

*Waves of Change CalsMUN 2024* 

# **Research Report**

Forum: Historical Security Council

Issue: Addressing the Environmental and Cultural Impacts of World War II on African and Asian Waters

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# Introduction

World War II had many devastating effects throughout the entire world. Many of these are now known and have thankfully, due to diligent measures applied by nations throughout the world, been contained or prevented. And yet a shadow of the war remains, lurking menacingly in oceans everywhere around the world, with no less than 15 thousand ships sunk worldwide. These steel giants may seem inoffensive, dormant at the bottom of the ocean, but many of them still contain large quantities of fuel and undetonated ammunition. As the sea and pressure wears away at these wrecks, the danger of leaking dangerous chemicals and oil increases. These can prove devastating to local ecosystems and populations, making a living off of the contaminated waters. These ticking timebombs are spread not only throughout Europe but also along many coasts of European colonies and East-Asian coasts. The increase of more unpredictable and severe storms, further increase risks of the rupture of fuel tanks. These conditions are only amplified in territories that already suffer the most from climate change, rendering them even more vulnerable.

# **Definitions of Key Terms**

### Wreck

A sunken State ship which is no longer operational, or any part thereof, including any sunken object that is or has been on board of such ship. This may sometimes also include parts of a ship that is sunken or stranded or objects lost at sea from such ships.

### **Oil-Containing Wrecks**

Potentially dangerous wrecks, originating from incidents such as groundings, collisions, structural failures or military attacks resulting in the submergence of the vessel. Incidents where the was reported vessel being raised, salvaged, lightered or scrapped are excluded. Furthermore wrecks that have already started leaking will be referred to separately. These wrecks are both tankers and non-tanker vessels, though the former are estimated to contain more than twice as much oil as non-tanker vessels, even in their great numerical inferiority.

### Environmental damage / degradation

Environmental damage or degradation is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of wildlife. It is defined as any change or disturbance to the environment perceived to be deleterious or undesirable.

### **Cultural impact**

The consequences to human populations of any public or private policies and actions that significantly change their norms, values, beliefs, practices, institutions as well as the way they live, work, socialize and organize themselves as part of their cultural life.

#### **UN Sustainable Development Goals**

A shared blueprint adopted by all member states of the United Nations adopted in 2015. At its core are 17 goals, encouraging member states to take action to better or prevent situations around the world. These goals tackle a variety of aspects, such as poverty, infrastructure, peace, healthcare and environment. One of these goals, number 14, encourages conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable marine development.

### **General Overview**

#### World War II

As commonly known the second World War was fought between the Allied countries and countries of the Axis. What springs to mind are mostly European powers; Germany, France, The United Kingdom, Italy, Russia, and perhaps the USA. And yet this war had massive repercussions not only in Europe, but also throughout Asia, Africa and America. The second World War was fought on many fronts, due not only to the implication of Japan, but also to the fact that the influence of many of these European powers, reached well into the then colonized African continent. These two factors contributed greatly to the immense scale of this conflict. The involvement of said country and colonies, result in a very impact on the regions in which they were vested. This affected these nations economically, demographically, ideologically and environmentally. For example many europeans power strongly increased production in their colonies, increasing manufacturing in these countries and thus developing their economies in unforeseen ways even though this was only felt far later as heavy strain was put on the African economy to increase the production of raw materials. Ideological changes caused by the war resulted in the decolonisation of Africa, reinforcing national identity. Many of these things are equally true for colonies in Asia. But most importantly, and tragically, soldiers were recruited from everywhere around the world to fight and die during the war. In Asia, Africa, and Europe millions fought and died, for many a reason, and many a cause. Many battles were also fought at sea, certainly in the east of Asia, where it is all too abundant. This resulted in hundreds of thousands lives lost at sea, but also thousands of shipwrecks. Many of these wrecks were filled with ammunition and fuel that now lies at the bottom of our oceans, waiting for storm and sea to break its casing and spread environmental and, in some cases, economical disaster.

### **Battle of Leyte Gulf**

One example among many is the battle of Leyte Gulf, considered one of the most devastating of the war. This naval battle was fought from 23 to 26 october 1944, involved combined American and Australian forces confronting the Imperial Japanese Navy. The aim of the battle was to isolate Japan from colonies in south-eastern Asia, thus severely undermining their access to the industrial and oil-based supplies produced in these regions. By this point Japan had lost many important ships and the balance of power was shifting more and more towards the allied side. Nonetheless, nearly all remaining vessels of the IJN were mobilized to counter the allied forces, but they ended up being repulsed regardless. It was the last recorded naval battle between battleships in history. During this battle alone 40 ships were sunk, and it is far from being the only one. It goes without saying that many

other naval battles were fought in south-east Asia, but not only there. Ships were also sunk in European seas and the seas of European colonies in battles such as this one.

### **Timeline of Key Events**

Date	Description of event
September 1 <sup>st</sup> 1939	Start of the Second World War
September 22 <sup>th</sup> 1940	Japan invades French Indochina
October 23 <sup>rd</sup> 1944	Start of the Battle of Leyte Gulf
September 2 <sup>nd</sup> 1944	End of the Second World War
July - August 2001	The USS Mississinewa leaks oil into a Micronesian lagoon
July 2008	The Hoyo Maru leaks oil into a Micronesian lagoon
April 14 <sup>th</sup> 2015	Entry into force of The Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks

# **Major Parties Involved**

### **Host States**

Small island developing states (SIDS) continue to endure the most impact from WWII, more than a half-century later. Often idealized because of their tropical setting, SIDS are challenged by limited resources, often reflected in their economies. These nations are dependent upon healthy seas for survival; their cultures, religions and diets are based on the sea. Furthermore the capacity of these countries individually for adequate response would a such a threat be discovered is very limited.

### **SPREP**

The Pacific Regional Environment Programme is a regional organization established by the Governments and Administrations of the Pacific charged with protecting and managing the environment and natural resources of the Pacific. Naturally this includes the removal of potentially dangerous wrecks. SPREP has 21 Pacific island member countries and territories (American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Marianas, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis & Futuna) and five metropolitan countries (Australia, France, New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States of America) with direct interests in the region. Their most significant plan came in 2002, shortly after the potentially polluting wreck of the *USS Mississinewa* had started leaking (2001). Currently according to protocol SPREP may only respond to specific calls for assistance from member states.

### **Coral Triangle**

The Coral Triangle consists of an initiative, with six signatories; Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Timor-Leste, Papua-New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, and backed by international conservation groups such as the World Wildlife Fund and Conservation International. It also receives funding from the United States, Australia, the Asian Development Bank and the Global Environment Facility. The goal of the Coral Triangle Initiative is to preserve the natural environment and collectively address threats to both the resources and people of the region (CTI, 2010). While the CTI has resulted in positive changes for the management of marine resources, they have yet to address the significant danger posed by sunken wrecks, nor have these nations requested assistance from flag states. More than 800 vessels are found within the Exclusive Economic Zones of CTI member countries.

### **United States**

In 2001, the USS Mississinewa, an oil tanker in Western Micronesia began leaking fuel after a cyclone moved through the area. Shortly after the spill was reported, the Navy responded by investigating on site, and patching areas with escaping oil. When the seeps continued, the Navy conducted a lengthy environmental assessment, and recommended for the complete removal of onboard oils, completed in 2003. While the United States Navy has successfully offloaded oil from ships in a few cases, it has explicitly stated that these cases do not set precedence for responsibility of leaking wartime wrecks. The Navy has also declared that it will handle requests for assistance on a "case-by-case" basis, and will not pursue a proactive approach. Admiralty Counsel to the Supervisor of Salvage for the U.S. Navy, Richard Buckingham, reiterated this sentiment at the First International Corrosion Workshop in 2010. Buckingham described the Navy's approach as conservative, and felt it was both environmentally and fiscally responsible to proceed this way.

### Japan

As a major participant in the Second World War and an island, Japan is not only an important contributor to the many shipwrecks inside it's territorial waters, but is possibly also a country that could be very vulnerable to the leakage of chemicals from said wrecks. The combination of these two factors secure Japan's position as an important player in the dealing of this issue, as there are approximately 2500 Japanese wartime wrecks in the Pacific representing a clear majority of the sunken vessels. Since the war, Japan has consistently claimed sovereignty over these wrecks, preventing private firms from salvage activities.Japan, like the U.S., has maintained sovereignty over their wrecks, but now appears willing to offer more assistance than it has in the past. When told about the leaking vessel Hoyo Maru in Truk Lagoon, Micronesia, the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs said that Japan recognized the issue and are "always ready to listen to our friends in the Pacific".

# **UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

UN involvement regarding shipwrecks could be considered thorough. Even though only a few resolutions have been consecrated to solving the issue as a whole, the NICRW provides a very in-depth explanation regarding the responsibilities, regulations and solutions to the issue. For more innovative or radical solutions, one must refer to independent reports. All-in-all UN resolutions regarding the issues offer very precise solutions but may be considered to lack radicality, taking a more passive approach to the issue.

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 16 November 1973
- Oceans and the Law of the Sea, 23 December 2016. (A/RES/71/257)

 The Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks, Nairobi, 18 May 2007

### **Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**

As partially explained before, attempts to solve the issue are mostly fixing leakage when it eventually occurs. This method stands true for almost all parties involved. As there are large quantities of dangerous wrecks it would be extremely costly to extract all dangerous products or isolate all of these wrecks. As such an approach is taken where potentially dangerous wrecks are surveilled and action is oftentimes only taken when a wreck actually starts leaking. Even though this may not be the most effective way of solving the issue, it is a relatively cheap and simple way to prevent major damage to the environment and way of life of people affected by such leaks. Few to no attempts have been made to actually solve the issue, with the UN taking on a more preventative approach to the issue.

# **Possible Solutions**

Apart from doing nothing there are two concrete solutions to the issue:

"Offloading": This is a process where the integrity of the hull is established and the oil is extracted from the wreck using an array of pumps. This method is very effective and safe for the environment as demonstrated during the operation with the USS Mississinewa, with only 5 gallons of oil leaked. It is currently still relatively expensive, but the extracted oil can be sold and techniques are continuously improved, which makes them cheaper and cheaper. This process does require significant planning and operational management. The Navy conducted an environmental assessment in conjunction with NOAA, performed a full year in advance. For the Mississinewa, five ships and a crew of more than 150 people were required, with equipment coming from as far as Williamsburg, VA. While similar operations in more coastal waters tend to be far simpler in size and scope, due to the number of ships in the Western Pacific, the Mississinewa is a realistic case study for other remote vessels. Costs also vary largely depending on oil quantity, placement of the ship and available equipment.

"Entombing": Entombing entails covering the wrecks in sand and concrete in order to contain dangerous or toxic pollutants. Entombing potentially polluting wrecks has been discussed as an option for cases that require extensive clean up operations or where remediation could pose significant hazards. As with all war wrecks, unexploded ordnance is a serious consideration that could justify entombing. Entombing has been suggested for the USS Montebello in Monterrey Bay and the wreck of a German U-boat, U-864. This submarine has released several kilograms of mercury a year into important Norwegian fishing grounds. This appears to be the least likely action plan, as the public is demanding complete removal. This method has yet to be used.

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