

The Strategy of Power Politics of the Philippines in Facing China in the South China Sea Conflict

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Abstract

The South China Sea conflict has involved many parties, including the Philippines. In defending one of the most strategic islands, the Spratly Islands, the Philippines has exerted its hard power by increasing its military power strategy. By engaging the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and working with the U.S., the Philippines can increase its military power. The prior studies have only explored how the dispute in SCS is caused by maritime growth, and some have found the effective way to solve the issue is from the liberal perspective. This study uses a power politics approach to the Philippines' strategy to defend the Spratly Islands and its surroundings in the South China Sea dispute. It analyzes the Philippines' interests in the Spratly islands. The research was conducted using qualitative methods through literature study, and the data were analyzed, then described to obtain a complete picture of the answers to the problems studied. This finding explores how the Philippines' defense strategy works and how it is generated. The results of this study indicate that the defense strategy in the Spratly Islands is generated by the national interests of the Philippines, especially in the economic field.

Keywords: South China Sea, Spratly Island, Power Politics, National Interest.

Abstrak

Konflik Laut Cina Selatan telah melibatkan banyak pihak, termasuk Filipina. Dalam mempertahankan salah satu pulau paling strategis yaitu Kepulauan Spratly, Filipina telah mengerahkan kekuatan kerasnya seperti meningkatkan strategi kekuatan militernya. Dengan melibatkan Angkatan Bersenjata Filipina (AFP) dan bekerja sama dengan AS, Filipina berhasil meningkatkan kekuatan militernya. Studi sebelumnya hanya mengeksplorasi bagaimana perselisihan di LCS disebabkan oleh pertumbuhan maritim dan beberapa telah menemukan cara yang efektif untuk menyelesaikan masalah adalah dari perspektif liberal. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan politik kekuasaan, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui strategi Filipina dalam mempertahankan Kepulauan Spratly dan sekitarnya dalam sengketa Laut Cina Selatan dan menganalisis kepentingan Filipina di kepulauan Spratly. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui studi pustaka dan data dianalisis, kemudian dideskripsikan untuk memperoleh gambaran yang lengkap tentang jawaban atas permasalahan yang diteliti. Temuan ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana strategi pertahanan Filipina bekerja dan bagaimana hal itu dihasilkan. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi pertahanan di Kepulauan Spratly dihasilkan oleh kepentingan nasional Filipina khususnya di bidang ekonomi.

Kata kunci: Laut Cina Selatan, Pulau Spratly, Power Politics, Kepentingan Nasional.

INTRODUCTION

China and the Philippines are embroiled in a bitter disagreement.

The South China Sea is home to a diverse range of natural resources.



Small countries like the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam can benefit significantly from the South China Sea's almost seven billion barrels of oil and 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves (Xu, South China Sea Tensions, 2014). China and the Philippines claim the South China Sea as a patent region. By showing the evidence, they have for the sake of claiming an ocean paradise.

China's claim to the South China Sea is based on the discovery and colonization of the region 2,000 years ago. Chinese people claim the Spratly was part of their domain during the Han Dynasty, which lasted from 206 BC to 220 AD. Historical artifacts discovered on the islands indicate the presence of Chinese fishers (Storey, 1999). The People's Republic of China's claim to sovereignty over the Spratly Islands was reiterated on February 25, 1992, in the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Water and Contiguous Zone, which clearly states in Article 2 that the Spratly Islands are part of mainland China (Warno, 2017).

The Philippines calls the South China Sea the West Philippine Sea. The Philippines recognizes ownership of the eight islets of the Spratly Islands range. The Philippines claims the Spratlys as its own under the name Kalayaan Islands. It all started in May 1956. A businessman and head of a

maritime institute from the Philippines named Tomas Cloma discovered a new archipelago while observing the South China Sea. Cloma occupied the territory after discovering no people or flags in the area. Cloma designated himself the archipelago's caretaker and named Kalayaan (land of freedom). Cloma decided to hand over the claimed area to the Philippine government in September 1956 (Mayasari, 2013).

As one of the countries claiming the Spratly Islands, the Philippines wants to demonstrate that the PRC has no claim to the islands. The Philippines has conducted bilateral and global negotiations to finish the execution. On the other hand, China remains a concern, and as such, it is an unsolved issue. The Philippines sought ASEAN and the U.S. to bridge the gap between the Philippines and China because it could risk regional stability. The Philippines has primarily relied on legal means to resolve its problems. The Philippines has recommended resolving this disagreement by referring it to the UNCLOS Tribunal. The Philippines and other ASEAN countries are attempting to fix the issue by adopting the Code of Ethics. This code of ethics was purposefully formed to control countries around the South China Sea following a confrontation between China and several ASEAN members that claim

each other's seas (Severino, 2010). China's claim to the South China Sea is based on the discovery and colonization of the region 2,000 years ago. Chinese people claim the Spratlys were part of their domain during the Han Dynasty, which lasted from 206 BC to 220 AD. Historical artifacts discovered on the islands indicate the presence of Chinese fishers (Storey, 1999). The People's Republic of China's claim to sovereignty over the Spratly Islands was reiterated on February 25, 1992, in the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Water and Contiguous Zone, which clearly states in Article 2 that the Spratly Islands are part of mainland China (Warno, 2017).

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Apart from the diplomatic concerns between China and the Philippines over the South China Sea, it is evident that tensions between the two countries improved under President Rodrigo Duterte's administration, with the Philippines prioritizing economic interests and stability. China is the country with the

highest number of imports in the Philippines. China also invests in the Philippines' development and supplies counter-terrorism arms help. Economic interests compel the Philippines and China to develop a positive relationship and collaboration (Damping, 2020).

Additionally, in October 2016, President Rodrigo stated that due to the U.S.'s waning status as a superpower, he had lowered his reliance on the U.S. Economic realities in the Philippines need a strong power alliance. Therefore, Rodrigo's leadership mentality shifted from his prior leadership. As a result, the Philippines increased investor ties with China and Japan (Syahrin, 2018). Trump's leadership is characterized by isolationism, in which the United States believes its economy is being defrauded, and Trump believes that U.S. allies are abusing the superpower to give cheap protection (Umoro, 2018)

Despite the Philippines' leadership's preference for commercial interests with China above relations with the United States, the Philippines will not cede sovereignty over the South China Sea to any country. As a result, this paper aims to demonstrate how the Philippines employs power politics to protect the Spratly Islands and its environs in the South China Sea dispute. In addition, a more in-depth

examination of the Philippines' interests and diplomatic techniques in settling the South China Sea issue, including the Spratly Islands, will be conducted. Two problem formulations arose in settling the South. China Sea dispute: (a) In the South China Sea issue, what is the Philippines' strategy for defending the Spratly Islands and their environs? (a) What are the Philippine government's interests in the Spratly Islands and beyond?

The research was written by (De Castro, 2015) previously reviewed two approaches taken by the Philippines in dealing with territorial disputes, including power politics and liberalism legalism. China, as a superpower, utilizes real politics to stifle its South China Sea claims. Meanwhile, the Philippines, a tiny country, takes a legal-liberal stance to counter China. His research also reveals how China pushed the Philippines off the shelf and occupied the contested territory de facto. As a response to China's actions, the Philippines filed a statement of claim with the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Another study conducted by (Brands and Cooper, 2018) examines how America became involved in the South China Sea dispute due to China's maritime growth, which has elevated China to a position of

excellence in the international waterway. America has spoken out against such expansion and is working to improve its overall military and geopolitical stance in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, his research reveals what is required to oppose Chinese threats by boosting strategic debate, clearly identifying, and systematically evaluating the critical possibilities. The strategies are drawn into, i.e. (1) Rollback, aims to push China back from recent gains in the South China Sea and restore the status quo ante: it accepts a significant likelihood of military conflict as the price of achieving this ambitious goal. (2) Containment accepts Chinese gains to date, recognizing how difficult and dangerous it would be to reverse those gains but draws a firm line against further advances, including by threat or use of military force. (3) Offset does not seek to prevent further Chinese encroachments in the South China Sea but instead seeks to punish Beijing for destabilizing actions while offsetting a negative impact. (4) Accommodation accepts Chinese supremacy of the South China Sea on the basis that competing with Beijing in its backyard is too costly and dangerous and instead tries to facilitate a seamless transition to Chinese regional primacy.

Meanwhile, (Kingdon, 2015) in his research, discusses Arbitration under Annex VII of UNCLOS in the

South China Sea dispute as to the most effective settlement method and the most favorable outcome for the Philippines against China. His research also shows how the Philippines chose not to submit a decision at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) because the court would likely grant sovereignty over an island to China. Under the Annex VII approach, detention by an arbitral tribunal in favor of the Philippines would allow ASEAN countries to present a united front to China as the only acceptable basis for maritime claims in the South China Sea under UNCLOS. It would ensure access to abundant natural resources in the South China Sea, which is the economic center of Southeast Asia.

Several previous studies conducted by analysts related to the conflict between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea dispute focused more on the Philippines strategy, America's participation in the South China Sea conflict, and how the Philippines claimed the Spratly islands. Then some researchers focus on how the Philippines utilizes the UNCLOS law in resolving the South China Sea dispute. However, how the Philippines examine their power politics strategy and national interest should also be considered. Therefore, this research tries to explain and explore how the Philippines uses the

Power Politics strategy and the Concept of National Interest in overcoming the South China Sea dispute between the Philippines and China.

METHOD AND THEORY

Method

This research uses qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is a method of exploring and understanding the meaning derived from social or humanitarian problems. This qualitative research involves secondary data such as library research as the collected data. Its objective is to be more precise and in-depth in articulating the related issue.

In completing this research, the researcher found that the best way to conduct this research is by doing the library research methodology. The researcher will collect data from journals, articles, and books that discuss the strategy of the Philippines in facing China in the South China Sea conflict. First, the researcher will collect surveys conducted to see whether the Philippines' political power strategy could benefit the Philippines in the SCS conflict. The researcher will also collect data from journals and articles regarding the Philippines' solution to the SCS dispute. After that, qualitative descriptive analysis techniques were used to analyze the results. These data

are evaluated, then explained or interpreted to get a complete picture of the problems under investigation.

The Concept of Power Politics

Power politics is an international relations theory that claims that distributions of power and national interests, as well as changes in those distributions, are primary causes of war and system stability (Lemke, 2008). The notion of power politics provides a framework for comprehending the international system: governments fight for the world's scarce resources, and actions that benefit one State may harm others. Power is defined as a person's or a group's ability to influence the conduct of another person or group so that the behavior is consistent with the person's or group's intentions and aims. Political power is defined as "the ability to affect the general (government) as well as the consequences following the power holder's intentions." Political power is defined as an individual's or a group's ability to use power sources to assist their power sector in attaining specific objectives. These sources can include the mainstream media, general media, students, political elites, community leaders, and military personnel (Hidayat, 2009).

The types of power divided into several types power as follows. (a) Soft

power can be defined as exchanging ideas, information, art, and other cultural aspects between the state and the nation to foster mutual understanding. It is also an ability to obtain what a country desires through the appearance of other countries' eyes rather than through coercion or payment. The essence of soft power is the non-war and non-economically critical examination of a nation's cultural strength as a means and tool for conducting diplomacy with other countries or regions (Mukti, 2013). (b) According to Oxford Dictionary, Hard power is one way of diplomacy that uses a coercive approach to international political relations, especially those involving military force, to achieve their national interest. In other words, hard power is one way of diplomacy that prioritizes real power to other parties/actors (Wagner, 2005).

The Concept of National Interest

National interest is the most fundamental idea in international relations. Every country bases its international political relations on the presence of national interests to be pursued. In general, the national interest can be defined as the objective or hope that a country aspires to achieve (Seta, 2014).

There are several opinions about the definition of national interest.

According to Hans J. Morgenthau, national interest is something that any country does to pursue power in any manner to preserve control over other countries (Navari, 2016). This power and control relationship can be created through coercion or cooperation techniques. National interests, on the other hand, are vital components such as sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, military security, and economic success, according to Jack C. Plano and Roy Olton, which are utilized as guidelines for a country while making decisions toward other countries (Barambangi, 2014).

The ability of a country to defend and retain the core elements of the identity of the control of other countries to realize the nation's welfare in the international arena can be defined as national interest. These countries typically create a foreign policy to fulfill their national objectives, implementing through cooperation with other countries or other policies. This policy ensures that international political contacts between countries function smoothly and efficiently. They can also be used as a bridge to achieve their national objectives (Ronapea, 2016).

A country's national interest is essential for it to be used as a tool to attain its objectives. It usually occurs due to a country's limited ability to deal with an issue or meet national interests

outside the country (Warsito, 1998). Thus, a country will pay attention to its behavior in international relations to achieve the desired goal.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Building Military Capability and Alliance as A Power Politics Strategy

Since 2010, the Philippines has been increasingly concerned about maritime security, particularly China's position on the SCS (Greitens, 2016). The Philippine administration has followed a policy of increasing internal strength and cooperating with the United States to address the Philippines' worries about external security. According to the Philippines, the military strategy includes the overall strategic backdrop and geopolitical landscape (Galang, 2019). President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines has stated that he is prepared to send military ships to the South China Sea to press the Philippines' claim to oil resources in a disputed waterway area (France-Press, 2021).

Both countries have conducted a corporation in economics and infrastructure matters at some point. The Philippines and China are working together to build infrastructure as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to create a new economic power with mutually beneficial collaboration.

The Philippines has played a critical part in China's Belt and Road Initiative's development. It is because Chinese capital investment in the Philippines as part of the Belt and Road Initiative will promote commerce, improve critical infrastructure, and create more employment, all of which will help China maintain its growth pace. Of course, this can also benefit the Philippines' development in various sectors. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China has become the Philippines' largest trading partner with investments worth one trillion dollars (Altares, 2018). This cooperation has perfectly explained how both countries have good relations except in security matters. The soft power relations like economics and infrastructure have enhanced the relations of both countries and influenced China's significant role and influence in the international relations sphere.

However, the Philippines is attempting to build internal strength by boosting military spending, implementing a defense modernization program, and shifting the focus of the Philippine Armed Forces, namely the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The AFP has a multi-mission force that can successfully cope with internal and external security challenges. The AFP

also has a specific security mission, which provides territorial integrity, maritime security, natural disasters, internal security, and cyber security (Antonio Atanacio A. Habulan, 2002). The Philippine Navy, which has a strength of 25,000 active service troops, including the 12,500-strong Philippine Marine Corps, was deployed to carry out the Philippines' security plan, particularly in the Spratly Islands (GOVERNMENT, n.d.). The Navy operates 81 combat ships, 12 auxiliary ships, 25 aircraft, and eight unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to focus on external and marine security. For 2021, the defense budget is PHP 96.8 billion. The Philippine Navy (P.N.) would receive PHP31.1 billion, and the Philippine Air Force (PAF) would receive PHP29.8 billion. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) headquarters will receive the majority of the remaining funds (PHP45.4 billion) (MacDonald, 2020).

Furthermore, the Philippine government's advances in the military are accompanied by increased cooperation with the United States. Through an agreement on the presence of U.S. soldiers on Philippine soil, the Philippines and the United States hope to constrain China's behavior in the South China Sea issue. Increased cooperation is achieved by signing the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in

2014, which governs the process for the U.S. military presence in the Philippines (Greitens, 2016). The agreement authorizes the U.S. to send soldiers to the Philippines for extended periods and develop and operate facilities for American and Filipino troops at Philippine bases (Dizon, 2015).

The strategy carried out by the Philippines by utilizing the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), especially The Philippine Navy, and also assistance from America by sending troops to the Philippines, is something that has positive potential in defending the Spratly Islands in the SCS dispute.

The Philippines's National Interest in Spratly Island

Spratly Island is one of the most strategically vital and contested oceans of the twenty-first century, with profitable fisheries, oil and gas deposits believed by U.S. officials to be at least similar to those in Mexico, and possibly the most significant oil reserves behind Saudi Arabia (Cobus, n.d.). Former President Benigno Aquino III (2010-2016) believed the Spratly Islands and their environs were rich in natural resources. Therefore the Philippines updated its air force and Navy as a policy priority to protect the Spratly Islands and its national interests. Furthermore, as a country

that significantly on energy imports, the Philippines is eager to safeguard its supplies and lower its energy supply costs by gaining ownership of more offshore oil and gas resources (Hsu, 2015).

In terms of economics, the Spratly Islands are the world's most productive fishing zones, accounting for roughly 10% of global totals and providing fishery resources to the Philippines (Bouchat, 2013). According to the Center for Naval Analyses in the United States, the Philippines has the world's 12th largest fishing industry, catching over 2.1 million tons of fish in 2012, or 2.67 percent of global total fish harvest (Cobus, n.d.). The Spratly Islands' vast fisheries resources have become fundamental for the countries bordering them. Fishery resources, the majority of which came from the waters of the Spratly Islands, provided more than 4% of the Philippines' gross domestic product (GDP) in 2009 (Bouchat, 2013). In terms of income and employment, the Philippines' fisheries substantially contribute to the national economy. In 2015, total fish production was predicted to be 4.65 million metric tons, with the fisheries sector contributing about \$4 billion to the country's economy. (BFAR, 2016).

The Spratly Islands contain abundant potential energy resources in addition to fishing resources. The

United States Energy Information Administration (USEIA) determined in 2013 that the Spratly Islands have 1 trillion cubic meters of natural gas and 5.4 billion barrels of oil reserves. Furthermore, the Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) estimates that the energy content of the Spratly Islands is at 125 billion barrels of oil and 500 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, according to the PRC's Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) (Bouchat, 2013). The Philippines has been exploring oil and gas deposits with the Reed Bank since the 1970s.

As the strategic island and the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), Spratly Islands offers Hundreds of islets, coral reefs, atolls, cays, rocks, sandbanks, shoals, and seamounts make up the Spratly Islands, which cover approximately 340,000 square miles (Marlay, 1997). Natural gas resources in the Spratly Islands appear far more promising than oil resources. Natural gas deposits in the Spratly Islands are estimated to be between 24 and 2,000 trillion cubic feet (Livingstone, 2006). The area is also home to the world's second-busiest maritime routes. The region's waterways are home to more than half of the world's supertankers and cargo ships. Most oil and material imports from the Middle East and Africa enter the South China Sea via the

strategically important Strait of Malacca (Velasco, 2014).

CONCLUSION

In defending the Spratly Islands in the SCS dispute, the Philippines used a military strategy successfully developed through the AFP and in cooperation with the U.S. This strategy has had a significant impact on the Philippines' defense in defending the Spratly Islands. In addition, defending the Spratlys in the SCS dispute is evidence of a national interest owned by the Philippines. This interest includes the economic potential of Spratly Island. Thus, the findings of the discussion of related topics are in under with the concept of national interest proposed by Hans J. Morgenthau. This research suggests that the Philippines should be more aggressive and effective in developing its military power and maintaining its national interest. We also suggest that future research find out the reasonable attempts in its issues.

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