CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dispute is by no means a new development in international politics. It is a result of natural condition of hostility amongst the states. \(^1\) As widely accepted, the interaction between states, by virtue of their various conflicting interests are generally shaped by continuing struggle for power. \(^2\) It is then not surprising if territorial dispute is part of global political life. But some disputes have wider ramifications and transnational implications. The conflicting claims of sovereignty and territorial jurisdictions in South China Sea are very complex and difficult for the international actors to resolve. This study is an attempt to analyse the dispute over the South China Sea with special reference to the Spratlys. Although the dispute is analysed under the parameters of economic and security dimensions, legal aspects are also taken into account.

\(^{1}\) For conceptualization of various territorial disputes in Asia see Alan J. Dey, Border and Territorial Disputes, Longman, USA, 1982, pp. 234-331

\(^{2}\) See, Hans J. Morgenthau, revised by Kenneth W. Thompson, Politics Among Nations The Struggle for Power and Peace, New Delhi, Kalyani Publishers, 1991, pp. 31-51. Also see, K. J. Holsti, International Politics A Framework for Analysis, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1972, pp. 462-465. Holsti has observed that territorial conflicts have been a primary cause for international conflict. There were 86 international conflicts which occurred between 1919 and 1975. Of this number, 36 originated from territorial dispute.
It is necessary at the outset to discuss briefly the geographical setting of the South China Sea. Stretching from south-easterly to north-easterly direction and bordered in the South by 30° latitude between Sumatra and Kalimantan and in the North by the Strait of Taiwan to the Fukien coast of China, the total area of the South China Sea is estimated about four million square kilometers. As far as the Spratlys are concerned, it is in the form of an archipelago situated at the Southeast Asian corner of the South China Sea. Located in the

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3 The extent of South China Sea follows the definition given by International Hydrographic Bureau. Quoted from Hasjim Djalal, "Conflicting Territorial and Jurisdictional Claims in South China Sea", The Indonesian Quarterly, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta, Vol. 7, No. 3, July 1979, p. 36.

4 Since a large part of the archipelago are not always above sea level, it is very difficult to know the precise number of reefs, atolls and islands in the Spratlys. However, Dieter Heinzig’s and Samuels’ works have given more accurate information. Heinzig has divided the area within 12 regions, namely the North Danger consisting of Northeast Cay and Southwest Cay; Thitu Island and the reefs around this island; West York Island; Loi Ta Island along with some reefs which are adjacent to it; Irving Cay; Nanshan Island; Tizard Bank (including in this group are Union Bank Group, Nam Yit Island, and Itu Aba); Union Bank (Sin Cowe, Caven and are part of this area); Spratly Island along with Quarteron Reef and Fiery Cross; Commodroe Reef; Amboyna Cay; and the last area comprises Mariveless Reef, Swallow Reef and Ardasier Reef. On the other hand, Marwyn S. Samuels has classified the Spratlys into three main area namely, the Western Spratlys, the Southern shoals and the Dangerous Area. Nevertheless, both Heinzig and Samuels has observed that Itu Aba, which is presently occupied by Taiwan and which is about 1 kilometer long and 0.4 kilometers wide, is the largest island in the Spratlys. See, Dieter Heinzig, Disputed Islands in the South China Sea, Hamburg, Institute of Asian Affairs, 1976; Marwyn S. Samuels, Contest for the South China Sea, New York, Methuen, 1982, pp. 188-194
North by 4° to 11° 30’ North latitude and by 109° 30’ to 117° 50’ East longitude, the archipelago stretches approximately 1000 kilometers from North to South. Measured from the Vietnamese coast, the distance is about 650 kilometers; from the Paracels is about 750 kilometers; from Hainan island (China) is about 10,000 kilometers; from the Sabah coast is about 250 kilometers; from the Sarawak coast is about 160 kilometers; and from the Palawan island of the Philippines territory is about 100 kilometers. It consists of more than 235 barren islets, reefs, sand bars and atolls. As the rest does not always protrude above sea level, only around 20 of these islands can sustain human life. 5

The South China Sea is geographically surrounded by most of Southeast Asian countries. Nine countries which have shorelines with South China Sea are China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. In this body of waters lies many islands consisting of islets, atolls, shoals, clays and banks. Of these, the Paratas, the Macclesfield Bank, the Paracels and Spratlys are the main group of islands.

5 ibid
Due to its geographical location connecting Southeast Asia and the Far East, the South China Sea is endowed with remarkable strategic importance. Historically speaking, a long time before the Western powers came to Southeast Asia, the South China Sea had been pivotal for prosperity of Southeast Asian kingdoms. It is understood that the rise and fall of some ancient kingdoms were, to some extent, determined by their capability to use the sea between Far East and Southeast Asia.

The Funan kingdom, situated at Cambodia in the historical past achieved glory during second and sixth century A.D. partly because of its status as a strong maritime power in Southeast Asia. This kingdom was determined to use naval force for expanding its territory and achieving economic goals. Owing to its powerful navy, the Funan Kingdom had succeeded in deriving economic benefits through the South China Sea. Again Srivijaya Kingdom's rise and fall, were dependent on its capacity to control the sea lanes in this area. The greatness of this empire originated from its capability to use its powerful navy between the ninth and twelfth century. By forcing the trade ships which sailed from South Asia and East Asia to ports in Palembang, the Kingdom of Srivijaya had

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established its empire as the centre of vast trading monopoly.\textsuperscript{7} In this way, it had gained the enormous economic benefits and it was responsible for its greatness.

The powers of the Srivijayan empire started declining with the increased political and economic intervention of Chinese empire. By early twelfth century, the Chinese began to demonstrate their sea powers. The Chinese under the Southern dynasty (1127-1280) began to trade directly through South China Sea with the Southeast Asian kingdoms. This was partly responsible for the decline of Srivijayan empire. Palembang ceased to be the great entreports of Asian traders because of the Chinese factor.\textsuperscript{8} The expansion of the Chinese trade vessels to sail directly between Southeast Asia and Far East, had gradually eroded the power base of Srivijaya.

Since the Southern Sung empire and till the Western colonial powers came to Southeast Asia in the sixteenth century, the expansion of the Chinese naval power in South China Sea was remarkable. This had served the Chinese kingdoms' ambition to dominate Nan Hai (South China Sea). With their great naval power, China had also curbed the ambitions of other kingdoms

\textsuperscript{7}D.G.E. Hall, \textit{A History of Southeast Asia}, New York, St. Martin Press, 1981, pp. 55-56

\textsuperscript{8}ibid, p. 62. So important was the sea trade for China that the Kingdom's revenue from trade and custom exceeded the land revenue. See C.P. Fitzgerald, \textit{The Southern Expansion of The Chinese People}, London, Barie and Jenkins, 1972, p. 15
and played as the power holder amongst political units in Southeast Asia. 9

It is worth noting that although various maritime powers in the historical past had successively become the lords of the ocean between Southeast Asia and Far East, freedom of the seas were never monopolized. 10 For a long time, Persians, Arabs, Indians, Chinese and people of Southeast Asia, all had freedom of the sea for trade. It was the advent of Western powers which had changed this situation. As it happened to the other part of Asia, the arrival of the Western powers brought about an immediate and great impact on the status of South China Sea. The Western arrival had indeed symbolized the victory of European maritime powers over Asian land mass and also marked the beginning of an era of Western colonization. 11 European countries established foothold in Asia and now no country bordering the South China Sea could dominate this sea territory. Subsequently the United Kingdom, France, 

9 The famous expeditions led by Cheng Ho to Siam in 1407, 1409 and 1413, indeed, could be interpreted as an effort to curb the Siamese ambition against Champa. See Wang Gungwu, Community and Nations: Essays on Southeast Asia and The Chinese, Sidney George Allen & Unwin, 1987, pp. 79-84.


11For further discussion, see K.M. Pannikar, Asia and Western Dominance, A Survey of the Vasco Da Gama Epoch of Asian History 1498-1945, , London, George Allen and Unwin, 1967
Netherland, and Spain divided South China Sea into their respective sphere of influence.

The Western powers had accepted the principle of "the freedom of the sea" during the colonial period. They had evolved such policies that could allow them to move across the wide open sea unhindered to protect their colonial interests. In this endeavour, they were successful and such a policy enabled them to colonize Southeast Asian countries. The Western countries were absolutely free to use, abuse and exploit the vast ocean for their own ends. But with the decolonisation of Southeast Asia after 1945, the situation started changing. New international actors emerged in power politics of the region. Thus the importance of the South China Sea in the calculation of maritime powers increased further. Though South China Sea is not so extensive, but it covers the strategic sea lane of communication connecting East Asia to Southeast Asia through the Malacca Straits. It is reported that more than 25 per cent of the world's crude oil passes through this lane and are of great geopolitical significance for regional and extra regional powers.

12 R.P. Anand, n.10, pp. 101-102

During the cold war era, competition of the super powers were intense in this area. The Soviet Union's naval base at Cam Ranh Bay of Vietnam and the United States naval base at Subic Bay of the Philippines indicated that South China Sea was pivotal area for their strategic objectives. The South China Sea offered the US to develop deterrence against the communist powers. The Soviet presence in the South China Sea on the other hand was to counter possible Chinese and American threats.

One could also see the presence of other extra-regional powers in the South China Sea namely the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand under the Five Power Defence Arrangement. Though the allies of this pact abstained from military presence, it supported training for Malaysian and Singaporean armed forces. The allies of this treaty underlined the strategic significance of the surrounding seas.

Besides its strategic importance for great powers, the striking aspect of the South China Sea has been the nature of the dispute. In short it is either over ownerships of the islands or over maritime boundaries. A study conducted by Sang-Myon Rhee and James Mac Aulay has shown that disputed areas make up almost one-third of the entire South China Sea. Of these, the dispute over the ownership of islands, rocks, reefs
are fiercely contested.  

According to J.R.V. Prescott, Mark. J. Valencia and Peter Polomka, there are five areas in South China Sea that can be identified as sensitive. The first area is situated in the eastern Gulf of Thailand in which both Malaysia, Thailand and Cambodia have overlapping maritime boundaries. The extent of the disputed area covers about 24,221 square miles of waters. The second area is located in the northern waters of Natuna Islands. In this area, Vietnam and Indonesia do not agree on the possession of Natuna Islands, presently under Indonesia. Vietnamese claim that Natuna Islands should be under their jurisdiction. The third is the surrounding area of Gulf of Tonkin involving China and Vietnam as the contending parties. Vietnam insists that the boundary line in this area had been concluded through Sino-France treaty


17Peter Polomka, Ocean Politics in Southeast Asia, Singapore Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1978, pp. 17-20
on 26 June 1887 and that should be the basis of settlement. On the contrary, China insists that the said treaty cannot be a base to draw boundaries between the two countries. The fourth sensitive area is the Paracels. This archipelago is disputed by China, Vietnam and Taiwan. On 19 January 1974, the entire group of islands previously occupied by South Vietnam was militarily taken over by China. Vietnamese are still reiterating their claim that the Paracel should be under Vietnam.

The fifth sensitive area is the Spratlyls. If the possession of Paracels had been contested by three countries, the Spratlyls are contested by six claimants i.e. China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei. While China, Taiwan and Vietnam contest each other to have the ownership over the entire Spratlys, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei, on the other hand, do not lay their claim to the whole archipelago. It is interesting to find that different claimants have given different names to the island groups under their possessions in the Spratlyls. If China and Taiwan name it Nansha, Vietnam calls it Truong Sa. The Philippine name is Kalayaan (Freedomland) and Malaysian names are Terumbu Mentani, Terumbu Layang-layang and Terumbu Laksamana etc. Although the Spratlyls is very small in terms of the size of its land area, the contest for ownership is menacing. On 14 March 1988, the clash had taken place between Vietnamese and Chinese troops.
in the disputed islands which left 74 Vietnamese missing and 7 killed.18

There are lot of material regarding this conflict and to have a prosper perspective, it will be worthwhile to make some references to them. First, there are those who views the problem over the Spratlys as part of historical legacies left over by the western colonial powers. According to them, it was the western colonial powers mapping most of the territorial boundaries in Southeast Asia.19 These maps were basically drawn to separate their colonial jurisdiction as to avoid the possibility of creating clashes amongst them. When these colonized countries gained independece, their territorial jurisdictions were largely based on the maps drawn by their colonial masters. Nevertheless, these boundary lines were poorly demarcated and were also largely different to each other. It is not surprising, if such colonial legacies have created disa-


greement amongst the Southeast Asian countries after their independence.

Second, there have also been studies with their emphasis on legal aspects. They point out that the 1982 international convention on law of the sea which was aimed at solving boundary disputes in the sea has given rise to more delicate situation in the South China Sea. Accordingly there is a possibility to create new geopolitical maps of many countries. Again the recognition of the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) have aroused the previous conflicts in this territory. The entire South China Sea is going to be divided into numerous national jurisdiction under EEZ. However, there has been no demarcation of the area so far because they are disputed. It is impossible to implement EEZ unless bases to draw the lines are agreed. As far as the Spratly dispute is concerned, the difficulty to reach an agreement on the baselines becomes more complicated because of geographical nature of the area. The fact that the entire Spratlys does not always stand above waters, only some islands of this archipelago can

indeed be used to draw baselines. To put it differently, only the islands which can sustain human inhabitation is legitimate to draw baselines.

Third, there are surveys with geo-strategic considerations to explain the complexities of the disputes in the South China Sea. According to Lim Joo Jock, for instance, there have been mutual distrust between China and Vietnam in the South China Sea. As part of its efforts to reconstruct Vietnamese economy soon after the unification, Vietnam emphasized on the importance of seabed oil and fisheries. The Vietnamese exploitation of South China Sea, however, faced opposition from the Chinese. China was apprehensive that the US withdrawal from Indochina will give the Soviet Union an opportunity to fill the vacuum by making an alliance with the Vietnamese. This apprehension had been strengthened by Soviet backing for the Vietnamese claim to the Paracels and the Spratlys, and by the Vietnamese-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of November 1978. Chinese security interest demanded the South China Sea as an open sea route to the littoral countries. This sea route was also important for China's economic interests as it provided passages for its foreign trade with the littoral

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states of the South China Sea such as Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines.

Highlighting the dispute over the Spratlys, Lim Joo Jock has shown further that the Vietnamese occupation of the archipelago, along with Soviet backing, could provide them with an opportunity to dominate South China Sea. That area is so important to the Chinese strategically to enforce their claims to Russia's far eastern border lands and the Senkaku or Diaoyotai islands between China and Japan that they will pursue their claims for sovereignty in the area. Therefore China is concerned on how and when to settle the Spratlys dispute in its favour.

Fourth, there are studies discussing possibility of oil discovery as a source of dispute over the South China. Edwin W. Martin,22 in his study has projected that China is going to be the world's largest oil producers in future. However, other Southeast Asian countries also have potentials for joining China as competitor in the international oil trade. Indonesia is a member of organization of petroleum exporting countries and other countries in the region are increasing the production of their oil output. While Malaysia was nearing the status of oil exporter, the Philippines also have hopes of significant oil

discoveries. Therefore, the potentials for offshore oil in the Spratlys may exacerbate existing territorial disputes in the region.

Related to oil potentials, it is also important to peruse Corazon Morales' study. He has made two important observations. First, the importance of the Spratlys significantly arose after the government of South Vietnam awarded contract for oil exploration in July 1973 to foreign oil companies in the waters south and south-east of Phuoc Tuy Province. Secondly, China's claim to the Spratlys were linked to Sino-Soviet dispute. Chinese perceived Soviet build-up at Cam Ranh Bay naval base detrimental to its interest. An occupation of the Spratlys by Vietnam could be used by the Soviets for monitoring of Chinese naval activities in the South China Sea.

Marwyn S. Samuels' study, however, presents more balanced analysis of the Spratlys. He has stated that the territorial dispute in the South China Sea is the outgrowth of power vacuum situation left by Japanese after the second world war and


24 Marwyn S. Samuels, n.4, pp. 1-25
it also reflects the larger question of contest for power. He has reached this conclusion after conducting a deep survey on ancient Chinese historical records as well as various historical documents. According to his fact-findings, although there are eleven historical texts of China on the South China Sea, none of these clearly confirm that the Spratlys was under the Chinese sovereignty. Most probably, the Paracels and not the Spratlys were considered as a southernmost maritime frontier of China in the ancient past. In other words, an understanding of the dispute could be better if it is based on power politics approach rather than on historical and legal arguments advanced by each claimants.

It seems that the peace prospect for the Spratlys is still grim. Some scholars have viewed that the dispute is quite impossible to be solved by negotiation. Chang Pao Min25, for instance has highlighted the multilateral nature of the dispute as a major constraint. He has argued that only multilateral conference would be capable of producing meaningful agreement. He has added, however, such conferences could not be held if each claimant refuses to recognize the status quo position. The Philippines and Malaysia may accept the format

25 Chang Pao Min, "A New Scramble for The South China Sea Islands", Contemporary Southeast Asia, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, Vol. 12, No. 1, June 1990, pp. 31-35
because they do not claim the entire archipelago. But such position seems out of question for China, Taiwan and Vietnam claiming sovereignty on the whole group of islands. The multilateral talks would undermine China’s weaknesses in bargaining. It appears that China might enter the multilateral talks if its interests in the archipelago are fully protected. Similarly, Taiwan would not accept the status quo though it occupies Itu Aba only. It is very difficult to imagine that Taiwan may gain anything in such conferences. Much the same is with Vietnam. As Vietnam had lost the Paracels, it appears that this country would insist on its claim to the whole Spratlys. Thus, the potential for armed conflict remains great. Almost similar with Chang Pao Min’s views, one could also look into Daniel J. Duzek’s study.26 He is of the opinion that a dispute over simple jurisdictional boundaries could be resolved easily through joint development arrangement compared to conflict over the ownership of islands. The reason is obvious. As the nature of dispute over the ownership of islands relates to the question of sovereignty, it cannot be a divisible commodity.

On the other hand, there are those who view that the escalation of conflict can be reduced and there is an option of

solving the dispute through reconciliation process. Mark J Valen-
cia’s study27, for instance, has offered an alternative thought of creating marine regional cooperation in the South China Sea so as to avoid the possible escalation of dispute. This cooperation could be done in various fields such as in the field of fisheries, environmental protection, and scientific research. Although the scenario for this regional cooperation will mainly depend on China and Vietnam’s reaction, the littoral state’s needs for hydrocarbon resources, fisheries and protection of environment could be a stimulant to establish such cooperation. Furthermore, littoral states must rely on multinational capital, technology and expertise if they want to exploit offshore hydrocarbon in the South China Sea. But it is unlikely that they will be ready to explore and exploit the hydrocarbon resources in the disputed South China Sea as it will threaten the security of their capital. Thus, cooperation for solving the dispute would be visible if littoral states of the South China Sea want to actualize economic potentials of this sea territory.

In his another essay, again Mark J. Valencia28 has presented an optimistic view regarding the peaceful solution. Analysing


the military capability of each claimants, he has drawn a conclusion that at the moment there is a military stalemate in the Spratlys. No claimant possess the capability to occupy all the islands for none of them have an aircraft carriers to support such unilateral military solution. The reef and islands are beyond the range of the claimant's bombers and fighters. Hence, there is an option of solving the problem by going to a round table. In this sense, Valencia offers the Antartic Treaty as a model for the drafting of a Spratlys treaty. Under this scheme, it is conceived that all the claimants would be members and claims would be frozen. In this way, a Spratly Authority will be established to eliminate conflict, facilitate exploration and development of resources, and facilitate management of fisheries and other potentials.

It is necessary to mention thought advanced by Hasjim Djalal, a senior Indonesian diplomat, who can be grouped into this optimistic view. Like Valencia, he too has shown that although South China Sea is vulnerable to numerous types of conflicts, there are possibilities for cooperation. This possibility arises from various factors such as an increasing awareness amongst the littoral states that ideological factors

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should not prevent the development of cooperation between them and that problems amongst the states should be solved by peaceful means and also because there is an increasing need for exploitation of the South China Sea.

Apart from these perspectives, there have also been some studies with their emphasis on the inter-regional and extra-regional factors. Choon-Ho Park's and Lee Lai To's studies, for instance, have stressed that any solution over the Spratlys should consider extra-regional powers' interests and positions namely, the United States, Russia and Japan. Nevertheless, considering the fact that China itself is also a major power, Choon Ho-Park has opined that extra-regional powers' pressures seem to be more effective to other claimants than to China. But, the situation will become more difficult for China should Vietnam decide to join ASEAN. The chances for Vietnamese membership in ASEAN cannot be ruled out in the future. On the other hand, Lai To has pointed out that it is not likely, at least in the near future, that China would escalate the conflict. The reason is that the situation in the Spratlys is much more


complicated than the Paracels. If the Paracels is primarily a bilateral conflict between China and Vietnam, the Spratlys have been the multilateral issue dealing with the Sino-ASEAN relations. The Chinese policy of further expansion into the Spratlys, therefore, would have adverse impact on their relations with the ASEAN countries, especially with Indonesia, which China has been eager to improve its relations. Similarly, Ganganath Jha\(^{32}\) has stated that if the three claimants of the Spratlys, i.e. Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines, take a united stand and evolve a common policy, it will have salutary effect on the attitudes of the Chinese.

On the other hand, Marko Milivojevic\(^{33}\) say that if conflict breaks out into an open war in the Spratlys, the United States would do nothing unless there is a move to block international maritime route in this sea territory. Furthermore, the United States would not give military assistance to China if a war breaks out because on the basis of geography China’s claim is far weaker than its claim to the Paracels. Regarding Russia’s position, Milivojevic has pointed out that its commit-

\(^{32}\) Ganganath Jha, "Vietnam-China Dispute Over The Spratlys", Strategic Analysis, Institute of Defence and Strategic Analysis, New Delhi, Vol. XII, No. 10, January 1989, pp. 1219-1220

ment towards Vietnam might be drastically modified if Sino-Russia rapprochement increases.

To have a more comprehensive overview, it is proper to analyse two studies. Firstly, B.A. Hamzah of Malaysia\(^{34}\), has shown that in the present situation a mechanism of confidence building measures amongst the claimants appear necessary as it would be useful to reduce tension and avoid interference of extra-regional powers in the South China Sea. However, he has also emphasized that such mechanism should be preceded by an acceptance of status quo position of each claimant's occupation of the Spratlys. Secondly, Ji Guoxing of China\(^{35}\) has offered an analyses that the issue of sovereignty could be solved if each claimants come together into a negotiation to resolve maritime rights and interests. At the same time, however, he points out that China's sovereignty over the Spratlys should be respected by other countries. While China may agree to shelve the sovereignty, it does not mean that the country accept to

\(^{34}\) B.A. Hamzah, *The Spratlies, What can be done to enhance Confidence*, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 1990: pp. 23-24

joint ownership or joint rule. Furthermore, he says that the united position of Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines vis-a-vis China is not undesirable and unhelpful to the settlement of the dispute but such a situation might bring negative consequences also. He is apprehensive that Vietnam might utilize that opportunity to sow the seeds of discord between China and the Asean countries.

Regarding ASEAN's position on the Spratlys dispute, it was only in July 1992 that for the first time it issued a declaration calling on all claimants to exercise restraint to avert a new regional conflict. However, it is noteworthy that before this declaration, there were informal efforts of solving the dispute at regional level. Started in January 1990, Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs took an initiative to hold a workshop on the Spratlys by inviting academics and the ASEAN Government officials. This was continued in July 1991 and July 1992. While the first workshop was held without inviting the participant beyond ASEAN countries, the following workshops took place by bringing in those from Vietnam, China and Taiwan. However, it is worth noting that those who participated in those workshops came on their personal capacity rather on behalf of their respective governments.

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Transforming the Spratlys from an area of conflict into that of cooperation has been the underlying idea of these efforts. It is conceived that by putting aside the question of sovereignty there would be possibility to evolve joint development programmes in the area such as in the field of oil exploration, in the ecological matters and in the fields of navigation, communication and shipping.\(^\text{37}\) So far as the peace processes are concerned it seems that the prospect of negotiated settlement is still uncertain. In his assessment soon after the second workshop, Hasjim Djalal, the chairman of the workshop, said that it would take three more years before anything could be agreed upon.\(^\text{38}\)

Apart from the aforementioned perspectives, the latest developments in international scene seem to have brought about a more intricate situation in the Spratlys. There is an inclination that the Sino-US relations, especially after the tragedy of Tienanmen in 1989, is not as warm as during 1970-1980’s period.\(^\text{39}\) Soon after the tragedy, President Bush


\(^{38}\)See, "Spratly Workshop to define future actions", *Jakarta Post*, 16 July 1991

announced the suspension of the US military exchanges and arms deal with China. He also ordered the suspension of the US participation in the high level exchanges of government level and declared consideration of postponment of new loans to China. Thus, American attitudes toward China has been changing.

At the regional level, there is wide raging implications of the Spratly conflict on the politics of region. There is indeed an apprehension of evolving new Southeast Asian security system. Thoughts advanced by Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, the former Foreign Minister of Indonesia, might imply that concern. He opined that power vacuum situation will be emerging in the next decade as a result of rapprochement and economic difficulties amongst great powers. The new equations may lead to a situation under which China might attempt to fill up that vacuum. Based on this assumption, he has proposed an institutionalization of military cooperation between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.40

To sum up it can be stated that the perception of the diplomats and scholars about the veracity of the Spratly dispute differs from one another. But there is a common point that the dispute is complicated with wide ranging implications. Thus, It will be in order to know the genesis and historical background of the conflict.

SPRATLY ISLANDS