



UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE SPRATLY ISLANDS DISPUTE: SECURITY IMPACTS
TOWARDS MALAYSIA**

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JUNE 2015

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ABSTRACT

The sovereignty of the Spratly Islands has been disputed since the early 1990's. There has been much perseverance proposed in order to eradicate the conflict. However, the setback is that the relation between the claimants is not conducive to these resolutions. There are two aims that the conflict is important to Malaysia. The first is that the conflicts have the potential to threaten Malaysia border stability. This is because China has become the regional domination in the South China Sea, which poses a serious threat to the Spratly Island. Secondly, the Malaysia concept towards the national security interest in contradiction of the Spratly island dispute. Entering the new century, in international structure, Malaysia has undergone a series of significant transformation. Malaysia has faced various challenges to national security such as the case of Lahad Datu in 2013. The methods of data gathering are based on literature review and interviews. The findings show that China has never stopped claiming that Spratly Island based on historical contact and prior discovery. Whereas, the Philippines argued that Kalayan forms part of the continental shelf of the Philippines and extends further than its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The ideas of Spratly Island dispute will have impact towards the Malaysia security is deemed so sensitive and controversial. The implication on the issue is that though it will continue to be a thorn in the Malaysia-China bilateral relations, it is unlikely to lead to any military conflict as both countries are becoming interdependence.

Keywords: *disputes, Malaysia approach, interdependence, border stability,*

Exclusive Economic Zone

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The Spratly Islands (Chinese name: Nansha islands, ¹Vietnamese Name: Quần đảo Trường Sa, Filipino Name: Kapuluan ng Kalayaan)² are a disputed group of more than 750 reefs, islets, atolls, cays and islands in the South China Sea.³ The archipelago lies off the coasts of the Philippines, Malaysia (Sabah), and southern Vietnam. Named after the 19th-century British explorer Richard Spratly who sighted them in 1843, the islands contain approximately 4 km² (1.5 mi²) of actual land area spread over a vast area of more than 425,000 km² (164,000 mi²).

The Spratlys are one of three archipelagos in the South China Sea which comprise more than 30,000 islands and reefs, and which complicate governance and economics in this part of Southeast Asia. Such small and remote islands have little economic value in themselves, but are important in establishing international boundaries. No native islanders inhabit the islands which offer rich fishing grounds and may contain significant oil and natural gas reserves.

¹ Anda, Redempto (17 July 2012). "Government told of China buildup 2 months ago". *Philippine Inquirer*. Retrieved 29 October 2013.

² Wikipedia, Spratly Islands, retrieved 21 November 2014.

³ "South China Sea Islands". *Terrestrial Ecoregions*. World Wildlife Fund.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Description of the Issue

The South China Sea⁷ area comprises the Spratly Islands, known in Vietnam as the Trường Sa and in Chinese as the Nansha, the Paracel Islands, known as the Hoàng Sa and the Zhongsha, the Pratas Islands, also known as the Dongsha, and the Macclesfield Bank, also known as Quần đảo Trung Sa or Zhongsha Qundao. Estimates of the number of features in the area vary considerably because of the difficulty of distinguishing between islands, atolls and reefs, many of which are only visible in low tide. Some estimate the number at 190 islets, still others opt for the general figure of 400 rocks, reefs, and islands, other estimates range as high as 650.

Figures on the number of occupied islands for this reason vary and range from 48-50. The term occupation is ambiguous as some islands may have a permanent garrison while small atolls may be garrisoned for part of the year; others may have only a token presence and still be called “occupied”. At present, Vietnam has occupied or has a presence on twenty-seven features; the Philippines claims a presence on nine features; China has a presence on nine features, though some reports claim only seven; Malaysia has occupied three but has a presence on another two islands; Taiwan occupies one island. Chinese and Vietnamese claims loop around the Spratly as well as the Paracel Islands and overlap with the specific claims raised by the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. These countries have specific claims to areas contiguous to their own territory which also overlap.

The Philippine claim to Kalayaan (Freedomland) as an extension of the island of Palawan overlaps with the Malaysian claim which extends from Sarawak/Sabah; Brunei’s claim which extends from its own territory overlaps with that of both Malaysia and the Philippines. Both Vietnam and China have based their claims on historical contact and prior discovery. Vietnam has argued that contact was first made

⁷ M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 33 no. 3 (December 2011), <http://taylorfravel.com/documents/research/fravel.2011.CSA.china.strategy.scs.pdf>.