

Sea of troubles

Fights over ownership of islands, economic zones, fishing grounds and rights of navigation plague the South China Sea. With US\$5 trillion (S\$6.7 trillion) worth of trade passing through it every year, the strategic waterway has also become a geopolitical tussle between the United States and China.

●●●● Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) — China's "nine-dash line" — Malaysian claim — Brunei claim — Philippines claim — Vietnam claim NOTE: Taiwan claims Spratly Islands.

PARCEL ISLANDS

Geography

Some 130 small coral islands and reefs.

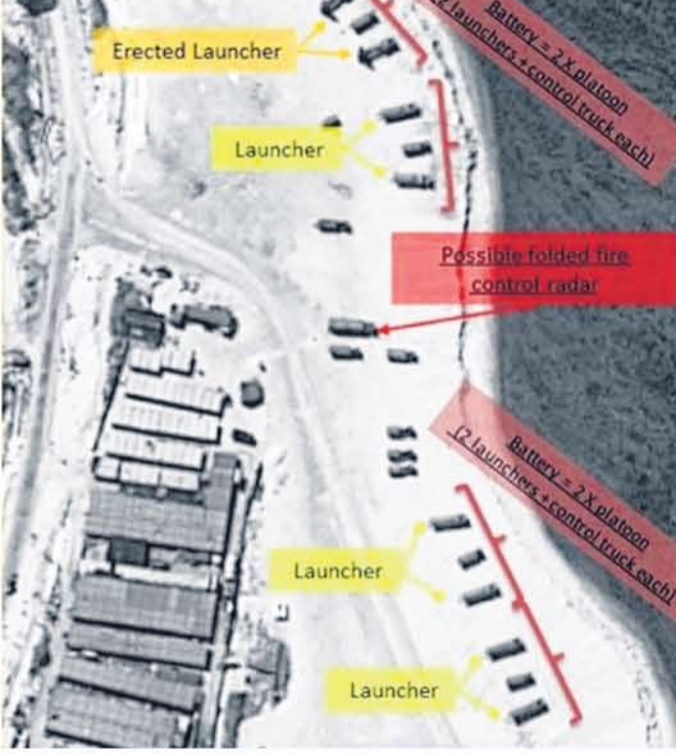
Claimants

- China, Taiwan and Vietnam.
- China and Taiwan claim artifacts show ancient contacts with the islands.
- Vietnam's claim is based on EEZ.
- The islands are occupied by China.

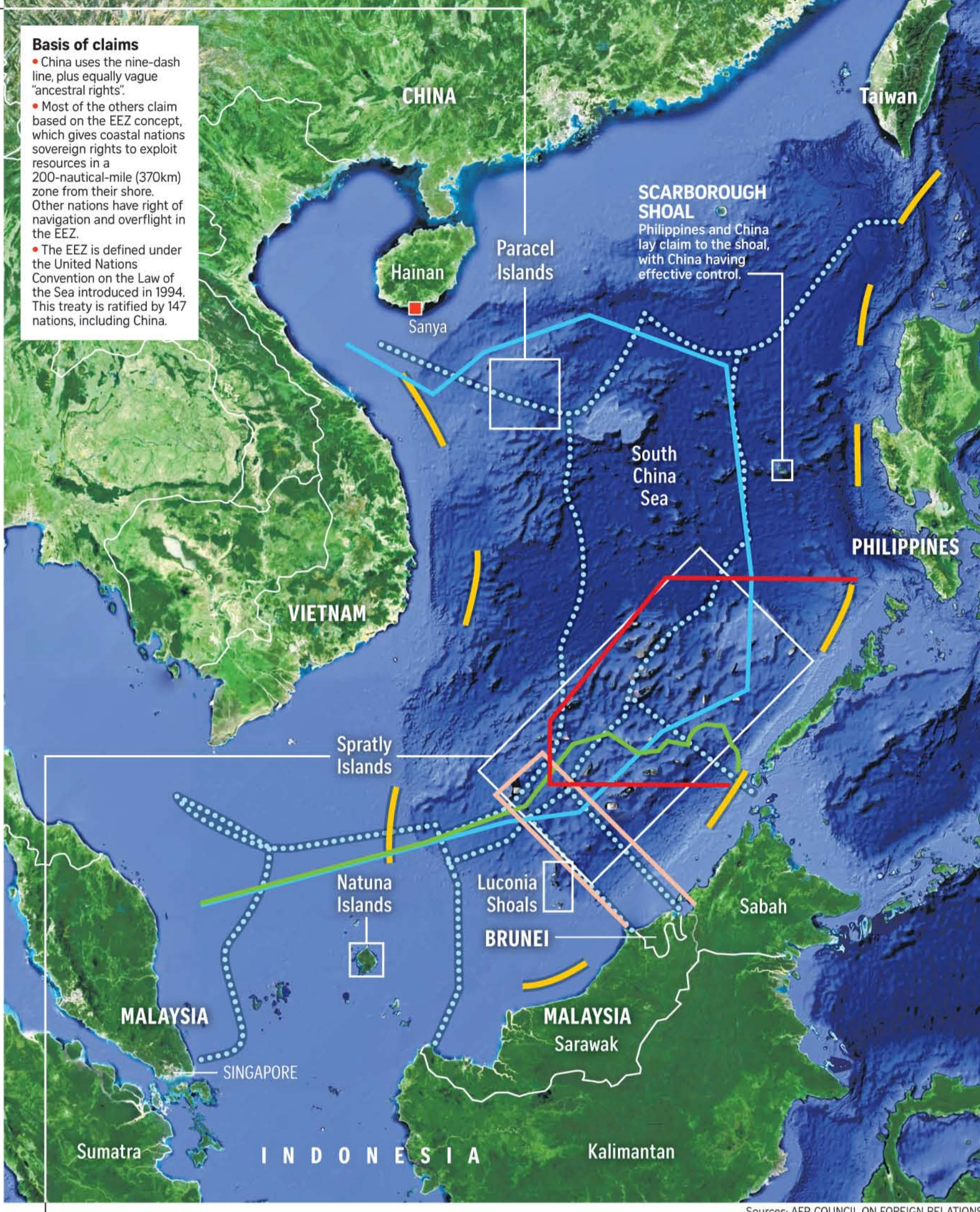
○ Occupied by China (Occupation does not signify undisputed sovereignty.)



Soldiers of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy patrolling Woody Island on Jan 29, 2016.



A satellite image taken in February shows deployment of missile launchers on Woody Island (Yongxing Island) in the Paracels. Beijing has neither confirmed nor denied the deployment.



Basis of claims

- China uses the nine-dash line, plus equally vague "ancestral rights".
- Most of the others claim based on the EEZ concept, which gives coastal nations sovereign rights to exploit resources in a 200-nautical-mile (370km) zone from their shore. Other nations have right of navigation and overflight in the EEZ.
- The EEZ is defined under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea introduced in 1994. This treaty is ratified by 147 nations, including China.

SCARBOROUGH SHOAL
Philippines and China lay claim to the shoal, with China having effective control.

Sources: AFP, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

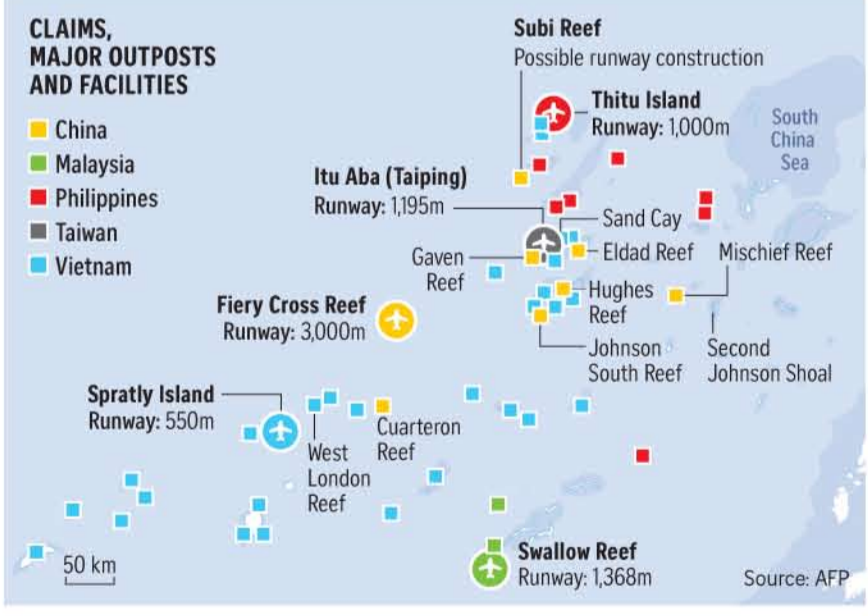
THE SPRATLY ISLANDS

Geography

Over 100 small islands and reefs.

Claimants

- Besides China, the Spratlys are also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam, who argue that the islands fall within their respective EEZs. China also claims them based on its "nine-dash line" map.
- The Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei claim some of the islands, based on their EEZ.
- About 45 of the islands are occupied by the armed forces of China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan.
- China has been building airstrips, harbours and military facilities on several of the islands, including Mischief Reef and Fiery Cross Reef.
- Vietnam controls 21 islands, reefs, shoals, and cays, including Alison Reef and Amboyan Reef.
- Taiwan controls Itu Aba Island (or Taiping Island), the largest island in the Spratlys.
- Philippines controls features such as Loaita Island and Nanshan Island.
- Malaysia occupies Ardasier Reef and Swallow Reef, and claims Luconia Shoals.
- Brunei claims part of the South China Seas nearest to it, including Louisa Reef.
- Indonesia is not a claimant of the Spratlys, but territorial claims by China and Taiwan overlap its EEZ near the Natunas.



Facilities on China-occupied Cuarteron Reef are seen in this satellite image taken in January.



Satellite image of Fiery Cross Reef taken in September last year shows extensive construction on the island. China landed commercial flights on new runways on the island earlier this year.



A satellite image of Sand Cay, an island occupied by the Vietnamese. This was taken in February last year.



Philippine Marines on board the BRP Sierra Madre, a dilapidated Philippine Navy ship near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal. Picture was taken on March 29, 2014.