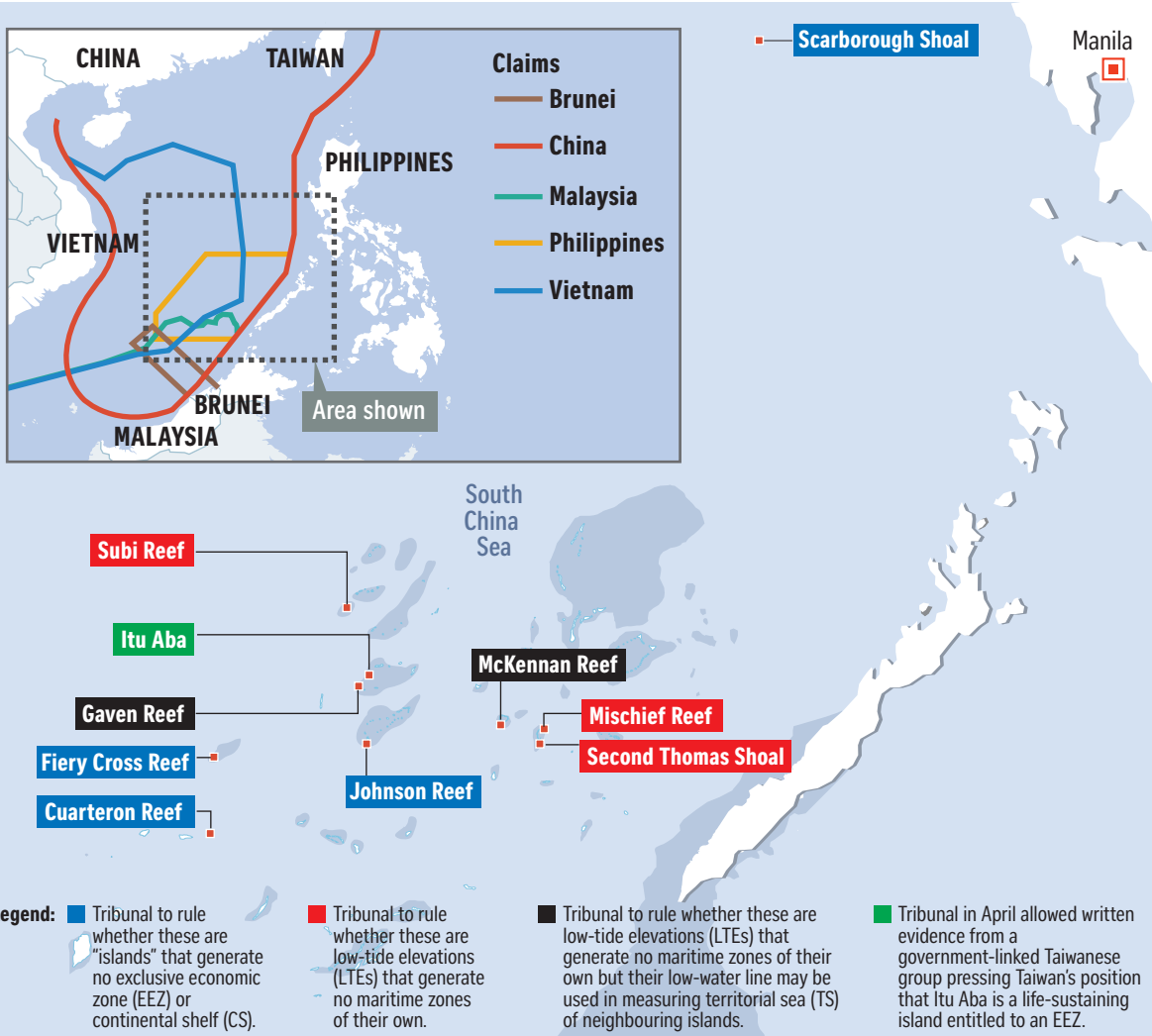


# Disputed waters in South China Sea



## Why the fuss over whether it is rock or island?

### ISLANDS

Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), only "a naturally formed area of land above water at high tide" that can support human or economic life can be considered an island, entitled to a 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and continental shelf of its own. Within an EEZ, the state has full rights to all natural resources for 200 nautical miles around.

### ROCKS

Rocks, naturally formed areas of land surrounded by and above water at high tide, are entitled to only a 12-nautical mile territorial sea because they are not capable of sustaining human habitation or economic activities.

### LOW-TIDE ELEVATIONS

A low-tide elevation is a naturally formed area of land above water at low tide but submerged at high tide. It is not entitled to any maritime zone.

- The Philippines in its arbitration case against China is seeking, among other things, a ruling on whether certain maritime features claimed by both China and the Philippines are islands, rocks or low-tide elevations.
- The features are Fiery Cross Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Gaven Reef, Johnson Reef, McKennan Reef, Mischief Reef, Subi Reef, Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal.
- Manila argues that some of these features are "rocks" incapable of sustaining human habitation or economic life of their own. These include Scarborough Shoal, Johnson Reef, Cuarteron Reef and Fiery Cross Reef, as well as Itu Aba, the biggest natural island in the Spratlys, occupied by Taiwan and mentioned by the Philippines in its oral argument.
- Manila wants the other features to be classified as low-tide elevations not entitled to any maritime zone.