THE SPRATLY ISLANDS DISPUTES: WILL THE UNITED STATES INTERVENE?

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this project paper is my own except for quotations and summaries, which have been duly acknowledge.

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The Spratly Islands of the South China Sea is a controversial dispute of sovereignty involving the entire littoral states of the South China Sea. Of the nine littoral states, six, namely, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines are disputing ownership of these islands. Approximately 44 of the 51 small island and reefs are claimed or occupied by China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei. Politicians, strategists and academicians from both the East and the West have opined that this dispute is a potential flash point in Southeast Asia that may propel the six claimants on an inevitable path towards armed conflict is the result of overlapping sovereignty claims to various Spratly Islands thought to possess substantial natural resources of oil and natural gas. It also has significant security implications on states without direct sovereignty claims.

China is the key player in the dispute and claims sovereignty over much of the South China Sea. The other claimants and outside regional players have a distrust of long-term Chinese intentions which is potentially fueling an arm race. The United States (US) has little direct interest but its continued military presence is viewed as vital to deterring an aggressive China. It is believe that sooner or later, China will take the Spratly Islands by force. Chinese aggressive actions will effect the security environment of the region. Nonetheless, the US probably cannot take an active interventionist attitude, either diplomatically or militarily unless its national interests are being threatened.
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