps in Discourse Analysis to ensure reliable inquiries into the securitisation process. Balzacq advocates for a “minimum of formalization in discourse analysis” as a scholarly requirement, emphasising systematic presentation and comparability of results with other studies. Balzacq’s technique focuses on two key aspects: determining which data to collect, specifying the quantity required, and discerning how to make sense of the gathered material.

In alignment with Balzacq’s methodology, this thesis employs a three-step approach to Discourse Analysis. The upcoming section delves into the first step, discussing the key information to be gathered and addressing the criteria for concluding data collection. The final section explores the next two steps in Discourse Analysis, considering interconnections among the empirical data and examining intratextual relationships within the texts. This structured approach aims to enhance the rigour and reliability of the Discourse Analysis conducted in the context of securitisation studies.

## **Sources of Securitization Discourse**

Balzacq (2011b) emphasises an essential aspect of research methodology: aligning the nature of data collection with the research question and, where relevant, establishing hierarchies among data types. In exploring the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes through the decades, the primary focus of analysis must centre on official documents articulating the Philippines' position on these maritime conflicts. However, obtaining access to classified national security documents proves challenging. To overcome this limitation, the data collection approach incorporates reports from secondary sources such as media reports, academic articles and books, which serve as valuable supplements to and validators of the primary data.

Deciding when to conclude data collection is another intricate yet essential aspect of the research process. While comprehensive reading of diverse sources is vital for Discourse Analysis, attempting to review all available materials on a given topic is practically unfeasible. The contours of the research question often become more apparent as data collection progresses; Balzacq (2011b) affirm that this is primarily because Discourse Analysis aligns with the logic of developing theory as it emerges. However, maintaining an open-ended approach to data collection does not imply indecision. In Discourse Analysis, as the investigation of recurring themes and representations approaches a saturation point, where additional data may yield minimal intellectual gain, it becomes prudent to halt data collection. This decision is particularly relevant in Chapter 6 when

scrutinising the Philippines' position on the SCS disputes during the Duterte administration, which relies on publicly available documents.

The following section discusses the specific data gathered for the analysed period. Notably, the Philippines' official stance on the SCS disputes from 1995 to 2016, just before the Duterte administration assumed office, remained consistent. This sustained consistency provides a crucial backdrop for understanding the subsequent shifts or continuities in the country's position during Duterte's tenure until 2022.

### ***Written Submissions and Transcripts of the SCS Arbitration Hearings***

Through its Notification and Statement of Claim on 22 January 2013, the Philippines invoked Article 287 and Annex VII of the 1982 UNCLOS concerning the maritime jurisdiction dispute with China in the WPS. In response, China issued a *Note Verbale* to the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on 19 February 2013, rejecting and returning the Philippines' Notification and Statement of Claim. Furthermore, China chose not to participate in the SCS Arbitration proceedings, reiterated in a *Note Verbale* to the PCA on 29 July 2013. Nonetheless, the Rules of Procedure of the SCS Arbitration, dated 27 August 2013, stipulated that the absence or failure of a party to defend its case would not impede the proceedings. The Arbitral Tribunal, before delivering its award, had the obligation to confirm jurisdiction over the dispute and assess the claim's validity based on facts and legal principles.

On 30 March 2014, the Philippines submitted its comprehensive Memorial and Annexes to the Arbitral Tribunal, the Chinese Embassy in the

Netherlands, and the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines, adhering to the Rules of Procedure and Procedural Order No. 1. This Memorial covered jurisdiction, admissibility, and the merits of the dispute across eleven volumes, including maps, figures, documentary exhibits, expert reports, and witness affidavits. Included in the Memorial were official documents marked “top secret” or “confidential”, authorised for SCS proceedings by relevant Philippine authorities.

To address specific queries from the Tribunal, the Philippines submitted its Supplemental Written Submission on 16 March 2015, reaffirming its claims’ jurisdiction and merit. Beyond written submissions, the analysis included hearing transcripts. The Hearing on Jurisdiction and Admissibility occurred from 7 to 13 July 2015, and the Hearing on the Merits and Remaining Issues of Jurisdiction and Admissibility occurred daily from 24 to 26 November 2015. On 30 November, the Philippines presented concluding remarks, addressing added questions posed during the initial hearings.

The documents and proceedings highlighted five primary concerns for the Philippines in the SCS disputes: (1) China’s occupation of Mischief Reef since 1995; (2) unlawful activities of China’s vessels at Scarborough Shoal in 2012; (3) harassment of resupply missions at Second Thomas Shoal in 2014; (4) infringements on the Sovereign Rights and Jurisdiction of the Philippines by China; and (5) environmental damage to marine ecosystems. Applying Securitization Theory, which encompasses military, economic, and environmental aspects, the subsequent cross-case analysis explores the dynamics of these security concerns.

### ***Public Sources of Securitisation during the Duterte Administration***

The initial phase of this research employed a multifaceted data collection approach to comprehensively understand the dynamics of the Duterte administration's foreign policy, particularly its China-oriented stance in response to the SCS disputes. First, official statements and documents from the Duterte administration were collected from authoritative sources such as the Official Gazette of the Philippines and the websites of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Defence. These materials provided valuable insights into the administration's official foreign policy positions and announcements. Second, to gain a broader perspective on the Philippines' foreign policy, a thorough examination of the foreign policies of the US and China concerning their interactions with the Philippines was conducted. This involved a review of official documents and pronouncements from both states, shedding light on their respective roles and interests in the region. Third, documents from international institutions played a pivotal role in shaping the context of the SCS disputes. The UNCLOS, proceedings and the Award from the PCA, and materials from the ASEAN were examined to understand the legal and regional dimensions of the disputes.

Fourth, scholarly works on Philippine foreign policy also contributed much knowledge to this research. Academic scholars' analyses and interpretations of the Philippines' foreign policy decisions and strategies were reviewed to provide a comprehensive academic backdrop. Finally, triangulated reports from diverse media sources were included in the data collection process to ensure a well-rounded understanding of



Philippine foreign affairs. These reports, spanning various media outlets, offered real-time insights and perspectives on critical foreign policy events and developments.

### **Making Sense of Securitization Discourse**

According to Balzacq (2011b), a comprehensive examination of discursive manifestations of securitization necessitates a dual focus on intertextuality and intratextuality. Intertextuality refers to the way different texts relate to each other. Meanings emerge from the intricate interplay between various texts, emphasising the interconnected nature of discourses across distinct temporal and social contexts. Various texts spanning different periods and social milieus are examined to capture securitisation processes thoroughly. Intertextuality leads to the creation of narrative frameworks that aid political actors in interpreting various phenomena.

In contrast, intratextuality focuses on the internal coherence of specific statements within a text, delving into its performative dimensions. This involves understanding the intended actions a text seeks to accomplish, the representations it constructs, the communicative goals it serves, and the interactions it fosters. Additionally, intratextuality scrutinises the deployment of heuristic tools like metaphors and analogies, elucidating their influence on shaping the portrayal of world politics. The combination of intertextuality and intratextuality provides a nuanced understanding of securitisation processes, unravelling the complexities embedded in the connections between texts and the internal dynamics

within individual texts. This dual analytical approach enhances the comprehension of the multi-layered nature of securitization, offering insights into how actors construct and interpret security narratives.

### ***Intertextuality: Storylines of Existential Threats and Responses***

Intertextuality in Discourse Analysis underscores the importance of considering texts as part of a broader web of meaning, as no text exists in isolation. Intertextuality views each text as part of a larger conversation, drawing on and responding to other texts and contributing to the ongoing construction and evolution of discourses in various cultural, social, and historical contexts. In addition, intertextuality highlights the power dynamics within the interconnectedness of discourse. Specific texts wield authority, serving as reference points that shape how other texts are interpreted. In Securitization Theory, this authority manifests in speech acts that frame an incident as a threat, attributing specific meaning to the event.

The concept of “storylines”, developed by Maarten Hajer (1995), provides a framework for understanding how language and narratives shape perceptions of complex socio-political issues. Storylines are narrative constructs that organise information to give meaning to events, going beyond isolated facts to influence how individuals perceive and interpret socio-political phenomena. Leveraging diverse discursive categories, storylines adapt to changes in the socio-political landscape. Unlike static narratives, storylines are dynamic mechanisms evolving in response to societal attitudes, political contexts, and emerging events,

remaining relevant and influential in shaping public understanding. The comparative case study in Chapters 5 and 6 incorporates storylines in analysing the Philippines' securitization responses to the SCS disputes.

### ***Intratextuality: Vuori's Basic Speech Acts of Securitization***

Juha Vuori (2008) underscores the versatility of the securitization concept, highlighting its capacity to fulfil diverse political functions across various contexts. He delineates five distinct types of securitization cases, each tailored for specific purposes, including agenda-setting, legitimising future actions, deterring threats, justifying past policies, and exerting control over subordinates. Two pertinent types for this thesis are "securitization for legitimating future acts" and "securitization for deterrence" (Vuori, 2008, pp. 79-83).

Vuori (2005) argues that the kind of securitization introduced by the Copenhagen School primarily falls under the "securitization for legitimating future acts" category. This type aims to achieve the perlocutionary effect of legitimising the future actions of the securitising actor. The target audience for this securitization type includes individuals responsible for evaluating the political legitimacy of the actor's actions, such as voters, journalists, and competing factions. Typically, the securitising actors are politically accountable decision-makers or individuals acting on their behalf. This securitization aims to provide a rationale for actions that might otherwise be deemed illegitimate by those assessing their legitimacy. This securitization act's illocutionary point is directive, urging the audience to accept that a specific action is necessary

to counteract a threat. Importantly, this speech act acknowledges the potential for disagreement, allowing the audience to reject the legitimacy of the speaker's intended future actions.

Vuori's (2005) framework categorises securitization according to three elementary sequential speech acts: (1) claim, (2) warning, and (3) request. The elements of these fundamental speech acts are presented in Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, as summarised by Vuori (2008, pp. 79-83).

(1) A claim is a declaration asserting the existence of a threat that poses a risk to the continued existence of a referent object. The illocutionary point of claiming is assertive. When making a claim, it is essential to back it up with evidence and ensure that the claim is not already known to both the speaker and the listener. The speaker must establish that the claim is necessary and relevant. Additionally, certain preparatory conditions (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985, pp. 16-18) must be met for the claim to be successful. The claim must be presented clearly and directly to convey its importance and motivate action.

Claim	
Propositional content	Any claim (C).
Preparatory	1) Speaker (S) has proof (reasons, etc.) for the truth of C.  2) It is not obvious to both S and hearer (H) that H knows (doesn't need to be reminded, etc.) that C.
Essential	Counts as an undertaking to the effect that C represents an actual state of affairs.

*Table 4.2 – Claim Speech Act in Securitization*

(2) A warning is an assertion signalling a threat's actualisation or imminent occurrence unless remedial measures are implemented. It can take either a directive or assertive form, addressing a situation detrimental to the hearer's best interests as communicated in the statement. The warning may involve indicating the factual nature of a particular circumstance or advising someone to either undertake or refrain from specific actions. In securitization, a warning issued by the securitising actor aims to prompt action in response to a specific issue. The conditions for issuing a warning involve the likelihood of the situation or a particular event being cautioned against, its inconsistency with the hearer's interests, and the absence of apparent certainty for both the speaker and the hearer regarding the inevitable occurrence of the warned condition or incident.

Warning	
Propositional content	Future event, state, etc. (E)
Preparatory	1) H has reason to believe that E will occur and that it is not in H's interest.  2) It is not obvious to both S and H that E will occur in any case.
Essential	Counts as an undertaking to the effect that E is not in H's best interest.

*Table 4.3 – Warn Speech Act in Securitization*

(3) A request constitutes a call to acknowledge that a specific action must be taken to avert an impending threat. To forestall potential risks, immediate and decisive action is imperative. The speaker is responsible for presenting compelling justifications to the listener, underscoring the

urgency of the request. The speaker must consider that the listener can fulfil the request and is not bound by conflicting obligations. Given the potential ramifications and substantial costs associated with security measures, the speaker must thoroughly justify the necessity for such actions. While the speaker may appeal to the listener to accept a future course of action to ward off the threat, acceptance cannot be coerced; therefore, it must be persuasively argued. Moreover, the speaker does not assume that the listener will independently undertake the action without prompting.

Request	
Propositional content	Future act (A) of H.
Preparatory	1) H can do A and S believes H can do A.  2) It is not obvious to both S and H that H will do A in the normal course of events of his/her own accord.
Essential	Counts as an attempt to get H to do A.

*Table 4.4 – Request Speech Act in Securitization*

Another closely related form of securitization revolves around preventing threats through securitization itself, a concept termed “securitization for deterrence” by Vuori (2008). This particular type of securitization functions as a pre-emptive warning regarding potential future actions. The unique emphasis placed on security may act as a deterrent, eliminating the necessity for extraordinary measures, as the mere anticipation of such actions might prove sufficient.

Securitising actors employing securitization for deterrence must hold an official position or de facto control over subordinates, such as state leaders or leaders of social movements, to leverage their authority in the securitization discourse. In this variant, securitization is primarily directed at the threat, whether it is another state, a secessionist group, or protesters. The illocutionary function of this strand of securitization is declarative. Declaratives aim to effect change in the world through speech alone. In utterances characterised by a declarative function, the speaker brings about the state of affairs expressed in the proposition solely through the successful execution of the speech act (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985, pp. 37-38). For example, the declaration that “Y poses a threat to Z” aims to bring about this new state of affairs, contingent upon the requirement that the speaker holds a position of authority capable of effecting such change.

According to Vuori (2008), Securitization for deterrence also begins with a claim (Table 4.1) and a warning (Table 4.2). These initial steps are followed by a declaration (Table 4.4), which transforms the asserted state of affairs into a reality. By proclaiming that something constitutes a threat to a particular entity, thereby framing it as a security issue, the securitising actor acquires special powers to deter the specific threats targeted in the securitisation. The goal is to repel the threat through the potential deterrent effect of future actions. The prerequisites for a declaration involve the speaker occupying a position where they can issue effective declarations and ensure that the effect of the declaration has yet to be realised (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985, pp. 37-38).

Declare	
Propositional content	Any proposition (P).
Preparatory	(1) S is in a position where they have the power to declare that P. (2) P is not already in effect.
Essential	Counts as an undertaking to the effect that P becomes the state of affairs.

*Table 4.5 – Declare Speech Act in Securitization*

Vuori's (2008) exposition of the varied securitization speech acts and their underlying structures provides a valuable tool for analysing securitization. The presence of all elements in securitization discourse – claims, warnings, requests/demands, and declarations – indicates the existence of a securitization discourse. Vuori's analytical framework is applied in Chapters 5 and 6 to investigate securitization discourses related to the SCS disputes involving the Philippines and China.

In summary, the chapters dedicated to cross-case analysis delve into the similarities and disparities between the existential threat posed by China's incursions in the WPS and the corresponding responses of the Philippines. Employing Balzacq's (2011b) formalisation of Discourse Analysis in securitization, Chapters 5 and 6 consider factors such as the appropriateness of data sources, intertextuality (referred to as "Storylines" by Hajer (1995), and intratextuality, further elucidated by Vuori (2008). The individual instances of these incursions are evaluated using the Copenhagen School's comprehensive concept of security, asserting that security pertains to survival, thereby justifying the securitization of all



threats. Guided by this analytical framework and coupled with Discourse Analysis, the cases are examined to determine how the Philippines responded to the perceived threat. Common elements, identified as facilitating conditions, are delineated and subsequently integrated into the within-case analysis using a Process Tracing technique. These analytical steps facilitate a thorough examination of the Philippines' responses to the SCS from 1995 until 2022.

### **Within-case Analysis using Process Tracing**

Securitization Theory is not confined solely to interpretivism, as Balzacq (2011b) argues; it accommodates the inclusion of positivist epistemology and even hybrid approaches in empirical investigations. Recent developments within securitisation literature have broadened the scope for employing positivist methodologies to illuminate critical aspects that Securitization Theory seeks to address, such as the factors influencing securitisation and the conditions under which it succeeds or fails (Balzacq, 2011b; Hayes, 2012). Balzacq (2011b) suggests that depending on specific cases and data availability, a spectrum of research techniques, including interviews, statistical analysis, content analysis, and the examination of matched pairs of cases, may offer insights into these inquiries that interpretive methods have yet to uncover fully.

Recognising the potential for analytical pluralism within securitisation research, Cote contends that Process Tracing holds promise as a valuable approach, even though it remains relatively under-explored (2014; 2010a, p. 46). This section ventures into this less-trodden path,

beginning with a brief historical overview of the method. The subsequent section delves into how Process Tracing may be employed to explore the entire process of (de)securitisation in the case of the Duterte administration's responses to sustained Chinese intrusions in the WPS.

### **Tracing Process Tracing in Securitisation**

The case-study method known as “Process Tracing (PT)” is distinctive in its ability to unveil the intricate mechanisms that connect triggers with outcomes (Hall, 2008; Collier, 2011; Rohlfling, 2012; Bennett & Checkel, 2014; Mahoney, 2015; Beach & Pedersen, 2013; 2019). Process-mechanism accounts have gained traction in the social sciences as an alternative or complement to variable-based methods and correlational analyses (Bennett, 2013; Bunge, 1997; Elster, 1998; Gross, 2009; Hedstrom & Swedberg, 1998). In disciplines such as Political Science, Comparative Politics, and IR, the quest to define, measure, and test social mechanisms has assumed a central role (Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005). In the field of IR, mainstream constructivist scholars have popularised PT as a research strategy aimed at either empirically testing or refining hypothesised causal explanations or inductively developing causal theories of political and social phenomena (Bennett & Checkel, 2014; Robinson, 2017). However, while there exists a consensus on what PT involves in principle, there remains no explicit agreement regarding its specific objectives – as Beach (2016) claims, what it should be “tracing” – or the precise manner in which it should carry out its investigative tasks (Bennett & Checkel, 2014).

Incorporating PT into security studies is a relatively recent development (Bennett, 2015; Mahoney, 2015; Tannenwald, 2015). Historically, process-mechanism explanations have received limited attention from critical, post-structural, and constructivist security scholars, particularly within the framework of Securitization Theory. This reluctance may be attributed to the misconception that PT is incompatible with interpretivist methodologies due to its emphasis on causal explanations. Process Tracing and social mechanisms might seem “daunting” to many securitisation scholars because of their perceived association with “neo-positivism, efficient causality, and a correspondence theory of truth” (Balzacq, 2011a, p. 48).

The subsequent sections delve into the essential characteristics of an interpretivist approach to PT, as explored in representative securitisation studies. The most substantial contribution to an explicitly interpretivist process-mechanism understanding of securitisation is found in Guzzini’s seminal work titled “Securitisation as Causal Mechanism”. Guzzini (2011) contends that when elucidating the process of securitisation – a process socially constructed by policymakers, influenced by interest groups, and legitimised by the public – Securitization Theory indeed operates as a causal mechanism, as implied by his article’s title.

Guzzini’s claims draw upon Elster’s definition of social mechanisms, forming the core of his argument. Elster defines mechanisms as “frequently occurring and easily recognisable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences” (1998, p. 45; 2015). Mechanisms represent middle-range theories rather

than law-like generalisations, as they cannot predict whether a mechanism will activate or consistently produce the same effects (Elster, 1998). Guzzini's Interpretivist PT (IPT) reinforces the empirical significance of Securitization Theory by elucidating securitisation through causal mechanisms, all the while aligning with the Copenhagen School's commitment to a post-positivist meta-theory (Balzacq, 2011a; Guzzini, 2012). Guzzini's ground-breaking work on an interpretivist process-mechanism account of securitisation has found application in numerous empirical studies, and the following sections will explore these securitisation studies, highlighting the key features of PT that inform the research at hand.

### ***Rethinking Causality***

The first attribute of PT involves reconceptualising the notion of causality within the securitisation framework. In contrast to traditional causality, which often focuses on correlations among variables, PT underscores an intrinsic relationship between two variables. In this perspective, causality extends beyond external effects. It incorporates the internal linguistic core of securitisation, considering the contextual conditions contributing to its empirical manifestation as a collectively legitimated discourse of security.

Several significant debates shape the understanding of causality across various research methodologies, including large-n statistical analysis, small-n comparative case study research, and single-case studies. The first debate revolves around whether causality should be based on

constant conjunctions and regular associations or grounded in a deeper, more mechanistic connection between a cause (X) and its effect (Y). While one perspective, influenced by Hume, emphasises criteria such as temporal succession and regular conjunction, the mechanistic understanding investigates the transmission of causal forces from X to Y. Studying mechanisms provides scholars with what Salmon (1998) terms “deeper explanatory knowledge”, forming the foundation for PT strategies (Bennett, 2008). Moreover, an ontological distinction exists between probabilistic and deterministic understandings of causality. Probabilistic causality considers systemic and stochastic properties and is often applied in cross-case methods to examine mean causal effects across populations or samples.

In contrast, deterministic causality, endorsed by PT, focuses on identifying necessary and sufficient causes in individual cases. This involves examining whether X is a necessary or sufficient cause of Y in a specific context rather than seeking generalisable correlations. A condition is necessary if its absence prevents an outcome, regardless of the values of other variables; if a sufficient condition is present, the outcome will always occur.

The Copenhagen School challenges deterministic causality due to the “explaining-understanding” or “causative/constitutive” dichotomy introduced in IR by Hollis and Smith (1990). According to this perspective, causal analysis entails explanatory theories, while theories focused on understanding are non-causal. Empiricist or positivist theorists adopt a causative stance. In contrast, reflectivist or post-positivist theorists favour

the constitutive view, arguing that causal analysis is less relevant in understanding international politics due to its social constructivist nature. Wæver (2011) argues that the Copenhagen School is non-causal due to its linguistic core based on analysing speech acts of the decision-maker. Therefore, for theorists of the Copenhagen School, any attempt to find causal relations explaining why securitisation happens makes no sense because of its constitutive characteristics (Wæver, 2011).

Nonetheless, scholars in the Post-Copenhagen School, led by Balzacq, advocate a more empirical analysis of the social construction of security. Securitisation, Balzacq argues, “can be discursive and non-discursive; intentional and non-intentional; performative but not an act in itself” (Balzacq, 2011b, p. 2). While the Copenhagen School challenges any attempt to explain securitisation, Balzacq’s pragmatic approach investigates constitutive and causative factors. Thus, Balzacq effectively reframes the question “What causes securitisation?” into “Under what conditions does securitisation occur?” (Balzacq, 2011a, p. 47). This pragmatic approach aims to uncover the complexities of securitisation by considering multiple factors.

In contrast to the Copenhagen School, Guzzini relies on mechanisms to explain securitisation. Guzzini’s (2011) view aligns with the post-structuralist meta-theory of the Copenhagen School, understanding securitisation as an ongoing process within the broader social construction of security. Guzzini argues that successful or unsuccessful securitisation processes occur within specific political contexts, emphasising their contextual, temporal, and contingent nature. This perspective expands

beyond viewing securitisation as mere speech acts, considering it part of a dynamic process involving adopting policies within particular contexts. Thus, Guzzini's approach enriches the understanding of securitisation within the broader social construction framework. This first key attribute of Process Tracing on its novel notion of causality relates to its next attribute, what it explores.

### ***Causal Process: Interplay between Mechanism and Facilitating Conditions***

A distinctive feature of Process Tracing lies in its focus on tracing not just causal mechanisms but the broader scope of causal processes. Causal processes encompass how mechanisms unfold within a particular immediate, often ongoing context referred to as facilitating or scope conditions. Therefore, what explains how the trigger X leads to its outcome Y covers the causal process, which is the interplay between mechanisms and facilitating conditions. This approach effectively exposes the black box of causality, providing insights into its complex dynamics.

This emphasis on tracing causal processes within PT challenges the prevailing consensus among PT scholars, which primarily revolves around generating causal mechanisms. While Beach's article titled "It's All about Mechanisms: What Process Tracing Case Studies Should Be Tracing" seeks to resolve this issue, it also acknowledges the persistent "considerable ambiguity and discord about what mechanisms actually are" (Beach, 2016, p. 463). Some scholars conceive of mechanisms as a series of events or a narrative that describes how an outcome unfolds (Roberts, 1996; Abell,

2004; Mahoney, 2012). However, merely narrating events does not elucidate the underlying reasons for why they transpired. Consequently, causal explanations that merely trace temporal sequences (Gryzmala-Busse, 2011) keep the mechanism entirely obscure.

Alternatively, some scholars perceive mechanisms as intervening variables (King et al., 1994; George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2007; Falleti & Lynch, 2009). The term “variable” implies a research design involving multiple observations of the values of X, the intervening variable (M), and Y, allowing the assessment of the net effects of X and M on the values of Y (Gerring, 2007). King et al. (1994) recommend disaggregating the empirical case into a series of observations over time or comparing two similar cases to execute this in a single case study. However, this recommendation effectively transforms within-case causal analysis into a cross-case analysis at a lower level of aggregation, obscuring the intricate processes that transpire between variables (Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010; Waldner, 2012). Hence, viewing mechanisms as intervening variables offers a partial glimpse into the causal mechanism, essentially “grey-boxing” it (Bunge, 1997, p. 428).

Rohlfing (2012) and Beach and Pedersen (2019) argue that scholars should approach mechanisms as theoretical systems that interconnect causes and outcomes. A causal mechanism is a system comprising interconnected parts that transmit causal energy or forces from a trigger or a set of triggers to produce an effect (Bunge, 1997; 2004; Machamer et al., 2000; Machamer, 2004). Hernes defines a mechanism as “a set of interacting parts – an assembly of elements producing an effect not



inherent in any of them. A mechanism is not so much about ‘nuts and bolts’ as about ‘cogs and wheels’ (cf. Elster, 1989) – the wheelwork or agency by which an effect is produced” (1998, p. 78). According to Hernes, within social mechanisms are processes or interactions that collectively produce a specific outcome instead of merely describing patterns or correlations. Social mechanisms operate at the intersection of individual actions and societal structure, considering both aspects to understand the complexity of social phenomena. The theorised causal mechanism describes each part of the mechanism – “entities” are factors engaging in “activities”, where the activities transmit causal forces through a mechanism. For PT scholars, the causal mechanism explains how a trigger leads to the outcome.

However, this section contends that PT deviates from tracing mechanisms and instead focuses on “causal processes”. The causal process unveiled within a case elucidates how a trigger is linked to an outcome through mechanisms that evolve within a particular socio-political setting. This immediate and historical context, which facilitates the entire causal process, is called “facilitating” or “scope conditions”. The process generated by PT constitutes a dynamic causal narrative that encompasses not only the mechanisms but also the facilitating conditions. This holistic view of the causal process, including both mechanisms and facilitating conditions, offers a comprehensive response to “how a particular trigger brings an outcome into being”. This approach interprets causality in terms of how a particular event is possible.

### ***Case-centric Explaining Outcome***

This exposition discusses PT as a single-case strategy. Beach and Pedersen (2013) expound upon three primary variants of PT: (1) Theory-testing, (2) Theory-building, (3) Explaining Outcome PTs, and subsequently introduce another variant in their second edition, (4) “Theoretical-revision PT” (Beach & Pedersen, 2019). These four PT variants align with diverse research situations where PT methods find application. The mainstream literature predominantly employs theory-centric PT, involving the deductive testing of whether a generalisable mechanism operates within a single case; conversely, the PT employed in this thesis adopts a case-centric variant of PT.

Distinctions among the PT variants hold significant methodological implications for research endeavours. In Theory-testing Process Tracing, researchers hypothesise the presence of a causal mechanism across a population of cases concerning a phenomenon. They select a specific case where both X (the trigger) and Y (the outcome) coexist, and the contextual conditions allow the mechanism to function. Evaluating evidence involves demonstrating the existence of the hypothesised causal mechanism linking X and Y and confirming its operation as theorised. The aim is to move beyond mere correlations and associations between X and Y and delve into the causal mechanism by which X leads to Y.

Theory-building Process Tracing speculates a causal mechanism between X and Y that can be generalised to a population of a given phenomenon. Theoretical-revision PT combines tracing a mechanism in a deviant case, where the mechanism should have been operational but

failed, compared to a typical case where the mechanism functioned. Its goal is to uncover previously unrecognised omitted conditions necessary for the mechanism to operate correctly.

Most encountered in practice is the scenario where researchers seek to explain a particularly puzzling historical outcome. In such cases, Explaining Outcome PT crafts a minimally sufficient explanation for a unique, surprising, or intriguing one-time outcome. This explanation accounts for all the essential facets of the outcome without any redundant elements (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 18). Thus, a clear demarcation exists between Theory-centric PT, which builds, tests, or revises causal mechanisms for generalisability, and Case-centric PT, which utilises mechanisms to explain a specific empirical phenomenon.

Moreover, the distinction between Case-centric and Theory-centric PT reflects a fundamental ontological and epistemological schism within the social sciences. On the theory-centric side are both neopositivist and critical realist positions, where the understanding is that the social world can be subdivided into parts that can be studied empirically (Jackson, 2016). In this paradigm, causal mechanisms are construed as systemic factors that can be generalised across cases within a specific contextual framework (Falletti & Lynch, 2009). These mechanisms represent parsimonious pathways through which X contributes to the production of Y, even though they are not sufficient causes of Y on their own.

Conversely, Case-centric PT operates from a distinct ontological perspective that acknowledges the social world's complexity, multifaceted nature, and profound context specificity. In this paradigm, generating

knowledge that can be applied across numerous cases may prove challenging, if not implausible. The primary goal is to account for exceptionally perplexing outcomes within specific contexts.

Within the PT framework, theories play a practical role, serving as heuristic instruments that provide analytical utility for crafting the most compelling explanations of a given phenomenon (Pouliot, 2014). Empirical analysis does not involve starting with a clean slate; theories act as guiding frameworks for data collection and analysis, with no explicit intent to test or revise them. The prudent objective of PT is not to validate a theory's correctness but to confirm that the theoretical framework proves valuable in delivering the most coherent explanation for the case under investigation (Humphreys, 2010). This pragmatic application of theories highlights the distinctive approach of the kind of PT employed in this thesis within the landscape of Process Tracing methodologies.

### ***Assessing Explanation based on Bayesian Reasoning***

PT does not draw inferences from observed correlations or repetitions (regular association), whereby the number of observations is key. Instead, PT uses an inferential logic similar to that widely used in observational research in fields as diverse as palaeontology, geography and biology and in practical situations such as courts of law (Beach, 2016, p. 468). PT analyses only one case at a time but involves high quality pieces of evidence that show how the mechanism worked. Assessing new pieces of information allows falsifying or just updating the confidence level in the explanation.

The logic of inference in PT is inspired by the Bayesian approach, which uses new empirical evidence to update the confidence in the validity of the causal theories being valid. Bayesian updating draws an inference from how a piece of evidence relates to a theory whereby the quality of the observation is primary. The degree of updating depends on the uniqueness of the empirical evidence in relation to the hypothesis (Bennett, 2008a; Rohlfing, 2012; Beach & Pedersen, 2013; 2016). Bayesian updating draws an inference from how a piece of evidence relates to a theory whereby the quality of the observation is primary.

Four distinct types of evidence serve as identifiable markers within a mechanism. Firstly, pattern evidence is rooted in statistical trends within empirical data. For example, when examining a theory concerning racial discrimination in employment, one would anticipate observing statistical variations in employment rates across different demographic groups.

Secondly, sequence evidence involves predicting the temporal or spatial order of events. For instance, when assessing a theory on rational decision-making, relevant evidence might entail examining whether decision-makers followed a logical sequence of gathering information, evaluating it, and then making decisions. Deviations from this expected sequence, such as decisions made prior to information gathering, could significantly diminish confidence in the theory's validity.

Thirdly, trace evidence consists of tangible material whose mere presence serves as confirmation. For instance, if a theory suggests that lobbyists must have engaged with decision-makers, and there are few

alternative explanations for such interactions, discovering evidence of these meetings would substantially bolster confidence in the theory.

Lastly, account evidence pertains to the substance of information rather than its form. This can manifest through participant testimonies in interviews or the contents of pertinent documents, such as diplomatic correspondence. These accounts provide valuable insights into the motivations, perspectives, and intentions of involved parties, enriching our understanding of the underlying mechanisms at play. In summary, by systematically evaluating pattern, sequence, trace, and account evidence, analysts can construct a comprehensive understanding of complex mechanisms. This process enables to either affirm or adjust confidence in a theory, thereby bolstering the resilience of explanations nonetheless.

### ***Meaning-making Political Agents***

A fundamental characteristic of Interpretivist Process Tracing (IPT) is its emphasis on the agency and capacity of political actors, whether they be states, groups, or individuals. IPT underscores these actors' ability to comprehend the world, make independent choices, and act based on their interpretations and assessments of the international environment. IPT recognises political agents not as passive recipients of events but as active participants shaping the course of international affairs through their perceptions and responses.

Thus, another essential methodological aspect of Guzzini's IPT is its "interpretivist" nature. In contrast to positivist approaches focusing solely on objective events, IPT, as Guzzini employs it, begins by examining how

different countries understood the end of the Cold War. His analysis delves into states' interpretations and readings of a series of international events, recognising that it is not the events in isolation but the subjective perceptions and understandings of those events that drive actors' responses and actions. This interpretivist perspective is crucial for comprehending the complexity of geopolitical shifts and responses in the post-Cold War era.

To illustrate this point, Guzzini (2012) poses a significant research question in exploring the resurgence of geopolitics in European countries after the Cold War: How did this resurgence challenge the dominance of realist approaches in IR? Referring to the end of the Cold War as the "1989 event", Guzzini identifies three categories of responses to the resulting ontological insecurity among states: (1) having no identity at all (e.g., Russia), (2) no longer having the previously established identity (such as Italy), and (3) not having a new identity yet (as seen in the case of recreated Estonia and reunited Germany). Guzzini argues that the resurgence of geopolitical thought was a response to this ontological insecurity, shaping how countries perceived and interpreted the evolving international landscape and influencing their roles in international politics.

### ***(Non-)Generalisability***

As discussed earlier, Beach and Pedersen (2013; 2019) introduced four PT variants: Theory-testing, Theory-building, Theoretical revision, and Explaining Outcome. These PT approaches are primarily geared towards developing or assessing mid-range theories within specific

contextual boundaries. By nature, PT faces limitations when handling unbounded theories or intended for broad generalisation. One of the key reasons behind this limitation is the substantial analytical resources required for PT (Beach, 2016). Beach acknowledges that when conducted in isolation, PT primarily facilitates within-case inferences about causal processes. PT case studies must be integrated into comparative research designs to extend these inferences to cross-case generalisations.

The primary strength of PT lies in its capacity to rigorously dissect the causal process, connecting causes and outcomes within a single case. However, it is not intended as a standalone method for generating generalisable theories or explanations that can be readily applied to other cases beyond the specific empirical study. Oliveira (2017) reinforces the idea that Securitization Theory's explanatory framework does not rest on the quest for regularities or observable, independent events that lead to the formulation of generalisable laws. To align causality with the social constructivist foundations of securitisation, the causal analysis must cover the "unobservable" facets of social reality, incorporate radical interpretive methodologies, and consider social life part of a complex causal system that produces effects in the world. Consequently, asserting that identical causal processes would manifest in different socio-political environments becomes challenging. Hence, the predictive aspect of traditional causality is incompatible with IPT, as the explanations it generates are inherently contingent and contextual.

Although IPT does not aim to expose generalisable causal processes, it offers the potential to apply a specific causal process to other cases with



the same mechanisms and facilitating conditions. Facilitating conditions serve as the parameters that delineate the scope within which a theory is expected to hold, defining a bounded and causally homogeneous population to which findings can be extended. While mechanisms exhibit regularity in their operation under similar conditions, the underlying activities sustain these regularities and provide the basis for explanation (Machamer et al., 2000, p. 22).

In this research, IPT is employed to trace the causal process by which continued Chinese aggression in the WPS, despite a favourable UN Tribunal Award (trigger), led to the adoption of specific China-friendly policies (outcome). Specifically, IPT is used to test this generated causal process, analysing how, in 2019, the alleged ramming of a Philippine fishing boat by a Chinese naval ship in the WPS, leaving the Filipino fishermen adrift for hours (trigger), prompted an official response from Philippine authorities mirroring the Chinese government's response (outcome). This same causal process may be applied to the actions of the preceding administration in dealing with SCS disputes and perhaps even to interactions between other small/middle powers with powerful states. However, these broader applications are not within the scope of this research but represent opportunities for further exploration and analysis.

### ***Equifinality***

Equifinality, defined by Goertz and Mahoney (2012), refers to the occurrence of multiple causal paths leading to the same outcome. Traditional case study methodologies often propose a singular causal path to explain an outcome, presenting a challenge for IPT when addressing

securitisation, particularly in cases where cross-case comparisons are limited. IPT, however, does not aim to eliminate equifinality; instead, it explicitly deals with it by thoroughly exploring the one path taken (Robinson, 2017). While IPT claims explanatory status for the identified causal process, it acknowledges that this process is just among many potential explanations for the outcome.

This fundamental aspect of IPT addresses why a specific explanation is chosen over others. For instance, this thesis incorporates the underlying structure of dependency, specifically domestic patron-client relations, as the condition enabling the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes. This contrasts with the explanatory focus on the personal interests of decision-makers in the neo-classical realist framework. Neoclassical realism, in its simplicity, falls short in several aspects. Firstly, it cannot account for situations where decision-makers' interests diverge from national interests, leading to policies that do not necessarily benefit the country. Secondly, it overly concentrates on the president's power and interests, neglecting the influence of other significant actors, such as the business sector, civil society groups, and public opinion, in shaping government policies. The complexity of the causal process is inadequately addressed within the confines of neoclassical realism, particularly in instances where opposition to policy changes actively exists.

Therefore, an alternative explanation is needed to comprehensively account for the entire causal process. While power and interest are factors, they are not the sole explanatory factors, given the inherent complexity of the social world. Simplicity in explanation does not equate to correctness

or provide a comprehensive view of the situation. Social constructivists argue that the social world, including foreign policy, is collectively constructed, with various factors contributing to the overall outcome, including ideational and normative ones. Consequently, IPT's approach, by exploring the intricacies of the causal process, offers a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in explaining outcomes in international relations.

### ***Compatibility to Mixed Methods***

Another noteworthy characteristic of IPT is its compatibility with mixed research methods and analysis. Oliveira (2017) integrates constitutive elements into a critical realist framework to analyse the securitisation of Somali piracy. This study uses qualitative and quantitative data from the International Chamber of Commerce's discourse and statistical reports to analyse how piracy was framed and escalated. Ultimately, state leaders and international organisations, such as the UN's International Maritime Organisation and the Security Council, treated piracy as an existential threat, leading to evolved securitisation moves. In a second study, Robinson (2017) employs IPT to explore the securitisation of irregular migration, focusing on the 2010 "Sun Sea" incident. Using qualitative data from interviews and grey literature, Robinson identifies mechanisms like the self-fulfilling prophecy and facilitating conditions that led to the securitisation of the crisis under specific contextual conditions. Both studies demonstrate IPT's effectiveness in analysing complex securitisation processes with diverse research methods.

While both Oliveira (2017) and Robinson (2017) employed mixed methods in their data collection and analysis, Oliveira used quantitative and qualitative datasets, whereas Robinson relied on two types of qualitative data. The choice of mixed methods stems from the authors' different epistemological commitments, with Oliveira aligning with critical realism and Robinson embracing the constructivist framework of Securitization Theory. Nonetheless, the crucial point is that IPT is amenable to a multi-methods approach.

This observation aligns with the arguments regarding triangulation among various data sources in PT (Bennett & Checkel, 2014). However, while Bennett and Checkel suggest that triangulation can validate causal inferences derived from IPT by incorporating diverse data sources, it is essential to consider two issues: first, different types of data yield distinct forms of knowledge and cannot validate each other inherently, and second, multiple data sources must be analysed in a manner consistent with the treatment of a single data source (Small, 2011).

The preceding discussions have elucidated the specific type of PT advocated in this thesis, which stands at the forefront of cutting-edge methodologies in the social sciences. While continued reflection and articulation are imperative, the highlighted attributes of IPT in this chapter provide a robust foundation for the forthcoming within-case analysis in Chapter 7. These distinctive characteristics of IPT encompass an expanded understanding of causality, a keen focus on the interplay between mechanisms and scope conditions, the ability to explain outcomes in

specific empirical puzzles, a grounding in the meaning-making capacity of agents, acknowledgement of non-generalisability, equifinality, and compatibility with mixed research methods. Each of these facets contributes to IPT's unique analytical power. The subsequent section of this chapter emphasises how IPT is not just a theoretical construct but a practical and indispensable tool for navigating the complexities of this research. The multifaceted nature of IPT equips researchers with the depth and nuance necessary to unravel intricate political phenomena, making it a compelling and pertinent method for the nuanced analysis required in this study.

### **The Research Framework**

Employing the IPT technique discussed above, this research explores the causal mechanism derived from the securitisation framework to analyse the empirical puzzle in Chapter 7. Chapter 7 delves into the analysis of empirical data on the Philippine policy response to an incident that President Duterte characterised as an “unfortunate maritime incident” near the Recto Bank (also known as Reed Bank) on 9 June 2019. Chapter 7 contends that the alleged ramming incident, resulting in the sinking of the Philippine fishing boat FBca Gem-Ver 1 and the abandonment of 22 Filipino fishermen, posed an existential threat. Regrettably, this incident triggered a series of China-centric policy responses from the Philippines. It was only during this specific maritime episode, following a continuous threat dating back to 1995, that the Philippine government chose to “de-securitise”. Sources providing mechanistic manifestations of the securitisation

framework include publicly available documents, such as official online statements, recorded press releases and transcripts, corroborated news accounts from various media sources, video interviews online, and secondary opinion polls. While the primary method of analysis for most of the collected data is Discourse Analysis, PT, as a practical within-case study method, allows for the utilisation of other research methods like key informant interviews and surveys.

This section combines three integral components of the within-case analysis portion of the research project: (1) the theoretical foundations, (2) the research methodology and methods employed, and (3) the contextual background related to the Philippine response to the SCS disputes. Figure 4.1 visually represents this synthesis, with terminologies associated with the securitisation framework in blue, expressions from the IPT technique in red, and empirical observations in black. This study employs PT and uses the securitisation framework to unravel the intricate puzzle of Philippine policy responses triggered by a specific incident – the collision between a Filipino and a Chinese fishing vessel. In this social constructivist interpretation of Philippine foreign policy, the trigger emanated from persistent Chinese assertiveness in the WPS. This external event subsequently resulted in the adoption of de-securitising policies by the Duterte government in response to the maritime episode.

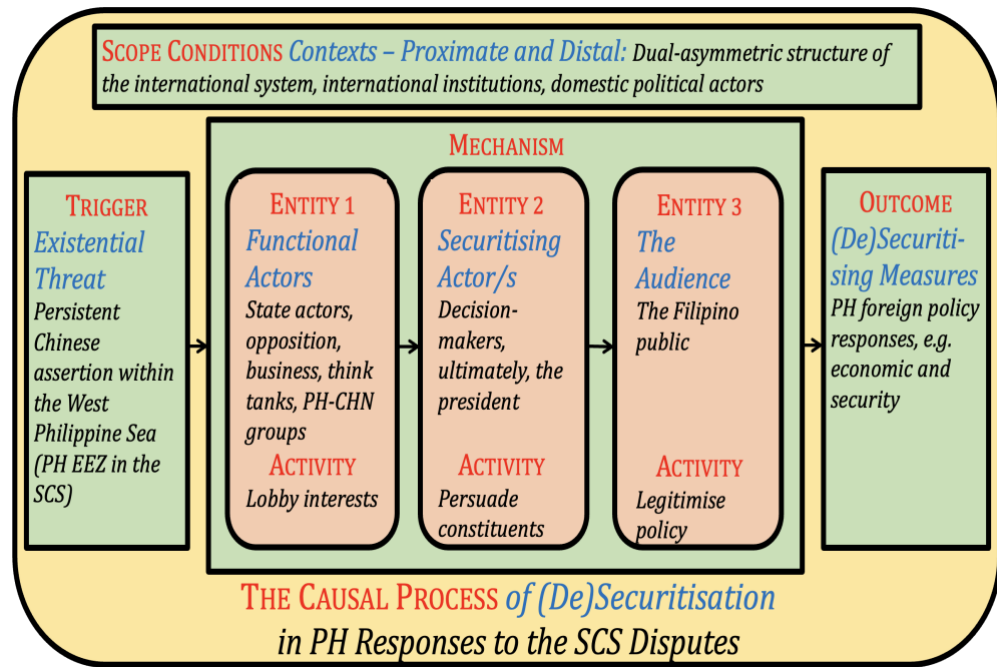


Figure 4.5 – The Research Framework

The research explores a process-mechanism understanding rooted in securitisation's notion of socially constructed (de-)securitising measures. This process involves various actors, including functional actors such as China and other international stakeholders, Philippine legislators, domestic opposition figures, business groups, think tanks, and academic institutions. These actors engage in lobbying efforts to advance their respective interests. President Duterte and government officials, in their roles as power-holders and decision-makers, persuaded the 22 fishermen affected by the incident and the broader voting public to rally behind their policy choices. Simultaneously, the audience, comprising the 22 Gem-Ver 1 fishermen and the Filipino nation, played a pivotal role in legitimising these securitising measures through their support.

The scope conditions, or the contextual backdrop within which the empirical data were observed, encompass many factors. These include the geopolitics among global and regional powers, the dynamics of double asymmetric power relations involving the Philippines, the US, and China, the influence of international institutions like the UN and the ASEAN, and the intricacies of patron-client relationships within domestic politics. This comprehensive framework provides a holistic understanding of the multifaceted interplay between actors, mechanisms, and contextual elements that shape the Philippine response to the ongoing challenges in the WPS.

### **Evaluating Mechanistic Evidence**

As considered earlier, IPT stands out as a method meticulously crafted to unravel specific empirical puzzles. This systematic approach involves a sequence of steps: firstly, gathering comprehensive data related to the case being examined; next, identifying suitable theoretical frameworks to interpret the social phenomenon effectively; and finally, evaluating the presence and functionality of hypothesised mechanisms within the empirical case study. Beach and Pedersen (2013; 2019) introduce the concept of “mechanistic evidence” to gauge the existence and activities of entities associated with the mechanism, emphasising the necessity of rich and diverse evidence. This can span qualitative and quantitative data, expert opinions, and historical information, fostering an iterative dialogue between the proposed mechanism and its observable manifestations.



This thesis asserts that the securitisation framework serves as the underlying mechanism that explains how the sustained threat in the SCS prompted de-securitising measures by the Philippine government. The mechanism involves functional actors advocating for their interests, a decision-maker shaping implemented measures, and the public, crucial for legitimising these actions. Observable manifestations are then clearly defined to assess whether each political agent within the mechanism has fulfilled its specified role in the securitisation process.

For example, evidence demonstrating that functional actors (including private sectors, government agencies, local governments, and civil society groups) held meetings with the decision-maker to convey their concerns substantiates their lobbying efforts. The decision by the Duterte administration, identified as the (de)securitising agent, to adopt particular policies is corroborated by official public documents and President Duterte's public statements outlining the Philippine strategy. Public opinion surveys revealing high approval ratings serve as indications of public support. Notably, despite significant opposition from influential political groups expressing their disagreements and discontent with Duterte's policies, the president maintained his position of authority.

Empirical manifestations of the theorised mechanism were derived from a diverse range of sources, including (1) public documents and statements from the Duterte administration and the Philippine Senate, which were accessible through official Philippine government websites; (2) official pronouncements from the Chinese government and other international actors concerning the case under consideration; (4) press

releases issued by key opposition figures and institutions; (5) cross-referenced reports on Philippine foreign affairs published by various media outlets; and (6) surveys conducted by two prominent Philippine research institutions, namely the Social Weather Stations, which provided net satisfaction ratings of President Duterte, and Pulse Asia Research, which supplied approval and trust ratings for top national officials. Equipped with this dataset, the causal process of de-securitisation was tracked using the synthesis framework depicted in the diagram above. Empirical observations were integrated into a coherent causal narrative encompassing the trigger, the outcome, the securitisation mechanism, and the scope conditions.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodology and research methods deployed in the thesis, specifically focusing on analysing the Philippine responses to the SCS disputes. Chapter 5 contains a comprehensive cross-case analysis spanning 1995 to 2016, utilising the Copenhagen School's securitization-as-speech-act framework and Discourse Analysis. The exploration extends beyond traditional military concerns, incorporating economic and environmental dimensions across five securitisation cases. Building on this research framework, Chapter 6 narrows its focus to 2016 to 2022, aligning with the Duterte Administration. The study delves into three military-related securitisation cases using the Copenhagen School's framework and Discourse Analysis. The comparative analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 brings to light similarities, outcomes, and a deviant case,

concluding with a nuanced consideration of the historical context spanning from 1995 to 2019.

Chapter 7 examines the 2019 Ramming, Sinking, and Abandonment Incident in the Reed Bank. Here, the theoretical framework expands to encompass the sociological-causal variant of securitisation, treating Securitization Theory as a causal mechanism. The study employs Interpretivist Process Tracing, honing in on one deviant case and employing an integrated theory-method-empirical case framework. This approach ensures a comprehensive perspective on securitisation within the intricate context of the 2019 Reed Bank incident. As a result, the study captures the broader trends in securitisation and provides a nuanced understanding of the specific dynamics at play in this critical incident.

## **Chapter 5: Comparative Case Study (Period 1) – Existential Threats from 1995 until the Arbitration**

### **Introduction**

This chapter investigates China's actions in the SCS between 1995 and 2016, which the Philippines interpreted as existential threats, leading to the adoption of securitizing measures. Throughout these two decades, the Philippines consistently regarded incursions into the WPS as security concerns.

Central to these disputes was China's assertion of historic rights that exceeded the boundaries set by UNCLOS. China defended these rights by exploiting resources and impeding other coastal states' access to the same areas. Numerous contested areas fell well within 200 miles of the Philippines' coastline. They often extended hundreds of miles beyond any EEZ or CS that China could legitimately claim under UNCLOS. China's insistence on these alleged rights, particularly in areas exceeding its UNCLOS entitlements, introduced significant uncertainty and instability into Philippines-China relations and the broader regional context.

Despite exhausting all diplomatic channels, which the Chinese government consistently disregarded, the Philippines was compelled to resort to an international legal battle. This legal pursuit marked the Philippines' ultimate securitizing response to what it perceived as China's persistent existential threat in the SCS.

This chapter relies on primary sources, including the Memorial, Supplemental Documents, and Written Responses submitted by the Philippines to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea as part of the SCS Arbitration proceedings. The comprehensive written submissions, accompanied by annexes, cover various aspects of the case, including matters related to jurisdiction and admissibility. Additionally, the analysis draws on transcripts of hearings concerning the case's merits, establishing a foundational basis for examination.

Each discussion of security issues employs Balzacq's (2011b) formalisation of Discourse Analysis, incorporating considerations such as the appropriateness of data sources, intertextuality (referred to as "Story Lines" by Hajer, 1997), and intratextuality, further elucidated by Vuori (2008). These analytical steps facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the Philippines' written submissions and oral hearings during the SCS Arbitration, as discussed in Chapter 4 on Methodology and Methods.

In the subsequent sections, the chapter delves into security issues within the context of the Copenhagen School's framework, specifically focusing on three of the five delineated security sectors: military security, economic security, and the environmental sector. The military security concerns encompass China's construction activities at Mischief Reef, the aggressive behaviour of Chinese vessels towards Philippine vessels at Scarborough Shoal, and China's unlawful conduct at Second Thomas Shoal during the SCS arbitration proceedings. Beyond military security, the chapter explores China's interference with the Philippines' exercise of sovereign rights within its EEZ and CS as an economic security issue.

Additionally, it addresses the environmental sector, examining China's accountability for causing damage to ecosystems at Mischief Reef, Scarborough Shoal, and Second Thomas Shoal, thus violating its obligations under UNCLOS and impinging upon the sovereign rights of the Philippines. This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of how the Philippines framed Chinese violations of UNCLOS as existential threats, offering invaluable insights into the securitisation processes underlying these complex disputes.

## **Security Issues in the Military Sector**

As Buzan et al. (1998) discuss, securitization complexities within the military sector are deeply institutionalised and significantly influenced by the international system. In this process, nation-states emerge as pivotal actors, serving as central referent objects possessing military capabilities. Simultaneously, ruling elites play crucial securitising roles, actively shaping discourse on military security. The concept of sovereignty, linked to exclusive governance rights over territories and inhabitants, underscores states' primary orientation toward using force. While traditionally focused on external military threats, contemporary state security has expanded to include the well-being and safety of citizens.

Military security relies on two critical dimensions: actual military capabilities and perceptions of each other's intentions, from the potential for destruction to subtle coercive tactics (Buzan et al., 1998). Geographical, historical, and political factors shape the intricacies of military sector securitization. Geography influences threat perceptions, with longer

distances often favouring defenders. Historical experiences, such as past conflicts, shape contemporary threat perceptions, influencing state policies and military postures. Political factors, encompassing international recognition and ideological differences, contribute to either cooperation or tension. Amidst these dynamics, the protection of human rights remains integral, although governance concerns complicate the military security landscape. As such, securitization in the military sector is a complex process, and a comprehensive understanding of these intricacies is essential for unravelling how military issues are framed as security concerns and how states respond within the international system.

Transitioning to the specific case of the SCS disputes, this section delves into military security, examining three distinct issues. The first revolves around China's construction activities at Mischief Reef, which violated provisions outlined in UNCLOS regarding the construction, operation, and use of artificial islands, installations, and structures and infringed upon the exclusive rights of the Philippines. The second concern pertains to the aggressive behaviour of Chinese vessels towards Philippine vessels in waters adjacent to Scarborough Shoal, contravening UNCLOS provisions and infringing upon the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea. The third incident involves China's unlawful conduct at Second Thomas Shoal during the SCS arbitration proceedings, including threats to remove the Philippine presence and the interception of vessels delivering essential supplies to Filipino nationals stationed there. These examples emphasise the broader

implications of military security within the intricate dynamics of international relations.

### **Data Sources for the Three Military Security Issues**

Securitising the military dimension of the SCS disputes involves three key submissions presented in the Memorial of the Philippines Vol. 1 (RP, 2014a, p. 272):

Submission 12 requests the Tribunal to adjudge and declare that

*China's occupation of and construction activities on Mischief*

*Reef:*

*(a) violate the provisions of the Convention concerning artificial islands, installations and structures;*

*(b) violate China's duties to protect and preserve the marine environment under the Convention; and*

*(c) constitute unlawful acts of attempted appropriation in violation of the Convention;*

Submission 13 is that

*China has breached its obligations under the Convention by operating its law enforcement vessels in a dangerous manner, causing serious risk of collision to Philippine vessels navigating in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal;*

And Submission 14 states



*Since the commencement of this arbitration in January 2013, China has unlawfully aggravated and extended the dispute by, among other things:*

*(a) interfering with the Philippines' rights of navigation in the waters at and adjacent to Second Thomas Shoal;*

*(b) preventing the rotation and resupply of Philippine personnel stationed at Second Thomas Shoal; and*

*(c) endangering the health and well-being of Philippine personnel stationed at Second Thomas Shoal.*

The following subsections analyse all texts about three securitised military issues: (1) Submission 12.a and 12.c – Chinese de facto control over Mischief Reef since 1995; (2) Submission 13 – Dangerous and unlawful conduct of China's vessels at Scarborough Shoal in 2012; and (3) Submission 14 – Harassment of supply missions at Second Thomas Shoal in 2014.

The following texts from the Memorial of the Philippines (RP, 2014a), the corresponding transcripts of the hearing on the particular merits of the case (PCA, 2015b), and the cited annexes are the empirical data for the Discourse Analysis:

1. China's construction of artificial islands, installations, and structures on Mischief Reef since 1995

- a. Memorial of the Philippines, Vol. 1, Nos. 6.90-6.113, pp. 193-202
  - b. Transcript Day 2, First Round Submissions by Prof Sands, pp. 131-150.
- 2. Dangerous and unlawful conduct of China's vessels at Scarborough Shoal in 2012
  - a. Memorial of the Philippines, Vol. 1, Nos. 6.114-6.147, pp. 202-213
  - b. Transcript Day 2, First Round Submissions by Prof Sands, pp. 150-162.
- 3. Harassment of Supply Missions at Second Thomas Shoal in 2014
  - a. Memorial of the Philippines, Vol. 1, Nos. 3.59-3.66, pp. 61-63.
  - b. Memorial of the Philippines, Vol. 1, Nos. 6.148-6.152, pp. 214-215.
  - c. Transcript Day 2, First Round Submissions by Mr Martin, pp. 162-187.

In each subsequent subsection, Discourse Analysis is applied to explore the narrative surrounding the three identified military threats (intertextuality) and to dissect the communication strategies and speech acts employed by the Philippine government as the securitising actor of the state (intratextuality). This comprehensive analysis provides insights into

the securitization of these military issues within the context of the SCS disputes.

### **Military Security Issue 1: Chinese Control over Mischief Reef since 1995**

China has constructed artificial islands, installations, and structures on Mischief Reef, also known as “Panganiban Reef” in the Philippines, a low-tide elevation in the WPS. Mischief Reef is approximately 126 nautical miles from the Philippine coastlines in Palawan, significantly closer than its distance of about 596 nautical miles from the nearest point on China’s Hainan Island (RP, 2014a). Despite its proximity to Palawan, Mischief Reef does not fall within 200 nautical miles of any feature that would grant entitlement to an EEZ or CS based on UNCLOS. For a visual representation of the location of Mischief Reef in the Southern Sector of the SCS, refer to Figure 1.3, presented again below as Figure 5.1.

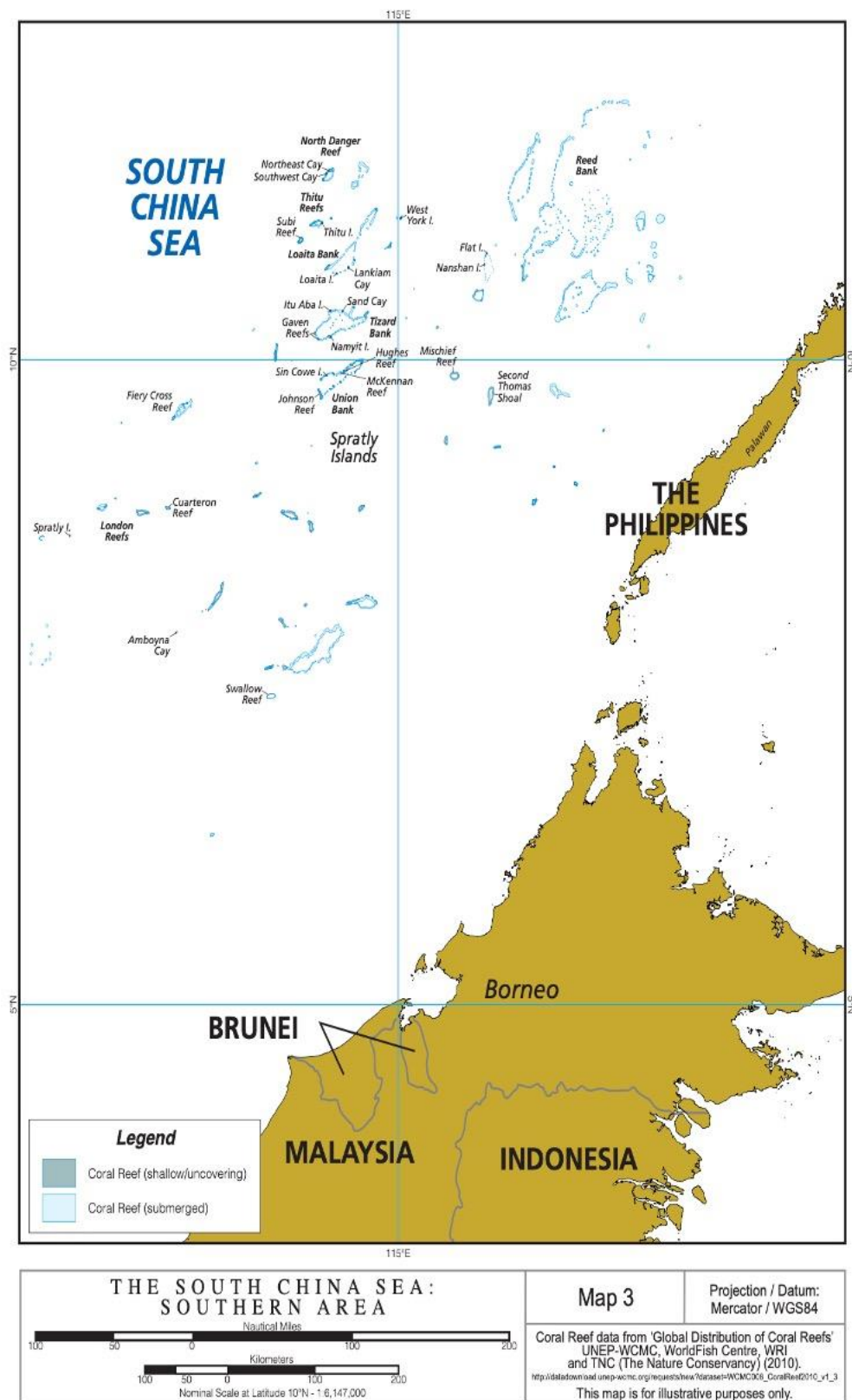


Figure 5.6 – Mischief Reef in the South Sector of the SCS

China's construction activities began in Mischief Reef in 1994. Figure 5.2 showcases satellite imagery captured in 1994 and offers a glimpse of the reef in its original state before substantial alterations. Only small, exposed areas were visible during low tide during this period. However, China has since erected concrete platforms atop the delicate coral ecosystem and developed various structures on these platforms. These actions undertaken by China at Mischief Reef counter the stipulations outlined in UNCLOS Articles 60 and 80 about artificial islands, installations, and structures. The Philippines perceives these actions as unlawful to assert territorial claims under UNCLOS.

## MISCHIEF REEF

(Landsat TM image – 26 April 1994)

*Prepared by: International Mapping*



Landsat TM - Band 1 (0.45 - 0.52  $\mu\text{m}$ , increased penetration of water)



Landsat TM - Band 4 (0.76 - 0.90  $\mu\text{m}$ , increased absorption by water)

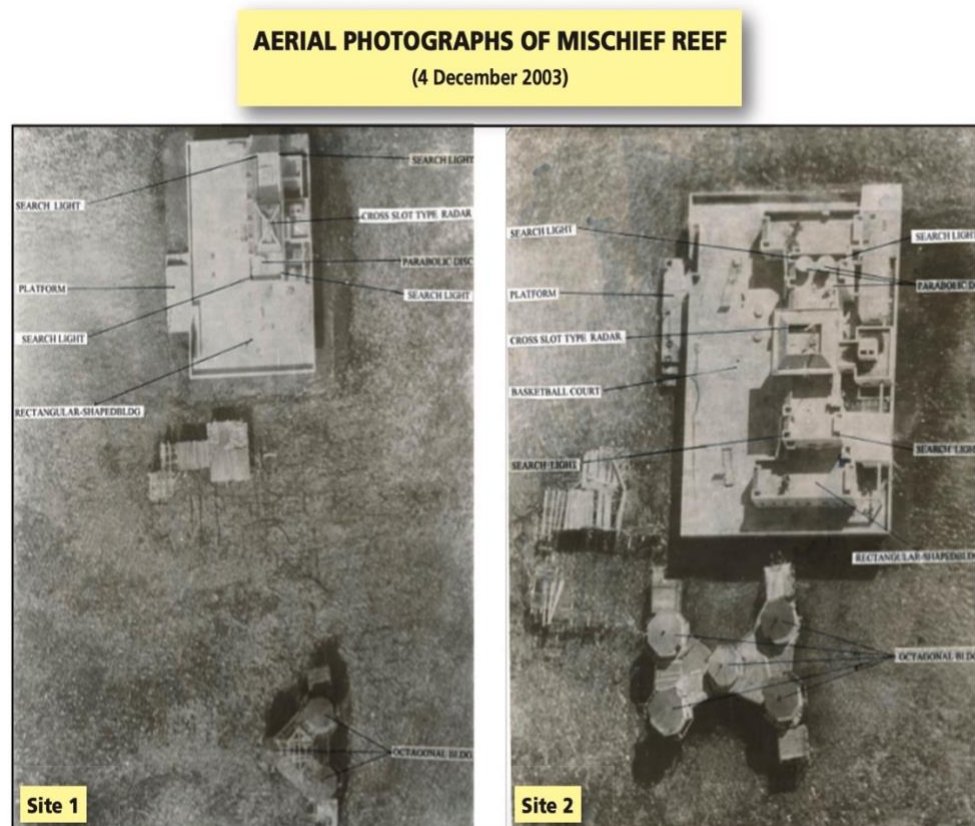
*Figure 5.7 – Mischief Reef, 26 April 1994*

### ***Intertextuality: The Takeover Commencing in 1995***

In January 1995, China started an active campaign to construct artificial islands on Mischief Reef, displaying the Chinese flag at four locations. These island clusters were crafted from robust materials, a blend of aluminium and fibreglass, reinforced by steel bars with cement bases and complemented by guardhouses. Reports from Filipino fishermen revealed approximately 1,000 uniformed individuals aboard eleven Chinese vessels near these structures. On 6 February 1995, the Philippines conveyed their concerns to the Chinese Ambassador in Manila. They cited the presence of sizable warships and smaller vessels affiliated with China near Mischief Reef, as well as China's construction activities and the detention of Filipino fishermen. The Philippines asserted that Mischief Reef fell within its territory, contending that China's actions violated the principles in the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the SCS. China refuted these allegations, asserting that the structures on the reef were not military and posed no threat.

Between October 1998 and February 1999, China substantially modified Mischief Reef, dismantling two structures and expanding two others. Despite initial claims of renovation, China's actions surpassed the stated scope. They erected three-story buildings, leading to "massive" construction activities involving 100-150 workers. On 5 November 1998, the Philippines formally opposed China's unauthorised structures, emphasising Mischief Reef's permanently submerged status. The Philippines demanded an immediate cessation of construction and dismantling of completed work. By February 1999, a helicopter pad, new

communications equipment, and wharves were added to one of the sites on Mischief Reef. China maintained that these facilities were for civilian purposes, not military use, a commitment reaffirmed in subsequent bilateral meetings. By 2003, aerial photographs revealed the evolution of these sites into fully developed artificial islands.



*Figure 5.8 – Mischief Reef, 4 December 2003*

From 2004 to 2012, China incorporated telecommunication equipment into the structures at both sites. Figures 5.4 and 5.5, which present aerial photographs taken on 27 February 2013, offer a visual reference to depict the situation at that specific juncture.





*Figure 5.9 – Mischief Reef, Site 1, 27 February 2013*

# AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF SITE 2 AT MISCHIEF REEF

(27 February 2013)

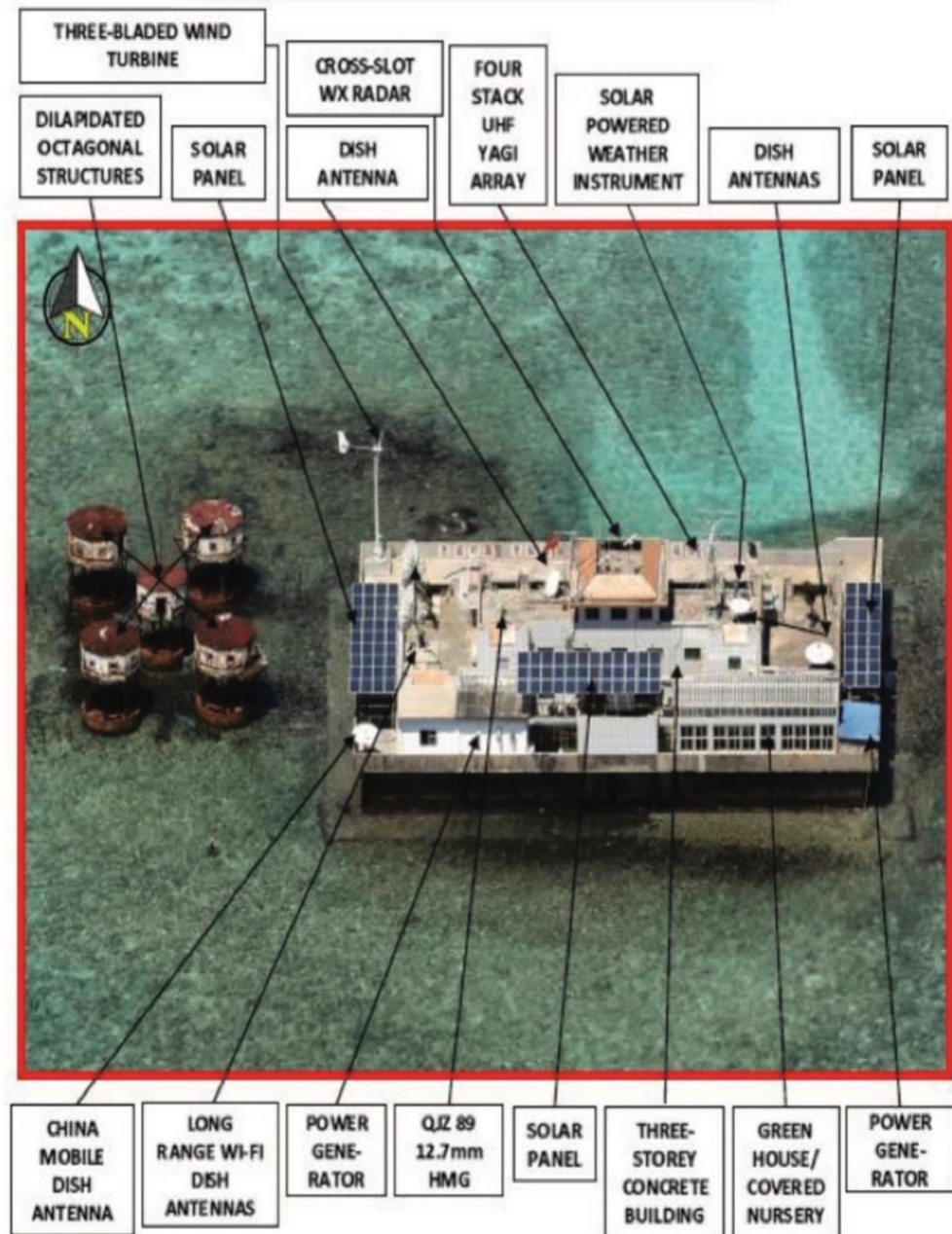


Figure 5.10 – Mischief Reef, Site 2, 27 February 2013

The Philippine submission to the SCS Arbitration asserted that creating an artificial island, installation, or structure within another state's EEZ without consent while claiming title constituted an unlawful appropriation act. As per UNCLOS, low-tide elevations are distinct from

islands or land territories regarding sovereign acquisition. The International Court of Justice clearly distinguished that low-tide elevations cannot be subject to appropriation under general international law (RP, 2014a). Determining sovereignty and associated rights is governed by UNCLOS, especially concerning the specific maritime zone where these features are located. If these features fall within the territorial sea, their sovereignty is subject to the state within that territorial sea.

Mischief Reef is situated less than 200 nautical miles from Palawan and does not fall within 200 nautical miles of any other feature claimed by China that could generate an EEZ or CS. Therefore, the Philippines has jurisdiction over the EEZ and CS of the reef based on UNCLOS. Any state intending to construct an artificial island, installation, or structure on Mischief Reef must seek authorisation from the Philippines. Unfortunately, China neither sought nor obtained such permission, proceeding with activities that elicited strong objections from the Philippines.

### ***Intratextuality: The Securitizing Move***

Chinese forces have taken control of Mischief Reef since 1995. In his letter dated 6 February 1995 addressed to the Philippine Ambassador to China (Romualdo Ong), Undersecretary for Policy at the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Rodolfo Severino shared an *Aide Memoire* that he had presented to the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Philippines (Huang Guifang). Severino underscored the Philippines' deep concerns regarding three key issues in this memorandum. Severino's emphasis on China's actions causing destabilisation in an area within the

SCS was particularly significant. Notably, this area was closer to the Philippines than any other Chinese-occupied location. Annex 17 of the Written Submission of the Philippines to the SCS Arbitration (RP, 2014a) contains Severino's memorandum to Ong, providing additional details on these concerns.



Kagawaran ng Hignapang Panlabas

Department of Foreign Affairs

MANILA

OFFICE OF THE UNDERSECRETARY FOR POLICY

VERY URGENT  
SECRET

AMBAPHIL BEIJING

6 FEBRUARY 1995

FOR FYI ONLY, I GAVE ATTACHED AIDE MEMOIRE TO CHINESE  
AMBASSADOR TODAY. FOLLOWING IS ACCOUNT OF HIS CALL ON ME:

As approved by the President, the Department called the PRC Ambassador yesterday afternoon and summoned him to the Department to meet with Undersecretary Rodolfo C. Severino at 0830H today. Undersecretary Severino expressed to the PRC ambassador the gravity of the Philippines' concern. Undersecretary Severino objected particularly to the fact that the Chinese had made a significant change in the disposition of forces in the South China Sea and had done so in a place nearer to the Philippines than any other such Chinese-occupied spot. This is destabilizing to the situation, Undersecretary Severino told the PRC Ambassador, and therefore, contrary to the Philippines' understanding of what was required for peace and stability in the area.

The PRC Ambassador merely repeated previous statements of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokesman that the Chinese Navy had not arrested and detained Filipino fishermen and was not building a "base" on "Meijijiao".

Undersecretary Severino then handed the PRC Ambassador the attached *aide memoire*.

YOU ARE NOT TO MAKE ANY REPRESENTATIONS WITH PROC ON THIS. IF SUMMONED, YOU ARE MERELY TO SAY THAT YOU WILL CONVEY TO DEFORAF WHATEVER PROC TELLS YOU. END.

  
RODOLFO C. SEVERINO  
Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs

*Annex 17. Memorandum from the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines to the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Manila (6 February 1995), p 1.*



## AIDE MEMOIRE

The Philippine Government expresses its serious concern over the following:

1. The presence of three large warships and five smaller vessels belonging to the People's Republic of China on or around Panganiban Reef, otherwise known as Mischief Reef;
2. The construction by the People's Republic of China of certain structures on Panganiban Reef; and
3. The detention of Filipino fishermen by military elements of the People's Republic of China deployed on and around Panganiban Reef.

Panganiban Reef is part of Philippine territory. Therefore, the presence of personnel and vessels of the People's Republic of China in the area is a violation of the sovereignty of the Philippines and of the norms of international law.

Moreover, it violates the spirit of the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea, to which both the Philippines and the People's Republic of China adhere, and further complicates the situation in the South China Sea.

The People's Republic of China is called upon to account for the detention of Filipino nationals.

In order to promote stability in the area, the personnel and vessels of the People's Republic of China must be removed forthwith from Panganiban Reef and further acts must be avoided which may adversely affect the peace and stability of the South China Sea and of East Asia as a whole.

The Philippine Government, in accordance with its well-known position on the South China Sea question, is confident that this matter shall be resolved peacefully and amicably.

6 February 1995

*Annex 17. Memorandum from the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines to the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Manila (6 February 1995), p. 2.*

This *Aide Memoire* represents a significant securitisation effort, with DFA Undersecretary Severino as the securitising actor. Furthermore, Severino's correspondence to Ong indicated that then-President Fidel Ramos had sanctioned his meeting with Chinese Ambassador Huang. Hence, it can be inferred that Ramos, as the Philippine government's leader, played the securitising actor in this incident. The intended audience

for this *Aide Memoire* was Ambassador Huang, serving as the representative of the Chinese Government.

The *Aide Memoire* is analysed using Vuori's (2008) three-part, structure of a speech act. Contained within the *Aide Memoire* is a clear claim: the presence of China's military within Philippine territory constitutes a violation of Philippine sovereignty, international law, specifically UNCLOS, and the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the SCS. The memo warned that these violations significantly complicated the situation in the SCS. The *Aide Memoire* concluded with demands for China to (1) explain the detention of Filipinos in the Panganiban (Mischief) Reef, (2) remove Chinese personnel and vessels in the area, and (3) avoid acts affecting peace and stability in the region. Thus, using the *Aide Memoire* as its speech act, the Philippines securitised China's control over the Mischief since 1995.

## **Military Security Issue 2: Dangerous and Unlawful Conduct of China's Vessels at Scarborough Shoal in 2012**

In May 2012, a series of concerning incidents in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal ("Bajo de Masinloc" in the Philippines) within the Northern Sector of the SCS involved Chinese vessels engaging in perilous manoeuvres that posed a significant threat to Philippine vessels operating in the area (RP, 2014a). Two Chinese government agencies owned and operated these vessels, specifically the Fisheries and Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) and the China Marine Surveillance (CMS). The primary

objective behind these manoeuvres was discouraging and obstructing Philippine vessels from approaching Scarborough Shoal.

This act of interference and intimidation raised serious concerns, not only for the Philippines but also in the context of international maritime law. The Philippines promptly asserted that these actions violated established regulations and norms under UNCLOS, particularly referencing Articles 94 and 21. UNCLOS Articles 94 and 21 outline fundamental principles related to the safe navigation of vessels in international waters, emphasising the responsibility of states to ensure the safety of navigation for all ships and to act following established international maritime rules and practices.

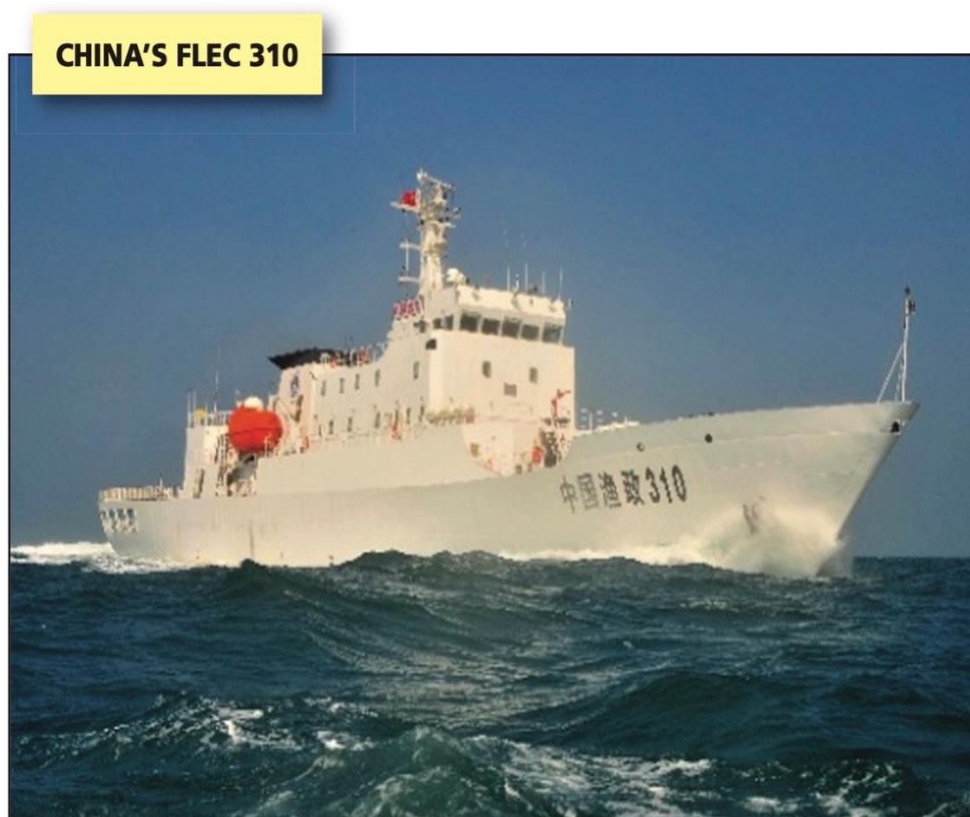
Furthermore, the Philippines contended that the manoeuvres also contravened international regulations outlined in the Convention on the International Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea (COLREGS). COLREGS is the treaty that governs the conduct of vessels at sea to prevent collisions, ensuring the safety of maritime navigation. COLREGS, binding both the Philippines and China, were ratified by China on 7 January 1980, taking effect on 25 May 1980. The Philippines acceded to the COLREGS on 15 December 1981, becoming effective on 15 March 1982.

The incident at Scarborough Shoal underscored not only the potential risks to maritime safety and navigation but also the imperative for all parties involved to adhere to established international laws and agreements governing the conduct of vessels at sea.



### ***Intertextuality: Chinese Vessels' Aggressive Manoeuvres***

On 28 April 2012, Philippine marine vessel BRP Pampanga Search and Rescue Vessel (SARV-)003 faced FLEC 310's aggressive manoeuvres, weighing 2,580 tonnes and measuring 108 meters long, equipped with advanced features. Refer to Figure 5.6 for a snapshot of FLEC 310.



*Figure 5.11 – FLEC 310*

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported that FLEC 310 dangerously approached BRP Pampanga, veering away at the last moment. Fifteen minutes later, FLEC 310 neared another Philippine vessel, BRP EDSA II SARV-002, generating a 2-meter wave, damaging two rubber boats.

PCG unequivocally characterised these actions as bullying, constituting a clear violation of COLREGS.

This incident was not isolated (RP, 2014a). In May 2012, several alarming incidents occurred in the SCS involving a Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) boat, MCS 3008, and multiple Chinese vessels. MCS 3008 aimed to supply a PCG vessel at Scarborough Shoal, a strategically important area. Critical Chinese vessels included CMS 71, a massive 1,111-tonne vessel, which dangerously manoeuvred near MCS 3008. Swiftly reacting, MCS 3008 avoided a collision, and tension rose as CMS 71 attempted another hazardous manoeuvre. Another Chinese state vessel, FLEC 303, mirrored the aggressive behaviour of CMS 71, surging towards MCS 3008, which employed a similar evasion tactic. An hour later, a third Chinese vessel, CMS 84, a substantial 1,500-tonne, 88-meter vessel, dangerously approached MCS 3008 as it was alongside BRP Corregidor, the Philippine vessel it sought to resupply. MCS 3008, trailed by Chinese vessels, faced impending manoeuvres, forcing evasive actions. The most perilous moment occurred when FLEC 306 closed in, narrowly avoided by MCS 3008's sharp manoeuvres.

Tensions escalated when China issued a stern warning to the Philippines, directing them to cease sending vessels to Scarborough Shoal or face dire consequences. Chinese vessels repeatedly engaged in aggressive manoeuvres, attempting to ram or harass Philippine vessels approaching the area. To avert the risk of violent confrontations, the Philippines refrained from dispatching vessels to Scarborough Shoal and

instead prioritised peaceful approaches to resolve the dispute, such as the SCS Arbitration.

***Intratextuality: Notes Verbales as Speech Acts***

The Philippines formally expressed concerns regarding the dangerous actions of Chinese vessels through diplomatic channels. A *Note Verbale*, dated 30 April 2012, with reference No. 12-122, was transmitted by the DFA to the Chinese Embassy in Manila. The DFA sent another *Note Verbale*, No. 12-1372, to the Embassies of ASEAN Member States in Manila on 21 May 2012. These two documents, cited as Annex 209 and Annex 210 in the Memorial submitted by the Philippines (RP, 2014a), are collectively analysed using Vuori's framework for intratextual analysis, treating them as securitizing speech acts. The full texts of the *Notes Verbales* are provided below for reference.

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
MANILA

No. 12 1222

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines presents its compliments to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China and has the honor to express its grave concerns over the repeated intrusions by Chinese vessels into Philippine territorial waters in and around Bajo de Masinloc in clear violation of Philippine sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction.

The Department also expresses its grave concern over the provocative and extremely dangerous maneuvers committed by Chinese vessels against Philippine vessels, in particular, the incidents involving the Chinese Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC)-310 on two Philippine Search and Rescue Vessels SARV-002 and SARV-003 in the Bajo de Masinloc, as witnessed and reported by the officers aboard these vessels:

**26 April 2012**

- At 0755H, FLEC 310 at a speed of 20 knots headed directly for SARV-003. FLEC 310 executed various maneuvers and passed at dead astern (at the back) of SARV 003 at a distance of 1.1 nautical miles.

**28 April 2012**

- At 0900H, FLEC-310 approached at a speed of 20.3 knots a lying to (at stop position) SARV-003 from her port (left) bow heading towards her then at 600 yards veered away crossing to the starboard (right) side of SARV-003.
- At 0915H, FLEC-310 at a speed of 20.6 knots passed by SARV-002 from her starboard (right) to the port (left) side at a distance of 200 yards.
- In both instances, the speeding FLEC-310 generated a 2 meter wave in her wake.

The Philippine SARV-002 and SARV-003 did not instigate any action that would necessitate provocative reactions of the Chinese FLEC-310. In spite of the provocative and extremely dangerous actions perpetuated by the Chinese FLEC-310, the Philippine Search and Rescue Vessels did not react. The dangerous maneuvers of the Chinese vessels endangered the Philippine vessels and their crew. For the safety of vessels, the Philippines requests China to instruct its ships to observe the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collision at Sea, 1972 (COLREG 72).

*Annex 209. Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 12-1222 (30 April 2012), p. 1.*

The provocative and dangerous actions of the Chinese FLEC-310 run contrary to the statements issued by the People's Republic of China that it does not want to aggravate the situation.

The Department urges the People's Republic of China to respect Philippine sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction over the Bajo de Masinloc and the waters in and around the area and to cease and desist from taking provocative and dangerous actions by its Chinese vessels that could escalate the tension in the Bajo de Masinloc area.

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China the assurances of its highest consideration.

Manila, 30 April 2012

Embassy of the People's Republic of China  
MANILA



*Annex 209. Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 12-1222 (30 April 2012), p. 2.*

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
MANILA

No. 12-1372

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines presents its compliments to all Embassies of ASEAN Member States and with reference to the situation in Bajo de Masinloc, has the honor to inform the latter that the Philippines has filed the following diplomatic protest to the People's Republic of China:

\* The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines presents its compliments to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China and with reference to the situation in Bajo de Masinloc, has the honor to express its grave concern over China's continuing actions that escalate tension in the area.

At around 1900 H of even date, the Department received a report from the Philippine Coast Guard there has been a significant increase of Chinese vessels in Bajo de Masinloc. In particular, there are now 5 Chinese Government vessels (CMS-71, CMS-84, FLEC-301, FLEC-303 and FLEC-310), and 16 Chinese fishing boats, 10 of which are inside the shoal while 6 are outside. In addition, there are 56 utility boats, 27 of which were inside and 29 were outside the shoal.

The Philippines protests the above actions of China as clear violations of Philippine sovereignty and jurisdiction over the Shoal and sovereign rights over the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

It is regrettable that these actions occurred at a time when China has been articulating for a de-escalation of tensions and while the two sides have been discussing how to defuse the situation in the area.

The above actions of China are clearly inconsistent with its statements and pronouncements.

The above actions of China are also in violation of the ASEAN-China Declaration of Conduct on the South China Sea specifically paragraph 5 which calls the Parties

"...to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability including, among others, refraining from action of inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, reefs, shoals, cays, and other features and to handle their differences in a constructive manner."

It is noteworthy that while the situation in Bajo de Masinloc started with the issue of Chinese fishermen poaching in the area; yet although these fishermen have already evaded arrests and prosecution for illegal

*Annex 210. Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines to the Embassies of ASEAN Member States in Manila, No. 12-1372 (21 May 2012), p. 1.*

Annex 210

fishing, nevertheless, Chinese Government vessels continue to ply the area in a much larger numbers now.

The recent actions of China are also in violation of the United Nations Charter, specifically Article 2.4, which provides the following:

"All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

Likewise, the increase in the number of China's vessels in the area imperils the marine biodiversity in the Shoal and threatens the marine ecosystem in the whole West Philippine Sea. The Philippines has documented the many instances where Chinese fishermen have unlawfully dredged the area and illegally harvested giant clams and corals.

The Philippines, therefore, demands that China's vessels immediately pull out from Bajo de Masinloc and the Philippines' EEZ and for China to refrain from taking further actions that exacerbate the situation in the West Philippine Sea."

The Philippines wishes to emphasize that it continues to abide by the ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and remains committed to the peaceful and diplomatic resolution of the current situation in Bajo de Masinloc.

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassies of ASEAN Member States the assurances of its highest consideration.

Manila, 21 May 2012

Embassies of ASEAN Member States  
MANILA



*Annex 210. Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines to the Embassies of ASEAN Member States in Manila, No. 12-1372 (21 May 2012), p. 2.*

The Philippines engaged in three key speech acts to securitize the perilous manoeuvres of Chinese vessels near Scarborough Shoal. First, the Philippines presented evidence that the provocative and highly dangerous manoeuvres of Chinese vessels, particularly incidents involving FLEC 310 and two Philippine Search and Rescue Vessels (SARV-002 and SARV-003), posed a significant threat of collision to Philippine vessels. This claim

asserted that FLEC 310 deliberately engaged in actions that could have resulted in near collisions, which were only averted through emergency manoeuvres by the Philippine vessels.

Second, the Philippines expressed concern that Chinese vessels' provocative and dangerous actions might lead to actual vessel collisions and escalate tensions in Scarborough Shoal. This warning was delivered believing that such collisions and heightened tensions are not in China's best interest. While it is uncertain to both parties whether actual collisions and increased tension will occur, this act serves as a cautionary message about the potential consequences of these actions.

Third, through the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Philippines urged China to respect Philippine sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction over Scarborough Shoal. The request called for China to cease taking provocative and dangerous actions with its vessels, actions that could further escalate tensions in the region. The Philippines believed that China could comply with this request and that doing so was essential to preventing an escalation of existing tensions.

These three elements of a securitizing speech act collectively demonstrate the Philippines' diplomatic efforts to address the situation, emphasising their concerns, issuing a warning, and requesting actions to promote stability and safety in the region.



### **Military Security Issue 3: Harassment of Supply Missions at Second Thomas Shoal in 2014**

In April 2013, as the SCS Arbitration proceedings commenced, China escalated its claims by asserting sovereignty over all features encompassed within the controversial nine-dashed line (RP, 2014a). This included the Second Thomas Shoal, recognised by the Philippines as the “Ayungin Shoal”. This submerged feature is 22 nautical miles east of Mischief Reef and approximately 104 miles from Palawan. Significantly, the Philippines had maintained a peaceful and continuous presence at Second Thomas Shoal since 1999, following China’s occupation of Mischief Reef. To achieve this, the Philippines stationed a dedicated team of Philippine Navy personnel aboard the BRP Sierra Madre, a naval vessel intentionally grounded at the shoal.

#### ***Intertextuality: Blocking of Philippine Operations for the BRP Sierra Madre***

In April 2013, China demanded the Philippines withdraw from Second Thomas Shoal, threatening force if the Philippines did not comply at once. Subsequently, two Chinese Marine Surveillance vessels and a navy missile frigate were observed near the shoal. Despite a May 2013 *Note Verbale* from the Philippines asserting UNCLOS-based sovereignty, China did not respond formally, albeit continued to send fewer vessels to the shoal.

On 9 March 2014, just three weeks before the Philippines submitted its Memorial in the SCS Arbitration, China obstructed access to the shoal.

Two Chinese Coast Guard ships pursued and intimidated Philippine vessels delivering essential supplies and personnel. The Chinese vessels compelled the Philippine vessels to depart or assume responsibility using sirens, megaphones, and a digital signboard. Consequently, the Philippine vessels withdrew without accomplishing their mission. China accused the Philippine vessels of carrying construction materials, a claim denied by the Philippines in a *Note Verbale* on 11 March 2014. The Philippines reiterated Second Thomas Shoal's location within its CS, asserting its right to sovereignty without requiring permission from other states. The Philippines clarified that the vessels were not transporting construction materials but delivering essential supplies and personnel rotation, hoping to alleviate tensions.

Moreover, the Philippines conveyed to China that its actions threatened UNCLOS-based rights and interests. In response, China rejected protests, maintaining sovereignty over the Spratly Islands. Meanwhile, to sustain personnel at Second Thomas Shoal, the Philippines conducted airdrops of food supplies on 10 and 15 March 2014. The rotation of personnel aboard BRP Sierra Madre remained uncertain due to China's history of preventing supply and rotation efforts by sea.

China's actions in and around Second Thomas Shoal regarding the maritime dispute violated Article 279 of UNCLOS, which mandates the peaceful settlement of conflicts following Article 2(3) of the UN Charter. The UN Charter provision necessitates the peaceful resolution of international disputes, avoiding actions jeopardising international peace, security, or justice. Moreover, China's disruption of a routine rotation and

resupply mission, a practice in place since 1999, fundamentally altered the status quo at Second Thomas Shoal. This disruption directly threatened the well-being of Philippine personnel stationed there, who depended on these supplies for survival. The Philippines argued that such behaviour was inconsistent with the conduct expected of a state party involved in an ongoing international legal proceeding and called on China to cease these unlawful activities to facilitate peaceful dispute resolution.

***Intratextuality: Securitizing a Threatening Change to the Status Quo***

Below is the *Note Verbale* dated 11 March 2014, originating from the DFA, addressed to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila under reference No. 140711. This diplomatic communication is critical in securitizing the issue surrounding this specific military incident within the SCS.

MAR 11 2014

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
MANILA

No. 14-0711

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines presents its compliments to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, and has the honor to convey its protest against China's recent actions in the vicinity of Second Thomas Shoal (Ayungin Shoal).

The Department refers to the actions taken on 09 March 2014 by two China Coast Guard ("CCG") vessels to prevent rotation of personnel and the resupply of operations at Ayungin Shoal including provision of food, water, and other essentials they require. Initial reports indicate that the two CCG vessels maneuvered to block two civilian vessels chartered by the Philippine Navy from approaching the shoal and then forced them to leave the area, thereby preventing the fulfillment of their mission.

The Department understands that China has purported to justify its actions by claiming that the Philippine vessels were carrying "construction materials" to Ayungin Shoal. The Philippines rejects this false accusation. Ayungin is part of the continental shelf of the Philippines. It is, therefore, entitled to exercise sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the area without the permission of other States. Nevertheless, in the interests of easing tensions, the Philippines wishes to make it perfectly clear that its chartered vessels were not carrying construction materials. To the contrary, they were merely delivering essential supplies to the Philippine personnel stationed there and to conduct rotation of personnel.

China is aware that the Philippines has maintained a peaceful and continuous presence at Ayungin Shoal in the form of the BRP *Sierra Madre* and the personnel stationed there since 1999. For the last fifteen years, the Philippines has conducted regular resupply missions and personnel rotation without interference from China.

China's recent actions therefore represent a dramatic and dangerous departure from the *status quo*. As such, they constitute a flagrant, willful and material

*Annex 221. Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 140711 (11 March 2014), p. 1.*

breach of Paragraph 5 of the 2002 ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (the "DOC"), pursuant to which the signatory States, including China, specifically undertook

"to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability including, among others, refraining from action of inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, reefs, shoals, cays, and other features and to handle their differences in a constructive manner."

In addition, China's actions constitute a clear and urgent threat to the rights and interests of the Philippines under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the "UNCLOS"), which are currently the subject of arbitration under Annex VII of UNCLOS. In accordance with Articles 76 and 77 of UNCLOS, only the Philippines has sovereign rights over the continental shelf in the area where Ayungin Shoal is located. No other State is lawfully entitled to assert sovereign rights or jurisdiction over said area. In this respect, the Philippines observes that there are no insular features claimed by China in the South China Sea capable of generating any potential entitlement in the area where Ayungin Shoal is located.

China's actions also constitute a grave and imminent threat to the Philippines' right to have its maritime dispute with China settled peacefully and in good faith, as well as its right not to have the dispute aggravated or extended pending the outcome of the arbitration.

The Department takes note of the fact that China's actions come just three weeks before the Philippines is due to submit its Memorial in the aforementioned arbitration. Under the circumstances, the Department is, regrettably, compelled to conclude that China's conduct at Ayungin Shoal is intended as retaliation for the Philippines' initiative in seeking the resolution of its maritime dispute with China in accordance with international law, something the Philippines and China were unable to achieve despite years of negotiation.

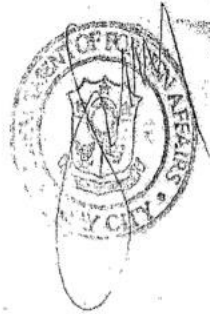
*Annex 221. Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 140711 (11 March 2014), p. 2.*

Accordingly, the Department urges China in the strongest possible terms (1) to desist from any further interference with the efforts of the Philippines to conduct personnel rotation and resupply operations at Ayungin Shoal on the BRP *Sierra Madre*; (2) to exercise self-restraint in accordance with Paragraph 5 of the DOC; and (3) to refrain from any activities that threaten the rights and interests of the Philippines under international law, including UNCLOS.

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China the assurances of its highest consideration.

The Embassy of the People's Republic of China  
Manila, Philippines

11 March 2014



*Annex 221. Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 140711 (11 Mar. 2014), p. 3.*

In securitizing the harassment of resupply missions at Second Thomas Shoal, the Philippines undertook the three key elements of a securitizing speech act. First, the Philippines asserted that China's actions near Second Thomas Shoal posed a severe threat to the Philippines' resupply operations. These actions violated the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) and disregarded the Philippines' rights and interests under UNCLOS. Moreover, they directly undermined the peaceful resolution of the ongoing maritime dispute,

potentially exacerbating the conflict until a final arbitration decision is reached. This claim explicitly declared China's actions as a threat to the Philippines.

Second, the Philippines warned that China's actions in the Second Thomas Shoal would not ease tensions in the SCS and were unlikely to resolve the longstanding dispute, despite years of negotiations. This caution was grounded in the belief that China's aggressive actions could potentially escalate tensions, a scenario deemed unfavourable to China's interests. While it is unclear to both parties whether such escalation would occur, this act explicitly communicated that increasing tensions in the SCS was not in China's best interest.

Finally, the Philippines urged China to cease interfering with personnel rotation and resupply operations at Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippines requested that China exercise self-restraint, as outlined in the 2002 DoC, and refrain from any activities that could potentially harm the rights and interests of the Philippines under UNCLOS. Although the Philippines believed China could fulfil this request, it remained to be seen whether China would voluntarily comply. This securitizing speech act represented the diplomatic effort to prompt a response from China, addressing the Philippines' concerns and securing its rights under international law.

Following the exposition of the three military concerns in the SCS disputes all securitised by the Philippines, the discussion transitions to explore economic and environmental security matters in the maritime row.

## **Economic Security Issues: Interferences with Sovereign Rights and Jurisdiction**

According to the Copenhagen School framework, the economic sector encompasses a variety of referent objects, such as individuals, social classes, states, and the global market system (Buzan et al., 1998). Securitising actors in the economic sector operate at different levels, with states, intergovernmental organisations, and (multi-national) corporations exerting the most significant influence, even if their activities are discreet. These elements often intertwine, adding complexity to concerns within the economic sector.

The perception of an existential economic threat varies based on the referent object (Buzan et al., 1998). For individuals, economic security is rooted in fulfilling basic needs like food, water, shelter, clothing, and education, which are crucial for human survival. Beyond these essentials, economic security, including welfare disparities, resource access, and unemployment, become less distinct. While significant, these challenges often transcend security, manifesting as complex economic, political, societal, or environmental issues. States are more resilient to certain economic threats than other actors. Although entities like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank may intervene in cases of state insolvency, potentially impacting military security, the direct impact on a state's economic security is often limited. However, states are not immune to economic security concerns. Like individuals, states have basic economic needs to sustain their populations and industries. If a state is not



self-reliant and dependent on external sources, threats to this dependence can justify securitizing the national economy.

The securitization of economic concerns was evident in the case of the Philippines, which claimed that China unlawfully interfered with its sovereign rights over living and non-living resources within its EEZ and CS. China was also accused of obstructing Philippine fishermen by interfering with traditional fishing activities at Scarborough Shoal. These actions highlight the intricate interplay of economic and maritime territorial concerns in the SCS disputes, where resource access and sovereignty issues are central to securitizing the economic sector.

### **Data Sources Analysed**

Securitizing the economic aspect of the SCS disputes involves the Philippines' Submissions 8, 9, and 10, all taken from the Memorial of the Philippines Vol. 1 (RP, 2014a, p. 271-272):

Submission 8 requests the Tribunal to adjudge and declare that  
*China has unlawfully interfered with the enjoyment and exercise of the sovereign rights of the Philippines, with respect to the living and non-living resources of its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf.*

Submission 9 is that  
*China has unlawfully failed to prevent its nationals and vessels from exploiting the living resources in the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines.*

Submission 10 is that

*China has unlawfully prevented Philippine fishermen from pursuing their livelihoods by interfering with traditional fishing activities at Scarborough Shoal.*

The subsequent sections analyse all texts focusing on three securitized economic issues: (1) Submission 8[.2] – China’s interference with the Philippines’ sovereign rights to exploit the non-living resources of its EEZ and CS; (2) Submission 8[.1] and Submission 9 – China’s interference with the Philippines’ sovereign rights to exploit the living resources of its EEZ and CS; and (3) Submission 10 – China’s interference with the traditional livelihood of Filipino fisherfolks at Scarborough Shoal.

The empirical data for the Discourse Analysis is derived from the texts presented in the Memorial of the Philippines (RP, 2014a), the corresponding hearing transcripts on the case’s particular merits (PCA, 2015b), and the cited annexes.

1. China’s interference with the Philippines’ sovereign rights to exploit the non-living resources of its EEZ and Continental Shelf
  - a. Memorial of the Philippines, Vol. 1, Nos. 6.6-6.28, pp. 162-168
  - b. Transcript Day 2, First Round Submissions by Professor Sands, pp. 131-150.
2. China’s interference with the Philippines’ sovereign rights to exploit the living resources of its EEZ and Continental Shelf –
  - a. Memorial of the Philippines, Vol. 1, Nos. 6.29-6.38, pp. 168-171

b. Transcript Day 2, First Round Submissions by  
Professor Sands, pp. 150-162.

3. China's interference with the traditional livelihood of  
Filipino Fishermen at Scarborough Shoal –  
Memorial of the Philippines, Vol. 1, Nos. 6.39-6.47, pp.  
171-175

Transcript Day 2, First Round Submissions by Mr  
Martin, pp. 162-187.

These cited sources from the Memorial of the Philippines and the corresponding transcripts of the hearings on the case's merits, as well as the referenced annexes, constitute the empirical foundation for the ensuing Discourse Analysis, shedding light on the securitization of these critical economic issues within the SCS disputes.

### **Intertextuality: Three Economic Security Issues**

China's assertive actions in the WPS raised concerns for the Philippines as they violated the Philippines' sovereign rights as outlined in UNCLOS. The following sections delve into three economic security issues. The first economic issue concerns three instances where China obstructed the Philippines' oil and gas exploration efforts: (1) the Geophysical Survey and Exploration Contract 1 (GSEC 1) involving Sterling Energy plc, specifically an incident with the MV Veritas Voyager; (2) Nido Petroleum Limited's contract in Block Service Contract (SC) 58 facing similar impediments; and (3) China's disruptions to the development efforts in Area 3 and Area 4, led by the Philippines' Department of Energy. These

occurrences collectively underscore a consistent and recurring pattern of behaviour by China that significantly infringes upon the Philippines' sovereign rights concerning non-living resources within its EEZ and CS.

China's activities went beyond impacting non-living resources; they also affected living resources by implementing an intricate network of laws and regulations, establishing an expansive law enforcement jurisdiction covering the region outlined by the nine-dash line. The Philippines has highlighted two specific economic concerns involving living resources in the WPS: (1) China imposed a fishing ban from May to August 2012, impacting the livelihoods of Filipino fishermen; and (2) in December 2012, China exercised excessive legislative control and acquired resources within this disputed territory.

Another pressing economic security issue in the SCS disputes relates to the long-standing, peaceful, uninterrupted Filipino fishing tradition in Scarborough Shoal, which abruptly ended in April 2012. The initial incident unfolded when Chinese government vessels intervened to prevent Philippine law enforcement from apprehending Chinese fishermen engaged in the harvesting of endangered species. These three security issues starkly illustrate the multifaceted economic security challenges arising within the SCS disputes, where issues encompassing sovereignty, resource access, and traditional livelihoods converge and interplay.

### ***Blocking Oil and Gas Explorations within Philippine EEZ***

In 2009, China aggressively pursued its “nine-dash line” claim, challenging the Philippines’ sovereign rights and jurisdiction over non-living resources near its coastline. This tension unfolded in 2002 when the Department of Energy (DoE) partnered with Sterling Energy, a United Kingdom-based company, intending to conduct exploration activities for oil and gas reserves in an area known as “GSEC 101” (RP, 2014a). This area is close to Reed Bank, approximately 75 nautical miles from the coast of Palawan. The location of GSEC 101 is visually represented in Figure 5.7. China did not object to the collaborative endeavour between the Philippines and Sterling Energy then.

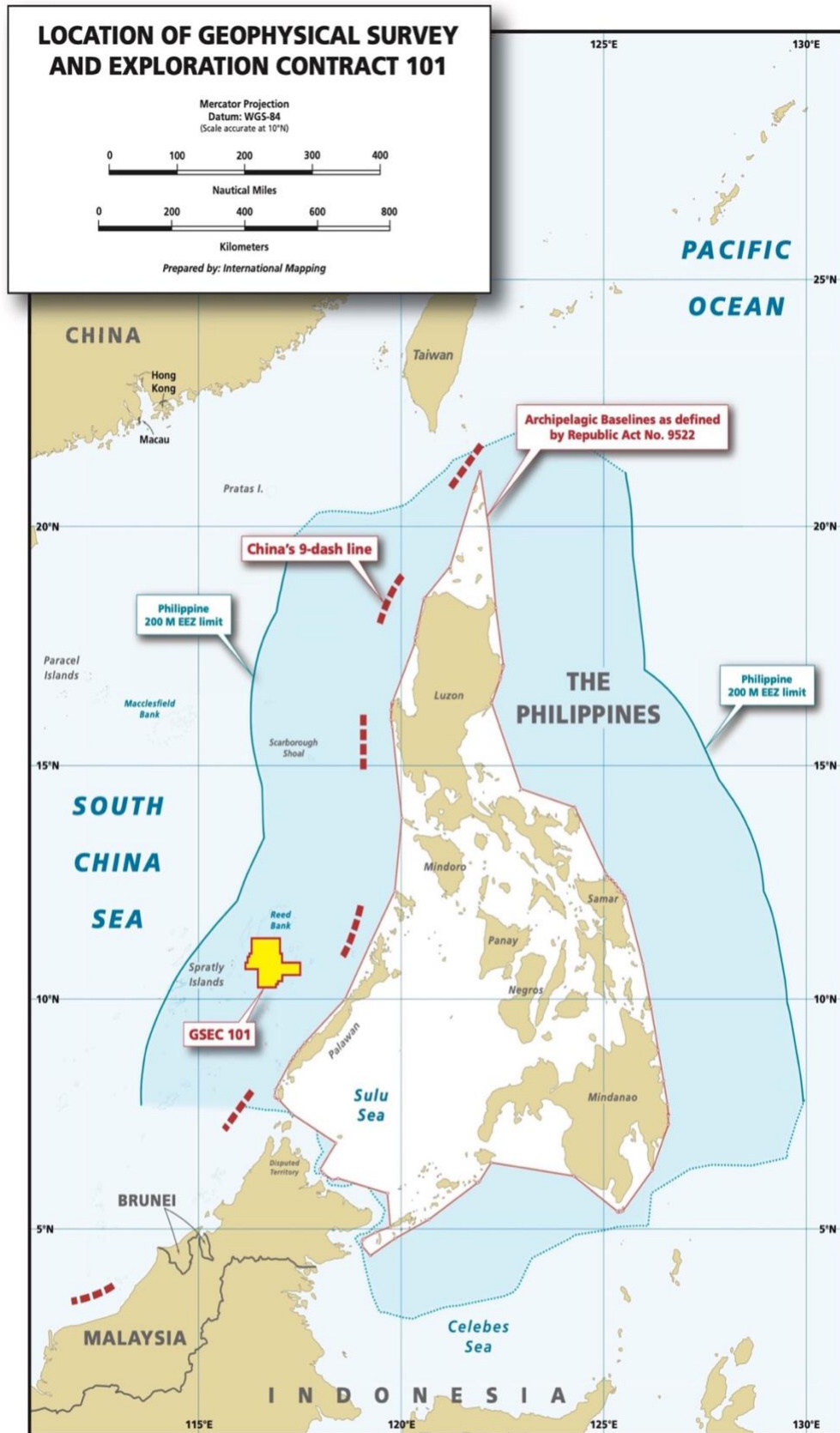


Figure 5.12– Location of Geophysical Survey and Exploration Contract 101

In 2010, however, converting GSEC 101 into a service contract encountered strong opposition from the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines. China contended that the geographical scope of GSEC 101 encompassed the waters of the Spratly Islands, a region it claimed in the SCS. In response, China took firm measures to impede the conversion. China issued a diplomatic note on 13 May 2010 to underscore its sovereignty and demand that the Philippines revoke the decision to award the service contract.

Despite this, the Philippines remained resolute in exercising its sovereign rights in the Reed Bank 1 area, allowing Sterling Energy to proceed with seismic survey plans deploying the MV Veritas Voyager. However, China responded aggressively, dispatching CMS 71 and CMS 75 vessels to tail the MV Veritas Voyager in March 2011. Despite having a valid license, the Philippine vessel faced unwavering demands to cease activities in what China claimed to be its territorial waters. The Philippines formally protested, citing encroachment on sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction. Due to the recurring risk of intimidating incidents, the Philippines was constrained in exercising UNCLOS-conferred sovereign rights in the region. Consequently, the Philippine government and private entities exercised caution to avoid potential confrontations with Chinese law enforcement vessels.

The Philippines encountered two more instances of China's infringement upon its sovereign rights and jurisdiction over non-living resources, distinct from the MV Veritas Voyager incident (RP, 2014a). The second incident involved Nido Petroleum Philippines Pty, Ltd. On 24 March

2010, Nido Petroleum unveiled its plan to undertake exploratory surveys in the Palawan area. SC 58, encompassing a vast deep-water fairway replete with numerous substantial multi-hundred-million-barrel structures, served as the focal point for this survey. Figure 5.8 locates SC 58 in the map.





Figure 5.13 – Location of Service Contract 58

On 30 July 2010, Bai Tian, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of China in Manila, voiced his concerns directly to the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs. As documented in a report of their meeting, Bai Tian lodged a formal protest, contending that Service Contracts 54, 14, 58, 63, and various other service contracts were geographically situated “deep within China’s 9-dash line”. He accused the Philippines of violating and infringing upon China’s sovereignty and sovereign rights within these regions.

In response to the apprehensions, the Chinese Embassy promptly requested a meeting with representatives from Nido on 2 August 2010. The meeting convened just four days later, during which the First Secretary of the Chinese Embassy, Li Yongshen, furnished Nido’s representative with a copy of China’s delineation of the nine-dash-line map. Li conveyed that all areas encompassed by this map fell under China’s unequivocal claim. This claim extended to the regions covered by Nido’s pre-existing service contracts with the Philippine government. After this meeting, all further exploration activities near SC 58 stopped.

The third incident revolves around offering 15 blocks for oil and gas exploration (RP, 2014a). In 2011, the DoE made available 15 blocks for exploration and development, which included Area 3 and Area 4, as depicted in Figure 5.9. These blocks were located 65 and 35 miles from the Philippine coast. These locations fell within the Philippines’ EEZ and CS.



Figure 5.14 – Location of Philippine Oil Blocks – Area 3 and Area 4.

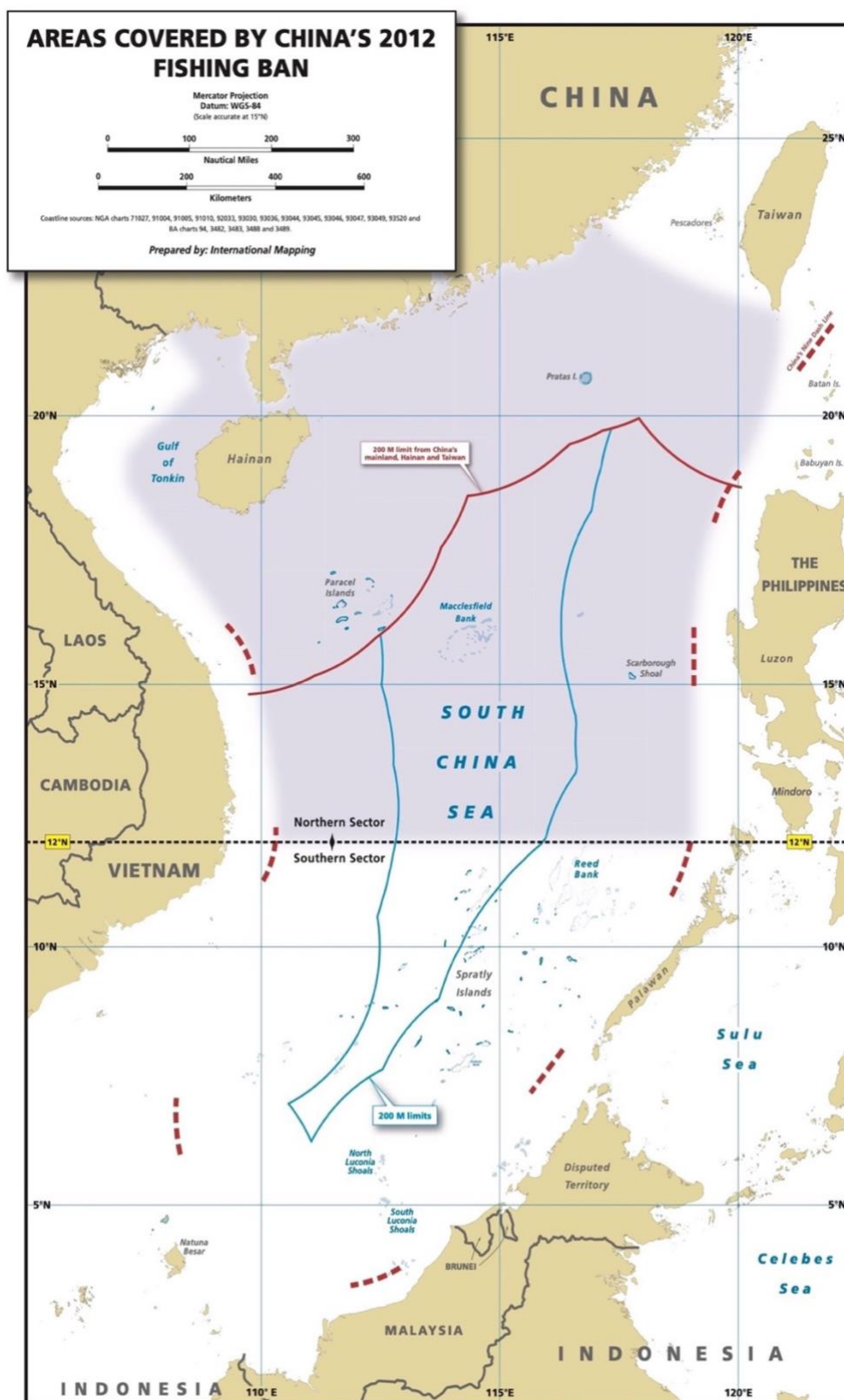
Nevertheless, China once again opposed the Philippines' exercise of sovereign rights over non-living resources in this region. China argued that these blocks were situated in waters falling under its sovereign rights and jurisdiction based on its claims of historic rights. As a result, China strongly urged the Philippines to withdraw its offer for AREA 3 and AREA 4 without substantiating these claims through reference to UNCLOS or established principles of international law.

These three incidents collectively reveal a recurring and consistent pattern of behaviour exhibited by China, characterised by its persistent interference with the Philippines' sovereign rights over non-living resources within its EEZ and CS. Through these repeated actions, China unequivocally and directly obstructed the Philippines' exercise and enjoyment of its indisputable rights as outlined in UNCLOS.

### ***Fishing Ban through Laws and Regulations***

In addition to impeding oil and gas exploration activities within the Philippines' EEZ and CS, China directly encroached upon the Philippines' rights to exploit living resources in these maritime zones. This interference was manifested through the implementation of laws and regulations extending China's law enforcement jurisdiction, covering matters related to fishing resources throughout the entire area defined by the contentious nine-dash line (RP, 2014a). Although there were few instances of enforcement, this regulatory expansion significantly contributed to uncertainty and a notable reduction in the fishing activities of Philippine fishermen.

One significant incident occurred in May 2012 when China imposed a comprehensive fishing ban in the SCS lasting two and a half months. This ban covered all areas north of the 12° N parallel of latitude and was delineated in the northeast by two points connecting the southern tip of Taiwan to the Chinese mainland (RP, 2014a). Notably, the ban included substantial portions of the sea within a 200-nautical mile radius of the Philippine coastline, directly impacting the livelihoods and activities of Filipino fishermen. The shaded area in Figure 5.10 shows the prohibited areas.



In its official statement on the fishing ban, the Chinese government outlined penalties for violations, including fines, license revocations, equipment confiscation, and potential criminal charges, applied to both domestic and foreign vessels (RP, 2014a). The Chinese Fishery Bureau, under the Ministry of Agriculture, emphasised that foreign ships found fishing in these restricted areas would be considered a direct encroachment on China's fisheries resources. The Philippines strongly objected, asserting they did not recognise the ban's legitimacy as certain areas fell within its EEZ and CS. China rejected this stance, with China's Ambassador to the ASEAN, Tong Xiaoling, stating that China had an inherent right to protect its territorial integrity and conserve fisheries resources.

Later that year, China expanded its regulatory reach by implementing the "Regulations for the Management of Coastal Border Security in Hainan Province" (RP, 2014a). These regulations required foreign ships to obtain prior permission before entering what China deemed its waters and allowed Chinese vessels to take action against unauthorised or illegal activities by foreign ships. The Philippines sought clarification on the scope of these regulations, mainly whether they applied uniformly across all areas defined by the nine-dash line. Although China did not directly clarify, the launch of the Haixun 21 vessel by the China Maritime Safety Administration revealed their intentions. This vessel extended maritime surveillance to cover an extensive area, including the SCS within Hainan Province's jurisdiction, mirroring the vast expanse outlined by the infamous nine-dash line – approximately 1.94 million

square kilometres. An image of this surveillance vessel can be viewed in Figure 5.11. Based on the nine-dash line, this jurisdiction claim has created widespread insecurity among nations and regions bordering the SCS, extending beyond the Philippines.



*Figure 5.16 – Haixun 21*

### ***Preventing Traditional Fishing at Scarborough Shoal***

China's actions in the SCS also violated the sovereign rights of the Philippines as defined by UNCLOS through the disruption of the traditional fishing practices of Filipino fishermen at Scarborough Shoal since 2012 (RP, 2014a). Following China's de facto takeover in April 2012, Filipino fishermen were prohibited from accessing the area, while Chinese vessels continued fishing without hindrance. Despite China's claim to Scarborough Shoal's territorial sea dating back to 1958, local Filipino fishermen



historically engaged in their activities for over half a century until abruptly being expelled in May 2012.

Scarborough Shoal and its surrounding waters have been a vital source of sustenance for Filipino fisherfolk for centuries, serving as a cherished fishing destination with traditional practices dating back to the Spanish colonial era (RP, 2014a). Historical records, including a 1953 publication by the Philippines' Bureau of Fisheries and a 1960 book by the Philippine Farmers' Journal, underscore the area's significance in sustaining local fishermen's livelihoods. However, China's abrupt disruption of these age-old fishing traditions in April and May 2012 severely impacted the livelihoods of Filipino fishermen. Since then, China has maintained control over Scarborough Shoal, occasionally permitting Filipino fishing boats to approach the area. These actions contravened China's commitments under UNCLOS. They represented a violation of the Philippines' exclusive sovereign rights and jurisdiction over living and non-living resources within its EEZ and CS.

### **Intratextuality: Securitization through Four *Notes Verbales***

The convergence of these events prompted the Philippines to propose that China elevate the issue to an appropriate third-party adjudication body under international law, specifically, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) under UNCLOS. The following *Notes Verbales* illustrate the securitizing move of the Philippines towards the economic security issues of the SCS disputes. These documents collectively

embody the securitizing responses of the Philippines to address the economic concerns stemming from the SCS disputes.

(1) Annex 198 – *Note Verbale* from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Philippines to the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Manila, No. 110526 (2 March 2011)

(2) Annex 205 – *Note Verbale* from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Philippines to the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Manila, No. 12-0894 (11 April 2012)

(3) Annex 206 – *Note Verbale* from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Philippines to the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Manila, No. 12-1030 (15 April 2012)

(4) Annex 207 – *Note Verbale* from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines to the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Manila, No. 12-1137 (26 April 2012)

2011-38

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
MANILA

No. 11 0526

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines presents its compliments to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, and has the honor to express its serious concern over the following incident involving violation by Chinese vessels of Philippine sovereignty and jurisdiction:

At 9:36 a.m. today, 2 March 2011, two Chinese surveillance vessels "Zhongguo 71 and 75" threatened a Philippine-authorized seismic survey vessel operating in Philippine waters around Reed Bank, and demanded that it stop its activities and immediately leave the area.

The area where the incident took place has the following coordinates:

Corner	LAT	LONG
1	10°40'00"N	116°30'00"E
2	10°40'00"N	116°50'00"E
3	10°20'00"N	116°50'00"E
4	10°20'00"N	116°30'00"E

The Philippine Government views the aggressive actions of the Chinese vessels as a serious violation of Philippine sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction.

The Department of Foreign Affairs avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China the assurances of its highest consideration.

2 March 2011

Embassy of the People's Republic of China  
MANILA



*Annex 198. Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 110526 (2 March 2011)*

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
MANILA

No. 12-0894

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines presents its compliments to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, and has the honor to express its grave concern over the repeated intrusions by Chinese vessels into Philippine territorial waters in clear violation of Philippine sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction. The latest intrusions occurred in the Scarborough Shoal, which is located at Lat 15 deg 8 min North and Lat 117 deg 45 min East.

The Philippines' concern has been repeatedly conveyed to the Chinese authorities through the Chinese Embassy in Manila, to former Chinese Ambassador Liu Jianchao, Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin and Vice Minister Fu Ying.

The Philippine Navy has reported that since February this year there has been sustained presence of Chinese fishing vessels at the Scarborough Shoal, based on information from local fishermen and confirmed by naval air surveillance.

- On 8 April 2012, aerial sortie by Philippine Navy Islander (PNI) 312 confirmed six (6) Chinese vessels inside the shoal. All vessels are manned by Chinese nationals from Hainan, China.
- In the morning of 9 April 2012, Patrol Frigate (PF)-15 arrived at the Shoal for sovereignty patrol, in which eight (8) Chinese fishing vessels were observed inside the shoal.
- A team consisting of three (3) NISG NL and eight (8) NAVSOU-2 personnel aboard two (2) rubber boats were launched to collect imagery intelligence. The boarding team requested clearance to conduct compliant boarding procedure on said vessels to validate the presence of corals or sea turtles aboard ship. The team started to conduct visit/board/search and seizure (VBSS) on the first of eight (8) monitored Chinese fishing vessels inside Scarborough Shoal.
- During the conduct of boarding procedure, strict adherence to human rights in the treatment of the crew was observed and this is reinforced by the strict Rules of Engagement (ROE) issued to PF-15 and the boarding team prior deployment.

The boarding resulted.../

Embassy of the People's Republic of China  
MANILA

*Annex 205 – Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 12-0894 (11 April 2012), p.1.*

- The boarding resulted in the documentation of two (2) Chinese fishing vessels filled with assorted corals and giant clams, six (6) Chinese fishing vessels with some catch of assorted endangered species and the recovery of assorted corals to serve as samples.

The presence of these Chinese fishing vessels is a serious violation of the Philippines' sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction.

Further, the poaching of endangered marine resources is in violation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES).

The Department of Foreign Affairs avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China the assurances of its highest consideration.

Manila, 11 April 2012



*Annex 205 – Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 12-0894 (11 April 2012), p.2.*

APR 16 2012

No. 12-1030

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines presents its compliments to the Embassy of People's Republic of China and has the honor to refer to the incident involving the M/Y Saranggani, which is conducting a marine archeological study in the Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal or Panatag Shoal). The Philippine Government, through the National Museum, has authorized the study conducted aboard the M/Y Saranggani in the exercise of its sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the Bajo de Masinloc.

The Department informs the Embassy that around 11:45 a.m. of Saturday, 14 April 2012, the M/Y Saranggani complained that a Chinese vessel harassed the Philippine-flagged motor yacht from conducting its operations and told to leave the area. At around 1:45 p.m. also of the same day, the M/Y Saranggani further complained that a Chinese aircraft, colored white and with blue stripe on its side, flew over the motor yacht and the Philippine Coast Guard vessel in the Bajo de Masinloc. The same Chinese aircraft again flew over the M/Y Saranggani and the Philippine Coast Guard vessel at 1:35 p.m. on Sunday, 15 April 2012.

The Department strongly protests these harassments by the Chinese vessel and aircraft of the M/Y Saranggani. Such actions are in violation of the sovereign right and jurisdiction of the Philippines to conduct marine research or studies in its Exclusive Economic Zone. The M/Y Saranggani is in the Bajo de Masinloc conducting lawful studies under national and international law. The Bajo de Masinloc, part of the municipality of Masinloc, Province of Zambales, is 124 nautical miles West of Zambales and is within the 200 nautical miles EEZ and Continental Shelf of the Philippines.

The Philippines demands that the Chinese vessel and aircraft cease the harassments of and fly-bys over M/Y Saranggani so that the Philippine-flagged vessel and its crew of researchers can complete the studies. Any attempted action by Chinese vessels or aircraft against the M/Y Saranggani will be considered by the Philippines as a gross violation of its national laws and of international law.

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China the assurances of its highest consideration.

Manila, 15 April 2012



*Annex 206 – Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 12-1030 (15 April 2012)*

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
MANILA

No.

12-1137

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines presents its compliments to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China and has the honor to refer to the on-going situation at the Philippines' Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal) and Philippines' 200 NM Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in and around the said feature.

The Philippines' peaceful and continuous sovereignty and jurisdiction over Bajo de Masinloc have been disturbed recently by China's assertion in the area. As a separate issue, the Philippines' sovereign rights over its EEZ, including its international obligation under existing conventions and international agreements relative to the protection and conservation of endangered species, have also been challenged by China in a manner inconsistent with that country's rights and obligations under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The Department of Foreign Affairs, therefore, calls on China to respect the Philippines' sovereignty and sovereign rights under international law including UNCLOS, over the Scarborough Shoal and its EEZ, respectively.

However, if China believes otherwise, it would be good - as a parallel track to the on-going efforts to settle the matter peacefully - for the two countries to bring the matter before an appropriate third-party adjudication body under international law, specifically the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) with respect to the rights and obligations of the two countries in the Philippines' EEZ under international law, specifically UNCLOS. In inviting China to join the Philippines in bringing the issue before any of the dispute settlement mechanism under international law, the Department believes that this approach would resolve on a long-term basis any differences of position on the matter, and thus ensure a peaceful, stable, and lasting bilateral relationship between the two countries.

The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China the assurances of its highest consideration.

26 April 2012, Manila

Embassy of the People's Republic of China  
MANILA



*Annex 207 – Note Verbale from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 12-1137 (26 Apr. 2012)*

The series of *Notes Verbales* represented a comprehensive strategic initiative undertaken by the Philippines to securitise the economic threat posed by China's actions in the SCS. Firstly, the Philippines asserted that China's persistent interference with its sovereign rights under UNCLOS had detrimental effects on both living and non-living resources within the EEZ and CS, as well as on traditional Filipino fishing activities near Scarborough Shoal. This interference was thoroughly documented, deeply rooted in history, and resulted in significant economic damages directly attributable to China.

In the warnings issued, the Philippines underscored that the Chinese government should anticipate the consequences of disregarding its sovereignty and jurisdiction, constituting clear national and international law violations. The Philippines advocated for the pursuit of resolution through established dispute settlement mechanisms under international law, emphasising that neglecting these consequences was not in China's best interest.

Finally, the formal request made by the Philippines to China involved urging the latter to respect its sovereignty and sovereign rights as defined in UNCLOS. This encompassed the cessation of all activities that harass Philippine vessels and fisherfolk and the prompt exit from the Philippine EEZ and CS. While the Philippines believed that China could fulfil this request, it acknowledged that it needed to be more evident to both parties that China would voluntarily comply.

These securitizing speech acts collectively expressed the Philippines' concerted effort to elicit a meaningful response from China,



addressing the economic security concerns arising from interference in the SCS. This multifaceted approach, which included claims, warnings, and requests, underscored the gravity of the situation and emphasised the Philippines' unwavering commitment to safeguarding its sovereign rights and economic interests in the region.

### **Environmental Security Issue: Damaging Marine Ecosystems**

The Copenhagen School recognises the dual nature of the environmental sector, marked by distinct yet interconnected scientific and political agendas (Buzan et al., 1998). The scientific agenda, predominantly led by researchers and institutions independent of political influences, establishes the factual basis for understanding environmental challenges. Conversely, governmental and intergovernmental bodies shape the political agenda, translating empirical evidence into a security discourse to mobilise actions and resources against perceived threats.

The scientific agenda adheres to rigorous academic standards, while the political agenda responds to short-term events and the immediacy of political challenges. While the scientific lobby proactively addresses the root causes of environmental issues, often pointing to a relatively distant future, it typically avoids inducing panic politics. However, radical environmentalists advocate for immediate action, utilising securitization rhetoric to underscore the urgency of measures and expressing concern that delaying action could lead to irreversible consequences.

Within environmental security, the referent object can be the environment itself or the interaction between humanity and the environment (Buzan et al., 1998). The dynamic and interdependent relationship between the environment and politics places civilisation in a position of accountability for structural environmental conditions. These conditions, in turn, influence the options available for development and shape incentives for cooperation or conflict. The nuanced interplay highlights the complexity of the environmental-security nexus, where scientific and political dimensions intersect to mould the trajectory of societal and environmental well-being.

Examining a specific case, the SCS boasts a highly diverse ecosystem with coral reefs, various fish species, and endangered sponges, all crucial for supporting marine life, safeguarding coasts, and sustaining fisheries (RP, 2014a). Unfortunately, human activities spanning centuries, such as land and sea pollution and overfishing, have significantly degraded this fragile environment. The ongoing conflict in the region further intensifies these issues as claimant countries, particularly China, rapidly construct artificial islands using environmentally harmful processes, escalating territorial tensions and fostering overfishing. Moreover, militarisation in the area increases air and water pollution, while pursuing hydrocarbons poses additional threats to the ecosystem, risking pollution and potential leaks. This scenario underscores the intricate relationship between environmental challenges and geopolitical tensions, emphasising the urgent need for coordinated efforts to address the region's environmental degradation and security concerns.

## Sources of Empirical Data

Securitising the environmental aspect of the SCS disputes involves the Philippines' Submissions 11 and 12, particularly 12.b, from the Memorial of the Philippines Vol. 1 (RP, 2014a, p. 272).

Submission 11 requests the Tribunal to adjudge and declare that  
*China has violated its obligations under the Convention to protect and preserve the marine environment at Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal.*

At the Hearing on the Merits of the case, Day 4, the Philippines sought the Tribunal's approval to modify Submission 11 (PCA, 2015c). The proposed amendment aimed to expand its scope to include the marine environment at Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Johnson Reef, Hughes Reef, Gaven Reef, and Subi Reef.

And Submission 12.b is that

*China's occupation of and construction activities on Mischief Reef*

*(b) violate China's duties to protect and preserve the marine environment under the Convention.*

The empirical data to be analysed include the following:

1. The relevant texts in the Memorial of the Philippines (RP, 2014a)
  - a. Harmful Practices at Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal, Vol. 1, Nos. 6.48-6.89, pp. 174-193

- b. Environmental Violations in the Mischief Reef,  
Vol. 1, Nos. 6.108-6.113, pp. 200-202
- 2. The corresponding parts in the hearing's  
Transcript Day 3 (PCA, 2015d)
  - a. First Round Submissions by Professor Boyle,  
pp. 10-47
  - b. Expert Statements of Professor Kent  
Carpenter, pp. 4-10
  - c. Expert Statement of Professor Clive Schofield,  
pp. 48-54; and
- 3. The cited annexes in the Memorial and the oral  
arguments.

### **Intertextuality: The Context of Securitization of the Marine**

#### **Ecosystem**

The SCS is renowned for its highly productive fisheries and extensive coral reef ecosystems, making it one of the most biodiverse regions globally (RP, 2014a). One focal point of the SCS Arbitration centred on a dispute related to protecting and preserving the marine environment. Before the arbitration, the Philippines had expressed environmental concerns through diplomatic channels. However, a significant transformation occurred during the SCS Arbitration process, elevating the discourse from bilateral discussions to a heightened recognition of the security implications associated with environmental degradation in the contested area.

Initially, the Philippines addressed environmentally harmful fishing practices at Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal in Submission 11 (RP, 2014a). These areas boasted exceptionally high biodiversity, hosting various vulnerable or endangered species. The coral reefs in these locations, vital both ecologically and socioeconomically, faced threats such as overfishing, destructive practices, pollution, human habitation, and construction. The intricate interplay of ocean currents and marine life cycles in the SCS meant that harm in one area could resonate across different ecosystems, jeopardising their health and viability. Following the Tribunal's approval to introduce new evidence, the scope of the dispute expanded to include additional features in the Spratly Islands, amending Submission 11 to encompass Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Johnson Reef, Hughes Reef, Gaven Reef, and Subi Reef, citing China's violations of its UNCLOS obligations (PCA, 2015c).

Environmental security concerns extended to Submission 12.b, focusing on the environmental harm from China's construction at Mischief Reef. The Philippines asserted that China's activities violated its duties under UNCLOS to protect and preserve the marine environment. China's extensive construction on Mischief Reef caused significant damage to the habitats of endangered species and had a detrimental impact on the delicate ecosystem.

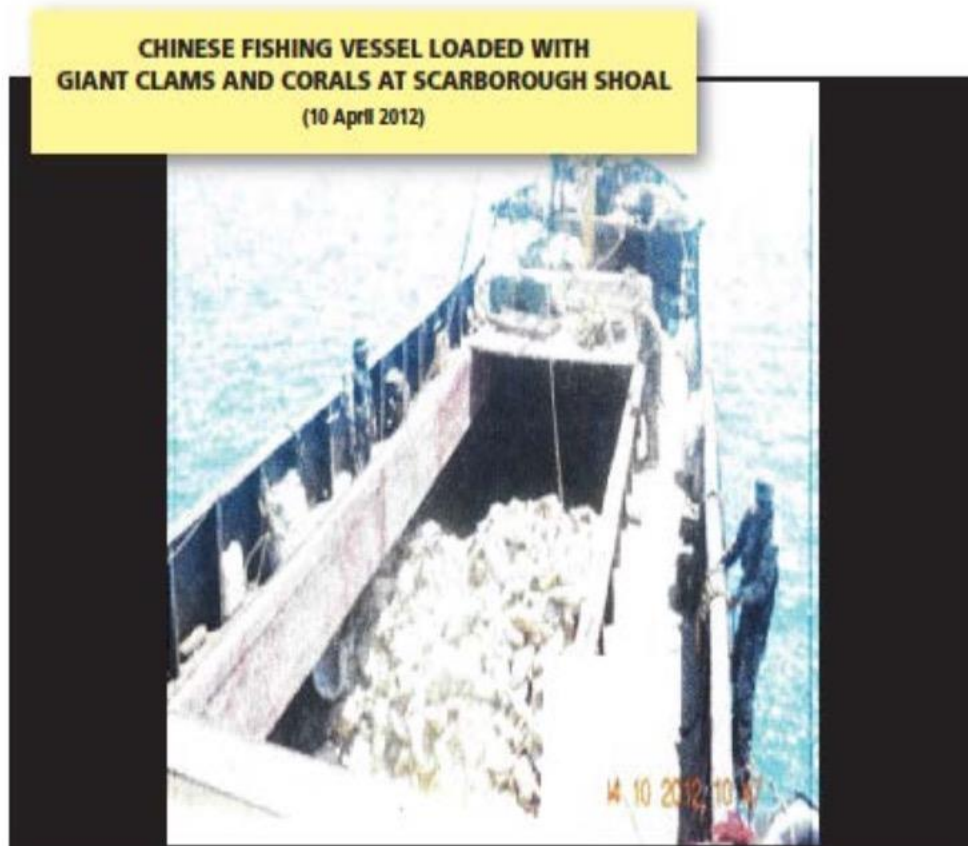
In summary, the SCS Arbitration marked a paradigm shift in the Philippines' approach to environmental concerns. It transitioned from diplomatic discussions to recognising the security implications linked to the environmental degradation of the marine ecosystem in the contested

region. This shift highlighted the interconnectedness of environmental issues with broader security considerations in the SCS.

### ***Illegal Poaching at Scarborough Shoal in April 2012***

In April 2012, despite the Philippines' ongoing efforts to curb environmentally harmful practices in the past, Chinese fishing vessels protected by the Chinese government perpetuated these activities (RP, 2014a). The Philippines, which had exercised fishing jurisdiction at Scarborough Shoal, consistently protected endangered species from poaching since the 1980s. By 9 April 2012, a minimum of eight Chinese fishing vessels from Hainan Province were actively operating at Scarborough Shoal, making it a hotspot for Chinese fishermen.

On 10 April, members of the Philippine Navy on the BRP Gregorio del Pilar conducted routine boarding operations on Chinese fishing boats suspected of illegal poaching, a practice undertaken for years. However, the Chinese government attempted to intervene for the first time, marking a departure from their previous actions. Six of the eight vessels were loaded with a combination of endangered species and corals. Figure 5.12 below presents a photograph taken by the boarding party, showcasing the giant clams harvested by one of the vessels.



*Figure 5.17 – Chinese Vessel Loaded with Clams and Corals at Scarborough Shoal*

In the subsequent weeks, Chinese fishing vessels once again felt their presence at Scarborough Shoal, as confirmed by a joint mission conducted by the PCG and BFAR. On 19 April, the crew of BRP EDSA II observed a CMS aircraft monitoring the activities of the Chinese fishing vessels. Two CMS vessels and FLEC 310 were spotted near Scarborough Shoal the following day. By April 23, the crew of BRP Pampanga witnessed Chinese fishermen towing equipment in an area containing corals and observed giant clam shells on one of the fishing vessels. Despite these observations, the presence of FLEC and CMS ships in the area deterred Philippine authorities from boarding the vessels or confronting the fishermen.

On 26 April 2012, BRP Pampanga returned to Scarborough Shoal, accompanied by BFAR vessel MCS-3001. The Philippine personnel received instructions to refrain from engaging with the Chinese counterparts, who were under the protection of two CMS vessels. Approaching the Chinese fishermen working in the shallow waters of the shoal, like their actions on 23 April 23, the Philippine personnel discovered that the coral beds in the area had been devastated, reduced to more than rubble. The Chinese fishermen were also observed extracting giant clams and corals from the seabed. Particularly striking was the sight of a Chinese fishing vessel departing from the shoal, its hold filled with a haul of corals and giant clams.

### ***Harvesting Endangered Species through the Years***

The events of April 2012 underscored an ongoing environmental concern involving the destructive actions of Chinese fishing vessels since 1998 (RP, 2014a). In January 1998, the Philippines apprehended 22 Chinese fishermen at Scarborough Shoal for possessing corals and sea turtles. They were subsequently tried and convicted in Zambales.

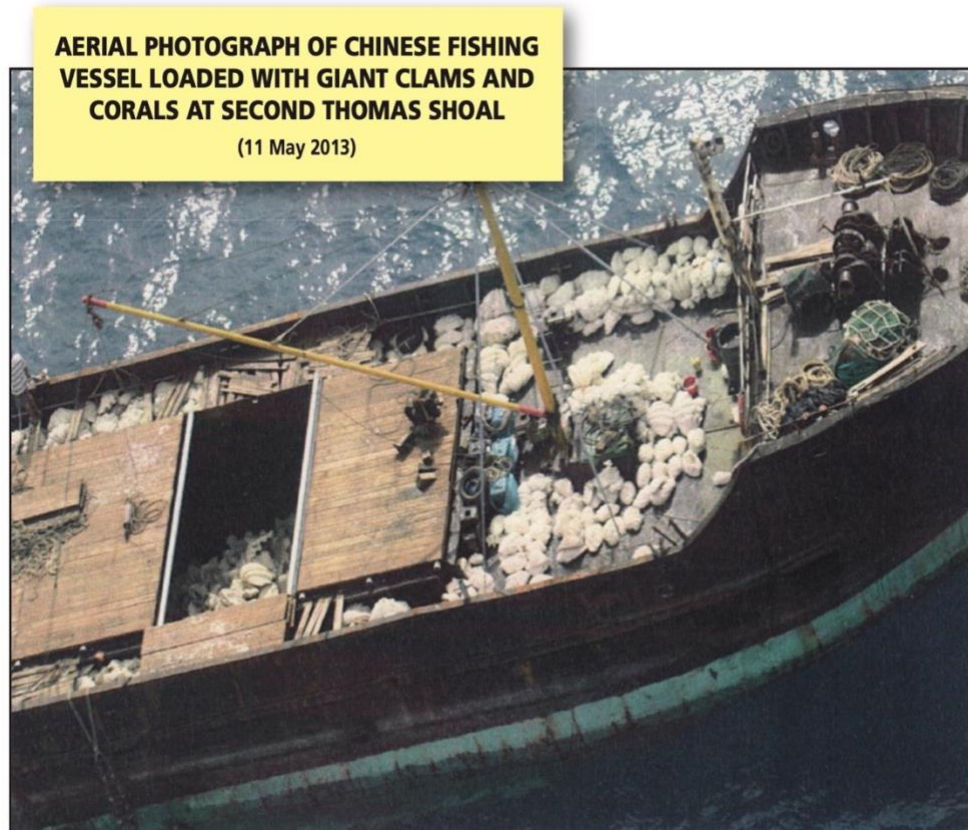
Likewise, on 14 January 2000, the Philippines lodged a diplomatic complaint against China for seizing two vessels transporting corals the previous week. These corals, reportedly from Scarborough Shoal, inflicted irreversible damage to the marine environment, violating the Convention on Biological Diversity. Although initial blame was placed on fisherfolks, the *Note Verbale* indicated a securitizing shift. During the SCS Arbitration,



the Philippines directly connected the environmentally harmful activity with China (RP, 2014a).

Over the years, the Philippine Navy successfully confiscated giant clams from Chinese fishing vessels on multiple occasions (RP, 2014a). For instance, on 17 April 2000, Philippine Naval Task Group personnel captured three Chinese fishing vessels loaded with coral from Scarborough Shoal. On 9 January 2001, Philippine authorities intercepted and boarded four Chinese vessels engaged in illegal fishing for corals and turtles. The inspection revealed live sharks, corals, and turtles, leading to a filed complaint with China.

In May 2013, Chinese fishing boats transported giant clams and corals, accompanied by four state vessels at Second Thomas Shoal. Since then, Chinese government vessels have patrolled the area, allowing Chinese access while restricting Filipino fishermen. The actions of Chinese fishermen engaging in environmentally destructive practices at Second Thomas Shoal, including harvesting endangered species, have raised concerns about China's tolerance and support, a stark contrast to the infrequent visits by Chinese fishermen before their arrival.



*Figure 5.18 – Chinese Vessel Loaded with Clams and Corals at Second Thomas Shoal*

China's tolerance of its fishermen's ecologically harmful actions at both Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal, coupled with its failure to prevent the harvesting of endangered species or the use of destructive methods, constituted a clear violation of its obligations under UNCLOS. The Philippines emphasised this critical environmental security issue during the SCS Arbitration proceedings.

### ***Destructive Fishing Using Explosives***

In addition to incidents involving endangered species, a troubling pattern emerged as numerous Chinese fishing vessels were found equipped with dynamite or explosives-related gear, either having used

these materials or intending to do so in their fishing operations (RP, 2014a). Several instances revealed Chinese nationals being apprehended with explosives during illegal fishing activities at Scarborough Shoal. Notably, on 10 March 1998, individuals were detained with dynamite, and on 15 March 2001, vessels were discovered carrying blasting caps. Another incident on 10 February 2002 involved three Chinese fishing vessels equipped with explosives and blasting caps, leading to legal proceedings in Philippine courts. Using explosives in fishing near coral reefs poses a severe threat to the surrounding ecosystem. These explosions result in the crushing of coral, particularly impacting fragile, branched corals that serve as habitats for small creatures crucial to the food chain. The adverse consequences of such destructive practices extend throughout the entire marine ecosystem, compromising its overall resilience.

Furthermore, several vessels caught using dynamite for fishing were also found transporting cyanide, a substance commonly used to stun and immobilise fish for more accessible collection with nets (RP, 2014a). Instances on 15 March 2001 and 10 February 2002 revealed Chinese vessels engaged in illegal fishing carrying cyanide. Additionally, a group of fourteen Chinese fishermen rescued by the Philippine Navy on 31 August 2002 were found in possession of cyanide used for fishing purposes. The use of cyanide in fishing has a devastating effect on the surrounding ecosystem, resulting in a loss of coral cover and negatively impacting all species reliant on the reef. Furthermore, cyanide fishing is an inefficient method that exacerbates coral destruction, as fishermen often pound the coral to extract fish, causing additional harm to the ecosystem.

Despite consistent protests from the Philippines against China's environmentally harmful fishing practices, China persisted in allowing its fishermen to engage in such activities, preventing the Philippines from curtailing them (RP, 2014a). In May 2012, China warned the Philippines, urging them to cease sending vessels to Scarborough Shoal or face consequences. To avoid potential conflict, the Philippines refrained from intervening while Chinese government vessels continued to patrol the waters, providing cover for their fishermen's activities. Consequently, the Philippines faced challenges in gathering further evidence of China's harmful practices, and the marine environment at Scarborough Shoal continued to endure severe degradation caused by China's actions. The persistent absence of enforcement of fisheries and environmental regulations heightened concerns that China would persist in causing harm to the marine environment in the area.

### ***Harm to the Environment at Mischief Reef***

The construction of artificial islands on Mischief Reef inevitably caused significant harm to the fragile ecosystem of coral reefs, leading to considerable damage to the habitats of vulnerable species (RP, 2014a). The immediate and apparent impact of erecting concrete structures on coral reefs involved reducing the reef's size and the displacement of organisms within it. This loss carried far-reaching consequences throughout the ecosystem, given the pivotal role that coral reefs play in maintaining the overall health and vitality of the marine environment. Additionally, the

presence of concrete structures exacerbated damage from wave action and storms, further compromising the structural integrity of the reef.

Moreover, establishing human habitation on these artificial islands involved waste disposal into the surrounding environment (RP, 2014a). This pollution compounded the existing environmental effects caused by construction activities. The discharge of wastewater fostered algal growth in the vicinity of the reef, leading to detrimental effects. The combination of construction-related harm and pollution created a compounding effect, posing a severe threat to the area's ecological balance.

The Philippines framed the environmental harms within the context of international obligations, asserting that China, as a signatory to UNCLOS, was obliged to protect and preserve the marine environment. According to Article 192 of UNCLOS, China was responsible for ensuring that its activities did not harm the marine environment and must adopt active measures to maintain its current condition. Article 194(5) specifically emphasised the need for measures to protect rare and fragile ecosystems, such as the coral reefs in the SCS. Finally, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which applied to activities regardless of where their effects occur, mandated China to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources significant for biological diversity.

As a result, by constructing artificial islands, installations, and structures on features like Mischief Reef, China violated its obligations under both UNCLOS and the CBD, failing to protect and preserve the marine environment and ensure its conservation. This breach raised concerns about the broader environmental impact and the necessity for

international cooperation to address the challenges posed by such actions. This was how the Philippines utilised the SCS Arbitration to securitize the environmental harm in the SCS, a crucial component of its SCS disputes with China.

### **Intratextuality: Environmental Securitization through the SCS**

#### **Arbitration**

The SCS disputes have historically been approached through the prisms of national sovereignty, territorial integrity, geopolitical regional dynamics, and military expansionism. However, the Philippines introduced a distinctive perspective by emphasising the environmental implications of the maritime conflict during the SCS Arbitration, representing a pivotal securitization effort to address China's ongoing destruction of the marine ecosystem in the SCS. To address the environmental threat stemming from China's actions in the SCS, the Philippines strategically framed the issue as a security concern, eliciting a prompt response from the Tribunal. The Philippines' collective speech act unfolded in a sequence of logical steps.

Initially, they asserted that China had significantly harmed the marine environment in the SCS, specifically targeting coral reefs, biodiversity, and living resources. The Philippines provided the Tribunal with substantive evidence illustrating China's damaging activities, including allowing its fishermen to exploit endangered species, employing destructive fishing methods, and conducting land reclamation and construction on features like Mischief Reef.

Next, the Philippines warned about the consequences of unchecked environmental degradation resulting from China's actions. The Philippines underscored that if these actions were not addressed straightaway, they would continue to pose a significant threat to the marine environment in the SCS, affecting the ecosystem and the neighbouring states. This warning was grounded in the belief that such environmental damage would not be in the best interest of the Tribunal, representing all state parties to UNCLOS.

Finally, through the SCS Arbitration, the Philippines requested the Tribunal, urging it to rule that China exercised control or authority over various activities that endangered the marine ecosystem across the SCS, irrespective of ownership or jurisdiction over specific features like Scarborough Shoal, Second Thomas Shoal, or Mischief Reef. They expressed confidence in the Tribunal's ability to resolve these matters peacefully, amicably, and immediately.

The Philippines' strategic use of speech acts aimed to securitize the environmental threat in the SCS disputes. The Philippines sought to underscore the gravity of the situation, highlight potential repercussions, and implore the Tribunal to intervene and address the environmental harm caused by China's actions. This securitization framed the environmental aspect of the SCS dispute as a significant concern demanding urgent attention and action.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the years, the Philippines strategically securitised multiple threats posed by China, addressing military, economic, and environmental concerns with distinct securitising measures:

China's construction activities at Mischief Reef were deemed unlawful under UNCLOS, violating provisions related to artificial islands, structures, and attempted appropriation. This military and territorial threat involved the unauthorised occupation of maritime features. The Philippines responded through diplomatic protests and legal action in The Hague.

China operated law enforcement vessels dangerously, creating serious collision risks for Philippine vessels near Scarborough Shoal. This military threat endangered Philippine maritime forces' safety, prompting diplomatic protests and negotiations to address and mitigate risks.

China threatened to forcibly remove the BRP Sierra Madre and its crew from Second Thomas Shoal, including interdicting Philippine vessels and engaging in hostile actions, escalating the SCS disputes. Diplomatic protests and defensive strategies were employed to ensure safety and resupply at Second Thomas Shoal.

China interfered with the Philippines' sovereign rights and jurisdiction within its EEZ and CS, preventing oil and gas exploration, fishing, and traditional fishing at Scarborough Shoal. These actions had significant economic implications, leading to diplomatic protests, negotiations, and initiatives to assert and protect the Philippines' rights and interests.



China engaged in environmentally damaging activities at Scarborough Shoal, Second Thomas Shoal, and Mischief Reef, including illegal poaching, harvesting endangered species, dynamite and cyanide fishing, and construction on coral reefs. These activities posed an environmental threat, addressed through diplomatic protests, environmental advocacy, and legal arguments.

The Philippines adopted various securitizing measures in response to these threats, including diplomatic protests, negotiations, legal actions, and defensive strategies. The ultimate securitisation response was initiating an international legal battle through the SCS Arbitration in The Hague. This legal recourse comprehensively addressed multiple securitised threats, asserting the Philippines' rights and interests under international law. The securitisation aimed to raise international awareness, garner support, and find a peaceful resolution to the complex SCS disputes through diplomatic and legal means.

The upcoming chapter delves into the Philippines' strategies in addressing three security challenges within the SCS disputes throughout the Duterte administration. This period spans from the beginning of the Duterte administration, just two weeks before the PCA Tribunal's issuance of its Award in July 2016, until the conclusion of Duterte's presidential tenure in June 2022.

## **Chapter 6: Comparative Case Study (Period 2) – Incidents during the Duterte Administration**

### **Introduction**

In 2016, Rodrigo Duterte assumed the presidency of the Philippines, promising an “independent foreign policy” that marked a departure from the traditional alliance with the US. This strategic reorientation led the Philippines to explore alternative partnerships, most notably with China. The Duterte administration recognised that the SCS disputes need not impede collaboration in other areas and understood the counterproductive nature of confrontations with the dominant regional power and economy. Central to this diplomatic recalibration was China’s commitment to providing substantial financial support for Duterte’s ambitious infrastructure program. A key institutional development in this shift was the establishment of the Bilateral Consultative Mechanism on the SCS (BCM). This mechanism aimed to serve as a platform for the peaceful management of conflicts and the strengthening of friendly relations between the Philippines and China (BCM, 2017). In embracing this foreign policy shift, Duterte effectively set aside the 2016 PCA Tribunal Award.

However, despite Duterte’s cooperative approach, China continued to assert its claims in the SCS, violating the Philippines’ maritime rights under UNCLOS. China’s growing naval capabilities allowed it to alter territorial conditions through force, taking control of areas within the Philippines’ EEZ and CS. In response, the Philippines took measures to

enhance its defence capabilities, including modernising the Philippine Navy, completing Philippine Coast Guard procurement plans, and contemplating establishing a maritime militia. Nevertheless, these efforts, primarily aimed at creating a credible defence, fell short of matching China's naval power.

This chapter investigates the Philippines' handling of the SCS disputes during Duterte's administration. While earlier administrations pursued an assertive approach, Duterte's strategy emphasised bilateral discussions, although these efforts did not resolve maritime tensions, leading to setbacks in diplomatic relations. The chapter analyses three maritime incidents during Duterte's tenure: (1) the ramming, sinking, and abandonment of a Philippine fishing boat in the Reed Bank in June 2019; (2) the swarming of Chinese vessels in Whitsun Reef from March to April 2021; and (3) the harassment of resupply missions to the BRP Sierra Madre in Second Thomas Shoal in November 2021. The analysis employs Securitization Theory based on the Copenhagen School, asserting that security becomes an issue when labelled as such, necessitating extreme measures. Discourse Analysis is applied to examine these securitization cases, ensuring reliability by exploring data sources, intertextuality, and intratextuality.

Assessing the evidence, the 2019 incident near the Reed Bank stands out as unusual. Instead of responding with security measures, the Duterte government chose de-escalation. The subsequent chapter will delve into this deviant case using Process Tracing, considering the ongoing historical context of the maritime disputes. This chapter concludes by

highlighting recurrent patterns of naval incidents in the SCS, all occurring within a consistent regional context since 1995.

### **Military (Non-)Security Issue 1: Ramming, Sinking, and Abandonment of FBCa Gem-Ver 1 in June 2019**

On 9 June 2019, a Chinese vessel collided with and sank the Philippine fishing boat FBCa Gem-Ver 1, anchored in the Reed (or Recto) Bank in the SCS. Fortunately, all crew members were rescued, thanks to the prompt intervention of a Vietnamese fishing vessel. Following this incident, Philippine authorities investigated to understand the circumstances and determine responsibility. The investigation concluded that the Chinese vessel bore responsibility for the collision, clarifying the incident's details and implications.

#### **Data Sources**

The narrative surrounding the maritime incident draws from three main sources: firstly, the official report compiled by the Joint Philippine Coast Guard – Marine Authority Industry (PCG-MARINA) in 2019; secondly, recorded interviews with the 22 fishermen involved, which were accessible on YouTube; and, various news articles covering the incident. These sources highlighted the serious risks to life and property that Filipino fishermen faced during this incident.

Initial statements from the Duterte administration were primarily sourced from three key groups: (1) the Department of National Defence

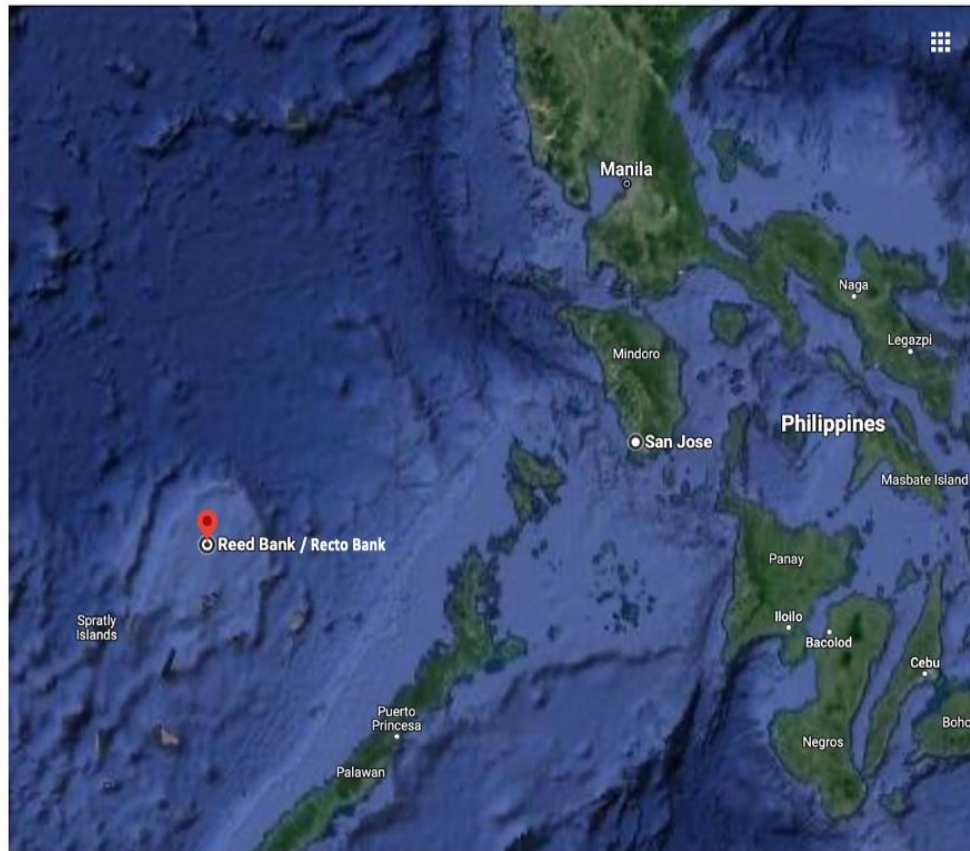
and the military; (2) the Department of Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic corps; and (3) the Office of the President, conveyed through the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO). Throughout the first week following the incident, the press briefings delivered by the Presidential Spokesperson and Chief Legal Counsel indicated President Duterte's stance during that period.

President Duterte addressed the issue on 17 June, a week after the incident happened. In his speech commemorating the 121<sup>st</sup> Philippine Navy anniversary, Duterte notably downplayed the episode, referring to it as a mere "maritime incident". On 22 June, the Presidential Spokesperson announced Duterte's decision to accept the Chinese government's proposal for a joint investigation into the events in the Reed Bank. The joint investigating committee aimed to establish an accurate understanding of the incident and work towards a satisfactory resolution. Further remarks from Duterte on the maritime issue emerged during the 122<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the Presidential Security Group on 26 June. In his address, Duterte openly conveyed his readiness to allow Chinese nationals to engage in fishing activities within Philippine waters. These actions collectively represent the Philippines' de-securitizing response to the 2019 ramming and sinking incident in the Reed Bank.

### **Intertextuality: The Maritime Incident and Initial Reactions from Philippine Authorities**

On Wednesday, 19 May 2019, the fishing vessel Gem-Ver 1, owned by Arlinda and Felix Dela Torre from the Municipality of San Jose in

Occidental Mindoro, embarked on a fishing expedition to the Reed Bank. The boat safely reached its destination on 31 May. Figure 6.1 provides a map displaying the location of San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, and Reed Bank within the SCS.



*Figure 6.19 – From San Jose to Reed Bank (Google Maps, 2022)*

According to the PCG-MARINA (2019) investigation, 10 minutes before midnight on Sunday, 9 June, an unidentified fishing vessel collided with Gem-Ver 1 while it was anchored approximately 140 nautical miles (NM) northwest of Piedras Point, Palawan, as depicted in Figure 6.2 below. At the time, Gem-Ver 1 carried 22 fishermen, including its captain, Junel Insigne.



*Figure 6.20 – Exact Location of the Maritime Incident (PCG-MARINA, 2019)*

Insigne and Jimmy Gordiones, Gem-Ver 1's boat engineer, asserted that their anchor lights and flashing lights, situated at 9-10 feet, were visible from a range of 4-7 NM (PCG-MARINA, 2019). They recalled fair weather that evening, with clear starry skies and a quarter moon, providing slightly clear visibility and calm seas. They had anchored in that position to rest after a day of fishing with hook and line in the northern part of the Reed Bank. That evening, no other fishing vessels were visible near their position, except for a single fishing vessel located approximately 5 NM away.

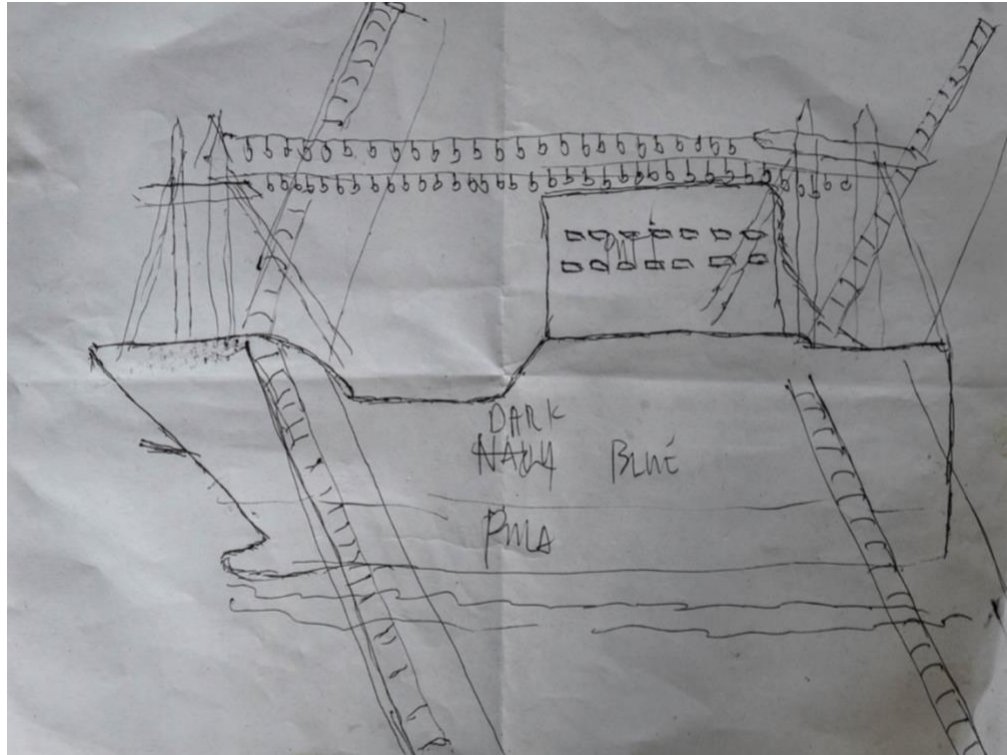
Richard Blaza, one of the crew members, recounted that he was the only one awake during the incident while preparing to cook food (Rappler, 2019a). Blaza confirmed that at 11:40 PM, he noticed a fishing vessel

approaching their position. As he saw the other fishing vessel drawing near and realised it was on a collision course with their boat, he hastily woke the rest of the crew, including the captain. Just as the captain was about to start the engine to manoeuvre away, the other ship collided with the rear of their boat.

After the collision, the other fishing vessel continued past the partially submerged fishing vessel and moved backwards approximately 50 meters away, its fishing lights still illuminated. However, after a brief interval, the other fishing vessel abruptly extinguished its fishing lights and departed the scene, leaving the Filipino fishermen stranded without offering any assistance.

During the PCG-MARINA investigation, all 22 fishermen positively identified the vessel that had struck Gem-Ver 1 as a Chinese fishing vessel based on its structural features and shape. Due to their extensive experience at sea, the crew members were well-acquainted with the typical appearance of Chinese fishing vessels. Boat captain Insigne, with 31 years of fishing experience, provided a detailed sketch of the fishing vessel, as shown in Figure 6.3 (PCG-MARINA, 2019).





*Figure 6.21 – Sketch of the Chinese Fishing Vessel that hit FBca Gem-Ver 1*

With the rest of the fishermen adrift in the sea, crew members Jaypee Gordiones and Justin Pacaul paddled their small service banca for approximately 5 NM in search of aid from the nearest fishing vessel. Around 2 AM on 10 June, the two fishermen reached TGTG-90983-TS, a Vietnamese fishing vessel from the Mekong Delta's Tien Giang Province. The Vietnamese crew promptly offered help, saving the remaining Filipino fishermen. Insigne used the radio equipment aboard the Vietnamese vessel to communicate with another Philippine fishing boat, FBca M2M, and seek further assistance.

On 12 June, M2M commenced towing Gem-Ver 1 on its journey to San Jose, Occidental Mindoro. The Gem-Ver 1 crew encountered a Philippine Navy (PN) rubber boat within the Reed Bank during this journey. The 22 survivors were transferred onto the PN vessel BRP Ramon

Alcaraz (PS-16), which transported them to San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, while escorting M2M as it continued to tow Gem-Ver 1. By 14 June, the 22 survivors arrived at Ambulong Island, San Jose, Occidental Mindoro. That afternoon, the Filipino crew reached the port of Caminawit, San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, where they were handed over to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR). BFAR Regional Director Elizer Salilig extended a warm welcome and offered each fisherman one sack of rice as immediate assistance.

### ***Shifting Stand of the Department of National Defence and the Military***

The immediate responses of the Duterte government to the maritime incident showcased a range of reactions, indicating a transition from an initial assertive stance to a more diplomatic approach geared towards further investigation. This evolving response emphasised the peculiarity of President Duterte's de-securitizing response a week after the incident unfolded.

On Philippine Independence Day, 12 June 2019, Secretary of the Department of National Defence (DND) Delfin Lorenzana issued an official statement via Twitter. Rather than focusing on the ramming and sinking of Gem-Ver 1, Lorenzana (2019) strongly condemned the abandonment of Filipino fishermen by the Chinese fishing vessel. He criticised the Chinese vessel and its crew for leaving the 22 Filipino fishermen at sea, describing the act as cowardly. Lorenzana called for a formal investigation and diplomatic actions to prevent similar incidents in the future.

The following day, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Penetrante, spokesman for the Armed Forces of the Philippines Western Command (WesCom), raised suspicions that the incident might not have been accidental (GMA News, 2019a). Penetrante highlighted that the Filipino fishing boat was anchored at the Reed Bank due to the time of day, making it stationary. Despite this, a Chinese vessel collided with it and immediately fled, resembling a hit-and-run incident. According to Penetrante, this seemed to be an intentional collision, as standard operating procedures mandated the vessel to stop and rescue fishermen in case of an accidental collision. Given the Chinese vessel's failure to stop, WesCom's Joint Task Force WPS initiated an inquiry to gather evidence for possible diplomatic complaints (ABS-CBN News, 2019a).

Around the same time, Lorenzana altered his position and expressed uncertainty about the vessel's flag state involved in the collision with Gem-Ver 1 (Rappler, 2019b). He clarified that his initial statement regarding a Chinese vessel's involvement was based solely on the accounts of the Filipino fishermen. Lorenzana stated that the government would investigate the sinking of the Philippine boat and gather more information by seeking perspectives from Vietnamese and Chinese parties. This change in tone from his earlier strong stance was made public on 13 June, when other officials suggested that the sinking might not have been intentional and may not have involved a Chinese vessel.

During the Maritime Security Symposium 2019 held at the Manila Hotel on 14 June, PN Chief Vice Admiral Robert Empredad alleged that the Chinese vessel deliberately attempted to collide with Gem-Ver 1 (PhilStar,

2019a; Inquirer, 2019a). Empredad emphasised that the ship was anchored, making the collision far from a typical maritime accident, and challenged China's claim that it was just an ordinary incident.

Between 15 and 19 June, PCG and MARINA conducted separate, independent investigations into the incident. While both agencies endorsed their joint report on 20 June, it was made public on 9 July. This report was critical in shedding light on the incident and its implications.

### ***Diplomatic Strategy of the Department of Foreign Affairs***

In the aftermath of the maritime incident and Lorenzana's initial statement on 12 June, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. issued a statement on the same day reiterating that the Chinese vessel had indeed sunk Gem-Ver 1 in the Reed Bank. Locsin (2019a) characterised the abandonment of the Filipino crew by the Chinese as "contemptible and condemnable". While Locsin acknowledged that the Chinese vessel was involved in the incident, he did not specify whether the Chinese vessel was responsible for the sinking. His focus at this stage was primarily on the fact that the Chinese fishermen failed to assist the 22 distressed Filipino fishermen (PNA, 2019a). The DFA's diplomatic stance aimed to address grievances through official channels while containing the escalation of conflict.

Locsin expressed his preference for a bilateral approach in response to questions and suggestions from the public about potential actions that may involve the international community. He replied on his Twitter account, stating, "F--- the international community. It can be

bought. This is our fight and in the end ours alone” (Locsin, 2019b). The statement highlights Locsin’s inclination to direct communication between the concerned parties rather than relying on the intervention of international organisations or other states. On 13 June, Locsin (2019c) confirmed his bilateral strategy when he announced that he had “fired off a diplomatic protest yesterday [12 June]”.

Responding to a suggestion to refer the incident to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), Locsin clarified that the Philippine government had previously filed diplomatic protests against China’s intrusions in the WPS. However, he emphasised that he intended to pursue the case through official channels between the Philippines and China while also considering presenting the case before the IMO. During a regular meeting of the IMO in London on 14 June, the Philippines’ Deputy Representative to the IMO, Senen Mangalile, highlighted the abandonment of the Filipino fishermen at sea, emphasising the moral obligation and responsibility of UN and IMO member-states to implement maritime safety and security regulations (Locsin, 2019d). Mangalile urged member-states to move beyond lip service and take concrete actions to save human lives, stressing that abandoning the fishermen in peril was unacceptable.

Locsin adamantly opposed using unofficial communication and conducting a joint probe with China. On 15 June, he tweeted, “We’ve our military intel reports, period. We don’t trust back-channelling; it smells back there. We cannot investigate w/ China, nor China investigate w/ us – that intrudes into each other’s sovereignty. I will not allow it. We hope for objectivity, but you don’t get that in reality” (Locsin, 2019e). Locsin’s

stance was rooted in the belief that independent investigations by both countries and resolutions through bilateral mechanisms were the way forward.

Notably, the Chinese government also expressed a preference for a diplomatic approach. Philippine Ambassador to the People's Republic of China Jose Santiago Sta. Romana revealed that the Chinese government immediately contacted the Philippine Embassy in Beijing upon learning of the Reed Bank incident. In his speech at the closing celebration of Philippine Independence Day in Beijing on 16 June, Sta. Romana emphasised that both governments sought to resolve their differences through bilateral negotiations (PTV News, 2019; PNA, 2019b). This alignment in approach demonstrated the diplomatic orientation of the Philippine government in dealing with the incident.

### ***Muffled President Speaking through the Communications Office***

President Duterte maintained silence throughout the initial week following the maritime incident (Rappler, 2019c). After DND Secretary Lorenzana's public announcements regarding the incident in the Reed Bank in the early days of the incident, Duterte, who was typically vocal, refrained from making any statements regarding the maritime incident in the three speeches he delivered. Shortly after Lorenzana's statement on 12 June, Duterte spoke at the Philippine Independence Day ceremony in Malabang, Lanao del Sur. Later that night, he addressed officials during the oath-taking ceremony in Cagayan de Oro. On 13 June, Duterte spoke at a land distribution ceremony in General Santos City.

Historically, Duterte took considerable time before publicly addressing China's actions in the WPS. However, the June 2019 Reed Bank incident held particular significance as it marked the first instance of the maritime dispute between the Philippines and China, where a Chinese ship sunk a Philippine vessel. The significance of the June 2019 Reed Bank incident cannot be overstated, as it represented the initial occurrence of a maritime dispute between the Philippines and China, resulting in the sinking of a Philippine vessel by a Chinese ship. A government agency, the DND, reported this collision and promptly corroborated by the DFA. This marked a departure from some previous maritime incidents, initially brought to public attention by the administration and opposition lawmakers and think tanks (Rappler, 2019c).

Despite Duterte's initial silence, Presidential Spokesperson and Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Secretary Salvador Panelo confirmed the president's awareness of the incident and his outrage over it (PCOO 2019a). During a press briefing on 13 June, Panelo strongly condemned the incident, characterising it as "outrage, barbaric, uncivilized", and called for punitive action against those responsible. Panelo outlined potential steps in response to hypothetical acts of aggression against Filipinos, including lodging a diplomatic protest and evaluating China's official response, before determining further actions. Panelo emphasised that the Philippine government's response would be measured but resolute in preventing assaults, bullying, or uncivilised actions from any source.

On 16 June, in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, Department of Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi reassured the 22 fishermen that the President was

actively “studying” the incident (Rappler, 2019d). Cusi, who hails from Mindoro, served as the Cabinet Officer for Regional Development and Security for Region IV-B, encompassing Occidental Mindoro, the home province of the Gem-Ver 1 crew. Appointed by the Duterte administration to assist in the government’s response to the maritime incident, Cusi explained that Duterte remained silent because he was meticulously evaluating the incident and did not want to make decisions based on inaccurate information. Cusi pointed out that the damage inflicted on the Philippine boat was relatively minor (“*daplis lang*”, literally, just a graze), suggesting that the Chinese vessel may not have deliberately rammed Gem-Ver 1 in the Reed Bank, as the outcome could have been more severe (Rappler, 2019e).

### **Intratextuality: Duterte’s De-securitizing Response**

This section explores the Philippines’ response to the maritime incident, highlighting the pivotal role of the chief executive in shaping foreign policy. In the Philippine context, the primary architect of foreign policy is the head of state, in this case, President Duterte. Therefore, critically examining the president’s official statements and speeches regarding the 2019 Reed Bank incident becomes imperative, as these statements define the country’s foreign policy stance.

Within the Duterte administration, a distinct narrative emerged concerning the Gem-Ver 1 incident. The government’s official position was that this maritime incident was not a direct assault on Philippine sovereignty. This contrasts with characterising it as an outright attack on



Philippine sovereignty, despite exposing Filipino fishermen to harm and potentially compromising the Philippines' sovereign rights within its EEZ and CS. Instead, the incident prompted a restrained response from the Philippines aimed at de-securitizing the situation.

This perspective of de-securitization holds particular significance as it mirrors the administration's approach to managing the incident diplomatically and within the bounds of international law. The deliberate strategy is evident in the efforts to prevent the escalation of the situation into a full-blown security crisis, showcasing a commitment to resolving the matter through diplomatic channels and adherence to established legal frameworks.

### ***Not an Attack on Philippine Sovereignty***

After maintaining a week of silence following the maritime incident, Duterte finally addressed the situation on 17 June, during the 121<sup>st</sup> Philippine Navy anniversary. In his speech, Duterte characterised the incident as a "maritime incident" (PCOO, 2019b), emphasising the importance of adhering to established rules among civilised nations. Duterte explicitly stated that the incident at the Reed Bank was merely a collision between two fishing vessels. He urged the Navy not to escalate the situation and stressed the importance of a thorough investigation before making definitive statements. As their Commander-in-Chief, Duterte called on the Navy to remain loyal to their leader and avoid actions that could escalate the conflict. In this speech, Duterte aligned himself with the Chinese government's position, emphasising that the incident was an

accidental collision between two boats and advocating for restraint. His message was clear: to downplay the perceived threat and de-securitize the situation.

On 21 June, during the Oath-taking Ceremony of Davao City Vice Mayor Sebastian Duterte, the President's son, Duterte reiterated that the incident should be regarded as a "maritime incident or accident" and not a confrontation involving armed forces or military vessels (PCOO, 2019c). During this event, President Duterte's statements closely echoed three key points articulated by the Chinese government. Firstly, he emphasised that it was solely a maritime incident or accident involving fishing vessels, explicitly ruling out any armed confrontation. Secondly, Duterte underscored the necessity for a thorough investigation, labelling it a "Marine Board of Inquiry". Finally, he reiterated the Chinese government's appeal to refrain from politicising and militarising the issue.

President Duterte also addressed the topic of military escalation. He acknowledged that compared to China, the Philippines was vulnerable and ill-equipped for an open military confrontation (PCOO, 2019c). He stressed that invoking the Military Defence Treaty with the US would require US congressional approval, expressing doubts about the reliability of US support even if the treaty were invoked.

Another crucial aspect of Duterte's speech during his son's inauguration was his clarification regarding sovereignty and sovereign rights (PCOO, 2019c). He explained that according to UNCLOS, coastal states retain full sovereignty over the ocean area immediately adjacent to their coastlines, extending up to 12 NM, known as the Territorial Sea.

Beyond these 12 NM, up to 200 NM, the Philippines has sovereign rights over its EEZ, but not full sovereignty, as affirmed by the PCA Tribunal Award in 2016. Since the Reed Bank incident occurred well beyond the 12-NM limit but within the Philippine EEZ, Duterte maintained that it did not constitute a direct assault on Philippine sovereignty. As a lawyer, President Duterte asserted that the Philippines held sovereign rights within its EEZ, allowing it to permit or deny access to foreign fishers. However, he acknowledged that the country did not exercise complete sovereignty over that maritime zone.

### ***Philippine-China Joint Investigation***

On 22 June, the Office of the President (OP) officially communicated President Duterte's acceptance of the Chinese government's proposal for a joint investigation into the Reed Bank incident (Panelo, 2019). This move signified the commitment of the Duterte administration and the Chinese government to dialogue and resolve the maritime issue satisfactorily. The announcement specified that the joint investigating committee would consist of three groups, each appointing one representative from the Philippines and China, with the third member selected from a neutral country. The two states' decision to pursue separate investigations raised concerns about potential bias, casting doubt on the credibility of any findings and complicating the issue further. On the contrary, opting for a joint and impartial investigation facilitated a more expeditious resolution. It aligned with the principles of international law, particularly those

outlined in UNCLOS, emphasising the importance of peaceful means for resolving international disputes.

Notably, the OP statement clarified that the Philippines was not relinquishing its sovereign rights nor compromising the rights of its 22 fishermen. The government actively sought justice for its citizens through legal channels. Eventually, Duterte agreed to China's proposal for a joint investigation, while China declined Duterte's suggestion to involve a "neutral" third party in the inquiry (Panelo, 2019). Nonetheless, this decision marked a step toward cooperative resolution and diplomacy, demonstrating a commitment to addressing the incident peacefully and following international legal principles.

### ***Mutual Agreement on Chinese Fishing in Philippine EEZ***

During the 122<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of the Presidential Security Group held at Malacañang Park in Manila on 26 June, Duterte made a significant public statement regarding the maritime issue (PCOO, 2019d; RTV Malacañang, 2019). In his speech, he unequivocally expressed his willingness to allow Chinese nationals to engage in fishing activities within Philippine waters. He emphasised that this decision was part of his "agreement" with Chinese President Xi Jinping, designed to ensure that Chinese authorities would not interfere with Filipino fishermen in the China-controlled Scarborough Shoal, as subsequently elaborated upon by Panelo. Due to negotiations between the Philippines and China, Duterte clarified that this mutual understanding encompassed all fishing activities within the Philippine EEZ and CS.

Following Duterte's announcement, Panelo confirmed the legal validity of the so-called "verbal agreement" in a press briefing (PNA, 2019c). Panelo explained that the president believed aggressively enforcing the 2016 Tribunal Award could lead to an armed conflict with dire consequences for national interests. Thus, Duterte opted for diplomatic negotiations to realise the benefits of the arbitral ruling eventually. This mutual agreement paved the way for Filipino fisherfolk to resume fishing activities in the Scarborough Shoal.

Responding to questions during another press briefing regarding whether the Philippines should accept Chinese fishermen operating within its EEZ and CS, Panelo reiterated the rationale behind the president's approach (PCOO, 2019e). Panelo emphasised that this concession was part of the agreement intended to prevent the escalation of hostilities between the two states. Panelo also underscored that, despite being a verbal agreement, records of bilateral meetings existed, providing a documented record of this understanding. This diplomatic approach reflected the Philippines' commitment to peacefully addressing contentious maritime issues and preserving regional stability.

As one final point, while previous Philippine administrations took an assertive stance against China in the SCS disputes, Duterte's strategy prioritised bilateral discussions, as evidenced by the 2019 incident near the Reed Bank. Despite uncertainties surrounding whether the Chinese vessel intentionally rammed the Philippine fishing boat, the broader context of China's coercive actions against all Filipino fishing vessels in the Reed Bank during that period raised the stakes to a potentially existential

level. The Duterte government navigated these challenges by opting for de-escalation over heightened security measures.

This chapter further examines two additional maritime incidents during Duterte's tenure: the swarming of Chinese vessels in Whitsun Reef from March to April 2021 and the harassment of resupply missions in Second Thomas Shoal in November 2021. These incidents contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Duterte's approach to the SCS disputes throughout his term.

## **Military Security Issue 2: Swarming of Chinese Vessels at the Whitsun Reef in March-April 2021**

In 2021, a concerning incident unfolded near Whitsun Reef, known as "Julian Felipe Reef" in the Philippines, involving numerous Chinese fishing vessels which remained moored for an extended period from March to April. The Philippine government asserted that these vessels were part of the Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM), a claim China vehemently denied (NTF-WPS, 2021a). Instead, China contended that these were ordinary fishing boats seeking refuge from adverse sea conditions despite the area experiencing clear weather during that time.

Whitsun Reef, located approximately 175 NM west of Bataraza, Palawan, is a sizable, boomerang-shaped shallow coral reef falling within the Philippines' EEZ and CS (NTF-WPS, 2021a). This designation grants the Philippines exclusive rights to exploit and preserve the area's abundant

resources, encompassing living resources such as fish and non-living resources like oil and natural gas.

The scale and duration of the Whitsun Reef incident were unprecedented. The incident marked the largest concentration of Chinese fishing vessels documented at a single reef, with an extended stay. The sustained presence of this considerable number of Chinese vessels at Whitsun Reef significantly escalated regional tensions. The fact that these ships were affiliated with the CMM potentially signalled a precursor to Chinese dominance over this maritime feature.

Thus, this episode evoked memories of instances where China had exerted control over maritime features in the SCS at the expense of the Philippines. Notable examples include the 1995 takeover of Mischief Reef and the events following the 2012 standoff in Scarborough Shoal, as discussed in the previous chapter. These instances underscored the existential threats faced by the Philippines and the securitization of its responses in the face of de facto Chinese control over these areas.

### **Empirical Data Analysed**

This section examines the 2021 maritime incident at Whitsun Reef, drawing insights from the reports of the National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; PNA, 2021). Led by the National Security Adviser (NSA), the NTF-WPS comprises representatives from various government agencies, including military and diplomatic officials, with its primary mission being to facilitate a well-coordinated and strategic approach to address the WPS issue. The NTF-WPS must submit

reports and recommendations to the President through the Security Cluster, as outlined in Memorandum Circular No. 94 (OP, 2016).

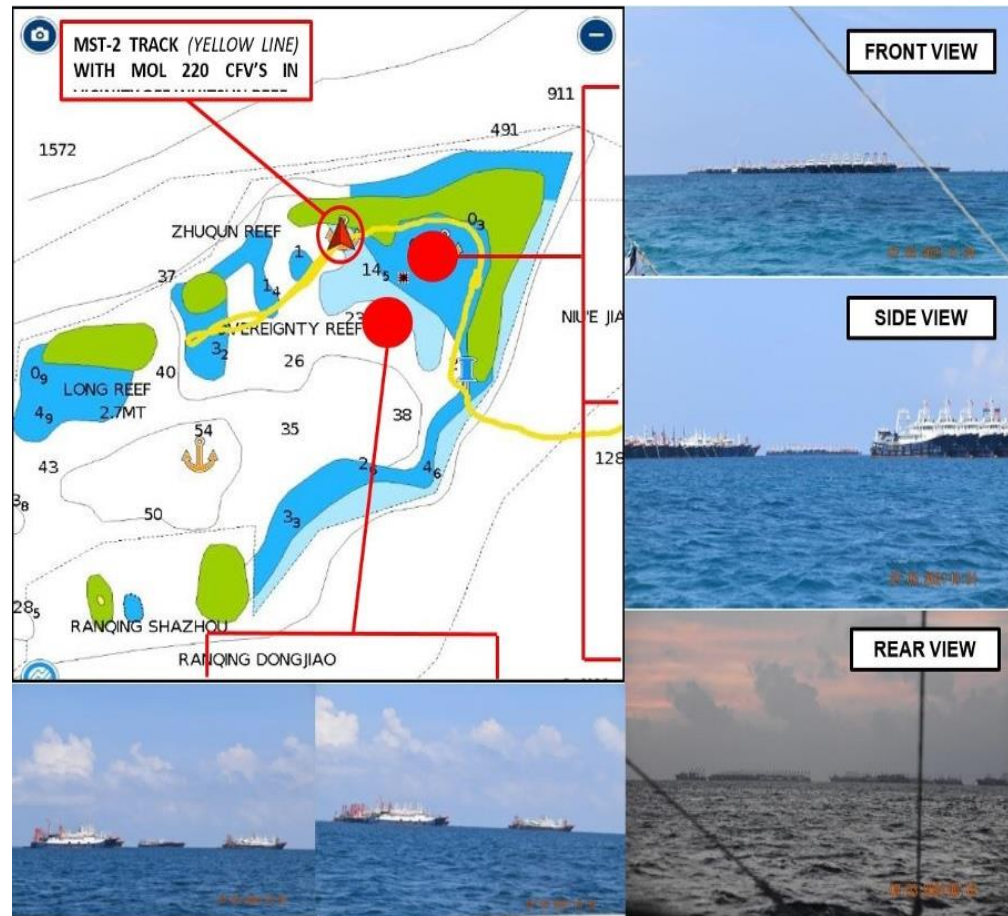
In response to the incursion of Chinese vessels in the Whitsun Reef in 2021, the different agencies in the Duterte government took unified action to condemn the presence of these vessels and demand their immediate departure from the area. While not all calls for action advocated a forceful approach, all responses sought to securitise the issue. These measures included diplomatic protests, routine aerial and maritime patrols to assert sovereignty, and reinforcing the Philippines' defensive cooperation with the US as a strategic counterbalance. The information sources informing these securitization efforts are drawn from the DND, DFA, and OP.

### **Intertextuality: The Maritime Episode Lasting Several Weeks**

On 20 March 2021, the NTF-WPS reported an alarming development: the presence of approximately 220 Chinese vessels near Whitsun Reef, with sightings dating back to 7 March (NTF-WPS, 2021a). These vessels, arranged in a line formation, were suspected to be crewed by personnel associated with the CMM. The NTF-WPS emphasised that these Chinese vessels were not engaged in legitimate fishing activities, anchored to shelter from adverse weather conditions in the area. Expressing apprehension about the unfolding maritime situation, the NTF-WPS highlighted potential risks such as overfishing, environmental degradation, and compromised navigational safety of seafarers. The NTF-



WPS's statement included visual documentation, Figure 6.4, providing evidence of the situation.



*Figure 6.22 – Chinese Marine Vessels at Whitsun Reef in 2021*

Beyond the immediate concerns raised by the NTF-WPS regarding the Whitsun Reef situation, security experts underscored the broader strategic implications at play (Erikson, 2021). They cautioned that China's growing presence at Whitsun Reef was a calculated move aimed at bolstering its control over this vital maritime region, implicitly excluding Philippine vessels from their territorial waters. On 4 April 2021, DND Secretary Lorenzana expressed this sentiment, stating that "the continued presence of Chinese maritime militias in the area reveals their intent to

further occupy features in the West Philippine Sea” (DND, 2021). Lorenzana pointed out previous incidents at the Scarborough Shoal and Mischief Reef as clear violations of Philippine sovereignty and sovereign rights under UNCLOS, demonstrating a recurrent pattern employed by China in the SCS.

An NTF-WPS (2021b) report dated 31 March 2021 reiterated the Philippines’ assertion of sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction over the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) and the WPS. According to the report, by 29 March, 44 CMM vessels remained moored at Whitsun Reef, with more vessels observed at various locations within the KIG. The report reiterated concerns about potential illicit activities by these Chinese vessels, posing threats to the marine environment and the safety of navigation and undermining the Philippines’ sovereign rights in its EEZ. In response to these threats, the NTF-WPS increased the deployment of maritime vessels from the PN and PCG to safeguard the country’s territorial integrity in the WPS. In the same statement, the Philippines appreciated the support and statements of solidarity from international partners who uphold a rules-based order following international law, as affirmed by the 2016 PCA Tribunal Award. Despite these efforts, Chinese vessels in Whitsun Reef persisted into the following month.

In a statement dated 13 April, the NTF-WPS (2021c) reported that even more Chinese ships, including navy warships, coast guard vessels, and those operated by CMM personnel, gathered in the WPS. The number of Chinese ships in Philippine waters as of 11 April had risen to 261,

exceeding the tally from 29 March when 258 Chinese ships were spotted within the Philippines' EEZ.

On 28 April, the NTF-WPS (PNA, 2021) reported the presence of three Chinese Coast Guard vessels in Mischief Reef, one more within the waters of Kalayaan Municipality and another in Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippine government continued its patrols in the WPS, upholding its sovereignty and sovereign rights as enshrined in the Philippine Constitution and international law. The government remained steadfast in pursuing peaceful, rules-based initiatives related to environmental protection, the safety of navigation, maritime security, and food security within its maritime domains.

### **Intratextuality: Threat Construction and Securitizing Responses**

The Duterte administration, including the military, diplomatic branches, and the highest office, displayed a unified front in denouncing the 2021 incident in Whitsun Reef. It steadfastly called for the immediate withdrawal of Chinese vessels from the contested area, demonstrating a collective stance across various governmental sectors. Although the response varied in assertiveness, its core was rooted in a defensive stance. These securitizing measures spanned a spectrum, encompassing diplomatic protests supported by consistent aerial and maritime sovereignty patrols and a strategic effort to reinforce the Philippines' defensive alliances, particularly with the US. While not all parties advocated for an overtly confrontational approach, the overarching

objective remained consistent: to assert and protect the nation's rights and interests in the face of perceived threats.

### ***Defence Secretary Lorenzana and the Military***

On 22 March, DND Secretary Lorenzana issued a firm call to China, urging the immediate recall of the boats to halt the incursion into Philippine waters. Lorenzana (2021) labelled this episode “a clear provocative action of militarizing the area”. During the Commission on Appointments hearing on 24 March 2021, AFP Chief of Staff Cirilito Sobejana corroborated the aerial observations of the NTF-WPS, confirming that the vessels were positioned in a “phalanx” formation – a military configuration typically associated with battle formations (Rappler, 2021; Limos, 2021).

With resolute determination, Lorenzana emphasised the DND's ongoing coordination with the PCG, NTF-WPS, and DFA to devise an appropriate response. This collective effort aimed to safeguard the welfare of Filipino fishermen, preserve the Philippines' marine resources, and uphold peace and stability in the WPS. Lorenzana (2021) concluded his statement with an unwavering commitment, declaring that the Philippines was resolute in defending its sovereign rights over the WPS.

**STATEMENT OF THE  
SECRETARY OF  
NATIONAL DEFENSE  
ON THE PRESENCE OF  
CHINESE MILITIA BOATS  
IN THE JULIAN FELIPE  
REEF**

“We call on the Chinese to stop this incursion and immediately recall these boats violating our maritime rights and encroaching into our sovereign territory.

We are committed to uphold our sovereign rights over the WPS.

**Sec. Delfin N. Lorenzana**  
Department of National Defense



*Figure 6.23 – Statement of Lorenzana on the Presence of Chinese Militia Boats in Whitsun Reef, 22 March 2021*

On 3 April, Lorenzana reiterated the Philippines’ demand to withdraw Chinese vessels from Whitsun Reef. He emphasised that there was no justifiable reason for their continued presence, particularly given the favourable weather conditions in the area. Lorenzana said, “I am no fool. The weather has been good so far, so they have no other reason to stay there. These vessels should be on their way out. *Umalis na kayo diyan* (Leave now)” (Inquirer, 2021).

In response, China characterised Lorenzana's statement as "unprofessional" and urged relevant authorities to foster constructive dialogue, discouraging the influence of irrational emotions in the discourse (Chinese Embassy Manila, 2021). China maintained that it was normal for its fishing vessels to operate in these waters and take shelter near the reef during "rough sea conditions". China staunchly asserted that Whitsun Reef was an inherent component of China's claims, and the adjacent waters had been a traditional fishing ground for Chinese fishermen for many years.

The exchange of words between Lorenzana and the Chinese Embassy persisted, leading to a subsequent statement dated 4 April, in which Lorenzana publicly called out China for disregarding international law (DND, 2021). Lorenzana underscored that the Philippines' territorial claims were firmly grounded, in contrast to China's unsubstantiated assertions. Lorenzana stated, "This, together with its so-called historical claim, was flatly and categorically rejected by the arbitral tribunal" (DND, 2021).

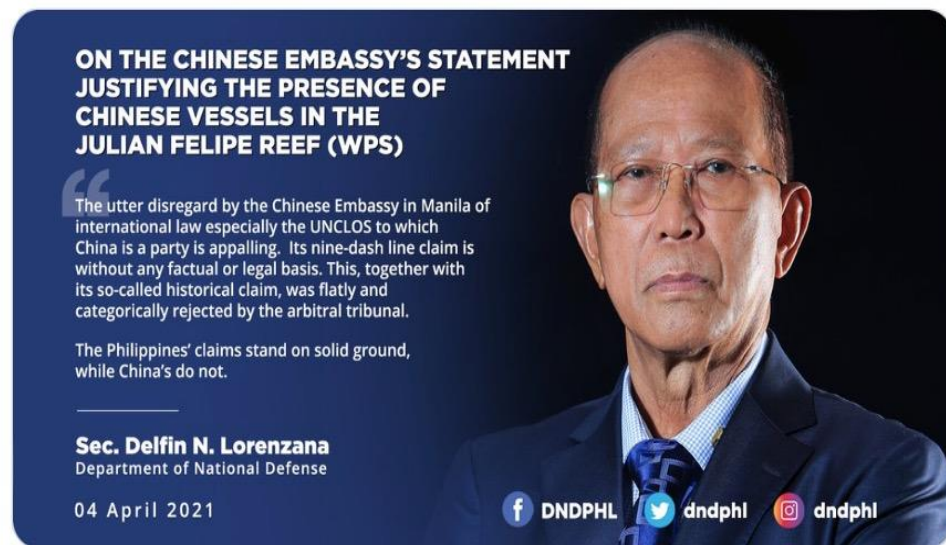
← Tweet



**DND Philippines** ✓  
@dndphl

...

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on the Chinese Embassy's Statement justifying the presence of Chinese vessels in the Julian Felipe Reef (WPS)  
Click link to read full statement:  
[dnd.gov.ph/Postings/Post/...](https://dnd.gov.ph/Postings/Post/...)



10:21 AM · Apr 4, 2021

82 Retweets 29 Quotes 341 Likes 5 Bookmarks

*Figure 6.24 – DND's Tweet on Secretary Lorenza's Statement, 4 April 2021*

### ***Department of Foreign Affairs***

In direct response to the influx of Chinese vessels at Whitsun Reef, the DFA initiated swift action on the same day the NTF-WPS issued its initial statement concerning the incident. On 21 March, the Philippines formally lodged the first in a series of diplomatic protests against China in light of the extensive presence of numerous Chinese vessels near Whitsun



Reef (Locsin, 2021). In these diplomatic protests, the Philippines called upon China to immediately withdraw its fishing and maritime vessels from the vicinity and adjoining waters of critical features within the KIG. The Philippines further urged China to instruct its fishing vessels to cease engaging in environmentally destructive activities. This stance was articulated by DFA Secretary Locsin, who revealed that the decision to file the diplomatic protest was based on the recommendation by the head of the NTF-WPS and NSA Adviser Esperon (Locsin, 2021).



*Figure 6.25 – DFA Secretary Locsin’s Tweet, 21 March 2021*

On 6 April, the DFA issued a formal rebuke to the Chinese Embassy in Manila, expressing its disapproval for engaging in a rare and undiplomatic verbal altercation with Lorenzana (DFA, 2021a). The DFA



reminded Chinese Embassy officials that they were guests of the Philippine government and, as such, were expected to consistently adhere to diplomatic protocols and show due respect to Philippine government officials. The Philippines took China to task for disseminating inaccurate statements in an exhaustive eight-point statement (DFA, 2021a). Furthermore, it underscored that China's tolerance of the prolonged presence of its vessels in the WPS exhibited a profound "lack of good faith" during ongoing negotiations regarding the ASEAN-China SCS Code of Conduct. The DFA warned that the Philippines intended to file daily diplomatic protests if Chinese vessels persisted in Philippine waters, signalling the country's unwavering commitment to defending its territorial rights.

### **Statement: DFA Deplores Chinese Embassy Response to Secretary of Defense's Statement**

1. The Department of Foreign Affairs strongly deplores the statement of the Chinese Embassy Spokesperson reacting to the 3 April 2021 statement of Secretary of National Defense Delfin N. Lorenzana calling on Chinese vessels to leave the waters in the area and vicinity of Julian Felipe Reef.
2. The Embassy statement contained blatant falsehoods such as claims of adverse weather conditions when there were none and the supposed non-existence of maritime militia vessels in the area. The statement also attempted to promote the clearly false narrative of China's expansive and illegitimate claims in the West Philippine Sea.

*Figure 6.26 – DFA Statement on the Chinese Embassy Response to Lorenzana, 5 April 2021, p. 1*

3. Julian Felipe Reef is part of the Kalayaan Island Group and lies in the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of the Philippines. It is located 175 nautical miles west of Bataraza town in Palawan and 638.229 nautical miles from Hainan Island.

4. The Department of Foreign Affairs rejects China's assertion that Julian Felipe Reef and its waters are their "traditional fishing grounds." Tradition yields to law whether or not it is regarded as traditional fishing. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) -- to which both the Republic of the Philippines and China are parties -- and the final and binding 12 July 2016 Award in the South China Sea Arbitration are clearly the only norm applicable to this situation.

5. The 12 July 2016 Award in the South China Sea Arbitration conclusively settled the issue of historic rights and maritime entitlements in the South China Sea. The Tribunal ruled that claims to historic rights, or other sovereign rights or jurisdiction that exceed the geographic and substantive limits of maritime entitlements under UNCLOS, are without lawful effect. It further ruled that UNCLOS "superseded any historic rights, or other sovereign rights or jurisdiction, in excess of the limits imposed therein."

6. The Department of Foreign Affairs therefore reiterates the demand of the Secretary of National Defense that China immediately withdraw its fishing vessels and maritime assets in the area and vicinity of Julian Felipe Reef and in the Philippines' maritime zones. For every day of delay, the Republic of the Philippines will lodge a diplomatic protest.

7. The continued deployment, lingering presence and activities of Chinese vessels in the West Philippine Sea and China's tolerance thereof blatantly infringe upon Philippine sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction. These are contrary to China's commitments under international law and the ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and demonstrate lack of good faith in the ongoing negotiations on a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea between ASEAN and China.

*Figure 6.27 – DFA Statement on the Chinese Embassy Response to Lorenzana, 5 April 2021, p. 2*

8. Moreover, the Department of Foreign Affairs strongly denounces the Embassy's attempt to impugn the Secretary of National Defense -- a Cabinet Official of the Republic of the Philippines -- by calling his statement "unprofessional". Chinese Embassy officials are reminded that they are guests of the Philippine Government, and as guests must at all times observe protocol and accord respect to Philippine Government officials. END

*Figure 6.28 – DFA Statement on the Chinese Embassy Response to Lorenzana, 5 April 2021, p. 3*

During a phone call on the Philippines' *Araw ng Kagitingan* (Day of Valour) celebrated on 9 April, Secretary Locsin and US Secretary of State Antony John Blinken discussed their concerns regarding CMM vessels' presence in the SCS (US Embassy in the Philippines, 2021). In a resounding reaffirmation of their commitment, Blinken asserted that the Mutual Defence Treaty between the Philippines and the US unequivocally applies to the SCS, underlining the robust bond between the two states.

On 13 April, the DFA summoned Ambassador Huang Xilian, China's envoy to the Philippines, marking the first time such a summons was made since Huang assumed his diplomatic role in December 2019 (PNA, 2021c). During the meeting between Philippine authorities and Huang, the Philippines conveyed its "utmost displeasure" regarding the persistent presence of Chinese vessels around Whitsun Reef and other maritime areas within Philippine territorial waters. The Philippines reiterated its demand for China to withdraw its vessels from the area promptly. Locsin emphasised that the continued incursions of Chinese ships into the WPS

held no legal merit and served as a needless distraction from the promising potential of fostering positive relations between China and the Philippines under the Duterte administration.

### ***The Office of the President***

In March 2021, as the Philippines confronted the escalating presence of Chinese vessels in Whitsun Reef, President Duterte, initially silent on the matter, eventually addressed the issue through various official channels. The trajectory of his response unfolded in a series of notable events. On 23 March, Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque announced that Duterte intended to engage in a dialogue with Ambassador Huang regarding the maritime episode in Whitsun Reef (PNA, 2021d). Roque emphasised the importance of diplomatic discourse between nations, noting that there were no issues that friends could not discuss.

However, it was not until 19 April that Duterte made a public statement during one of his “Talk to the People” addresses (PCOO, 2021a). Departing from his Defence and Foreign Affairs secretaries’ more assertive stance, Duterte reiterated his longstanding arguments against provoking China. He contended that asserting the Philippines’ rights in the area could potentially lead to war with China and suggested that China was, in his view, already “in possession” of the WPS. Nonetheless, Duterte asserted that he would be more assertive if China initiated drilling for oil or other mineral resources in the WPS. He declared his intention to maintain a military presence in the WPS, stating, “I will really not leave. If I have a ship

there now, Coast Guard, I will not leave... If they are driven away, I will tell them to stay put,” in a mix of English and Filipino.

While Duterte’s statement recognising the Whitsun Reef incident as an existential threat was delayed, it underscored his acknowledgement of the Philippines’ vulnerability against the military might of China. In recognising the intrusion into the Philippines’ EEZ as a violation of international law, Duterte displayed a pragmatic approach, refraining from a hostile response due to the country’s limited capacity to challenge China.

The Philippines employed diplomatic protests and conducted patrol missions to safeguard its territory and EEZ in addressing the existential threat. This measured approach was in stark contrast to any aggressive retaliation. Simultaneously, the securitizing discourses from the DND, DFA, and OP collectively framed the 2021 Whitsun Reef episode as a security issue. These discourses urged China to rectify its actions and emphasised the imperative to avoid further escalation in the SCS disputes.

### **Military Security Issue 3: Harassing Resupply Mission to the BRP Sierra Madre in November 2021**

In the aftermath of the maritime episode at Whitsun Reef, tensions in the SCS escalated further with another concerning incident near Second Thomas Shoal, also known as “Ayungin Shoal” in the Philippines, in November 2021. This incident happened six days before President Xi Jinping’s significant speech commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations. In his address, Xi (2021) sought to assure

the ASEAN of China's commitment to being a "good neighbor, good friend, and good partner". He pledged that China would "never seek hegemony, still less bully smaller countries". The proximity of this statement to the brewing tension near the Second Thomas Shoal raised questions about the consistency of China's actions with its diplomatic rhetoric. The juxtaposition of these events highlighted the need to examine the gap between Chinese official declarations and on-the-ground developments in the SCS.

In this incident, the Chinese Coast Guard used water cannons to assault two Philippine boats that were resupplying BRP Sierra Madre, the Philippine Navy vessel and symbol of the Philippines' territorial claim over Whitsun Reef. Although China has had a history of intimidating and attacking Filipino fishing boats in disputed Philippine waters and disrupting resupply missions to Filipino troops at Second Thomas Shoal, this incident represented a notable departure from past actions. It stood out as the first instance of China launching an attack on a supply mission intended for the Philippine military.

Hence, this maritime episode parallels a similar incident in the Second Thomas Shoal in 2014, when tensions surged due to China's opposition to the SCS Arbitration initiated by the Philippines. The intricacies of this earlier confrontation and the Philippines' securitizing response were explored in Chapter 5, highlighting the recurring nature of such confrontations and their potential to destabilise the SCS region.

## **Sources of Evidence**

The primary sources regarding the maritime incident in November 2021 trace back to the Western Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (WesCom), with communication channelled through the Philippine National Security Adviser (NSA) and the head of the National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS), Hermogenes Esperon Jr. To substantiate the distressing water cannon incident, Esperon released a video providing tangible evidence of the episode.

In response to this incident, a series of securitizing measures were set into motion, and the information was disseminated through statements from various authoritative entities. These included the Department of National Defence (DND), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), and the Office of the President, communicated through the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO). This collaborative effort across multiple channels underscores the gravity of the situation and the concerted response from different government sectors.

Moreover, a particularly impactful response emerged from President Duterte during his speech at the online ASEAN-China Special Summit, held to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations on 21 November 2021 (PCOO, 2021b). Duterte's address at this summit provided the platform to articulate the Philippines' position and concerns regarding the incident, elevating it to an international stage. This event underscored the gravity of the situation and demonstrated the Philippines' commitment to addressing the issue

through diplomatic channels, emphasising the necessity to garner international support and attention.

### **Intertextuality: Another Blocking Incident in Second Thomas Shoal**

The AFP WesCom statement on 16 November 2021, collaborated by the PCOO and DFA, confirmed that three Chinese Coast Guard vessels intercepted and subjected two Philippine supply boats to water cannon attacks (DFA, 2021; PNA, 2021e). The intended recipients of the essential supplies were the crew of the BRP Sierra Madre, the Philippine Navy ship grounded at Second Thomas Shoal in 1999. This strategic presence is crucial in asserting the Philippines' territorial claims at the WPS. Despite the unfortunate cancellation of the resupply mission, no severe injuries were reported.

In the aftermath of the incident, the NSA and head of NTF-WPS, Esperon, provided additional details during a media interview (PNA, 2021f). He disclosed that two Chinese Coast Guard vessels obstructed the progress of the two Filipino boats involved in the resupply mission. At the same time, a third Chinese Coast Guard ship deployed water cannons against the Philippine vessels. This provocative attack unfolded within Second Thomas Shoal, a region unequivocally within the Philippines' Kalayaan Island Group (KIG). The assault persisted for at least an hour, damaging one of the boats and compelling both vessels to return to Palawan, the nearest Philippine island.

By 18 November, Esperon reasserted the Philippines' unwavering commitment to supplying its troops stationed at the BRP Sierra Madre in



Second Thomas Shoal (PNA, 2021f). Notably, Esperon highlighted that the government had observed an unusual surge in the presence of CMM vessels near Second Thomas Shoal and Thitu Island in the WPS about a week before the attack. The Philippine government, maintaining vigilance, closely monitored the persistent incursion of Chinese vessels within the Philippines' EEZ and CS, expressing heightened concern over their increasingly aggressive behaviour.

On 23 November, the Philippine Navy completed the mission to deliver supplies to the BRP Sierra Madre in Second Thomas Shoal without complications (Acosta, 2021). Lorenzana publicly shared a photo of this achievement, symbolising the Philippines' determination to fulfil its resupply commitment in adversity (Philippine Star, 2021). Lorenzana also condemned the use of water cannons against the resupply boats, emphasising the importance of treating the Filipino people with the respect and dignity they rightfully deserve. This incident underscored the persistent challenges and complexities surrounding territorial disputes in the WPS, highlighting the significance of diplomatic efforts and international cooperation in effectively addressing these issues.



*Figure 6.29 – The Two Boats (encircled) Bringing Supplies to Philippine Troops Aboard the BRP Sierra Madre*

### **Intratextuality: Duterte’s Condemnation before the ASEAN-China Summit**

Despite his inclination towards maintaining friendly relations with China, President Duterte addressed the maritime incident during a virtual Special Summit to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations on 22 November 2021 (PCOO, 2021b). In this significant intervention at the Special Summit, Duterte strongly condemned the maritime incident. Duterte stressed the gravity of the situation, stating, “We abhor the recent event in the Ayungin Shoal and view with grave concern other similar developments. This does not speak well of the relations between our nations and our partnership.” Duterte underscored that the issue was not merely a localised dispute but a matter

of broader consequence affecting the Philippines and the ASEAN community.

Furthermore, Duterte urged all stakeholders to exercise restraint and avoid escalating tensions, emphasising the need for peaceful dispute resolution based on international law (PCOO, 2021b). He highlighted the significance of resolving maritime disputes in line with UNCLOS and the 2016 Tribunal Award. Duterte also called upon China to maintain its commitment to expeditiously conclude a robust and substantive ASEAN-China Code of Conduct for the SCS, underlining that adherence to the rule of law was the only viable pathway to address the monumental challenges presented by the ongoing SCS disputes.

Before President Duterte became involved, DFA Secretary Locsin adopted a resolute stance (Figure 6.12) by formally denouncing the maritime incident at Second Thomas Shoal to Chinese Ambassador Huang and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing (DFA, 2021). Following Locsin's lead, various Philippine government agencies collaborated, unifying their efforts to securitize the harassment and water cannon incident.



DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
KAGAWARAN NG UGNAYANG PANLABAS

STATEMENT OF SECRETARY TEODORO L. LOCSIN, JR. ON THE AYUNGIN SHOAL INCIDENT  
18 November 2021

The Western Command in Palawan reports that on 16 November 2021, three (3) Chinese Coast Guard vessels blocked and water cannoned two (2) Philippine supply boats *en route* to transport food supplies to Philippine military personnel in Ayungin Shoal (Second Thomas Shoal). Fortunately, no one was hurt; but our boats had to abort their resupply mission.

I have conveyed in the strongest terms to H.E. Huang Xilian, Ambassador of China and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing our outrage, condemnation and protest of the incident. I reminded China that a public vessel is covered by the Philippines-United States Mutual Defense Treaty.

Ayungin Shoal is part of the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG), which is an integral part of the Philippines, as well as the Philippines' exclusive economic zone and continental shelf, and over which the Philippines has sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction.

The acts of the Chinese Coast Guard vessels are illegal. China has no law enforcement rights in and around these areas. They must take heed and back off.

This failure to exercise self-restraint threatens the special relationship between the Philippines and China that President Rodrigo R. Duterte and President Xi Jin Ping have worked hard to nurture.

The Philippines will continue to provide supplies to our troops in Ayungin Shoal (Second Thomas Shoal). We do not ask permission to do what we need to do in our territory. END.

*Figure 6.30 - Statement of Locsin on the Ayungin Shoal Incident, 18 November 2021*

In summary, in response to the maritime incident, Philippine authorities, with the backing of President Duterte, conveyed resolute statements to securitize the issue. First, the Philippines denounced the water cannon incident at Second Thomas Shoal, expressing profound concerns about the potential for future harassment episodes. This claim

highlighted the situation and served as a call to address the issue. Second, the Philippines warned about China's actions at Second Thomas Shoal, emphasising that such actions had escalated tensions in the SCS. The warning conveyed that this escalation was detrimental to international law and the ASEAN-China Code of Conduct in the SCS, serving as an explicit indication that the continued unresolved disputes were against China's interests. Finally, the Philippines called upon China to exercise self-restraint, refrain from escalating tensions in the SCS, and actively engage in peaceful dispute resolution. This demand sought China's commitment to resolving disputes in compliance with international legal frameworks, an attempt to persuade China to take specific actions.

### **Contrasting and Comparing Cases since 1995**

After examining the three incidents in the WPS that occurred during the Duterte administration using Discourse Analysis, this section compares them with the securitized issues investigated in the previous chapter. Notably, the maritime episodes presented to the PCA Tribunal were all securitized, meaning they were treated as matters of utmost security concern and were addressed accordingly. Therefore, one might expect similar post-arbitration maritime incidents to be securitized as part of the Philippines' strategy to protect its national interests.

However, this thesis claims that not all post-SCS Arbitration cases were securitized. One such case was the June 2019 ramming, sinking, and abandoning incident in the Reed Bank. Surprisingly, the Philippines did not choose to securitise this issue, which set it apart as a deviant case. As a

result, this case warrants further investigation in the subsequent chapter to explore why the Philippines decided not to securitise this incident despite its potential significance in maritime security and national interest.

### **Comparable Incident of Dangerous and Unlawful Conduct of China's Vessels**

The ramming and sinking of a Philippine fishing boat in the Reed Bank in 2019, followed by the abandonment of its crew, constitutes a precise instance of dangerous manoeuvre and unlawful conduct by Chinese vessels. The official joint investigation report conducted by the PCG and MARINA (2019) concluded that the “unidentified Chinese fishing vessel” involved in the incident failed to take necessary measures to prevent a collision with Gem-Ver 1, which was anchored at the time. This failure to abide by the COLREGS, specifically Rule 18 (a), which mandates that a power-driven vessel underway should give way to a vessel not under command, was a crucial investigation finding.

Furthermore, the PCG-MARINA (2019) highlighted the Chinese vessel's failure to assist the 22 Filipino fishermen who were left stranded at sea after the collision. Despite stopping approximately 50 meters from the distressed Gem-Ver 1 and having direct knowledge of the perilous situation due to its fishing lights being on, the Chinese vessel neglected its obligations under UNCLOS and the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS). As detailed in the report, these international regulations bind shipmasters to aid individuals in distress at sea, yet the crew of the Chinese vessel failed to do so.

The Reed Bank incident of 2019 resembles the Scarborough Shoal incident of 2012, the second military issue discussed in Chapter 5. The dangerous and unlawful activities of Chinese vessels at Scarborough Shoal were deemed an existential threat by the Philippines as presented in the SCS Arbitration. Given the similarities between these two incidents, one might anticipate a similar outcome of securitisation for the Reed Bank incident. However, the Reed Bank incident did not lead to the securitisation of the issue, setting it apart as a case demanding further examination.

### **Similar Case to the De Facto Control since 1995**

The Whitsun Reef incident of 2021 raised grave concerns over the substantial presence of CMM vessels in the area, sparking fears that this might be a precursor to China asserting de facto control, much akin to its actions at Mischief Reef since 1995. The first military issue explored in Chapter 5 was China's expansionist activities at Mischief Reef and how its persistent strategy led to effectively controlling the maritime region. During the SCS Arbitration, the Philippine delegation portrayed this maritime episode as a severe threat to exercising sovereign rights within its EEZ. The episodes in Mischief Reef since 1995 and Whitsun Reef in 2021 were met with similar responses, as they were classified as significant security threats.

The Philippines condemned the mass gathering of hundreds of CMM boats in Whitsun Reef in 2021. The DFA took decisive actions, including issuing daily diplomatic protests to the Chinese Embassy in Manila. These protests demanded that China promptly withdraw its fishing

vessels and maritime assets from the areas in the Spratly Islands claimed by the Philippines. Additionally, the DFA called on China to instruct its fishing vessels to cease their environmentally destructive activities in the region. The DFA went a step further by summoning the Chinese envoy to Manila on 13 April, marking the first time such an action had been taken since the start of Duterte's term in 2016. This move underscored the Philippines' displeasure over the prolonged presence of Chinese militia boats in the area.

### **Recurring Harassment of Supply Mission at Second Thomas Shoal**

In November 2021, another incident unfolded as three China Coast Guard vessels engaged in an aggressive manoeuvre, attempting to ram and subsequently employing water cannons to obstruct two Philippine Navy ships from delivering essential food and supplies to a contingent of marines stationed at Second Thomas Shoal. While this may appear as a distinct instance of China's attempt to thwart the Philippine Navy's resupply efforts at Second Thomas Shoal, such provocations were nothing novel. The harassment of supply missions to the BRP Sierra Madre at Second Thomas Shoal in 2021 was reminiscent of a similar confrontation in 2014, as explored in the third military issue in Chapter 5. In both these maritime incidents at Second Thomas Shoal, occurring in 2014 and 2021, the Philippines regarded them as existential threats, signalling the gravity of these confrontations.

However, the most recent stand-off should be perceived as more than another episode in the ongoing cat-and-mouse game. In this context,



China's actions against the Philippines represented a worrisome shift in tactics. China appeared to employ domestic legislation to assert its expansive maritime claims within the SCS. This manoeuvre was particularly concerning, as it could potentially escalate tensions in the already-disputed waters, raising the stakes and intensifying the challenges coastal nations face.

### **The 2019 Reed Bank Incident as the Deviant Case**

In examining the various incidents involving China's claims in the SCS since 1995 until 2022, a notable exception stands out: the 2019 incident in the Reed Bank, during which the Philippines refrained from securitising the issue. This maritime incident demands a deeper exploration of the factors that led to this unconventional response.

According to the Copenhagen School's framework, securitisation entails recognising an issue as a security concern and constructing it as a threat. In the face of such a developing issue, the securitising actor typically has three potential courses of action. The first involves acknowledging the issue as a genuine threat and responding with immediate securitising measures, as observed in 2021, specifically those at Whitsun Reef in March-April and Second Thomas Shoal in November. From the Copenhagen School's perspective, this represents a successful securitisation.

The second response by the securitising actor entails recognising the issue as a threat but choosing not to take any action. At times, as with President Duterte, Chinese aggression in the WPS might be acknowledged

as a threat. However, the securitising actor might opt for a resigned stance, believing there is little recourse against the overwhelming power. This situation could still be seen as a form of securitisation but characterised by its failure, where the acknowledged danger remains unaddressed.

The third alternative involves not acknowledging the issue as a threat at all. In this scenario, even if the issue poses a danger to the referent object, the recognition of being a risk is absent. No securitising response is initiated, or if one had been adopted earlier, it is subsequently downgraded to de-securitisation. This is the approach President Duterte took in response to the 2019 ramming, sinking, and abandonment incident in the Reed Bank. Despite launching diplomatic protests and military confrontations by government agencies, Duterte downplayed the imminent danger posed by the issue. Duterte, as the primary architect of the Philippines' foreign policy, chose to discontinue all security measures in response to the incident.

Thus, when contrasting all maritime incidents in the SCS from 1995 to 2022, the Reed Bank incident in 2019 emerges as a singular case where the Philippine response was characterised by de-securitisation. To understand what circumstances contributed to this unique response, the following chapter examines the causal process leading to this unusual case unfolding.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the SCS disputes between the Philippines and China during the Duterte administration. It focused on three

prominently reported maritime incidents and compared them to previous securitised cases of Chinese incursions in the WPS. Throughout Chapters 5 and 6, maritime incidents were assessed in isolation to determine whether securitisation occurred. This analytical approach intentionally avoided complicating the model with extraneous material to facilitate the comparison of different cases. Consequently, external factors such as the US-China rivalry or the ASEAN's role in the SCS disputes have not been directly considered in the analysis thus far. Given the urgency and significance of the maritime episodes examined from 1995 to 2022 as national security matters for the Philippines, focusing solely on developing securitising measures was deemed justified.

Notably, the 2019 ramming and sinking of Gem-Ver 1 and the abandonment of its 22 Filipino crew members at sea emerged as a deviant case among these incidents. During this incident, the Philippine government decided to de-securitise the issue, contrasting the typical securitisation response. The forthcoming chapter will incorporate the historical context into the within-case analysis, specifically focusing on the deviant case. Chapter 2, the literature review, provided insight into the context of the disputes spanning from 1995 to 2019, highlighting persistent behaviours of key actors involved in the disputes, including China, the US, the ASEAN, and international institutions. Moreover, it underscored the dual asymmetric relational dynamics in the region. This consistent context of the SCS disputes will serve as the scope condition for understanding the mechanism that led a threatening trigger result in a de-securitizing measure.

Considering the broader context of the SCS disputes, the in-depth case analysis moves beyond mere comparative case analysis. It encompasses a broader spectrum of considerations, including linkages among issues, multilevel games, complexities encountered by reciprocity strategies in intricate situations, and the role of international organisations. This holistic perspective recognises that actors in world politics pursue various strategies within an established interaction context, which, in turn, can change the context itself. Ultimately, the interplay among all these factors – structure and agency, external and internal – elucidates the causal process behind the Philippines' de-securitisation response to the 2019 ramming and sinking incident in the Reed Bank.

## **Chapter 7: Within Case Analysis – The “Unfortunate Maritime Incident” in the Reed Bank, June 2019**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the Philippine policy response prompted by what President Duterte regarded as an “unfortunate maritime incident” near the Recto Bank, internationally known as “Reed Bank”. This maritime event serves as the deviant case in the comparative analysis of the Philippines’ responses to SCS disputes from 1995 to 2022, as examined in the preceding two analytical chapters.

The chapter is grounded in the sociological-causal securitisation framework. According to the securitisation framework, any issue, regardless of its critical nature, does not become a security concern until authorities perceive it as a direct threat to a specific referent object. Since security fundamentally relates to survival, decision-makers must promptly address the assumed peril and often resort to extraordinary measures. As Weaver (1995) aptly points out, categorising an issue as a security concern hinges on a political decision.

The central argument of this chapter is that the reported collision in the Reed Bank on 9 June 2019, leading to the sinking of the Philippine fishing vessel FBca Gem-Ver 1, along with the abandonment of 22 Filipino fishermen at sea, represented a significant and tangible existential danger. However, this incident provoked the Philippine government to adopt policy responses primarily centred on China. This was an exceptional case,

especially considering the persistent threats and incidents in the SCS dating back to 1995. Within this unique context, the Philippines opted for a de-escalation approach. The subsequent sections of this chapter investigate the circumstances surrounding this distinct maritime incident and analyse the factors and dynamics that prompted the Philippines to pursue a de-securitisation strategy, a departure from its usual securitisation responses.

As previously explored in Chapter 4, this chapter serves as the nexus to the second part of the thesis, weaving together three key elements: (1) the sociological-causal securitisation framework, (2) the research methodology and method, and (3) the empirical backdrop concerning the Philippine response to the SCS disputes. Figure 7.1 offers a visual representation of this synthesis, illustrating how these interconnected components form the comprehensive framework of this study.

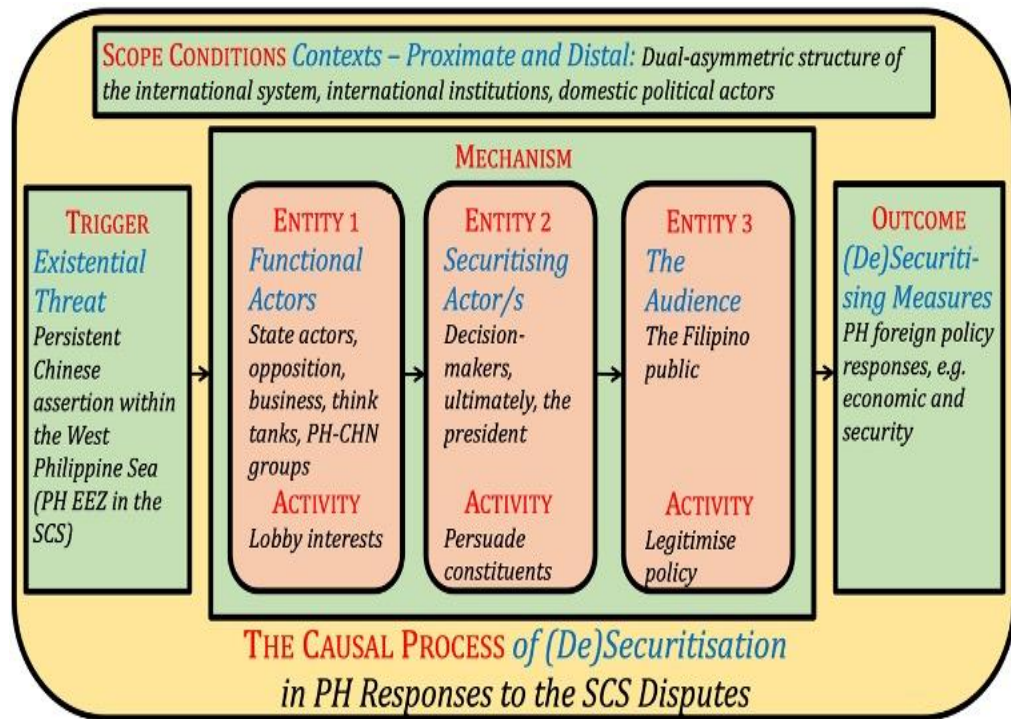


Figure 7.31 – The Research Framework

This thesis posits that the Securitization Theory explains how persistent threats in the SCS have compelled the Philippine government to enact (de)securitising measures. This (de)securitisation mechanism comprises three political agents: (1) functional actors advocating their interests to (2) the decision-making authority, which then selects and implements measures that (3) require endorsement and legitimisation from the audience. The empirical data are subsequently examined to ascertain whether each political actor in the mechanism fulfils their designated role within the securitisation process. Finally, these empirical findings are woven into a causal narrative encompassing the triggering event, the resultant outcome, the Securitization Theory-based mechanism, and the scope conditions.

The de-securitisation response of the Philippines to the 2019 Reed Bank incident transpired over two weeks, as summarised in Table 7.1. The initial week, from 9 to 16 June 2019, covered the period when the fishermen departed their hometown to fish at Reed Bank up to the collision incident. Throughout this phase, various international and domestic actors endeavoured to influence the response of the Duterte administration.

THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF THE MARITIME EPISODE IN THE RECTO BANK IN JUNE 2019												
9-11 JUNE SUN- TUES	12 JUNE WED	13 JUNE THU	14 JUNE FRI	15 JUNE SAT	16 JUNE SUN	17 JUNE MON	18 JUNE TUE	19 JUNE WED	20 JUNE THU	21 JUNE FRI	22 JUNE SAT	23 JUNE AND BEYOND
Trigger												
	Functional Actors											
					(De)Securitising Actors							
								Audience				
										Outcome		

*Table 7.6 – De-securitisation within Two Weeks*

The narrative of the subsequent week, from 16 to 23 June 2019, picks up from the activities and statements of pertinent government agencies concerning the incident. Within this period, the audience legitimised the government's de-securitising measures. The chapter ends by summarising how Philippine foreign policy evolved in response to this maritime incident using the research's integrated empirical-theoretical-method framework.



## **Functional Actors**

According to the Copenhagen School framework, “functional actors” are pivotal in influencing the securitisation process, although they lack the authority to elevate an issue from normal politics to security. Nevertheless, functional actors shape the narratives depicting the emerging issue as an existential threat through public expressions and positions. In the context of the maritime incident being investigated, these functional actors encompassed a spectrum of entities, including the Chinese government represented through its Foreign Ministry and Embassy in Manila, other international stakeholders such as the US and the ASEAN, Philippine legislators, domestic opposition figures, think tanks, academic institutions, and Chinese-Filipino cultural and business organisations.

The analysis in this section spans the period from the onset of the incident on Sunday, 9 June, until Monday, 17 June, a crucial juncture when President Duterte made his initial public remarks about the incident, aligning with the stance of the Chinese government. This timeframe encapsulates the dynamic interplay among these functional actors in shaping the securitisation narrative.

### **Chinese Government: “An Ordinary Maritime Traffic Accident” and Joint Probe**

Amid a developing maritime issue, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang held a press briefing in Beijing on Thursday, 13 June. He characterised the incident as “an ordinary maritime traffic

accident” and emphasised China’s active investigation into the situation (AP, 2019a; NY Times, 2019). Moreover, Geng asserted that if preliminary reports were accurate, condemnation should be directed at the responsible party, irrespective of nationality. He stated it would be “irresponsible to resort to the media to hype and politicize the incident without verification” (Rappler, 2019f; Philstar, 2019b; NY Times, 2019). This response came after Philippine Defence Secretary Lorenzana shifted from initially condemning the Chinese vessel “in the strongest terms” for colliding with a Filipino boat in the WPS to expressing uncertainty about its origin.

Simultaneously in Manila, Presidential Spokesperson Panelo echoed China’s official stance through a text message from Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jinhua. The message emphasised the thorough investigation of the incident, expressing shared concerns for the Filipino fishermen. It stated that if the Chinese fishing boat were answerable, they would be punished for their irresponsible behaviour. The message also alluded to the complexity of sea incidents, hoping for a proper contextual understanding (ABS-CBN News, 2019b; Inquirer, 2019b; GMA News, 2019b).

The following day, the Chinese Embassy in Manila issued a press release (2019a) disputing the notion of a “hit-and-run” incident. According to China’s preliminary investigation, the Chinese fishing boat Yuemaobinyu 42212 from Guangdong Province was engaged in fishing operations near Reed Bank of the Spratly Islands at midnight on 9 June. The vessel claimed to have been unexpectedly surrounded by seven or eight Filipino fishing boats. The Chinese account stated that the collision resulted from the steel

cable of their vessel “bumping into the Filipino pilothouse”, causing the Philippine boat to tilt and sink. Allegedly, the Chinese crew attempted to rescue the Filipino fishermen but refrained due to fear of being encircled by other Filipino fishing boats. The Chinese vessel departed only after confirming the safe rescue of the Filipino fishermen.

On 17 June, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang expressed sympathy for the Filipino fishermen, stating that the incident constituted “only an accidental collision between fishing boats at sea” (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2019a). He underscored extensive communication between China and the Philippines at various levels and condemned linking the incident to political implications. Lu Kang echoed Geng Shuang’s earlier statement, albeit omitting the details of the besieging incident conveyed in the press release of the Chinese Embassy in Manila. The revised statement was disseminated to news reporters on 18 June.

Finally, on 20 June, Lu Kang suggested a joint investigation during a press conference in Beijing. He recommended exchanging preliminary findings and engaging in amicable consultations based on mutually recognised investigation results. Their Philippine counterparts later reiterated this proposal over the next two weeks, hinting at the possibility of a mechanism unfolding (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2019b).

### **International Actors Playing Safe**

Following the maritime incident near the Reed Bank, the US issued a statement on Friday, 14 June, firmly rejecting coercion and intimidation in asserting naval claims within the SCS. The US Embassy in Manila

expressed gratitude for no Filipino lives lost and commended Vietnamese fishermen for their rescue efforts (Rappler, 2019g; Manila Bulletin, 2019; GMA News, 2019c). The statement reiterated the US's unwavering support for lawful uses of the sea, adherence to international law, unimpeded legal commerce, and maintaining peace. Thus, the US urged all parties to avoid coercion and intimidation in pursuing territorial and maritime claims.

However, Foreign Affairs Secretary Locsin downplayed the significance of the US statement in safeguarding the Philippines' maritime claims, citing previous US silence during WPS disputes (PNA, 2019d). Locsin (2019f) acknowledged that the statement might be a cautious approach, recalling the Obama administration's passivity during the Scarborough Shoal confrontation, which resulted in the Philippines losing ground. Locsin suggested the Trump administration aimed to change this approach.

Remarkably, there was a notable absence of public statements from other states during the initial week following the Reed Bank incident. Even the Vietnamese government, whose fishermen had assisted the 22 Filipino fishermen, refrained from communicating its stance until ten days later. It was not until a press conference on 20 June in Hanoi that Vietnamese Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Le Thi Thu Hang articulated Vietnam's position, emphasising the nation's commitment to complying with international law, notably UNCLOS and IMO initiatives, applicable to all marine vessels, including fishing boats (Vietnam +, 2019). The delayed response from Vietnam illustrates the consistently cautious approach

taken by the international community in addressing disputes in the SCS for decades.

The official ASEAN position emerged on 23 June 2019 in the concluding statement of the 34<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, Thailand. The Chairman's Statement reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to peace, security, and stability, highlighting peaceful dispute resolution and respect for legal and diplomatic processes (ASEAN, 2019a). The Summit supported ongoing Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (CoC) negotiations and measures to reduce tensions. The statement implicitly addressed the Reed Bank incident and remained diplomatic, not explicitly denouncing it. At most, the incident in June 2019 applied pressure on ASEAN to hasten the negotiations for the CoC, considering that the CoC was envisioned as the primary ASEAN-China mechanism for addressing maritime disputes in the SCS.

### **Philippine Lawmakers**

Philippine senators, primarily hailing from the minority opposition bloc, publicly commented on the maritime incident within two weeks of its occurrence. These statements were disseminated through various channels, including online news archives of the Philippine Senate, official websites, and multiple media outlets.

It is essential to note that the maritime incident occurred during the interlude between the regular sessions of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the commencement of the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Philippines. The 17<sup>th</sup> Congress adjourned on 4 June 2019, while the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress convened on 22 July 2019.

Consequently, the senators who issued statements were part of the Senate's membership retained in the succeeding congress, while the other half underwent replacement or re-election every three years (Senate, 2019).

Hence, certain senators did not present a cohesive front as a unified legislative body when articulating their opinions on the matter. Instead, they voiced individual perspectives, proposed varied solutions, and exhibited varying degrees of influence on the executive branch of the government. These statements can be grouped into three categories: (1) press releases addressing the abandonment of the Filipino fishermen, (2) reactions critiquing Chinese official statements regarding the alleged besiegement of the Chinese vessel and the denial of a hit-and-run incident, and (3) objections raised against the proposed joint probe.

Several senators focused on the aspect of the abandoned Filipino fishermen. For example, on 12 June, Senator Panfilo Lacson Sr. (2019a) advocated for robust punitive measures against the Chinese crew and called for a "leader-to-leader talk" to resolve the incident. The following day, Senator Antonio Trillanes IV (2019a) expressed concerns about potential escalation and recommended referring the matter to the Maritime Safety Committee of the International Maritime Organisation. Senator Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel (2019a) equated the incident with the "sinking sovereignty" of the nation. Hontiveros also insisted that the Chinese government identify the vessel responsible for colliding with the Filipino boat, hold the captain and crew accountable, and commit to preventing the recurrence of such incidents.

On 14 June, Senator Aquilino Martin Pimentel III, the incoming head of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, decried the reported abandonment of Filipino crew members by the vessel that struck their boat. Pimentel (2019) asserted that irrespective of fault, an able ship should never abandon the crew of a sinking vessel. Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon (2019a) implored the DFA to promptly file a diplomatic protest, emphasising that the maritime incident warranted robust and immediate action. Senator Leila De Lima (2019) called for an investigation to address two pivotal questions: (1) whether the collision was intentional and (2) what the Chinese fishing vessel was doing in the Philippine EEZ. Finally, Senator Richard Gordon (2019a) also expressed strong displeasure at the Chinese crew's abandonment of the Filipino crew.

On 15 June, a day after China claimed the incident was not a hit-and-run, Senator Francis Pangilinan (2019a) vehemently rejected China's version, calling it "as fake as its territorial claims". Pangilinan highlighted the stark contrast between the fishermen's account and the Chinese press release, stating it was evident who the "besieged victim telling the truth" was. Drilon (2019b) concurred, denouncing the Chinese claim that the vessel left due to fear of being surrounded by Philippine boats as "baloney and an outright malicious lie". Hontiveros (2019b) found the Chinese government's response "preposterous", characterising it as a "flimsy attempt at a cover-up" to shield the involved crew while shifting blame to the distressed Filipino fisherfolk. She argued that the Chinese government's statement indicated its inability to conduct an impartial investigation.

Senators strongly opposed the proposed joint probe between China and the Duterte government regarding the Reed Bank incident. Drilon (2019c) firmly resisted, stating, “I am opposed to a joint investigation with China. The law is on our side, with clear violations of international treaties and our local laws committed by the Chinese vessel. A joint investigation will only serve their interest, not ours,” citing concerns about weakening the Philippines’ maritime claims in the WPS. Hontiveros (2019c) also criticised the proposed Philippines-China joint investigation, likening it to a futile endeavour. Pangilinan (2019b) echoed concerns about the joint investigation, emphasising it would not serve Philippine national interests and pointing out the inherent unfairness in a joint inquiry where one party is the victim and the other is the alleged perpetrator. Lacson (2019b) raised concerns that engaging in a joint investigation might be interpreted as waiving the Philippines’ rights to the Reed Bank. While acknowledging efforts to preserve bilateral relations, Lacson stressed the importance of safeguarding sovereign rights and territorial integrity, asserting that any potential joint investigation must address these sovereignty and sovereign rights issues.

On a different note, Gordon (2019b) advocated for a centralised approach to government officials’ statements on the sinking of the Filipino fishing boat near Reed Bank. He stressed directing communication through specific departments like the DFA, DND, and the Office of the Solicitor General, arguing that independent statements could weaken the country’s position. Gordon urged fellow officials, including those in Congress, to refrain from pressuring the President for additional comments. Instead of



immediate commentary, he promoted a unified and official stance from the Philippine government, seeking cooperation among entities. Gordon highlighted the importance of deferring to decisions made by Duterte's cabinet to ensure consistency and coherence in the government's response, safeguarding the country's interests and diplomatic efforts. Therefore, Gordon's statement underscored the need for unity within the Duterte administration.

### **Think Tanks and the Academe**

Various influential actors, including think tanks and academic platforms, significantly shaped the discourse on the maritime incident. By offering impartial and fact-based analyses, think tanks guided political decision-makers through publications, briefings, and other formats, illuminating complex international relations issues (Lux, 2021). These contributions enhanced politicians' global understanding and aided in formulating informed foreign policy strategies. Academics specialising in IR also played a crucial role in securitisation. Scholars often provided advisory services, leveraging their expertise to navigate intricate international dynamics. Platforms for academics, such as forums for foreign policy debates and training for policymakers, served as hubs for informed discussions, facilitating the exchange of ideas among experts on foreign policy matters.

Former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert Del Rosario, through his Stratbase Institute, issued a call to action to the Duterte administration regarding the Reed Bank incident. Del Rosario characterised China as a

“Goliath” and a “neighborhood bully”, illustrating the inherent vulnerability of the Philippines against its colossal neighbour (Inquirer, 2019c; ABS-CBN News, 2019c). Del Rosario stressed the importance of holding China’s leadership accountable for such incidents, expressing genuine concern that China might continue to intimidate Filipino fishermen without repercussions. Del Rosario advocated a multilateral approach as the most prudent means to address the Philippines’ disputes with China in the WPS (Philstar, 2019c). He questioned the delay in seeking resolution through established international bodies like the UN General Assembly, where the Philippines could effectively promote the Arbitral Award, recognised as an integral component of international law reinforcing the Philippines’ legal rights in the region.

In his 14 June statement, Supreme Court Justice Antonio Carpio (2019) outlined a compelling argument asserting that the Chinese vessel responsible for colliding with FBca Gem-Ver 1 was a Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM) vessel. Firstly, Captain Insigne and the crew of Gem-Ver 1, experienced sailors, unequivocally identified the vessel that rammed them as a Chinese fishing vessel (Rappler, 2019h). They emphasised that both boats were well-lit, and after the collision, the Chinese vessel returned to illuminate their sinking boat, strongly suggesting intentional ramming. Secondly, Carpio pointed out that CMM vessels, unlike ordinary fishing boats, were equipped with reinforced steel hulls designed for intentional ramming. This structural reinforcement indicated the vessel’s intent and capability for such actions.

Carpio (2019) also cited past incidents where CMM vessels, trained and organised by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, had rammed Vietnamese ships in the Paracel Islands. These militia vessels operated under the PLA's chain of command, demonstrating advanced coordination capabilities. Carpio highlighted that CMM vessels had previously patrolled the Philippine EEZ, intimidating Filipino fishermen. The ramming of Gem-Ver 1 prevented the Filipino crew from exercising their sovereign right to fish, constituting a clear violation of UNCLOS, as ruled in the SCS Arbitration. Carpio argued that the ramming represented the significant escalation of China's aggressive actions. He suggested it might signal the beginning of a new "grey zone" offensive akin to tactics against Vietnamese vessels. In response, Carpio emphasised the need for the Philippines to send a clear message to China, asserting that any "grey zone" offensive involving the ramming of Filipino vessels would lead to a diplomatic rupture. This underscored the gravity of the situation and the importance of defending Filipino fishermen's rights and territorial sovereignty.

Professor Jay Batongbacal, the Director of the University of the Philippines Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea, conveyed his concerns about the incident and its broader implications in the SCS. According to Batongbacal, the incident was another clear example of China's persistent and aggressive policies in the SCS (Rappler, 2019i). Batongbacal's statement carried a stern warning, suggesting that this incident should prompt the Philippine administration to seriously reconsider its current friendly policy with China.

As a further point, Batongbacal provided evidence to refute the Chinese Embassy's claim that the Chinese vessel had been suddenly besieged by Filipino fishing boats (Rappler, 2019i). He shared a Google Earth screenshot, utilising visible, infrared imaging radiometer suite (VIIRS) data, which displayed the positions of numerous boats spread throughout the Reed Bank area on the night of 9 June. This visual evidence, shown in Figure 7.2, contradicted the Chinese Embassy's narrative, casting doubt on its version of events and reinforcing the need for a thorough and impartial investigation. Batongbacal's insights and evidence added depth to the understanding of the incident and its implications in the ongoing maritime disputes in the region.



*Figure 7.32 – Batongbacal’s Google Earth Screenshots of the Maritime Incident Using VIIRS*

The VIIRS satellite data revealed a relatively small number of fishing vessels operating near the Reed Bank. These vessels were dispersed across

the Reed Bank, with the nearest pair of lights situated approximately 3 to 5 NM apart, equivalent to around 7 to 9 kilometres. This satellite observation stood in stark contrast to the Chinese government's assertion that the Chinese boat had been besieged by seven or eight Filipino vessels. Batongbacal explained that the scattered distribution of fishing vessels made it highly improbable that any swarm or coordinated attack would have occurred. While visibility and stationary status could affect the appearance of vessels in the satellite imagery, the overall pattern indicated that the Chinese besiegement narrative lacked credibility.

Moreover, Batongbacal highlighted the absence of any historical record of Filipino fishing vessels engaging in such besieging or attacking behaviours on the high seas (Rappler, 2019i). He emphasised that this mode of operation was unprecedented among Filipino fishermen. Instead, coordinated swarming tactics were typically associated with CMM vessels, often in response to perceived threats.

During a live interview conducted via phone patch on ANC Early Edition, Dr Aaron Jed Rabena, an international affairs analyst and Research Fellow at the Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress, shared insights into the proposed joint probe concerning the Reed Bank incident (ABS-CBN News, 2019d). Rabena emphasised the importance of establishing clear terms and conditions for such an investigation. Rabena's perspective underscores the significance of transparency and open dialogue in any joint investigation. By providing a platform for both sides to present their narratives and evidence, the probe can work towards achieving a fair and well-informed resolution to the incident. This approach aligns with

principles of due process and impartiality, which are essential in addressing complex international disputes.

### **Chinese-Filipino Groups**

Growing dissatisfaction among Filipinos with the Duterte administration's handling of the SCS issue fuelled an increase in anti-Chinese sentiments. Unfortunately, these sentiments have extended to fellow Filipinos of Chinese descent. Opinion polls have revealed rising anger due to perceived infringements on the country's sovereignty in territorial waters, with the maritime incident in the Reed Bank further escalating tensions, particularly affecting Chinese Filipinos. In response to the mounting anti-Chinese sentiment, Chinese-Filipino associations actively sought to influence the government, the opposition, and the general public, advocating for a measured response to the incident.

A week after the maritime incident, Henry Lim Bon Liong, President of the Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Inc. (FFCCCII), held a press briefing at the Pandesal Forum at Kamuning Bakery in Quezon City (Philstar, 2019d). During this briefing, Liong asserted that while the Philippine and Chinese governments were still determining the details, one undeniable truth emerged: 22 Filipino fishermen had lost their vessels and livelihoods. In a gesture of support, the FFCCCII pledged assistance to the crew members of Gem-Ver 1, committing to repair the damaged fishing boat and enabling the fishermen to resume their livelihoods.

Subsequently, on 28 June, the FFCCCII donated PHP 1.45 million to the Gem-Ver 1 crew (Manila Times, 2019). Liong explained that this donation included PHP 1.2 million earmarked for the comprehensive rehabilitation of the damaged fishing boat and an additional PHP 250,000 designated as livelihood assistance for the 22 fishermen. Liong reiterated the FFCCCII's commitment to promoting sobriety among all sectors of Philippine society. This call for sobriety echoed the ongoing appeal of the Chinese government, underlining the need to avoid politicising the incident and to seek a peaceful resolution through official diplomatic channels.

These influential actors played a crucial role in shaping the narrative of (de)securitisation, ultimately influencing the Philippine foreign policy response to the alleged ramming and sinking incident. Their public expressions and positions actively contributed to framing the significance and implications of the incident. The subsequent section will explore the political actors tasked with responding to such incidents, regardless of whether they are perceived as matters of security or not. This exploration aims to better understand the dynamics at play in the event's aftermath.

### **(De)Securitising Actor/s**

This section explores how decision-makers construct and present an issue as an existential threat to persuade the audience of its utmost security concern. The securitising actor emphasises the immediacy and severity of the threat, presenting it as irreversible and proposing



exceptional, often military, measures. This aims to garner support for rational responses deemed necessary to protect the referent object from existential peril. Conversely, “de-securitisation” involves reversing securitisation, returning the issue to normal politics. This entails disassociating the issue from its heightened security status, diminishing the need for extraordinary measures. This chapter explores the de-securitisation approach of the Duterte government in response to the 2019 Reed Bank incident.

This section examines two crucial activities within the (de)securitisation mechanism. First, (de)securitising actors decide whether the issue should be framed as an existential threat. The Duterte administration asserted that the incident with FBca Gem-Ver 1 on 9 June 2019 did not constitute an attack on Philippine sovereignty. Second, (de)securitising actors seek to convince the audience to support a policy. The Duterte government worked to ensure that the 22 fishermen and the broader Filipino public would endorse the interpretation of the incident as an “unfortunate maritime incident” rather than an assault on sovereignty. This analysis sheds light on framing dynamics, persuasion, and policy orientation in securitisation and de-securitisation processes. It provides insights into how governments navigate security challenges and shifting perceptions of their constituencies.

### **Preliminary Assessment: “*Daplis lang*. ([It was] just a graze.)”**

On Sunday, 16 June, Department of Energy (DoE) Secretary Alfonso Cusi visited San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, the hometown of the 22

fishermen involved in the incident. Cusi's visit was part of his role as the cabinet member responsible for overseeing affairs in the Philippine Region IV-B, which includes Mindoro, his place of origin. However, rather than offering support and empathy, the meeting with the Gem-Ver 1 crew led to Cusi raising doubts about the fishermen's account of the incident.

During an interview following his meeting with the fishermen, Cusi made a statement that marked a significant departure from the government's earlier stance. He remarked, translated from original Filipino, "Let's say, if they would ram it, why was it so, let's say, it was poorly done. It was just a graze. Of course, if you mean to kill, you would do it" (Rappler, 2019j). This marked the first instance where a high-ranking government official publicly suggested downgrading the incident from a deliberate act to an unintentional accident, echoing the statements made by Chinese authorities days earlier. Cusi's comments marked a notable shift in the government's narrative on the incident, prompting questions about the coherence of their overall response.

### **Duterte: "A Maritime Incident"**

As explored in Chapter 6, after a week of relative silence, President Duterte finally addressed the issue surrounding the Reed Bank incident. In his speech at the 121<sup>st</sup> Philippine Navy anniversary celebration, Duterte asserted that the events in the Reed Bank the previous week were indeed a "maritime incident" (PCOO, 2019b). During this address, Duterte took the opportunity to remind the Philippine Navy of his role as their Commander-in-Chief and urged them to remain loyal to their leader. He also issued a

directive for them to avoid exacerbating the conflict. Duterte emphasised that he had no intention of escalating tensions over what he framed as a collision between two fishing boats. He defended his earlier silence, explaining that he was waiting for the investigation results and wanted to ensure that the other fishing vessel involved had the opportunity to present its side of the story.

Duterte effectively echoed the official Chinese position on the incident in this pivotal speech. He characterised it as an accidental collision or maritime incident between two boats and stressed the importance of not escalating the issue. This statement was significant because it represented the President's definitive decision in front of the Navy and before the entire military, his administration, and the Filipino people. Duterte chose to downplay the incident, contrary to the narrative presented by the fishermen and opted for de-securitisation. Subsequently, the rest of the Duterte government adopted this stance.

### **The Government Response Team Changing the Narrative**

Following an evening cabinet meeting, Cabinet Secretary Karlo Alexei Nograles announced that Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Emmanuel Piñol had been designated as the chairman of the government response team, primarily focusing on assisting the 22 affected fishermen (PNA, 2019e). Piñol's co-lead in this endeavour was the Cabinet Officer for Regional Development and Security (CORDS) Region IV-B and DoE Secretary Cusi. Their mandate was to leverage all available government resources, including those from the DA and the Department of Social

Welfare and Development (DSWD), to support the affected individuals. This support package would be assembled using contributions from various government agencies (Rappler, 2019k).

In addition to providing immediate assistance, the government response team had another critical role. They were entrusted with conducting preliminary inquiries into the incident. This investigation aimed to establish the extent of liabilities involved and, more importantly, to identify the most effective legal avenues through which justice could be pursued on behalf of the Filipino fishermen (Rappler, 2019k). This multi-pronged approach underscored the government's commitment to addressing the issue comprehensively and ensuring accountability for those responsible.

On 19 June, two days after Cusi's visit, Piñol sailed overnight to meet with the fishermen at the house of the boat owner Felix Dela Torre. Spending around 40 minutes in conversation with them, Piñol held a live-streamed press briefing at the San Jose Municipal Hall, marking a significant development (ABS-CBN, 2019e). During the briefing, Insigne modified his account, expressing uncertainty about whether the Chinese vessel intentionally struck Gem-Ver 1.

Piñol highlighted critical points during the briefing. First, the fishermen could not determine whether the incident was accidental or intentional. Piñol highlighted that the onboard cook, Blaza, implied that the Chinese vessel might not have seen them. Piñol suggested a marine inquiry for a more comprehensive investigation in light of this uncertainty. Secondly, the group condemned the Chinese vessel's actions in abandoning

the distressed Filipino fishermen. Piñol emphasised that international maritime laws did not justify the Chinese crew leaving the Filipino fishermen stranded. Thirdly, the fishermen urged Piñol to convey their request to Duterte, imploring him to hold the Chinese vessel's captain and crew accountable. They also requested that Reed Bank be designated the exclusive fishing ground for Filipinos. However, it became clear that the President would not grant this request.

Finally, the fishermen asked Piñol to convey their message to the public and the media, urging them not to turn the incident into a political issue. During an open forum, Piñol claimed he was not advocating for any party but conveying the fishermen's statements based on presented facts. Piñol's interventions in this context can be seen as part of the government's broader damage control strategy in response to the incident.

The day after the meeting with Piñol, the government launched a substantial aid programme for the fishermen, their families, and their community (PNA, 2019f). Piñol directed the Agricultural Credit Policy Council to provide PHP 25,000 for each fisherman under the Survival Response Loan Program, structured for three-year repayment without collateral or interest, aiming to assist in their recovery. Beyond financial aid, the BFAR provided eleven 30-foot fibreglass boats, engines, nets, and fishing accessories, offering an alternative income source during Gem-Ver 1's repairs. Each fisherman also received a sack of rice from the DA. The DSWD contributed PHP 10,000 and food packs for each, while CORDS for Region IV-B extended an additional PHP 10,000 to each. To seek more funding, Piñol approached the Philippine Amusement and Gaming

Corporation for the fishermen and procuring ice-making machines and cold storage facilities benefiting fishing communities nationwide. Stressing the need for modernising fishing boats, Piñol revealed a drafted proposal for a fishing boat modernisation program, pending submission to the President.

The magnitude of government aid was unprecedented, with multiple agencies collaborating to provide comprehensive support to the fishermen and their communities. However, it is worth noting that this assistance was provided shortly after the fishermen aligned themselves with the government's preferred narrative of the incident. Consequently, this aid was seen as an incentive or persuasion tactic, effectively bribing the Gem-Ver 1 crew into maintaining their silence and accepting the narrative propagated by authorities.

Allegations arose after Piñol's visit, claiming Piñol used bribery and intimidation to manipulate the fishermen's accounts of the incident. In response, Piñol (2019) released a statement on 20 June. Piñol argued that critics of the administration were upset because the public now understood what happened during the incident, thanks to his meeting. He asserted that this prevented those opposing the President from exploiting the situation. Piñol also highlighted the fishermen's satisfaction with the government's immediate interventions, suggesting this fuelled critics' anger for failing in their campaign against the administration.

Addressing specific accusations, Piñol clarified that he did not intimidate the fishermen but informed them about the government's assistance and commitment to justice. He used hashtags like

*#KungTutulunganBribery!* (Helping may be considered bribery!) and *#KungDiTulunganPinabayaan!* (Not helping may be regarded as neglect!), suggesting the government could be criticised or deemed wrong, regardless of providing aid. However, Piñol overlooked a crucial point. Critics were not challenging government assistance but how the fishermen changed their narrative after receiving aid, aligning with the administration's position and echoing the Chinese government's perspective.

### **Internal Divergence among Decision-makers**

The government's approach not to securitise the maritime episode could be attributed, in part, to a lack of consensus among key authorities within the government. These decision-makers can be broadly categorised into three groups: the President and his government response team, the military establishment, and foreign affairs. This internal discord weakened the government's ability to frame the incident as an existential threat and to convince a broader audience to consider it a pressing security concern. While Duterte's stance leaned towards de-securitisation and downplaying the incident, the military and the DFA were more inclined to view it as a security and sovereignty matter that required a robust response.

Initially condemning the event, Defense Secretary Lorenzana later categorised it as an accident, aligning with the position of the President (Rappler, 2019). This shift underscored critical points. In a democratic system, the military operates under civilian control, with elected officials making final decisions, including in national security. Lorenzana's

adjustment reflected the military's allegiance to the elected civilian leadership. On the one hand, the military's alignment with Duterte's stance could be considered its strategy to prevent escalation. Prioritising stability and peaceful resolutions over confrontations could be the military's discerned approach to this incident.

On the other hand, the perennial question of military loyalty in democracies arises. Democratic systems require military loyalty to the constitution, rule of law, and democratic values over an individual leader. Lorenzana's alignment with Duterte in this case could have demonstrated the military's commitment to civilian authority, adapting to the President's judgements despite its initial assessments. Obedience to the commander-in-chief thus prevented military intervention and reinforced civilian control over the armed forces. This situation underscored the complexities of managing civil-military relations in a democratic context.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Locsin's handling of the Reed Bank incident reveals a strategic and diplomatic approach to a sensitive situation. He stressed the importance of adhering to the rules-based order at the UNCLOS meeting on 17 June 2019 (Locsin, 2019g). He highlighted the challenge of implementing international law when powerful states capable of enforcing these laws choose not to participate in UNCLOS. Locsin narrated the maritime incident without directly accusing the Chinese vessel, focusing on the duty to assist those in distress at sea, a universally recognised obligation. While diplomatic and grounded in legal principles, this approach had the potential to be perceived as hostile, contrary to Duterte's instructions.



On 18 June, Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Panelo proposed a joint investigation supported by the Chinese government (PNA, 2019g). However, on 21 June, Locsin (2019h) contradicted this proposal, asserting that China and the Philippines would conduct separate investigations. Despite this, on 22 June, Duterte accepted China's offer for a joint investigation, signalling a shift in strategy towards a peaceful resolution while upholding international law (PNA, 2019h). Locsin's approach demonstrated a delicate balance between asserting rights and avoiding confrontation with China, aligning with the President's instructions.

## **The Audience**

The Copenhagen School highlights not only the securitising actors and influential groups but also the audience's role in the securitisation process. Initially defined as those persuaded by the securitising actor to accept security measures, recent developments, like Waever's contributions, emphasise the necessity of convincing this audience of successful securitisation (Buzan et al., 1998; Waever, 2003 as cited in Cote, 2016).

Two audience groups are examined in the context of the 2019 Reed Bank maritime incident. The first, a micro-level audience, consists of the 22 fishermen and the owner of FBca Gem-Ver 1, who were directly impacted by the incident. Their perspectives gathered through interviews posted online and news reports, provide crucial insights into (de)securitisation at the grassroots level. The second, a macro-level audience, represents the broader public. Insights from surveys conducted after the maritime

incident by organisations like the Social Weather Stations (SWS) and Pulse Asia reveal how the incident resonated with the general populace.

Analysing these distinct audience groups offers a comprehensive view of the (de)securitisation process. The fishermen and their community, directly affected, illuminate the immediate impact and personal experiences tied to the securitisation effort. Conversely, the broader public's perspective showcases how securitisation influences public opinion, revealing societal implications. This multi-dimensional approach underscores the dynamic and layered nature of the securitisation process.

### **Insistent Fishermen Before Meeting Authorities**

On Sunday, 16 June, Cusi met with the fishermen in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro. Mayor Muloy Festin announced that Gem-Ver 1 captain Insigne and the boat's cook Blaza were scheduled to meet President Duterte the next day (Rappler, 2019m). However, following Cusi's statements implying the collision was minor, Insigne and crew member Justin Pacaul expressed disappointment, feeling that their original account of the incident was contradicted (Rappler, 2019j). Consequently, Insigne cancelled the meeting with the President and opted to be dropped off on the way to Calapan City en route to Manila.

Insigne admitted that Cusi's statements on 16 June significantly influenced his decision not to proceed to Manila. He expressed his dismay regarding Cusi's words and stressed his belief that they had been intentionally rammed by the Chinese fishing vessel (Rappler, 2019j).

Fellow Gem-Ver 1 crew members supported Insigne's stance, with Bannie Condeza sharing the opinion that if the ramming had been accidental, the Chinese vessel could have taken evasive action to avoid the collision. Meanwhile, the owner of Gem-Ver 1, Dela Torre, observed that Philippine authorities seemed intent on casting doubt on the crew's account of the incident. Despite the change in plans, Blaza continued his journey to Manila along with Dela Torre.

On June 18, Blaza met Piñol and shared his account of the incident (ABS-CBN News, 2019f). Blaza's version differed from the initial narrative, stating he was the only one awake just before the incident, with only two lights on – one in the captain's cabin and one in the kitchen. Blaza recounted that when he saw an approaching vessel, he hurried to wake Insigne and alerted him to the oncoming danger. Insigne attempted to start the boat's engine, but it was too late to avoid the collision. Blaza's narrative matched earlier reports of the Chinese vessel swiftly leaving after the incident.

Piñol emphasised the need to investigate whether the ramming was intentional. When Piñol asked Blaza whether he believed the ramming was intentional, Blaza responded, "Sir, *maaring hindi kami nakita*. (We may not have been seen)" (ABS-CBN News, 2019f). This suggested a degree of uncertainty about the Chinese vessel's intentions. Later that afternoon, Insigne defended his initial account, accusing Blaza of changing his story after arriving in Manila (ABS-CBN News, 2019f).

Furthermore, the following day, Insigne and his crew members also altered their collective account of events following a closed-door meeting

with Piñol at the Dela Torre residence in San Jose (GMA News, 2019d). Whereas the Filipino fishermen had initially asserted that the Chinese vessel intentionally rammed Gem-Ver 1, they now agreed with Piñol's version. Piñol concluded that Blaza was the only credible witness to the incident as he was the only one awake before the collision.

The immediate and extensive aid package offered by various government agencies, coinciding with the crew's change in their description of the incident, raised questions about the nature of this sudden shift of narrative. Following a press conference, Piñol, DA Undersecretary Eduardo Gongona and BFAR Regional Director Salilig provided government assistance to the fishermen (ABS-CBN, 2019g). The timing and nature of the government's assistance sparked speculations regarding its potential connection with the fishermen's modified narrative of the incident.

### **Public Opinion through Polls**

The Copenhagen School highlights the role of the audience in legitimising (de)securitisation measures, especially in democratic states where public opinion significantly shapes foreign policy decisions (da Conceição-Heldt & Mello, 2017). Governments in democratic frameworks must consider their citizens' will to avoid adverse consequences during their tenure (Russett & Oneal, 2001; Tomz et al., 2018). While public support is deemed fundamental for the success of foreign policy initiatives, it rarely stands alone as the sole determinant for or against military actions

(Buzan, 1974; 1983). Decision-makers often weigh public opinion convergence and alignment among opposing political groups.

This section draws on opinion polls from two survey firms in the Philippines – Social Weather Stations (SWS) and Pulse Asia Research Inc. The Second Quarter 2019 SWS Survey (22-26 June 2019) and Pulse Asia’s *Ulat ng Bayan* (National Report) (24-30 June 2019) employed face-to-face interviews, addressing the Duterte administration’s overall approval ratings and its foreign policy approach, particularly regarding the Reed Bank incident earlier that month.

The substantial net satisfaction ratings received by the Duterte administration in these surveys are compelling evidence of public support for the de-securitising measures. These measures aimed at de-escalation and narrative redirection away from securitisation found resonance with the citizenry, evidenced by the high levels of public approval. This underscores the potent force of domestic public opinion in shaping foreign policy, emphasising its significant influence on democratic governance.

The Second Quarter 2019 SWS survey (2019a) provided insights into public sentiment regarding President Duterte’s performance. A remarkable 80% of adult Filipinos expressed satisfaction, resulting in an impressive net satisfaction rating of +68, classified as “very good”. This set a new record-high for Duterte, surpassing previous ratings in March 2019 and June 2017. Chart 7.1 illustrates a comparative overview of Net Satisfaction Ratings for Philippine Presidents from 1986 to June 2019, highlighting Duterte’s outstanding performance.

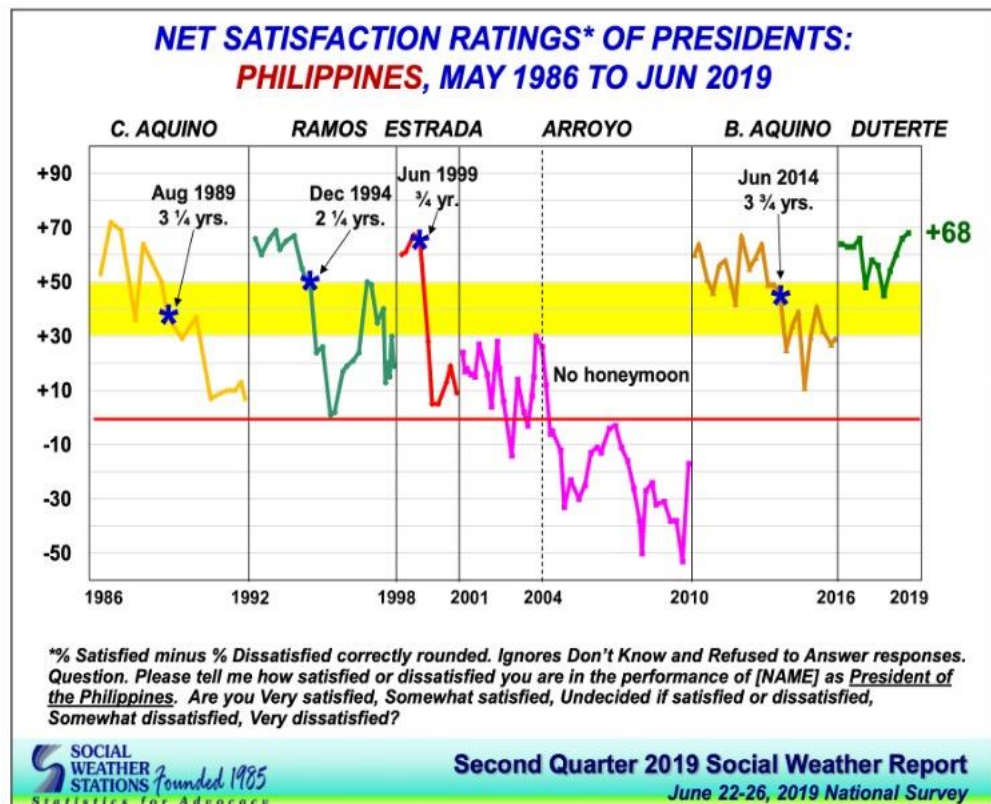


Chart 7.1 – Net Satisfaction Ratings of Philippine Presidents from May 1986 to June 2019 (SWS, 2019a)

In the same survey, SWS (2019b) unveiled striking public sentiments on key WPS dispute issues. An overwhelming 87% believed the Philippine government should assert its right to the islands in the WPS per the 2016 SCS Arbitration decision. Chart 7.2 provides a breakdown of responses. Similarly, 87% of Filipinos concurred that the government should arrest and prosecute Chinese fishermen for destroying the WPS (Chart 7.3).

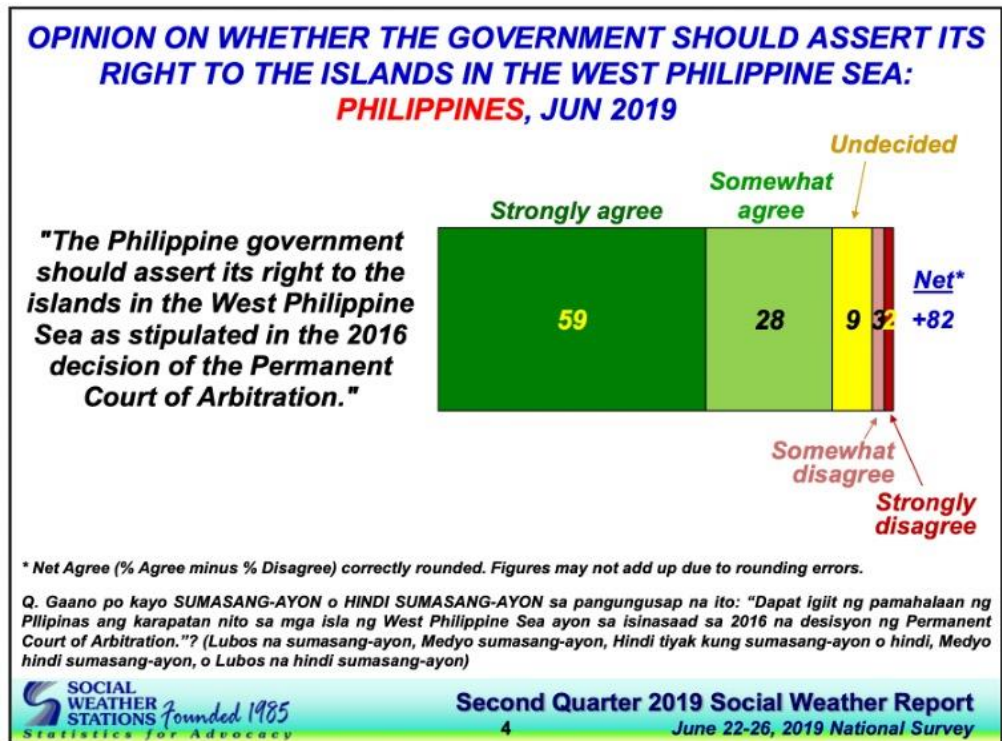


Chart 7.2 – Should the Government Assert its Right to the WPS? (SWS, 2019b)

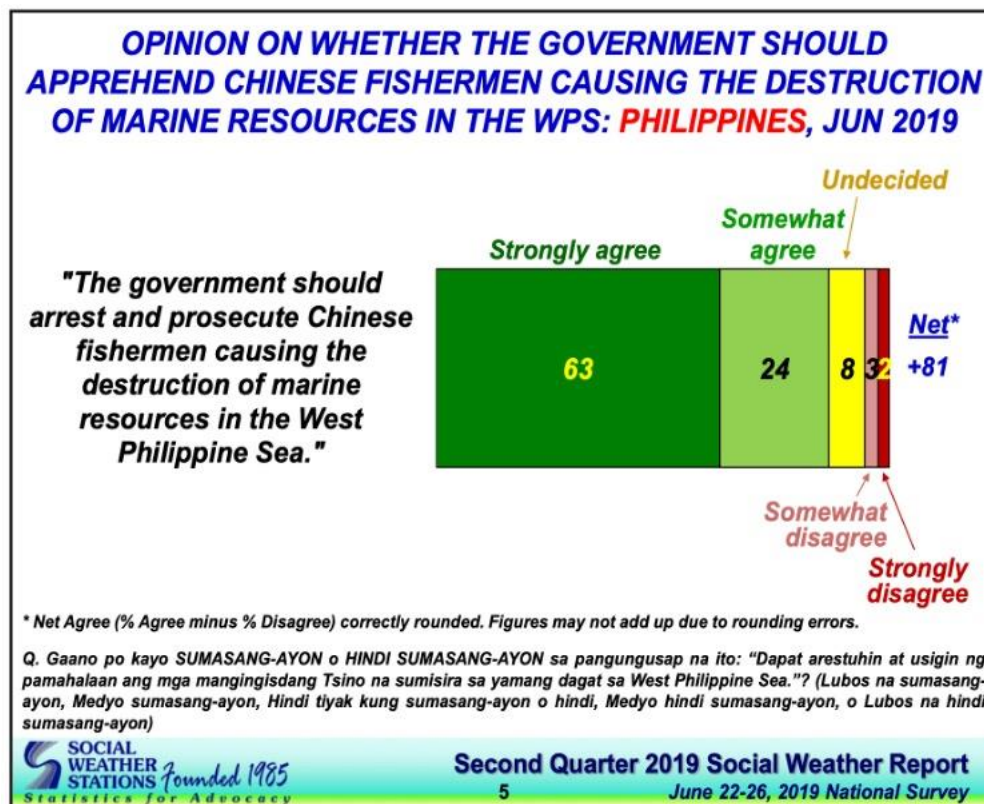


Chart 7.3 – Should the Government Apprehend Chinese Fishermen Causing the Destruction of Marine Resources in the WPS? (SWS, 2019b)

Additionally, 71% believed the government was serious about safeguarding Filipino fishermen against foreign vessels threatening their security in the WPS (Chart 7.4).



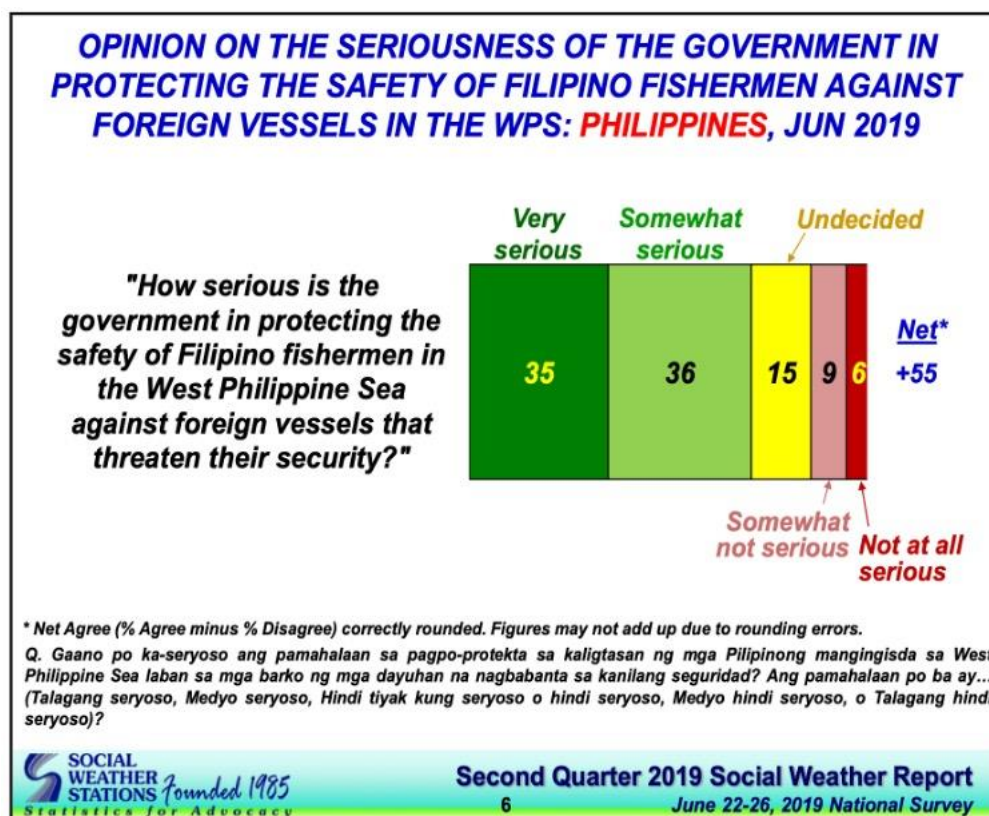


Chart 7.4 – On the Seriousness of the Government in Protecting the Safety of Filipino Fishermen against Foreign Vessels in the WPS (SWS, 2019b)

The findings of the SWS survey (2019c) highlighted a growing demand for government action and steadfast public sentiment regarding the WPS. A striking 93% emphasised the importance of the Philippines regaining control of China-occupied islands, with 74% deeming it “very important” (Chart 7.5). Additionally, 89% believed it was inappropriate for the government to leave China alone with its infrastructure and military presence in the claimed territories. Meanwhile, 92% expressed support for strengthening the military capability of the Philippines, especially the Navy (Chart 7.6).



Chart 7.5 – On Getting Back Control of the WPS (SWS, 2019c)

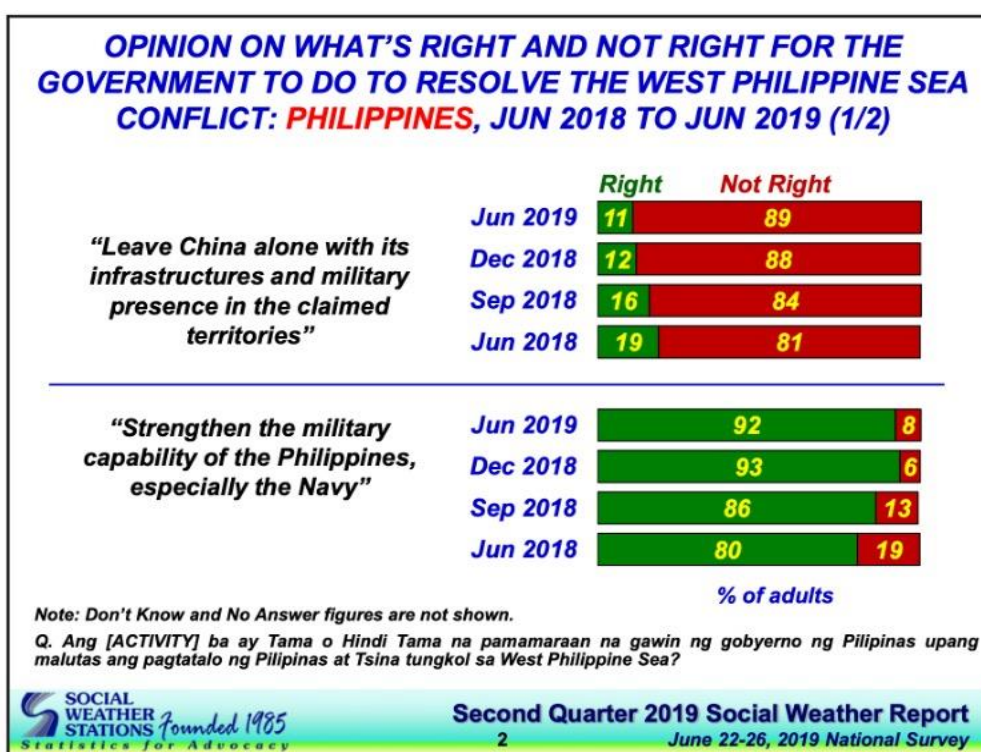


Chart 7.6 – On What's Right and Not Right for the Government to Do to Resolve the WPS Conflict (1/2) (SWS, 2019c)

Chart 7.7 presents the Filipino public's stance on diplomatic approaches and international cooperation in addressing the WPS issue. An overwhelming 83% found it appropriate for the government to bring the issue to international organisations for diplomatic negotiation. Furthermore, 84% believed it was right for the government to form alliances with other countries ready to help defend security in the WPS. These findings reflected evolving and assertive public sentiment, emphasising the importance of diplomatic solutions and international cooperation in addressing the complex territorial and security challenges posed by the WPS dispute.

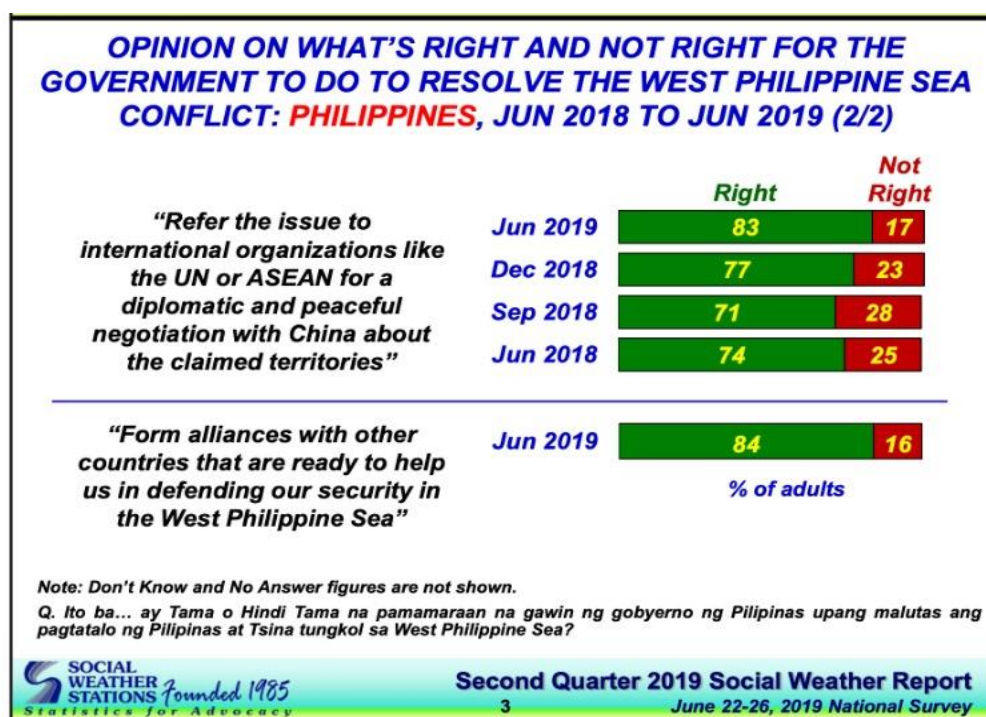


Chart 7.7 – On What's Right and Not Right for the Government to Do to Resolve the WPS Conflict: Philippines, June 2018 – June 2019 (2/2) (SWS, 2019c)

Pulse Asia Research, Inc. conducted two pertinent surveys – “Performance and Trust Ratings of the Top Philippine Government Officials” (2019a) and “Public Trust in Selected Countries and Public Opinion on the Recto Bank Incident” (2019b) – as part of the June 2019 *Ulat ng Bayan* national survey. The surveys focused on events preoccupying Filipinos during the interviews, including the Reed Bank incident of 9 June 2019. The “Performance and Trust Ratings of the Top Philippine Government Officials” survey (2019a) revealed President Duterte’s substantial approval among Filipino adults (85%). Senate President Vicente Sotto III also enjoyed high ratings, while House Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo faced a more divided public opinion (see Table 7.2).

**AWARENESS & PERFORMANCE RATINGS OF TOP NATIONAL OFFICIALS**  
June 24 - 30, 2019 / Philippines  
(Row Percent)

Top National Officials	Aware	Base: Aware		
		Approval	Undecided	Disapproval
RODRIGO R. DUTERTE (President)	100	85	11	3
MARIA LEONOR G. ROBREDO (Vice-President)	100	55	21	24
VICENTE C. SOTTO III (Senate President)	100	77	16	7
GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO (Speaker of the House of Representatives)	100	26	27	47
LUCAS P. BERSAMIN (Supreme Court Chief Justice)	72	41	41	16

Q18. Mayroon ako ritong mga pangalan ng ilang mga kasalukuyang opisyal ng ating pamahalaan. Pakisabi ninyo ang inyong opinyon tungkol sa pagganap nila ng kanilang tungkulin nitong huling tatlong buwan. Sa pamamagitan po ng board na ito, kayo ba ay (SHOW AND READ RATING BOARD) kay (NAME) sa kanyang pagganap bilang (POSITION) o wala pa kayong narinig, nabasa o napanood na kahit na ano tungkol sa kanya kahit na kailan?

Notes: (1) % Approve = % Truly Approve plus % Somewhat Approve; % Disapprove = % Somewhat Disapprove plus % Truly Disapprove.  
(2) Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding off or to Don't Know and Refuse responses.

*Table 7.7 – Performance Rating of Philippine Officials, 24-30 June 2019  
(Pulse Asia, 2019a)*



In Table 7.3, trust ratings mirrored performance ratings, with President Duterte securing the highest trust level (85%). Vice President Robredo garnered trust from 52% of respondents, and Senate President Sotto garnered trust from 73%. However, House Speaker Macapagal-Arroyo faced significant distrust from nearly half of Filipinos (49%). This divergence in trust reflects varying degrees of public confidence in key government figures.

#### AWARENESS & TRUST RATINGS OF TOP NATIONAL OFFICIALS

June 24 - 30, 2019 / Philippines  
(Row Percent)

Top National Officials	Aware	Base : Aware		
		Big Trust	Undecided	Small / No trust
RODRIGO R. DUTERTE (President)	100	85	11	4
MARIA LEONOR G. ROBREDO (Vice-President)	100	52	22	26
VICENTE C. SOTTO III (Senate President)	100	73	21	7
GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO (Speaker of the House of Representatives)	100	22	29	49
LUCAS P. BERSAMIN (Supreme Court Chief Justice)	72	35	48	15

Q19. Nais sana naming tanungin kayo tungkol sa pagtitiwala ninyo sa ilang mga tao sa ating lipunan.  
Sa pamamagitan po ng board na ito, maaari bang pakisabi ninyo kung gaano kalaki o kalilit ang inyong pagtitiwala kay/sa [NAME]? Masasabi ba ninyo na ito ay (SHOW AND READ RATING BOARD)?

Notes: (1) % Big Trust = % Very Big Trust plus % Big Trust ; % Small/No Trust = % Small Trust plus %Very Small Trust  
(2) \*Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding off.

Table 7.8 – Trust Ratings of Philippine Officials, 24-30 June 2019 (Pulse Asia, 2019b)

The survey also explored public sentiment toward international relationships, revealing high trust in countries like Australia, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, the US, and Vietnam. However, a noteworthy finding was the substantial lack of trust in China,

with 74% expressing scepticism, underscoring the complexity of the Philippines' foreign relations, particularly concerning the WPS disputes. Refer to Table 7.4.

**AWARENESS AND TRUST RATINGS OF SELECTED COUNTRIES**  
June 24 - 30, 2019 / Philippines  
(In Percent)

Selected Countries	Aware	Base: Aware						
		Total	A great deal of trust	A fair amount of trust	Total	Not too much trust	No trust at all	Don't know / Refused
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	100	89	33	56	11	10	1	0.3
JAPAN	100	79	21	59	20	15	5	0.3
AUSTRALIA	100	76	13	63	23	20	3	0.5
CANADA	100	71	12	59	28	23	5	1
MALAYSIA	99	63	13	51	37	31	5	0.3
GREAT BRITAIN/ UNITED KINGDOM	98	56	9	47	43	36	7	0.4
INDONESIA	99	56	9	47	43	32	11	0.3
VIETNAM	99	53	9	44	46	36	10	1
RUSSIA	98	42	5	37	57	40	18	1
CHINA	97	26	5	21	74	35	39	0.3

Q20. Sa pangkalahatan, gaano kailik o kailik na tiwala ang dapat ibigay o ipakita ng Pilipinas sa (BANSAG)? Masasabi ba nitayo na ito ay (SHOWCARD)?

*Table 7.9 – Trust Ratings of Selected Countries, 24-30 June 2019 (Pulse Asia, 2019)*

The awareness and sentiments of the Filipino public about the 2019 Reed Bank incident presented in Table 7.5 provide insights into their perspectives on the government's appropriate response and its implications for President Duterte's popularity and foreign policy stance. 87% of Filipinos knew the incident, emphasising its significance among the population. However, among those surveyed, only 36% advocated for the Philippine government to formally request China to impose sanctions on the individuals of the Chinese vessel involved in the collision and abandonment of the Filipino crew. Additionally, 26% believed that the

Chinese fishing vessel and China itself should be held responsible for the damages and injuries inflicted on the Filipino crew, reflecting a desire for broader diplomatic accountability. Notably, 19% of respondents suggested that the crew members of Chinese fishing vessels should face legal proceedings in a Philippine court, emphasising the call for justice through domestic legal channels. Around 10% of Filipinos believed in establishing mutually agreed-upon rules between the Philippines and China to govern similar maritime incidents in the WPS, highlighting a diplomatic approach to prevent future confrontations.

# WEST PHILIPPINE SEA (WPS) INCIDENT

June 24 - 30, 2019 / Philippines  
(in Percent)

Base: Total interviews, 100%

**INTRO:** In June 9, 2019, there is a reported incident that a fishing vessel sank with Filipinos on board after allegedly rammed by a Chinese fishing vessel in the West Philippine Sea, according to the Department of National Defense. After the incident, the Chinese allegedly fled the scene and abandoned the Filipino fishermen. According to the Filipino captain of the ship, they survived because they were rescued by Vietnamese fishermen. Last June 12, 2019, the Philippines filed a formal diplomatic protest in the International Maritime Organization or IMO regarding the incident.

		LOCATION					CLASS		
			BAL						
Have you heard, read, or watched anything about this incident before this or not?	RP	NCR	LUZ	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E	
Yes, before this	87	95	85	83	91	99	87	87	
None, only now	13	5	15	17	9	1	13	13	
Aside from filing a formal complaint, what other measure should the Duterte administration take regarding this incident?									
The Philippines should ask China to sanction the crew members of the Chinese vessel involved in the alleged collision, sinking, and abandonment of Filipino fishermen	36	46	45	22	22	38	36	34	
China should be made to pay for the damages incurred that sank the fishing vessel	26	21	18	36	35	12	27	21	
China should present those who are involved in the incident before a Philippine court and try the case here	19	16	16	24	21	20	18	24	
The Philippines and China should already create rules regarding the increasing number of incidents such as this	10	13	9	6	13	15	10	7	
The Philippines should elevate the alleged collision, sinking, and abandonment incident to the United Nations General Assembly	8	2	9	8	8	12	7	11	
<b>UNAIDED</b>									
Others	0.3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	
I don't have enough knowledge to give an opinion on this issue	2	1	3	3	1	2	2	2	

WIKONG KALAYAN NG HAPYD 2019, MAY LUMBURO SA BARKONG GINAGABIT SA PANGMAGDA NA MAY LULANG MGA FILIPINO MATAPOS DUMANO BANGGAW NG SAING BARKONG TONTO SA WEST PHILIPPINE SEA, AYON SA DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE. UMBALIS DUMANO AMO MGA TONTO AT BUKANGDINA NA LABANG AMO MGA BANGGAWDANG FILIPINO MATAPOS ANG BANGGAW. AYON SA FILIPINONG KAPITAN NG BARKO, SINAGIP SILA NG MGA BANGGAWDANG PAGA-VIETNAMESE SA SAHAGDAPAS. BONGO SA-12 NG HAPYD 2019, NAGHAIN NG FORMAL NA REKLAMO ANG FILIPINAS SA INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION O IMO TUNGKOL SA INCIDENTE.

Q2: Puyo po ba ay may mabasa, nakinig, o kapaarod na tungkol sa insideng ito bago nito o nasa pal?

Q3: Bakod sa pagpahalip ng formal na reklamo, ano pa ang dapat gawin ng administrasyong Duterte tungkol sa insidente?

Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding off.

Table 7.10 – On the WPS Incident in 2019

In summary, following the incident at the Reed Bank in 2019, President Duterte experienced a notable surge in trust and performance ratings, as indicated by SWS and Pulse Asia surveys. These findings suggested sustained strong backing from the Filipino public, even in the face of heightened tensions in the WPS.



Remarkably, during this period, China ranked among the least trusted countries by Filipinos in the Pulse Asia Survey, aligning with a prior negative trust rating for China reported by the SWS Survey. This divergence in public sentiment reflected a palpable scepticism among Filipinos towards China, a sentiment that contradicted the government's efforts to downplay the severity of the maritime incident.

Significantly, even with the Filipino public being well-informed and expressing a spectrum of opinions on the government's handling of the incident – ranging from demands for accountability to calls for diplomatic solutions – President Duterte's popularity remained steadfast. This enduring support highlighted the interplay between public sentiment and foreign policy decisions in the Philippines. Duterte's sustained backing superseded the diverse perspectives and concerns voiced by the public on the 2019 Reed Bank incident. The sustained public endorsement underscored the broader acceptance of Duterte's approach aimed at de-securitizing the issue, lending legitimacy to his response.

## **Constructing Philippine Foreign Policy**

Thus far, this chapter has delved into the operational dynamics of the hypothesised causal mechanism, illustrating its role in de-securitization through a synthesis of empirical evidence that corresponds with the theoretical framework. The entire causal process unfolds through three key features: firstly, the socio-political conditions that facilitated (de)securitisation process; secondly, how the perceived existential threat

contributed to the outcome; and finally, how every actor within the causal mechanism based on the securitisation framework engaged in each theorised activity. The following sections elaborate on each of these integral components, shedding light on their contributions to the overarching narrative of the process of de-securitisation.

### **Scope Conditions**

The particular de-securitisation response following the 2019 incident in the Reed Bank aligns with the overarching trends highlighted in Chapters 5 and 6. These global trends were established through a cross-case analysis, examining Philippine responses to Chinese assertiveness within the WPS since 1995. To fully grasp the nuances of the Philippine responses towards the SCS disputes, it is essential to contextualise them within a larger framework commonly referred to as “facilitating” or “scope conditions”. These conditions create an environment that fosters the observed causal process, providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

In the context of this specific case, several critical scope conditions played instrumental roles. One fundamental condition was China’s persistent and assertive actions within the WPS. The consistent nature of China’s behaviour served as a backdrop that significantly influenced the dynamics of the situation. This ongoing assertiveness set the stage for the maritime incident and shaped how various actors, including the Philippines, responded to the unfolding events.

Another relevant continuing international condition was the cautious stance adopted by the US despite being a treaty partner of the Philippines. While the US maintained its treaty commitments, its approach was characterised by prudence, impacting the options available to the Philippines in responding to the incident. The lack of cohesive action within the ASEAN regarding the SCS disputes with China was also an enduring scope condition. The inability of ASEAN to present a united front in addressing regional challenges, including the WPS issue, influenced the Philippines' response and the broader regional dynamics. Despite UNCLOS and the 2016 PCA Tribunal Award favouring the Philippines, these international legal mechanisms did not deter Chinese incursions in the WPS. This was a significant scope condition, highlighting the limitations of international legal instruments in shaping behaviour in contested maritime areas.

These scope conditions collectively formed the contextual backdrop within which the Philippine government formulated its response to the maritime incident. These conditions the complex and multifaceted nature of the situation, with each condition exerting its influence on the decision-making process. It is essential to recognise these scope conditions as integral components of the broader geopolitical landscape that shaped the course of events and responses in the aftermath of the incident.

### **Trigger Leading to the Outcome**

The ramming incident, culminating in the sinking of the Philippine fishing boat Gem-Ver 1 and the subsequent abandonment of 22 Filipino

fishermen, posed an existential threat with profound implications. At its core, the maritime incident presented an immediate and severe danger to the lives and well-being of the Filipino fishermen aboard Gem-Ver 1. The collision left it adrift at sea, placing their lives in imminent peril.

This threat took on an added dimension within the Philippines' EEZ and CS, territories over which the Philippines asserts sovereign rights. The incident transpired in a region where the Philippines held legitimate claims, accentuating the gravity of the perceived threat and magnifying the implications of China's actions from the perspective of the Philippine government and its citizens.

At that time, uncertainty prevailed regarding whether the collision with the Philippine fishing boat was intentional on the part of the Chinese vessel. However, when viewed in the broader context of China's assertive behaviour towards all Filipino fishing boats in the WPS, the potential threat to the existence of Filipino fishermen loomed large. The broader pattern of aggressive actions by China in the WPS heightened concerns about the safety and security of Filipino fishermen, thereby amplifying the gravity of the situation.

Undoubtedly, President Duterte played a crucial role in shaping the narrative around the incident, providing a pivotal initial assessment. Despite the delayed response, he clarified publicly that the event was not an attack on Philippine sovereignty but rather a maritime accident. This declaration by the highest authority in the Philippines set the tone for subsequent actions, with Duterte emphasising the imperative of further investigation and diplomacy to address the issue.

A notable component of the Philippine response involved the reaffirmation of verbal agreements between the leaders of the Philippines and China. These agreements permitted Chinese fishermen to operate within the Philippine EEZ and CS. Despite historical contention surrounding these arrangements, they were reinforced as part of the response to the incident, aiming to foster a cooperative and non-confrontational approach.

While the initial shock of the maritime incident was alarming, the subsequent policy response centred on de-securitization. This approach sought to de-escalate tensions, prioritise cooperation, and avoid framing the incident as a matter of national security. It reflected the Philippines' commitment to diplomatic engagement and peaceful resolution, even facing a significant maritime challenge.

### **The Causal Mechanism**

Figure 7.3 below presents a comprehensive illustration of the causal process of de-securitisation, which encapsulates the Philippine response to the unfortunate maritime incident in the Reed Bank in June 2019. This process aligns closely with the securitisation framework and encompasses the interactions between various political entities: functional actors, securitising actors, and the audience. Each of these entities engages in specific activities, including lobbying efforts, decision-making regarding securitisation measures, and the legitimisation of policies. These activities are interconnected and progress sequentially, forming a cohesive causal chain. To substantiate the effectiveness of this causal mechanism, this

chapter explored the evidence of each agent’s actions and their contribution to the construction of Philippine foreign policy.

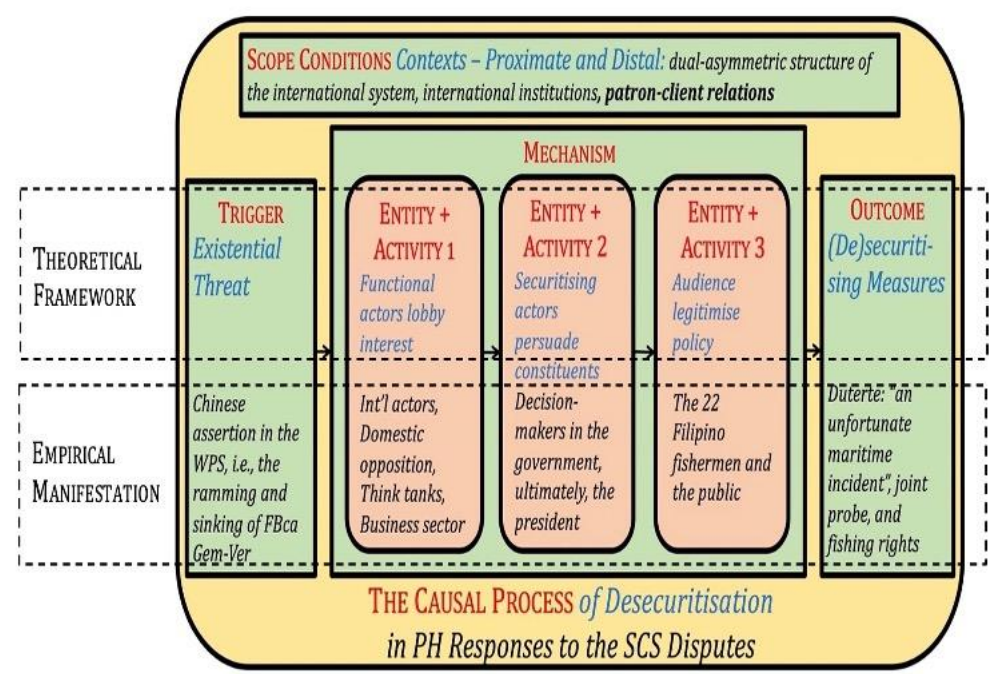


Figure 7.33 – The Theoretical Framework and Empirical Evidence of the De-securitisation Process of the Philippine Response to the Maritime Incident

In the initial phase, attention was drawn to the existential threat posed by the maritime incident. Figure 7.3 illustrates how functional actors played a pivotal role in highlighting or downplaying the severity of the threat. Their lobbying activities involved seeking assistance and intervention coincided with the first week following the incident. These activities set the stage for subsequent developments in the de-securitisation process.

The second week of the incident marked a critical juncture in the causal process. The decision-makers, including government officials and authorities, took centre stage during this period. Their deliberations and

actions were analysed as they navigated the complexities of responding to the incident. Additionally, Figure 7.3 highlights the importance of the audience, the 22 fishermen and encompassing the broader Filipino public. The audience plays a crucial role in legitimising the policies formulated by decision-makers.

As the timeline unfolded, evidence emerged to substantiate the contention that the theorised mechanism rooted in the securitisation framework was operational within this maritime episode's context. This progression culminated in adopting a series of policies focusing on China, distinctly characterised as de-securitizing measures. These policies strongly emphasised diplomacy, cooperation, and non-confrontation as the preferred approaches for addressing the incident. While certain timelines overlapped in terms of perceived threats, political activities, and policy outcomes, this chapter presented evidence that supported the existence and effectiveness of the proposed causal mechanism based on securitisation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the development of the Philippines' response to the 2019 Reed Bank incident, employing a Process Tracing technique. The causal process unveiled in this within-case study explained how the trigger (maritime incident) was linked to the outcome (de-securitising measures) progressing within a consistent international political context. Thus, the securitisation framework emerged as a crucial

lens, providing a comprehensive understanding of the Philippines' foreign policy response to the SCS disputes.

The subsequent Discussion chapter delves deeper into the causal mechanism of the de-escalation measures adopted by the Duterte government. This exploration investigates the interplay of various elements, such as the divergence among power-holders, the often-overlooked issue of intentionality, Chinese grey zone operations, ambiguous provisions within the Military Defence Treaty between the Philippines and the US, the complex questions surrounding sovereignty and sovereign rights, and the role of the media.

Furthermore, the following chapter sheds light on another explanatory structural factor – patron-client relations within domestic politics and the international system. Thus, the next chapter offers insights into the intricate interplay between domestic and international dynamics. It enriches the understanding of how these multifaceted factors collectively shape Philippine foreign policy in response to the 2019 ramming and sinking incident in the Reed Bank from a securitisation perspective.



## **Chapter 8: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Drawing upon the empirical analysis presented in the preceding three chapters, this chapter asserts that Securitization Theory offers valuable insights into developing the Philippines' foreign policy responses concerning the SCS disputes spanning 1995 to 2022. The chapter highlights how the securitisation framework facilitates a comprehensive examination of maritime conflicts through a comparative study of cases, assessing causal mechanisms and considering the enabling conditions that give rise to specific instances.

The three aspects of the securitisation framework involve three levels of analysis. The first pertains to the state level, where it compares the Philippines' responses to various episodes of Chinese incursions in the WPS. The second level delves into an individual-level within-case study, examining the process of de-securitisation. This level highlights specific individuals' actions and decisions, such as political leaders, diplomats, the military, business figures, fishing communities, and the Filipino public. Lastly, the third level concentrates on the international systems level, focusing on the broader global political context, encompassing power distribution and interactions among nations and international organisations. The securitisation framework's understanding of these three levels of analysis is crucial for grasping the complex dynamics of international relations.

This chapter initially explores the utility of the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory for comparative case studies. By emphasising speech acts and communication, the theory facilitates the comparison and contrast of various actors, contexts, and discourses contributing to the securitisation or de-securitisation of specific issues. Securitization Theory underscores the influential role of political leaders and elite actors in defining security issues, a crucial perspective for comprehending the diverse responses of different Philippine administrations to the evolving SCS disputes. Building on the groundwork laid in Chapters 5 and 6, which covers China's initial construction activities in the Mischief Reef in 1995 to the conclusion of the Duterte administration in 2022, it becomes apparent that the Philippine government consistently portrayed episodes of the SCS disputes as threats to military-political, economic, and environmental security. Chinese incursions were consistently perceived as existential dangers, with only one incident diverging from this pattern.

The second part of this chapter discusses another significant application of Securitization Theory, particularly its sociological-causal strand. This part focuses on the in-depth single-case study presented in Chapter 7, where the securitisation framework served as a tool for assessing the operations of the hypothesised causal mechanism in the de-securitisation process and interpreting the power dynamics at play. Through this approach, the framework facilitated a comprehensive analysis of how international and internal factors intricately shape the (de)securitisation process. Chapter 7 unveiled a complex network of influences, revealing the impact of interactions with other states and

international institutions and the nuanced interplay of domestic politics. These factors, in turn, mould policy responses to perceived threats and profoundly influence public opinion, ultimately garnering support for specific (de)securitising measures. Furthermore, the framework also offered valuable insights into the Philippine government's perception of China's actions and whether they threatened national sovereignty and interests, consequently guiding the choice of appropriate (de)securitising measures.

One final advantage of the securitisation framework lies in its appreciation for the historical context that underpins the (de)securitisation process, a facet explored in the third section of this chapter. Rather than construing (de)securitisation as a solitary, isolated event, this analytical approach delves into the broader setting in which it unfolds, recognising that distinct outcomes can emerge from specific contextual conditions. Consequently, the securitisation framework fosters a holistic understanding of the (de)securitisation process and its underlying mechanisms, contingent upon specific facilitating conditions. Considering the pivotal role of scope conditions is crucial in limiting the generalisability of research findings. This delineation, in turn, provides invaluable clarity regarding the framework's applicability, identifying when it is pertinent and when it might not align with the analytical context at hand.

## Comparing Case Studies

The Securitization Theory developed by the Copenhagen School proves valuable, first and foremost, in comparative case security studies of issues that have undergone distinct process of (de)securitisation. Securitization refers to the declaration by an actor that a specific entity is at risk, prompting comprehensive measures to safeguard it. Such proclamations elevate situations to emergency status, circumventing standard political channels and necessitating swift responses. This analytical approach was applied in Chapters 5 and 6, where the actors' reactions in the securitisation or de-securitisation of the SCS disputes were examined. Those chapters entailed a comparative analysis of the narratives and rhetoric employed by the Philippine government to frame maritime issues as either security threats or non-threats.

Chapter 5, for instance, employed the securitization approach to elucidate the Philippines' perception of China's actions in the SCS from 1995 to 2016 as existential threats. Under UNCLOS, these actions undermined the Philippines' sovereignty, territorial integrity, and sovereign rights. Throughout these two decades, the Philippines consistently treated incursions in the WPS as security matters. Chapter 6, on the other hand, investigated three specific maritime incidents in the WPS that occurred during President Duterte's term. These incidents included the sinking and abandonment of a Philippine fishing boat in the Reed Bank in June 2019, the swarming of Chinese vessels in Whitsun Reef from March to April 2021, and the harassment of resupply missions to the BRP Sierra Madre in Second Thomas Shoal in November 2021.

While the evidence indicated a consistent prioritisation of security concerns by the Philippines in its approach to the SCS disputes, handling the Reed Bank incident in 2019 marked a significant departure from this established approach. Instead of implementing security measures to address perceived threats, the Duterte government opted for de-escalation. This unique case was analysed in Chapter 7 while considering the historical context of maritime disputes. Throughout these chapters, applying the securitisation framework offered a well-grounded approach for the Philippines to navigate the complexities of the ongoing conflicts in the SCS.

Second, Securitization Theory is valuable for comparing how political actors, whether states or non-state entities, such as government officials, non-governmental organisations, media outlets, and public figures, construct and frame security issues. Understanding their motivations and interests in advocating for specific responses and the power dynamics can be examined across various cases. Moreover, one can assess securitisation discourses by analysing how different audiences receive and respond to policy measures in response to security threats, considering the variation in public opinion and support for the securitisation measure. The in-depth analysis in Chapter 7 explored activities of political agents within the (de)securitisation mechanism. However, Chapter 7 did not compare the actions of these entities to other cases because it was only interested in analysing the deviant case.

Another facet where the Securitization Theory finds relevance in comparative studies revolves around contextual factors. These factors

encompass historical, cultural, and economic conditions that have the potential to influence how a security issue is framed significantly. They should be considered when examining each securitisation case. Additionally, it is essential to analyse how contextual factors contribute to the scope conditions and how they impact the response to security issues. While Chapter 7 delved into the political dynamics within the mechanism in the deviant case, it did not need to provide a comparative analysis of the facilitating condition concerning other cases.

Fourth, the Securitisation framework can be applied to comparative security studies focusing on policy implications. Such analyses can explore the policies that emerge from each case of securitisation and assess the nature and scope of these policies and their impacts on domestic and international dynamics. Researchers can examine whether securitisation increases policy attention, resource allocation, or heightened public awareness. Conversely, they can explore whether de-securitisation results in a policy direction change or a sense of urgency reduction.

Through applying Securitization Theory in comparative case studies, researchers gain insights into framing security issues, the roles played by different actors, the complex dynamics of discourse, and the concrete impacts on policy outcomes. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the nature of security issues and how they are addressed across diverse contexts.

## **Assessment of the Causal Mechanism**

In addition to its applicability in comparative studies of securitization cases, the securitisation framework also proves instrumental in exploring the mechanism determining whether an incident is classified as a security threat. The securitisation process entails a sophisticated interplay of diverse factors, collectively transforming a trigger into a perceived security threat. Within this mechanism, influential actors, securitising actors, and the audience contribute to shaping the dynamics of the process.

Influential actors play a pivotal role in this process, often encompassing government officials, representatives of international institutions, local groups, or individuals with notable political power. They identify an issue that they believe should be framed as a security concern and leverage their political influence to shape the agenda, ultimately dictating the terms of the security debate. The effectiveness of these influential actors in mobilising attention and resources for the identified issue is central to the overall process.

Conversely, the securitisation framework also accommodates the examination of de-securitisation efforts. In such instances, influential actors may advocate against categorising an incident as a security threat. Diplomats, peacemakers, human rights organisations, or those endorsing diplomacy and peaceful resolution form part of this counter-securitisation effort. Their endeavours aim to reframe the narrative and diminish the perception of the issue as a security threat. The nuanced interplay among

these actors underscores the dynamic nature of the (de)securitisation process.

Securitising actors serve as the linchpin of this process, tasked with framing the identified issue as a security threat. They employ strategic language and rhetoric to portray it as an existential danger to a specific referent object, such as a nation or a community. The objective is to convince the broader audience that extraordinary measures are urgently needed to address the perceived threat. Securitising actors' persuasive skills and language choices are instrumental in initiating the securitisation process.

The audience, comprising the general public and other relevant stakeholders, plays a crucial role in determining the success of (de)securitisation. Their perception of the issue as a security threat ultimately legitimises the need for immediate and exceptional action. Responding optimistically to securitising actors' framing and persuasion efforts can lead to the implementation of various security measures and policies. The dynamic interaction among influential actors, securitising actors, and the audience shapes the securitisation process' causal mechanism.

The analysis of the mechanism operative in the Philippines' response to the disputes in the SCS was effectively conducted through the lens of securitisation, as discussed in Chapter 7. The de-securitisation process is depicted as the Philippine response to the maritime incident at Reed Bank in June 2019. Chapter 7 discussed how functional actors' existential threat and lobbying efforts aligned with the first week of the



maritime incident, and the second week provided mechanistic evidence for decision-makers, the audience, and China-centric policies as de-securitising measures. The argument that the causal mechanism played a role in shaping Philippine foreign policy was supported by presenting and evaluating evidence that each agent could execute its intended action as hypothesised by the securitisation framework. Chapter 7, thus, demonstrated the de-securitisation process in action.

Moreover, a thorough examination of the causal mechanism provides valuable insights into the interaction of actors and systemic structures that form the foundation of the securitisation process. It is imperative to recognise that securitisation is a complex process. While the causal mechanism propels the process toward its intended outcomes, whether securitisation or de-securitisation, it does not guarantee these results due to its inherent complexity.

The upcoming sections discuss key observations regarding the causal mechanism, which can be distinctly classified into two fundamental dimensions: the exercise of political agency and the influence of systemic structures. The interweaving of these elements shapes the course of the securitisation process and is thus essential for comprehending its dynamics.

### **Political Agency within the Mechanism**

Political agency involves the capability of individuals and groups to actively participate and decide within the confines of a political system, bringing about change through purposeful action. In the specific context of

this thesis, it pertains to entities involved in particular activities that collectively adopted the de-securitising measures undertaken by the Philippines in response to the 2019 Reed Bank incident. On the contrary, political structure refers to the foundational elements of a political system that significantly shape and guide the actions and decisions of individuals and groups. In the 2019 Reed Bank case context, these elements include government institutions, legal statutes, prevailing social norms, and deeply ingrained cultural values.

Agency and structure are closely interrelated. While actors possess agency, they do not operate in isolation. Instead, their actions and decisions are intricately linked with the existing structures that define the political landscape. Actors not only have the capacity to influence and shape these structures but are also influenced and shaped by the broader political framework in which they operate. This interaction highlights the nature of political dynamics, where individuals and groups navigate and contribute to shaping the political landscape.

### ***Divergence-Convergence among Powerholders***

The de-securitisation response of the Duterte administration was a subject of scrutiny and critique, offering a complex interplay of factors in its causal mechanism. In the initial days following the maritime incident, various government agencies held disparate viewpoints, resulting in a spectrum of reactions. Some voices within the administration advocated for a more assertive military posture, suggesting a firmer stance in response to the situation. Conversely, others favoured a diplomatic

approach, with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) taking a prominent role in this perspective. Simultaneously, the Office of the President (OP) called for further investigations to understand the incident better.

Examining these contrasting viewpoints in the early aftermath of the incident reveals a distinctive aspect of Duterte's strategy. A week after the incident occurred, there was a deliberate effort to decrease the emphasis on security measures and shift the narrative. The Gem-Ver 1 incident in 2019, which had placed Filipino fishermen in grave danger and appeared to undermine the Philippines' sovereign rights within its EEZ, was, by the Duterte administration's account, downplayed. President Duterte and his officials sought to reframe the incident, arguing that it did not constitute an attack on Philippine sovereignty. In this manner, their response can be understood as a strategic move to de-securitise the situation.

The act of de-securitisation, in this context, was not merely a passive response but a calculated effort to redefine the narrative. By minimising the security implications and emphasising other aspects of the incident, such as economic interests or diplomatic resolutions, the administration aimed to de-escalate the situation and avoid an overtly confrontational approach. This approach could serve various strategic and political objectives, including maintaining stable international relations and preserving domestic support while reframing the incident as less of a security threat and more as an issue to be resolved bilaterally. The de-securitisation response of the Duterte administration to the maritime

incident was a multifaceted strategy driven by the differing perspectives within the government and orchestrated by the President. It sought to reconfigure the incident's narrative from a security crisis to a more diplomatically manageable issue, reflecting the complexities of modern security and foreign policy dynamics.

### ***Neglected Dimension of Intentionality***

The de-securitisation response by the Duterte government in the wake of a critical maritime incident conspicuously omitted the crucial dimension of intentionality. This omission starkly contrasted the positions put forth by opposition senators within the first week following the incident. These senators raised three primary concerns: the abandonment of Filipino fishermen, the alleged deliberate collision and sinking of the Philippine vessel, and their opposition to the suggested joint investigation. While the Duterte administration emphasised the abandonment of the 22 fishermen at sea, this focus raised questions about the administration's stance on the nature of the incident. Instead of directly addressing whether the maritime collision was a deliberate attack on the Philippine fishing boat, their rhetoric prioritised the issue of abandonment. This intentional focus begs an important question: Why did the administration emphasise abandonment rather than delving into the coercive actions taken by China against all Philippine fishing vessels at the Reed Bank?

Understanding this shift in focus requires an exploration of the distinction between military and humanitarian concerns. Incidents that involve direct military attacks typically fall under the jurisdiction of the

military and are handled at a national level due to their grave implications for national security. In contrast, civilian matters, such as abandonment at sea, are viewed as humanitarian issues. These concerns can often be addressed more directly and swiftly, involving engagement with the affected parties without triggering a broader security crisis. The proper venue for determining the facts arising from the incident and drawing the appropriate conclusions was a Board of Marine Inquiry chaired by the Philippine Coast Guard. At the outset, the military had no jurisdiction over the issue.

The strategic choice of emphasising abandonment over deliberating on the nature of the incident aligned with the broader containment strategy of the Duterte administration, which manifested in a de-securitisation response. By redirecting the narrative towards abandonment, the administration successfully de-escalated the situation, framing it more as a humanitarian than a security crisis. This approach aimed to manage the incident without resorting to a full-fledged military response or getting involved in high-stakes diplomatic confrontations. The Duterte administration's decision to downplay intentionality in favour of highlighting abandonment reflected the complexities of their containment-oriented strategy. The response was designed to maintain stability and prevent the escalation of potentially volatile situations.

### ***Chinese Grey Zone Operations***

Former Supreme Court Justice Carpio's (2019) analysis of the collision between FBca Gem-Ver 1 and a Chinese vessel brought to light the

security implications of the incident and its connection to China's Maritime Militia (CMM). Carpio emphasised the credibility of the Filipino fishing boat crew's identification of the ramming vessel as a CMM vessel, citing their extensive experience. Carpio highlighted that CMM vessels are known for having reinforced steel hulls designed for ramming other coastal states' fishing vessels.

Furthermore, Carpio (2019) pointed out that after the collision, the Chinese crew deliberately submerged Gem-Ver 1, consistent with the CMM's history of aggressive actions in the region. This included ramming Vietnamese ships in the Paracel Islands and intimidating Filipino fishermen in the Philippine EEZ. Carpio argued that the Gem-Ver 1 collision unequivocally breached UNCLOS, suggesting China's potential "grey zone" offensive to expel Philippine fishing vessels from the region.

Chinese "grey zone" operations, also referred to as "hybrid warfare", encompass strategic tactics and manoeuvres in the SCS (Gershaneck, 2020, p. 26). According to Green et al., engaging in a "grey zone strategy" involves avoiding crossing a threshold that leads to war (2017, p. 21). The grey zone represents the uncertain territory between peacetime activities and overt military operations. In the SCS, these tactics aim to assert China's territorial and maritime claims gradually, consolidating regional presence and influence without direct military conflict.

In connection with the military issues securitized by the Philippines in Chapter 5, a crucial aspect of China's grey zone operations involves constructing and militarising artificial islands in disputed waters

(Kremidas-Courtney, 2019). Over time, China has transformed reefs and shoals into military bases with airstrips, ports, and critical infrastructure, serving various purposes such as reconnaissance, surveillance, and potential power projection. China's assertive measures, deploying coast guard and maritime militia, have led to confrontations with vessels from other claimant states, and its deployment of oil rigs, drilling platforms, and seismic survey vessels has heightened tensions, potentially leading to clashes and affecting regional stability. China's establishment of administrative districts and naming of geographical features reinforces territorial claims but has faced international disapproval for concerns about freedom of navigation, adherence to international law, and the rights of other countries with competing claims.

In response to the 2019 maritime incident in the Reed Bank, Carpio (2019) urged the Philippines to convey a clear message to China that further aggressive actions would result in a diplomatic rupture – a piece of advice the Duterte government did not follow. Subsequent maritime incidents revealed that the Duterte administration's approach, aiming to de-securitise and downplay China's actions in 2019, did not effectively address the security challenges posed by China in the SCS.

### ***Ambiguous Provisions in the Military Defence Treaty with the US***

The Military Defence Treaty (MDT) signed between the Philippines and the US in 1951 represents a pivotal agreement fostering mutual defence and security cooperation. While its advantages in aligning with a military powerhouse like the US are undeniable, excessive reliance on the

MDT presents challenges, particularly regarding provisions that demand careful clarification. These include delineating the scope of mutual defence obligations, defining collective defence responsibilities, specifying territorial coverage, elaborating on the legal implications of consultation, and addressing emerging challenges posed by grey zone operations. Military and diplomatic groups within the Duterte administration underscored that ambiguities within these terms could potentially compromise the security of the Philippines.

Notably, China exploited certain unclear elements within the treaty, prompting the Philippines to seek clarification from the US. Unfortunately, the response from the US had been slow-moving, leaving the Philippines with limited options to counteract foreign encroachments. The measured response from the US to the maritime incident in the Reed Bank heightened the predicament, placing the Philippines in a situation where it grapples with constrained avenues for addressing security concerns. This situation fuelled growing frustration among Philippine leaders, with some contemplating the possibility of entirely shelving the treaty. This intensified the urgency for clarification and resolution within the MDT framework. The pressing need for clarity in addressing security challenges emphasises the importance of a prompt and comprehensive response to safeguard the interests of the Philippines and the US.

### ***Sovereignty versus Sovereign Rights: A Legal Distinction***

President Duterte's deliberate emphasis on differentiating between "sovereignty" and "sovereign rights" in the context of the June 2019



maritime incident at the Reed Bank underscores a legally critical distinction of global significance. “Sovereignty” asserts complete ownership and control over a specific territory, entailing the full rights and privileges accompanying such ownership. For coastal states, sovereignty primarily applies to its landmass and the adjacent 12-NM territorial sea as per UNCLOS.

In contrast, “sovereign rights” represent a more limited set of entitlements akin to the right to use and enjoy property or a leasehold. Within the expansive domain of the Philippines’ 200-NM EEZ in the SCS, sovereign rights confer exclusive privileges for exploiting and managing the region’s resources, such as fisheries, oil, and natural gas. Importantly, under UNCLOS, sovereignty beyond the 12-NM territorial sea is not recognised.

The paramount importance of this distinction cannot be overstated, as it serves as the foundational basis for China’s claims in the SCS. The crux lies in comprehending that the Philippines and other stakeholders in the SCS can exercise their sovereign rights solely within their respective EEZ and CS. This implies that while they possess exclusive entitlements to the resources and activities within their designated zones, they do not enjoy complete and unchallenged ownership of the disputed features in the SCS.

China’s position, grounded in its unique interpretation of international law, asserts that while sovereign rights apply within the EEZ and CS, China claims full sovereignty over those areas based on its historical rights. This nuanced differentiation significantly impacts understanding territorial disputes, resource utilisation, and maritime

activities in the SCS. Recognition and appreciation of this distinction are pivotal in dissecting the complex geopolitical issues and legal intricacies of one of the world's most contentious and closely watched maritime regions. Despite the 2016 PCA Tribunal Award nullifying China's historical rights, Duterte chose not to capitalise on this significant decision.

### ***Personal Attributes of the (De)Securitising Actor***

The role of the President of the Philippines is pivotal, as s/he serves as both the head of state and the chief architect of the nation's foreign policy. This unique position is emblematic of presidential systems, concentrating executive authority profoundly on the President. In the Philippine context, this authority extends to foreign policy formulation, providing the President with significant leverage to shape the country's international relations and strategic priorities. To comprehend Duterte's China-centric approach to the SCS disputes, exploring the influence of the power holder on foreign policy, as discussed in Chapter 2's literature review, offers a valuable lens. Thus, President Duterte's leadership and personal attributes are central to understanding this dynamic.

One critical aspect of Duterte's foreign policy decisions was rooted in his early political career, where he encountered a sense of disrespect and harboured suspicions about American intentions, particularly in Mindanao. These early experiences contributed to his anti-American stance, leaving an indelible mark on his worldview. Acknowledging this background is imperative as it significantly influenced his foreign policy

choices, including his occasional sceptical stance toward traditional Western allies, particularly the US.

Duterte's leadership style was another critical factor in shaping his China-centric strategy. His strongman persona and unorthodox approach to governance resonate with followers seeking rational leadership and a sense of hope and change from established norms. This leadership style strongly shaped his foreign policy decisions related to the SCS disputes.

Furthermore, Duterte's populism was crucial in addressing the SCS disputes. His approach tapped into the collective Filipino "struggle for autonomy", aligning with the national yearning for self-determination and sovereignty. In a broader context, Duterte's foreign policy approach could be seen as a challenge to the US-led liberal-democratic system, reflecting a broader backlash against globalisation. His anti-American stance and pivot toward China represented his commitment to establishing an independent foreign policy that asserted Philippine sovereignty and stood apart from traditional Western powers.

In summary, Duterte's leadership, personal experiences, ideology, and populism are instrumental in shaping his foreign policy responses to events such as the maritime incident in the Reed Bank in June 2019. Understanding these personal attributes of the (de)securitising agent provides essential insights into the complexities of the Philippines' approach to the SCS disputes and its broader foreign policy agenda in a globalised world.

### ***The Media***

The media, encompassing broadcast, print, and digital platforms, played a crucial role in shaping public understanding of the incident involving the collision and subsequent sinking of the Filipino fishing boat. Initially, these media outlets not only brought the incident to the forefront but also highlighted the potential dangers the 22 Filipino fishermen faced. Digital media, in particular, became a pivotal platform as journalists and online news peddlers delved into the details surrounding the collision, investigating the events leading up to it, and contributing significantly to the clarification of facts and the establishment of accountability.

As the media's coverage progressed, it acted as a conduit for the responses of both the Philippine and Chinese governments. The extensive reporting of statements, reactions, and diplomatic efforts had a profound impact on public opinion and the international perception of the incident. Beyond the immediate actors, the media also conveyed the reactions of the international community, providing a comprehensive view of the incident's broader geopolitical implications and the stance of the global community.

It is crucial to acknowledge the variable nature of media coverage, with different outlets presenting distinct perspectives. Various media organisations framed the maritime incident based on their unique viewpoints and biases. Some chose to highlight the human aspect, shedding light on the challenges faced by Filipino fishermen, while others focused on the geopolitical implications and tensions in the SCS. Nonetheless, the portrayal of the incident in different media outlets had the potential to

sway public sentiment, subsequently influencing government actions and decision-making processes. This diversity of perspectives within the media landscape added complexity to the overall narrative surrounding the incident.

### **Two-level Patron-Client Structure**

Regarding structural dynamics, the causal mechanism implies the existence of a two-level patron-client framework within the de-securitisation process. Clientelism, defined as personal relationships involving the exchange of goods and services among individuals of different socioeconomic statuses (Kimura, 2018), has been central in Philippine political studies since Lande's pioneering work in the late 1950s. Lande's (1965) research on the patron-client framework argues that a network of mutual aid relationships, characterised by dyadic connections between affluent patrons and their less privileged, reliant clients, significantly influences the Philippine political landscape, often surpassing the impact of organised interest groups or categories. Eisenstadt and Roniger (1980) identify key attributes of patron-client relationships, such as their particularistic and diffused nature, involvement in simultaneous exchanges of diverse resources, and their foundation in informal yet tightly binding understandings. These relationships typically lack a legal or contractual basis and are built on voluntary agreements.

The applicability of the patron-client framework extends to explaining relationships between a dominant state and a vulnerable,

dependent state. According to Shoemaker and Spanier (1984), critical elements integral to patron-client state relationships include substantial disparities in military resources between the two states, the client's active role in patron competition, and the recognition of this association by the international community. Additionally, these relationships are intrinsically unstable due to divergent goals and distinct frames of reference. They serve as mechanisms through which patrons compete, with the extent of the client's contribution positively correlating with the patron's willingness to invest in the relationship and accommodate client demands.

The patron-clientelism framework also finds application in state relations in the Asia Pacific. For example, a study by Do (2016) analyses the US's patronage towards Southeast Asian clients, assessing it through metrics such as military assistance, foreign military sales, and arms imported by clients. Different periods in US-Philippine relations exhibited varying influence parity and client-centric approaches. In another study, Giorciari (2015) notes that China's strategy and norms present challenges in cultivating strong patron-client relationships, exemplified in China-Cambodian relations. China's patronage in this context involves economic investments, political backing, and modest military support. In return, Cambodia grants access to resources and political support on specific issues.

This section adapts Carney's (1989) characterisation of international patron-client relationships to the context of Philippines-China relations following the 2019 maritime incident in the Reed Bank. Carney's attributes, such as asymmetry, affectivity, compliance, and

reciprocity, are reinterpreted to emphasise three critical aspects of patron-client networks: power differential, practicality, and particular affinity between the actors.

The first aspect, power differential or asymmetry, reflects the unequal distribution of resources, mirroring disparities in economic and military capabilities and control over the distribution of government aid to constituents. It signifies the uneven status and influence between the patron and the client, which can be perceived or objectively manifested. Some states are acknowledged as international superpowers, while others are deemed vulnerable, dependent, or even failed states incapable of influencing global affairs. In domestic politics, government officials wield authority over constituents and resource management.

The second aspect, practicality or pragmatism, encompasses the concept of reciprocity within the patron-client relationship. The patron provides resources, and the client supports the patron's endeavours. This mutual support is vital to both parties, with compliance being just one facet of their mutually beneficial relationship. Consequently, the focus here shifts from Carney's "compliance" to a broader concept of "practicality".

The third aspect, affinity, complements practicality and represents the relational dimension of the patron-client relationship. Affectivity pertains to attachment to individuals, groups, or institutions driven by shared ideologies or common adversaries. It incentivises states and individuals to build and sustain relationships, aligning with their shared vision of a social order that they collectively endorse as a goal and a means to establish more stable identities.

This section highlights patron-client dynamics within the causal mechanism, bridging the trigger (the maritime incident in the Reed Bank in 2019) with the outcome (China-centric policy). By presenting evidence of asymmetry, practicality, and affinity, this section posits the existence of patron-client relationships at the international level, involving the influential state actor (China) and the securitising actor (the Philippine government), and at the national level, encompassing the securitising actor and the audience (the 22 fishermen and the Philippine public).

### ***The Philippines as a Chinese Client***

The dynamics characterising the relationship between the Philippines and China can be understood through a patron-client relationship. Notably, during President Duterte's tenure, there were tangible advancements in bilateral relations between the Philippines and China. However, these improvements coexisted with persistent accusations of Duterte being overly conciliatory towards China, given China's role as a patron that extended its influence across economic, political, and security domains.

In this intricate relationship, while there were benefits such as increased investments and closer cooperation, concerns loomed about the potential for undue influence and the erosion of the Philippines' autonomy. China had evolved into one of the Philippines' most significant trading partners, offering substantial investments, loans, and aid that directly contributed to various infrastructural projects. A noteworthy example is the "Build, Build, Build" program initiated under President Duterte, which



received billions of dollars in support from China. However, scholars and experts argued that these financial incentives may have subtly swayed the Philippines towards aligning more closely with China's strategic interests, creating an uneven relationship that could impact the country's foreign policy decisions.

The warming of political relations between China and the Philippines since 2016 was marked by increased cooperation on various fronts, including joint military exercises. China extended its support to the Philippines through military equipment and weapons, actions that can be construed as reinforcing their patron-client relationship. Nonetheless, concerns persisted regarding the implications of the Philippines' security cooperation with China. According to De Castro (2020), client states often find themselves in a precarious position, reliant on their patron's support, while simultaneously apprehensive about becoming excessively dependent, especially in delicate security situations. Duterte's strategy, however, did not deter Chinese activities in the SCS, most notably the ramming and sinking of a Philippine vessel near the Reed Bank in 2019. This incident revealed a vulnerability within the patron-client relationship.

The subsequent sections of this discussion will provide evidence for the three key elements underpinning the patron-clientelism relationship between the Philippines and China. This evidence substantiates the claim that patron-clientelism played a pivotal role in shaping the Philippine response to the Reed Bank incident, underlining the complexities and intricacies of this diplomatic relationship.

### *Power-differential*

In his State of the Nation Address (SONA) delivered in July 2019, less than two months after the maritime incident in the Reed Bank, President Duterte underscored the profound power differential between the Philippines and China concerning the SCS disputes. Duterte openly acknowledged the imperative for the Philippine government to protect its territorial waters and precious natural resources, all while treading cautiously to avert military confrontation. Duterte made a resolute commitment to the peaceful resolution of this matter, underscoring its paramount importance to the country's honour and territorial integrity. While some advocated for swift action against those fishing in the Philippine EEZ, Duterte argued that such measures should be taken judiciously at the appropriate time.

According to Duterte, the government faced significant challenges when it came to the removal of Chinese vessels from the disputed territory. China asserted ownership over the area, and Duterte believed China possessed control. This presented a complex predicament for the Philippines, which also laid claim to the territory but could not enforce that claim, owing to past conflicts and, notably, the withdrawal from Scarborough Shoal during the previous administration. This concession allowed China to gain access and control of the Spratly Islands, which, in turn, led to a substantial loss for the Philippines. Duterte eventually reiterated the impracticality of engaging in a military confrontation with China as a viable option for the Philippines, given the country's relatively

limited military capabilities compared to China's considerable military power.

#### *Practical Association*

President Duterte's presidency ushered in a significant period of diplomatic exchanges between the Philippines and China. These interactions were marked by official visits, resulting in the signing of crucial government-to-government agreements, exchanges of letters, and memorandum of understanding (MOUs) across various vital sectors, including education, science and technology, finance, customs, and tourism. During these visits, both states reaffirmed their willingness to support each other's socio-economic and security initiatives. This commitment extended to collaborative efforts in addressing pressing issues such as illicit drugs, terrorism, poverty, and criminality.

In May 2017, Duterte travelled to China to participate in the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. During this visit, he met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and President Xi Jinping, reaffirming the Philippines' dedication to strengthening their ties. The Chinese leadership expressed support for the Philippines' socio-economic and security programs. Subsequently, in November 2017, Li officially visited the Philippines, engaging in discussions on Philippines-China relations, regional matters, and global issues. This visit resulted in multiple agreements, exchanges of letters, and MOUs between the two governments.

In April 2018, Duterte attended the 2018 Bo'ao Forum for Asia Annual Conference, where he emphasised the collaboration between the Philippines and China in infrastructure projects, counterterrorism, and law enforcement. The event witnessed the signing of Letters of Intent between Philippine and Chinese companies, along with exchanges of letters and MOUs. The close of 2018 saw Xi visiting the Philippines for a state visit, with both state leaders discussing cooperation in various areas, including bilateral trade, investments, tourism, agriculture, education, and cultural exchange. The visit culminated in the signing of twenty-nine government-to-government agreements.

The following year, in April 2019, Duterte attended the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. He met with Xi and Li during this forum, reinforcing their commitment to a robust development partnership. The forum also witnessed the signing and exchange of agreements, further enhancing cooperation. In August 2019, Duterte's visit to China reinforced the partnership between the two countries, with agreements signed in various areas and emphasising comprehensive strategic cooperation.

The practical association between the Philippines and China was evident in the numerous official visits and bilateral agreements that strengthened their cooperation. These engagements not only underscored their shared commitment to socio-economic development but also addressed security concerns of mutual interest.

### *Particular Affinity*

The third aspect, affinity, seamlessly intertwines with reciprocity, bringing a relational dimension to the fore in patron-client relations. While reciprocity forms the rational core of these relationships, affinity delves into their emotional and relational aspects. Affinity assumes a central role, facilitating, establishing, and sustaining lasting connections between patrons and clients.

As the Philippines and China advanced towards an increasingly closer relationship, concerns emerged, chiefly regarding potential compromises concerning the Philippines' sovereign rights in the SCS. With overlapping claims involving the Philippines, China, and other regional states, critics closely examined Duterte's approach, pondering whether economic interests overshadowed the Philippines' territorial integrity. The point where national interests and emotional ties converge became the focal point of intense scrutiny.

A pivotal episode in this evolving diplomatic landscape unfolded during the final meeting between Duterte and Xi, just before the unfortunate ramming and sinking incident in the Reed Bank in 2019. In April 2019 in Beijing, setting the stage for the Belt and Road Forum, Duterte emphasised the profound importance of mutual trust, respect, and friendship. He fervently encouraged further cooperation and partnership between the two states. Acknowledging the pivotal role played by Xi's state visit to the Philippines in 2018, Duterte underscored how this visit significantly strengthened the bonds between the two countries. For Duterte, the Belt and Road Forum presented a unique opportunity to

rekindle and reaffirm cherished bilateral relations, cementing the affinity between the two leaders.

Therefore, it was not entirely unexpected that, despite the maritime incident in the Reed Bank just two months later, Duterte made the controversial decision to allow Chinese nationals to fish in Philippine waters. His decision was grounded in both reciprocity and the bonds of the Philippines' relationship with China. Duterte offered this concession as a reciprocal gesture for the Chinese authorities permitting Filipinos to fish peacefully in the China-controlled Scarborough Shoal since 2012. In his view, Duterte was merely upholding his word based on the foundation of their well-established relationship.

This contentious decision lacked an explicit written agreement between Duterte and Xi permitting Chinese nationals to fish in Philippine waters. Instead, it relied on a verbal understanding reached during a bilateral meeting in 2016. The Office of the President later clarified that, according to legal standards, even verbal agreements hold validity if there is mutual consent from both parties. In this intricate interplay of affectivity, national interests, and diplomatic agreements, the Philippines-China relationship emerges as a prime exemplar of how a fusion of relational and practical elements can profoundly influence the trajectory of international affairs.

### ***Duterte as Patron of the Filipino People***

President Duterte projected a strongman persona as part of his leadership style, positioning himself as a defender of the Filipino people,

especially those who historically had been marginalised or oppressed by previous administrations. Duterte's mission was to address pressing national issues, such as crime, corruption, and poverty, resonating strongly with many Filipinos who appreciated his focus on their concerns. Duterte, as a patron to his clients, the Filipino people, implemented a series of policies and programs to improve their well-being and livelihoods. These initiatives encompassed infrastructure projects designed to enhance national connectivity and transportation, fostering economic growth and ensuring better accessibility for all citizens. Furthermore, his administration introduced social welfare programs primarily focusing on assisting the most underprivileged segments of society.

However, critics of Duterte raised significant concerns about his human rights record, especially in connection with his contentious "war on drugs" campaign. This campaign witnessed numerous deaths and allegations of extrajudicial executions, leading to accusations that his administration's approach contradicted the concept of being a patron to all Filipinos. Instead, it raised significant issues concerning human rights and the rule of law. Nonetheless, the following sections highlight the three aspects of the patron-client dynamics between Duterte and the fishermen and their families affected by the maritime incident in the Reed Bank in 2019, shedding light on the intricacies of this relationship.

### *Power Imbalance*

The government's response to the Reed Bank incident revealed a marked power imbalance between the national government and its

citizens, notably the affected fishermen. This imbalance manifested in cash and kind assistance, signifying a disparity in the government's resource capacity versus that of its constituents. This power asymmetry was evident in the unequal influence between the government and its citizens, underscoring its authority and responsibility towards its constituents.

The 2019 maritime incident in the Reed Bank led to diplomatic protests and initial investigations conducted by several government agencies. The initial response involved the Economic Development Cluster and the Security, Justice, and Peace Cluster within the Duterte administration, each with a dual mission: ensuring the well-being of the impacted fishermen and affirming the Philippines' rights within its EEZ. To lead the government's endeavours in providing aid to the affected fishermen, key leadership roles were assigned to Secretary Piñol of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Region IV-B Cabinet Officer for Regional Development and Security (CORDS) and the Department of Energy Secretary Cusi. They marshalled support from various government agencies, collectively collaborating to formulate a comprehensive response.

Notably, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and Region IV-B CORDS played pivotal roles in the initial investigative efforts. Their objective encompassed two core aspects – assessing the extent of liabilities and devising the most effective legal strategies to seek justice. Furthermore, the Maritime Industry Authority and PCG took the lead in conducting more extensive investigations to ensure a robust and thorough



response to the incident. These actions were critical in addressing the affected fishermen's immediate concerns and the broader issue of the Philippines' territorial rights within its EEZ. These collective efforts of the Duterte government underscored the presence of a power disparity, a defining feature within patron-client relationships, where the asymmetry in resource allocation and influence became manifest.

### *Pragmatic Association*

Within patron-client dynamics, a core relationship emerges where the patron, typically a figure of authority or influence, offers the client support, guidance, and protection. In return, the client benefits from the patron's resources and connections. This relationship thrives on mutual benefit, with the client providing loyalty and support to the patron in exchange for assistance. However, it can turn exploitative or abusive if the patron manipulates or seeks to control the client for personal gain. The second aspect of patron-clientelism discussed in this section delves into the government's support package to the 22 fishermen and their families and the reciprocity they needed to demonstrate.

The fishermen at the heart of the incident received aid from several government agencies. DA Secretary Piñol orchestrated PHP25,000 disbursements to each of the 22 fishermen through the Survival Response Loan Program. They also received 11 fibreglass boats, engines, nets, and accessories from BFAR, which they efficiently shared among them. The DA provided one sack of rice per fisherman, while DSWD offered PHP10,000 and food packs. CORDS provided each fisherman with PHP10,000. Piñol

endeavoured to secure extra funding from the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation to acquire ice-making machines and establish nationwide cold storage facilities. Piñol even proposed to Duterte to enhance the country's fishing boat infrastructure.

However, in line with the causal mechanism of the de-securitisation process, the fishermen, as the primary audience, had to accept the actions the Philippine government took in response to the incident. This required a shift in the fishermen's account of the event, moving from their initial assertion that the Chinese vessel deliberately rammed and sank their boat to a position of uncertainty regarding the intentions of the Chinese crew. Consequently, on 19 June, the crew of Gem-Ver 1 adjusted their initial narrative following a meeting with Piñol. They had previously claimed that the collision was a deliberate act by the Chinese vessel, but now their stance aligned with Piñol's version. This shift was prompted by Piñol's determination that one of the fishermen, Blaza, the only individual awake before the incident, was the most reliable witness to the events.

The government's comprehensive aid package, which included the provision of boats, nets, essential supplies, financial assistance, and scholarships for the fishermen's children, was extended in response to their altered account of the incident. This change in their narrative led to speculation that the aid could be perceived as a form of compensation, highlighting the intricate dynamics of reciprocity in patron-client relationships, where benefits are exchanged based on mutual actions and commitments.

### *Particular Relation*

The third facet of patron-client relations was evident in Duterte's commitment to the well-being of all citizens, reflected in his colloquial nickname "Tatay Digong". "Tatay" means father in Filipino, and "Digong" is derived from his name, Rodrigo. This label conveyed an image of Duterte as a solid and caring paternal figure dedicated to improving the lives of the Filipino people. The label was cultivated through his strong leadership style, support for populist policies, direct communication, connection with marginalised communities, anti-establishment stance, and nationalist agenda.

Duterte's reputation as a resolute leader stemmed from his tough stance on crime and drugs, appealing to those who sought law and order. The Duterte administration implemented measures to address the needs of ordinary citizens, including social welfare initiatives and infrastructure projects to enhance their quality of life. Duterte's candid and direct communication resonated with many, making him relatable. He championed the underprivileged and labour force, pledging to improve their well-being. Duterte portrayed himself as an outsider to mainstream politics and appealed to those disillusioned with conventional politics. His foreign policy approach, especially in asserting Philippine sovereignty in SCS conflicts, was seen as safeguarding national interests.

However, not everyone viewed Duterte in a positive light. Some Filipinos had reservations about his policies, speech, and leadership style, and his presidency was characterised by various opinions and controversies reflecting Philippine society's diverse viewpoints. Notably,

public perception of Duterte, like any political figure, was influenced by individual political affiliations, personal experiences, and values.

Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter 7, the results of opinion polls conducted in June 2019 indicated high net satisfaction ratings for the Duterte administration. These surveys involved face-to-face interviews and explored various aspects of government approval and foreign policy on the WPS disputes, particularly the maritime incident in the Reed Bank. Analysing survey data requires considering a range of factors, such as political events, economic conditions, and public sentiment, which can significantly impact the data over time. These survey results must be interpreted within their broader context to understand trends and insights better. These survey results indicated the Filipino public's support for the de-securitisation measures enacted by the Duterte administration.

To sum up, this section has provided a comprehensive examination of patron-client dynamics and their pivotal role in the complex mechanism that connected the 2019 maritime incident at the Reed Bank to the China-focused policy response of the Duterte government. This argument has been substantiated by the demonstration of asymmetry, reciprocity, and affinity, underscoring the presence of patron-client relationships on an international scale, especially between the influential state actor, China, and the de-securitising actor, the Philippine government. These same dynamics were equally discernible at the national level, unfolding between the de-securitising actor and the audience, encompassing the 22 fishermen and the wider Philippine public. This multifaceted analysis underscores the

far-reaching influence of patron-client dynamics in shaping the Philippines' response to the incident and its broader foreign policy stance.

## **Incorporating Scope Conditions**

The securitisation framework is a comprehensive approach that not only delves into the causal mechanism underpinning the process of (de)securitisation but also considers scope conditions to ensure a nuanced understanding of the specific context in which these processes are examined. These scope conditions are vital as they consider the various contextual factors influencing political phenomena, thereby customising the securitisation analysis to the unique circumstances in which it is applied.

Chapter 7 provided a historical context for the 2019 Reed Bank incident, drawing from The National Security Policy 2017-2022 (NSP) of the Duterte government. The NSP highlights the Philippines' multifaceted challenges in safeguarding its maritime boundaries and interests. These challenges encompassed hostile forces, pirates, terrorists, traffickers, illegal fishers, and environmental transgressors. The maritime row in the SCS was of particular concern, posing a significant threat to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Nevertheless, the government's strategy primarily revolved around diplomatic negotiations to define and delimit maritime borders and jurisdictions while implementing laws to meet international obligations.

The NSP also acknowledges the broader global and regional geopolitical issues impacting the Philippines. These encompass conflicts in

the Middle East and Africa, tensions on the Korean Peninsula, territorial disputes in Northeast and Southeast Asia, the Sabah issue, the China-Taiwan conflict, and challenges to the US hegemony. The NSP recognises the US as the world's sole superpower with substantial global strategic influence, especially in Asia-Pacific, through its "pivot/rebalance policy". The Philippines maintains a defence treaty alliance and military cooperation with the US. China's rise as a significant economic power is characterised by its vast population, extensive territory, abundant resources, and economic growth. Its increasing presence in the WPS is driven by resource needs and nationalist sentiments, significantly influencing regional dynamics. The ASEAN seeks to address border disputes through consultation and consensus to enhance regional integration and manage geopolitical rivalries.

Incorporating scope conditions is essential in delineating the boundaries within which the (de)securitisation approach is expected to apply. This is particularly valuable when dealing with complex and multifaceted phenomena, which is often the case in security studies. Establishing scope conditions allows for more precise and tailored interpretations specific to the context under examination. Moreover, scope conditions enhance the credibility of research outcomes by reducing the risk of overly broad or generalised conclusions. They provide a clear framework for rigorously testing theories or hypotheses, thereby enabling the refinement of theories to better align with the intricacies of the political world. Thus, understanding the comprehensive (de)securitisation analysis of the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes necessitates considering

this complex world of state actors, international institutions, and the international structures operative in the region.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter argued that Securitization Theory is a valuable framework for comprehending the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes from 1995 to 2022. The theory's emphasis on speech acts and communication enables a comparative analysis of different actors, contexts, and discourses contributing to the securitisation or de-securitisation of specific issues. In the context of the SCS disputes, the framework proved invaluable for understanding how the Philippines' political leaders employed rhetoric to mobilise domestic and international support while also drawing attention to these complex maritime issues. Notably, applying Securitization Theory shed light on the responses of various Philippine administrations as they grappled with the evolving dynamics of the SCS disputes.

The in-depth case study, centring on the deviant case, employed the securitisation framework to analyse the de-securitisation process comprehensively. The framework's application proved effective in exposing the intricate causal mechanism, which triggered the de-securitisation of the issue. Through the lens of the securitisation framework, the study provided valuable insights into the power dynamics that operated within the process, shedding light on how various actors and institutions exerted their influence and how power relations facilitated the (de)securitisation of the maritime incident. This examination was

instrumental in gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in the process.

Integrating historical context and specific enabling conditions into the analysis presented another crucial and invaluable facet of the securitisation framework. The inclusion of historical context was instrumental in delving into the intricate and often longstanding factors that had contributed to the evolution of a particular security issue. This approach unravelled the historical events, decisions, and tensions that laid the foundation for the current situation, offering invaluable insights into the broader context within which (de)securitisation unfolded. Additionally, specific enabling conditions emerged as a pivotal determinant in shaping the multifaceted nature of the (de)securitisation process. By considering these enabling conditions, the framework enabled a precise evaluation of the generalisability and applicability of research findings, illuminating the circumstances under which these findings held. This nuanced perspective enhanced the depth and accuracy of the analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influenced the (de)securitisation process.

These three applications of the securitisation framework were aligned with the three distinct levels of analysis. Firstly, at the state level, the framework compared the Philippines' responses to various instances of China's encroachments in the WPS. The second level explored the political agent-focused within-case study, examining the actions and decisions of specific individuals or groups, thus providing a deeper insight into de-securitisation structural dynamics within domestic politics. Lastly,



the third level concerns the international system, emphasising the broader framework of global politics, including power distribution and interactions among nations and international entities. The interplay between these three analytical levels is crucial for grasping the intricate dynamics within the broader international politics, and in this particular case, the Philippine foreign policy towards the disputes in the SCS.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

### **Summary of the Thesis**

This thesis explored the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes, examining the period from 1995 to the conclusion of the Duterte government in June 2022. The Philippines, perceiving Chinese intrusions in the WPS as security concerns, made one notable exception during the Duterte administration. Regrettably, despite or possibly due to Duterte's China-centric policies, China has persistently asserted its claims in Philippine waters even beyond his presidential term.

The maritime row escalated significantly in July 2023 when the Philippine military reported a disturbing increase in Chinese fishing vessels near the Reed Bank. Specifically, the number of Chinese vessels near the Iroquois Reef, situated just south of the Reed Bank, surged from a dozen in February 2023 to 47 by July 2023. Subsequent months witnessed heightened tensions, marked by accusations against China's coast guard for actions such as blocking and firing a water cannon at a supply boat, intentional collisions with Philippine vessels in Scarborough Shoal, and a Chinese navy ship shadowing and attempting to disrupt a Philippine navy vessel near Thitu Island. By December 2023, the situation further intensified as the Philippines identified over 135 Chinese Maritime Militia vessels near Whitsun Reef.

In response, the incumbent Philippine President, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., underscored the importance of dialogue and

cooperation with China to address territorial issues peacefully. Concurrently, Marcos Jr. worked to bolster alliances with the US and other Southeast Asian nations, fostering a collective stance against China's maritime expansion. Complementing these diplomatic efforts, Marcos Jr. focused on enhancing military capabilities and infrastructure in disputed areas, presenting a nuanced and pragmatic foreign policy approach that prioritises national interests and regional stability.

Given China's persistent approach to the SCS disputes over the decades, there is a compelling need to establish a comprehensive framework for analysing Philippine responses to the maritime conflict in the SCS. This imperative arises from the interplay of evolving geopolitical factors, regional power dynamics, and the web of domestic considerations that influence the Philippines' strategic decisions in the face of a longstanding maritime dispute. This thesis sought to fulfil that need.

The first phase of the research employed Securitization Theory by the Copenhagen School through Discourse Analysis within a comparative case study. Subsequently, an examination focused on the 2019 ramming, sinking, and abandonment incident in the Reed Bank, warranting in-depth analysis. This second phase used the sociological-causal securitisation framework, employing Process Tracing to conduct a within-case analysis of the deviant case. Both theoretical frameworks, implemented through these two methods, played a pivotal role in effectively comprehending the multifaceted dimensions of the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes over the decades.

Chapter 1 of the thesis set the stage by providing context and establishing the imperative to investigate the intricate landscape of the Philippines' foreign policy response to the SCS disputes. Within this context, the study aimed to address two primary research questions. The first question sought an explanation for the strategies employed by the Philippines from 1995 to 2022, with a specific focus on the China-centric approach during the Duterte administration. This was despite ongoing Chinese encroachments in the SCS and the favourable decision resulting from the SCS Arbitration. In response to this query, the thesis posited that securitisation explained the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes.

The second research question shifted the focus to evaluating how the Securitisation framework clarified the Philippines' foreign policy response to the SCS disputes, essentially assessing the framework's effectiveness. The advantages of utilising the securitisation framework were outlined, encompassing its facilitation of a comprehensive examination of conflicts through a comparative study of cases, an evaluation of causal mechanisms, and a consideration of the enabling conditions leading to specific instances. In the subsequent sections of this concluding chapter, the inherent limitations of the securitisation explanation are discussed, along with proposed strategies to address these deficiencies.

Chapter 2 of the thesis reviewed the factors influencing Philippine foreign policy regarding the maritime row. These drivers were categorised as external and internal, challenging the oversimplified perspective of the US-China rivalry while underscoring the significance of domestic

structures as an often-overlooked factor. Chapter 3 of the study introduced the Securitization Theory, providing an overview that included its original formulation developed by the Copenhagen School and a significantly more nuanced and elaborated causal-sociological variant. Chapter 4 discussed the methodology and methods employed in the research, with Discourse Analysis as the primary method for the comparative study and Process Tracing applied for the in-depth investigation of the deviant case.

Moving forward, Chapter 5 analysed maritime incidents spanning from 1995 to 2016, encompassing military, political, economic, and environmental dimensions of the SCS disputes. It highlighted the Philippines' securitization responses, notably through an international legal battle utilising UNCLOS. Chapter 6 shifted focus to securitization cases in the WPS during the Duterte administration from 2016 to 2022, with particular attention to the unique de-securitization response observed in the 2019 sinking incident. Chapter 7 employed the causal-sociological securitisation framework to investigate this deviant case, incorporating structural factors and the interactions of political actors involved in the conflicts. Finally, Chapter 8 underscored the inherent value of securitisation for comprehending the multifaceted nature of the Philippine response to the SCS disputes.

While acknowledging the value of securitisation as a framework for examining the maritime row, it is imperative to acknowledge and address its inherent limitations. Consequently, this concluding chapter responds to (1) alternative explanations, (2) assessments of the theoretical framework, (3) criticisms of the methodology and methods employed, and (4) issues of

empirical data analysed in this research. Following this, the chapter puts forward prospective directions for future research, culminating in the research's significance.

## **Responding to Research Limitations**

This second part of the concluding chapter delves into the limitations of the thesis and suggests remedies to mitigate them. The initial section tackles a specific critique of Securitization Theory: its potential for being overly complex and challenging to grasp compared to the more straightforward explanations offered by mainstream IR theories. Advocates of Securitization Theory posit that its meticulous analysis contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of intricate issues like the SCS disputes, contrasting with the tendency of prevailing IR theories to oversimplify such complexities.

The second section responds to three primary criticisms of Securitization Theory. Firstly, it has been criticised for focusing mainly on the actions of elite political agents (influential and securitising actors) and disregarding the role of ordinary citizens. Secondly, the framework assumes that securitised policies will be adopted once an issue is framed as a security threat. Lastly, it has been criticised for being too Eurocentric and may not be applicable in other parts of the world with different cultural and political contexts.

Section 3 responds to the critiques on the thesis' methods. Discourse Analysis' criticisms include its tendency to overemphasise language and neglect other aspects of social reality, its potential to

reinforce power imbalances in society by prioritising dominant discourses, and the challenge of maintaining objectivity and avoiding bias in the analysis. Some argue that Discourse Analysis can be overly complex and challenging to apply in practice, limiting usefulness in real-world contexts. Nevertheless, proponents of Discourse Analysis maintain that it is a valuable tool for understanding how language shapes social interactions and structures and can help uncover hidden power dynamics and biases.

The third section also examines various perspectives on Process Tracing. A key concern critics raise is the difficulty establishing causality using this method. Since PT entails an in-depth examination of a specific case, discerning whether the observed patterns reflect broader trends can pose a significant challenge. Furthermore, sceptics contend that PT tends to be overly subjective, relying heavily on the researcher's judgment. Lastly, apprehensions are expressed regarding the reliability and validity of data collected through this method. Despite these critiques, scholars value PT as a tool for understanding complex social phenomena, such as the SCS conflicts.

The last section responds to the critique of the empirical data: discourse alone is insufficient when analysing foreign policy. While discourse can provide valuable insights into the language and rhetoric used by policymakers and politicians, it often falls short of capturing the complex web of relationships and dynamics that shape foreign policy decisions. Thus, the analysis must look beyond the surface-level discourse to fully understand foreign policy and delve into the underlying power

structures, economic interests, and historical legacies that shape the international system.

### **Trade-offs between Neorealism and Securitisation**

One strength of a neorealist approach to explaining international relations is its structural focus. Neorealism's emphasis on the international system's structural constraints provides insights into how power dynamics shape state behaviour. In the context of the SCS disputes, neorealism posits that the international system is characterised by anarchy, meaning there is no central authority to ensure states' security. This leads states to prioritise their security and survival. Multiple states, including the Philippines, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and others, have overlapping territorial claims within the SCS, creating a situation of potential conflict. The absence of a higher authority to resolve disputes increases the likelihood of competition and potential conflict.

Neorealism underscores the security dilemma, highlighting that a state's endeavours to bolster its security can be perceived as a threat by other states, fostering distrust and potential conflict. China's militarisation of islands and reefs in the SCS has instilled insecurity in neighbouring states, prompting them to adopt similar measures to safeguard their interests and exacerbating regional tensions. The Philippines, for example, responded to the SCS conflicts by enhancing its security posture in this manner. Moreover, in the face of a rising power, states may counteract by forming alliances or bolstering their military capabilities. This dynamic is evident in the SCS disputes, where external actors like the US have



intervened to uphold their regional influence. The US has actively supported its allies and partners in their confrontations with China, underscoring the region's geopolitical complexities and power dynamics.

Nonetheless, the neorealist perspective proves overly simplistic in its grasp of the disputes unfolding in the SCS. It focuses on states' imperatives for survival and power, neglecting crucial elements such as ideology, identity, and domestic politics. Conversely, the constructivist approach, particularly through the lens of securitisation, offers a more nuanced understanding of the situation by incorporating the influence of ideas, norms, and non-state actors in shaping state behaviour. Securitisation's conceptual framework enhances security to encompass diverse dimensions, including political, economic, environmental, and military. This proves particularly pertinent to the multifaceted SCS disputes. Hence, in contrast to neorealism, securitisation appreciates the intricacies of international relations, acknowledging the myriad factors that impact the actions of states and non-state entities in the region.

An additional advantage of the conventional neorealist approach to the SCS disputes lies in its predictive capability, owing to its straightforward assumptions. Neorealism emphasises power distribution and state interest and excels in foreseeing state actions in specific scenarios, such as alliances and conflicts among major powers. According to neorealism, states strive to maximise their relative power to ensure security. Notably, great powers like the US and China will compete to secure their interests and influence. As detailed in the thesis, China's escalating assertiveness in the region has manifested in its vigorous

pursuit of territorial claims and the assertion of dominance in the SCS. Consequently, other regional states may seek alliances or external support to counterbalance China's growing influence in response to these developments.

Consequently, while neorealism occupies a significant space in the realm of international relations, it often downplays the influence of non-state actors, including NGOs, corporations, and transnational networks. Contrastingly, the securitisation framework integrates these actors into its analytical lens, underscoring the impact of ideas, norms, and identity in shaping state behaviour. This framework argues that comprehending global dynamics requires acknowledging the pivotal role played by these factors, capable of triggering shifts in state interests and behaviour. Unlike neorealism's deterministic structure, constructivism offers a more dynamic and adaptive framework.

Thus, neorealism as a parsimonious and generalisable IR theory and a constructivist approach, including theories like the securitisation framework, offer distinct trade-offs in explaining phenomena such as the Philippine responses to the SCS disputes. Neorealism, known for its simplicity and generalisability, focuses on structural factors such as power dynamics and the international system's anarchic nature. Its parsimonious approach provides clear predictions based on state interests and security considerations. However, it may oversimplify complex situations, overlooking the role of ideational factors and domestic politics in shaping state behaviour. In the case of the Philippine responses to the SCS disputes, while neorealism might predict certain state actions based on power

considerations, it might miss the nuances of domestic politics and identity issues within the Philippines that influence its response.

On the other hand, a constructivist approach, including the securitisation framework, delves into the complexities of social context, norms, and identities. By highlighting the role of domestic politics, constructivism offers a nuanced understanding of state behaviour, acknowledging that perceptions of security and interests are socially constructed within the state. In the Philippine context, the securitisation framework can elucidate how domestic political agents and dynamics, such as patron-clientelism, shape the government's response to the SCS disputes. However, its emphasis on context-specific factors may limit its generalisability across different cases or contexts. Additionally, its complexity may make it challenging to apply in certain situations or to generate predictions to a broader set of cases.

In summary, the trade-offs between parsimonious and generalisable theories and comprehensive and contextual IR approaches lie in their balance between simplicity and complexity, and their ability to capture both structural and ideational factors. Therefore, the choice between these approaches depends on the specific research question and the level of detail and context sensitivity required for analysis.

### **Addressing Alternative Explanations and Criticisms of Securitisation**

The Literature Review chapter discussed competing explanations for the Philippine responses to the SCS disputes other than the securitisation approach. The thesis highlighted these alternative routes to

key observable outcomes and incorporated them into the comprehensive analysis using the securitisation framework.

For instance, neorealist explanations would emphasise power dynamics and strategic calculations in shaping Philippine responses to the SCS disputes. Factors such as the balance of power in the region, military capabilities, and strategic interests would be central to understanding state behaviour. The Philippines' responses may also be influenced by its alliances and security partnerships with other countries, such as the US and regional allies. Alliance commitments, security assurances, and coordination with partners could shape the Philippines' strategic calculations and policy choices. Finally, instead of framing the issue as a security threat, Philippine responses to the SCS disputes could be driven primarily by economic considerations. The Philippines may prioritise economic cooperation with China to access trade opportunities, investment, or development assistance.

Philippine responses may also be influenced by legal and normative frameworks, such as adherence to international law, including UNCLOS. The Philippines may pursue diplomatic and legal avenues to assert its territorial claims and defend its rights under international law.

Political dynamics within the Philippines, including electoral cycles, public opinion, and bureaucratic interests, can shape the government's responses to the disputes. Decision-making may be influenced by considerations of political legitimacy, nationalism, and the balance of power between different domestic actors.

Moreover, while Securitization Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes from 1995 to 2022, its explanatory power faces criticisms. A prominent critique is its exclusive focus on the actions of high-ranking political figures and security personnel, neglecting the role of ordinary citizens and civil society in influencing security dynamics. Nevertheless, scholars within the Copenhagen School have recognised the significance of considering a broader audience beyond political elites. This involves understanding how public opinion, media, interest groups, and civil society contribute to constructing and contesting security discourses.

The analysis of the causal mechanism behind the de-securitising measures of the Duterte administration in Chapter 7 illustrates this point. Here, the legitimacy of the government response had to be endorsed by the 22 fishermen, their families and community, and the Filipino public. In response to the critique of neglecting ordinary citizens, the securitisation framework has evolved by acknowledging the importance of a more inclusive understanding of security dynamics. While the theory's fundamental concepts still revolve around elite actors, it has expanded to incorporate the role of public opinion, civil society, and discursive contestation in shaping security narratives. This broader perspective enables a more nuanced analysis of how security issues are constructed, contested, and transformed within societies.

Secondly, Securitization Theory has faced criticism for its assumption that framing an issue as a security threat will inevitably lead to securitised policies or extraordinary measures. However, scholars have

clarified that the theory does not propose a deterministic relationship between successful securitization and policy outcomes. Instead, it emphasises the use of language and discourse to elevate issues to security, focusing on understanding the construction of security issues through speech acts rather than predicting specific policy responses. Moreover, the Copenhagen School acknowledges that securitisation is a political process, and the decision to implement securitised policies ultimately rests with policymakers. Implementing securitised policies is only partially dependent on successful framing through language and discourse; various other factors, such as political considerations, institutional constraints, and economic implications, come into play. The concept of de-securitisation within the securitisation framework also recognises that security issues can be contested and reversed. Just as an issue can be successfully framed as a security threat, it can also be de-securitised or challenged by alternative discourses prioritising other values, interests, or considerations. These three points were further illustrated in the within-case study presented in Chapter 7.

Finally, addressing the criticism that the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory is too Eurocentric and may not be universally applicable to diverse cultural and political contexts has prompted scholars within the framework to implement several adjustments and adaptations. These scholars acknowledge the variation in security discourses and practices across regions and cultures. To address this concern, the Copenhagen School considers specific cultural, historical, and political contexts when applying Securitization Theory, as demonstrated in the

comprehensive analysis of the deviant case in Chapter 7. Moreover, to showcase the theory's applicability beyond the European context, scholars within the Copenhagen School have actively researched securitisation processes in non-European regions. By analysing cases from diverse areas such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America, these scholars aim to illustrate how the theory can be adapted and applied to different geopolitical settings, as demonstrated in this thesis within Southeast Asia.

### **Replying to Drawbacks of Methods**

This part of the thesis addresses criticisms of the methods utilised, which involved Discourse Analysis and Process Tracing. Those who critique Discourse Analysis argue that it may place too much emphasis on language, disregard other societal factors, reinforce power imbalances by favouring dominant discourses, and challenge maintaining objectivity. Some may also consider Discourse Analysis complicated and impractical in real-world situations. Despite these criticisms, those who favour the method contend that it uncovers how language shapes social dynamics and reveals hidden power dynamics.

Process Tracing, the other research method employed, also faces criticisms. Such concerns include difficulties establishing causality due to a single-case focus, potential subjectivity, and reliance on researchers' judgment. Additionally, the reliability and validity of generalisations are questioned. Nevertheless, PT remains valuable for comprehending complex social phenomena.

### ***Analysing Securitizing Discourse***

In Chapters 5 and 6, this thesis employed Discourse Analysis to investigate the Philippines' involvement in SCS disputes from 1995 to 2022. As a qualitative research method, Discourse Analysis facilitates a thorough examination of communication structures, encompassing linguistic patterns, metaphors, symbols, and the framing and representation of ideas. By uncovering concealed assumptions, power hierarchies, and the construction and negotiation of meaning through language, Discourse Analysis offers valuable insights into how individuals and groups respond to social issues.

Nevertheless, despite its instrumental role in unravelling the intricate relationship between language and social realities, it is imperative to recognise the limitations of Discourse Analysis. This section critically scrutinises and addresses key criticisms directed at Discourse Analysis, including subjectivity, an overemphasis on language, and a perceived lack of causality. Through an in-depth exploration of these criticisms, this section aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the methodological considerations involved in employing Discourse Analysis for studying international relations, as exemplified in the thesis.

One of the most significant challenges inherent in Discourse Analysis lies in the need to interpret and evaluate the significance of language, a process inherently influenced by personal biases, assumptions, and prior knowledge. This subjectivity introduces the potential for drawing disparate conclusions from the same dataset, thereby impacting



the objectivity of the analysis. To mitigate this, the thesis conscientiously adhered to Balzacq's (2010) principle of "minimum formalization in discourse analysis", expounded upon in Chapter 4 on Methodology and Methods. This principled approach facilitated a transparent interpretive process and the clear articulation of analytical choices, ensuring a systematic presentation of results amenable to comparisons with other cases.

The application of Balzacq's (2010) formalisation in the context of the comparative case study conducted in Chapters 5 and 6 involved critical decision-making processes related to data collection, establishing stopping points for data gathering, and analysing the material through the lenses of intertextuality and intratextuality. The pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of securitization events necessitated the analysis of diverse text types originating from different historical periods and social contexts. The recognition that discourses are intricately linked to both preceding and concurrent discourses led to the emergence of "storylines" (Hajer, 1995), a pivotal element accounting for the intertextuality dimension integral to Discourse Analysis.

Regarding intratextuality, Vuori's (2008) introduction of elements of speech acts provided a structured framework for analysing securitization discourse. Following Vuori's categorisation, securitization discourses were dissected into three sequential elementary speech acts: claim, warning, and request. The comparative case study chapters applied Vuori's technique in the detailed analysis of speech acts, providing a nuanced understanding of how securitization unfolded in the Philippine

context. This strategic integration of methodological frameworks strengthened the analytical foundation of the study, offering a comprehensive exploration of the complexities associated with securitization discourse.

Another limitation of Discourse Analysis is its tendency to neglect non-verbal forms of communication, including body language, tone of voice, and visual cues. These elements can wield substantial influence over the meaning and significance conveyed in a message. In recognition of this shortfall, Chapter 7 of the thesis addressed the issue by considering various non-verbal aspects of communication, encompassing visual and auditory cues. The overarching objective of Chapter 7 was to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the discourse by delving into recorded speeches by President Duterte and interviews with government officials, the 22 fishermen, and their families. Through this multifaceted approach, the study sought to capture the nuanced layers of meaning embedded in verbal and non-verbal dimensions, enriching the analysis and offering a more holistic perspective on how communication shaped responses in the SCS disputes.

The third critique posits that Discourse Analysis tends to be more descriptive than explanatory. Although effective in discerning patterns and themes in language use, it may fall short in providing explicit causal explanations for the emergence of certain discourses or their impact on behaviour and policy. In Chapters 5 and 6, Discourse Analysis was applied to evaluate whether the Philippines securitized a specific issue, primarily focusing on pattern identification. Chapter 7 introduced a complementary

methodology, Process Tracing, to address the need for deeper causative insights. This approach, encompassing methods such as interviews uploaded on YouTube, public surveys, and historical research, was employed to unveil causal relationships and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. By integrating Process Tracing with Discourse Analysis, the research aimed to bridge the descriptive-explanatory gap, presenting a nuanced analysis that identified linguistic patterns and probed into the underlying causes and effects shaping the Philippines' responses to the SCS conflicts.

Despite its acknowledged limitations, Discourse Analysis remains valuable for revealing how language affects social realities, creates meaning, and reflects power imbalances. Thus, this thesis was transparent about its methodology, limitations, and findings to ensure a well-rounded analysis. By acknowledging and strategically addressing these limitations, the thesis enhanced the quality and credibility of its Discourse Analysis, offering more detailed insights into how language shaped the securitization responses of the Philippines.

### ***A Within-case Process Tracing Method***

Chapter 7 investigated the ramming and sinking incident at Reed Bank in 2019, employing the method conceptualised by Beach and Pedersen (2016, 2019). Process Tracing, a qualitative research method within the social sciences, illuminates the intricacies of events unfolding by establishing connections between triggers and outcomes. Despite its value in unravelling complex causal pathways in social phenomena, PT is not

immune to criticism. This section explores these criticisms, offering insights into their implications and addressing them within the context of the study.

Critics contend that PT is susceptible to subjectivity and bias, hinging on the interpretation and judgment of researchers. This risk of selective evidence presentation or overlooking alternative explanations prompted Chapter 7 to adopt a methodically transparent approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Aligned with Guzzini's (2011, 2012) perspective identifying securitisation as a causal mechanism, the chapter enhanced objectivity by explicitly outlining assumptions and potential biases, collectively mitigating subjectivity's impact on the research process.

An additional limitation of PT lies in its potential need for more applicability to broader contexts, often due to its focus on specific or limited cases. The detailed examination of a single or few cases may limit insights to a narrow scope, hindering generalisability. To address this, a potential solution involves integrating a comparative case study methodology or employing PT across multiple contexts, expanding the relevance of findings. However, in Chapter 7, the use of PT focused on a specific objective – exploring the deviant case further. Given this, there was no imperative need to mitigate PT's limitations, as the study's unique goal aligned with the in-depth scrutiny of a singular incident, making considerations for generalisability less critical in this specific context.

Finally, a comprehensive PT study demands significant investments in time, effort, and expertise, a concern critics highlight regarding its

practicality. In response, researchers are advised to strategically prioritise their research questions, selectively adopting PT when it aligns with investigation objectives. For instance, in Chapter 7, PT was applied purposefully, examining the causal mechanism within the context of the securitisation framework to analyse the empirical puzzle. The chapter integrated three key components within the within-case analysis: (1) establishing the theoretical framework, (2) delineating the research approach and techniques, and (3) exploring the empirical context, specifically concerning the Philippine response to the SCS disputes.

In summary, although PT encounters criticisms, adopting transparent and systematic research practices, carefully considering biases, contextualising findings, and integrating PT with a well-suited theoretical framework and complementary methods can effectively address these concerns. Researchers can capitalise on PT's strengths while mitigating its limitations, leading to a comprehensive and resilient research approach.

### **Assessment of Discourse as Empirical Data**

The utilisation of discourse in foreign policy analysis unfolds numerous advantages, primarily by unveiling power dynamics and hierarchies within decision-making processes. This sheds light on how specific actors and narratives wield more influence than others – a crucial aspect for understanding how these influential entities shape foreign policy agendas. Additionally, examining publicly available discourse aids in comprehending how states construct their identity and embed norms in

foreign policy narratives, influencing interactions with other nations. Employing discourse in this manner elucidates shifts in foreign policy priorities, strategies, and alliances. Finally, analysing foreign policy discourse can encompass various actors, such as non-state entities, media, interest groups, and public opinion, providing a comprehensive view of foreign policy dynamics.

Despite these advantages, relying solely on discourse to examine security issues may fall short of fully grasping complex security dynamics. A significant criticism in this context is its lack of focus on material impacts, including military capabilities, economic factors, and geopolitical power dynamics – all critical components in security concerns. Concentrating solely on language and discourse may yield a narrow, unrealistic view of security issues. For instance, illustrating the complexity of foreign policy decision-making in the Duterte administration, the thesis highlighted a paradox. Despite Duterte's reconciliatory stance towards China, specific governmental departments persist in lodging diplomatic protests, asserting the SCS Arbitral Award, and expressing support for the US. This paradox suggests that Duterte's policy declarations alone do not provide comprehensive insights into the Philippines' overall foreign policy approach. To address this, the thesis explored other aspects shaping the country's stance on China, emphasising the need to go beyond the verbal statements of influential political agents and assess them against tangible indicators.

Furthermore, another criticism of exploring policy discourse is its concentration on the language used by political elites, potentially

overlooking the perspectives of ordinary citizens, civil society groups, and marginalised communities, each with their differing views and concerns regarding security issues. In response, the securitisation framework employed in the thesis considered the roles of decision-making units and domestic political dynamics in the process. For instance, Chapter 7 evaluated a mechanism derived from the Copenhagen School's concept of socially constructed (de)securitising measures involving various actors and structures, offering a comprehensive understanding beyond the government's policy statements.

One more criticism of relying solely on discourse for understanding security is its oversight of complex historical, cultural, and societal factors shaping security narratives. To counter this, Chapter 7 included the scope condition within the analysis, considering the broader historical and contextual elements influencing the de-securitising response opted by the Duterte administration in 2019. In synthesising these critiques and considerations, the thesis underscored the need for a multi-faceted approach that combines Discourse Analysis with an awareness of material, historical, and societal dimensions, ensuring a nuanced understanding of security dynamics in foreign policy.

Lastly, acknowledging its limitation in focusing solely on the Philippine perspective when analysing threat construction, the thesis recognised the inherently one-sided nature of this process, where security concerns often predominate, irrespective of the other party's motivations. Importantly, this limitation is not perceived as a flaw; rather, it represents

a purposeful decision, underscoring the thesis' commitment to underscore the significance of giving due attention to this specific viewpoint.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

The preceding section introduced strategies to overcome the limitations of the securitisation approach, providing actionable insights for enhanced efficacy. These recommendations, derived from a discerning examination of the framework's challenges, aim to advance the utilisation of securitisation in studying complex security phenomena.

Building on the comprehensive understanding derived from analysing the SCS disputes between the Philippines and China using a constructivist perspective, researchers can explore several advantages of Securitization Theory. Firstly, this theory provides a unique perspective by focusing on framing issues as security threats, deepening our understanding of political dynamics. Researchers can systematically analyse how different states approach the securitization of similar issues, offering nuanced insights into cross-case variations and parallels. This exploration sheds light on states' diverse strategies in addressing common security concerns with direct policy relevance by highlighting how issue framing impacts policy decisions and international relations.

Secondly, the framework critically emphasises actors' agency across different levels. Simultaneously, it examines structural dynamics and scope conditions within which the securitisation process unfolds. This comprehensive framework provides analytical leverage for examining motivations, strategies, and interests and embeds these considerations



within the broader historical context as the process evolves. Consequently, the securitisation approach becomes indispensable for understanding responses to security issues, extending its relevance beyond the SCS disputes.

Explaining foreign policy demands a multifaceted approach beyond Discourse Analysis. While Discourse Analysis examines language and rhetoric in foreign policy statements, additional methods offer insights into motivations, decision-making, and outcomes. Surveys and interviews with various stakeholders yield valuable data on attitudes, preferences, and perceptions, exploring quantitatively and qualitatively for a thorough assessment. Quantitative methods, like statistical analysis, reveal patterns and trends in large datasets, offering empirical evidence to support or challenge theories. Historical analysis, utilising records and archives, illuminates the evolution of foreign policy, drawing lessons from the past. Each method has unique strengths, and their combination allows triangulation for robust conclusions, contributing to evidence-based policymaking.

Moreover, analysing discourse provides insights into policymakers' language and rhetoric but may not fully capture the intricate dynamics influencing foreign policy decisions. Thus, research on SCS disputes involving China and the Philippines can benefit from diverse empirical data types, offering a comprehensive and less subjective perspective. For instance, historical data is essential for tracing SCS conflicts and revealing conflict origins, past agreements, and territorial claims. Geospatial data, including satellite imagery and geographic information systems, provides

concrete evidence of landscape alterations, offering insights into militarisation, island-building, resource exploitation, and environmental degradation. Economic data, such as trade flows, oil and natural gas deposits, fish stocks, and fisheries catch, reveals the economic dimensions of disputes, showing how economic interests influence behaviour. This multidisciplinary approach enriches the depth and objectivity of SCS disputes research, fostering evidence-based analysis and empowering policymakers. It mitigates reliance on subjective interpretations, promoting regional transparency and accountability.

Understanding the long-term consequences of President Duterte's foreign policy is crucial. Duterte's pragmatic engagement with China shifted from a confrontational stance, raising concerns about compromising territorial claims and the Philippines-US alliance. Future research can assess whether Duterte's policies contributed to tensions or stability in the SCS, influenced the behaviour of claimant states and regional powers, and impacted ongoing disputes and regional security and prospects for a peaceful resolution. Post-Duterte, researchers can explore how these foreign policy decisions impact the Philippines' position in the region. They can examine whether the pragmatic approach to China has yielded economic benefits or whether it has potentially compromised the Philippines' territorial claims and sovereignty. Furthermore, researchers can assess how the shift in foreign policy affects relations with the US and other regional actors like the Quad and other ASEAN member states.

The recommendations presented form a guiding framework for future research endeavours, emphasising the need for adopting a holistic

and multidimensional approach. This proposed roadmap not only addresses the limitations identified in the thesis but also underscores the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives and methodologies. Such an inclusive approach is essential for attaining a nuanced understanding of the inherent complexities of security issues.

## **Research Contribution and Relevance**

This thesis stands out as an advancement in empirical knowledge, presenting not merely an alternative but a comprehensive understanding of the Philippines' responses to the SCS disputes, with a particular focus on the Sino-centric foreign policy approach during the Duterte administration. Going beyond conventional analyses, this study delves into the multifaceted dimensions of the country's strategic responses to the challenges posed by the maritime row in the SCS. The insights remain pertinent and applicable in contemporary Philippine context beyond the Duterte government, contributing valuable perspectives to the ongoing discourse in the field.

At its theoretical foundation, this thesis contributes to scholarship by intertwining two constructivist frameworks: the Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory and the sociological-causal securitisation framework. This combination facilitates a nuanced examination of (de)securitisation processes by unravelling layers of complexity in understanding the dynamics at play. The integration signifies a shift in analytical emphasis, moving from the influential political agent to the securitising authority that perceives its constituent entity as facing an

imminent threat. In the context of the Philippines-China disputes in the SCS, this perspective directs attention towards the smaller power, namely the Philippines.

Moreover, the research sheds light on the influence of patron-client relationships, both on the international stage and within the domestic arena. Doing so highlights the integral role played by these dynamics in shaping government policies. The consequential decision to either perpetuate the narrative of dependency or chart a new course of action emerges as a profound crossroads laden with implications for Philippine governance. This dual agency-structure perspective, encompassing international and domestic dynamics, enriches understanding of the intricate forces that shape and guide decision-making at various levels.

Methodologically, this thesis constitutes a significant contribution by providing insights into the application of Discourse Analysis, as demonstrated in its exploration of how the Philippines navigated the SCS disputes. This research presents a valuable resource for scholars interested in the role of language in shaping perceptions in international relations. Analysing diplomatic statements and media communications between the Philippines and China during maritime conflicts illustrate how language constructs realities and influences policy decisions. Interpretivist IR scholars can adopt this approach to explore how discourse contributes to understanding and framing international events.

Furthermore, the thesis underscores the compatibility of Process Tracing with the securitisation framework, presenting a methodologically rigorous avenue for comprehending the development of policies. This

aspect is relevant for foreign policy analysts examining a state's conflict response. By following the thesis' lead, analysts can explore the sequential unfolding of decision-making processes within causal mechanisms and examine policy decisions. This approach enables the identification of critical junctures in the policy-making process, offering a systematic understanding of how policies develop and adapt within the context of conflict response.

Hence, this thesis' synthesis of empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions collectively propels a multi-faceted understanding of security phenomena. As a result, this work not only broadens the scope of existing knowledge but also establishes itself as a foundational framework for future research endeavours to explore the intricacies of international security issues.

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# Annexes from the Philippines' Submission to the SCS Arbitration

## VOLUME III

### EXHIBITS

#### ARBITRAL DOCUMENTS

Annex 1	Notification and Statement of Claim of the Republic of the Philippines (22 Jan. 2013)
Annex 2	<i>Note Verbale</i> from the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila, No. 13-0211 (22 Jan. 2013)
Annex 3	<i>Note Verbale</i> from the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Manila to the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, No. (13) PG-039 (19 Feb. 2013)
Annex 4	<i>Note Verbale</i> from the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in The Hague to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, No. (013)-117 (29 July 2013)
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