CHINA’S ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA:
IMPACT ON THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY COMPLEX

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INTRODUCTION

This paper makes a theoretical approach using the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which complements the scope of the Southeast Asian Security Complex concerning China’s Artificial Island construction and the Spratly Islands conflict in the South China Sea. In special, we should be paying attention on the relevance of securitization in the Southeast Asian region, China’s aggressiveness-assertiveness and United States as a global actor. In consequence, it’s a sector-specific (not only on the military domain, but also on political, economical and environmental domains) at regional level, where security could be defined by actors interactions; in this senses, the security issues are related with China relation with their near neighbors, because there are some dynamics that could be categorized by the level of antagonism or friendship between China (as a Regional and Global Power) and others actors which are affected by China’s activities in the South China Sea (specifically the Spratly Islands). So, the objective of this paper is to identify changes that are affecting Southeast Asian Security Complex by the construction of the China’s Artificial Islands.

In the first part of this paper I make an approach on the nature of the Regional Security Complex Theory, immediately I pass to explain the case of China’s artificial island construction in the South China Sea, and then I try to describe and analyze the different variables, dynamic transformations that China’s artificial island construction have had within the Southeast Asian Security Complex.
I-APPROACH TO THE REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY

The Regional Security Complex (RSC) referred by Buzan and Waever, is where the interdependence between states is sufficiently intense so that their national security concerns cannot be resolved separately from others within the region. The security of the separate units and the process of global power intervention can be understood by the regional security dynamics. The formation of RSCs drives an interplay between, on one hand, an anarchic structure related to balance of power, and, on the other hand, local geographically proximity’s pressures.

The RSCT is an analytical concept that defines regions as socially constructed, in the sense they are contingent on the “security practices” and “security discourse” of their actors. This theoretical approach offers a concept of security as an issue, which is posited (by a securitizing actor) as a threat for the survival of some referent object(s) (nation-state, the liberal internal economic order, the rainforests, etc) that is (are) claimed to have the right of protection. Since a question of survival necessarily involves a point of no return, in consequence, it is not reasonable to leave the issue to normal politics.

Then, securitization is defined as the discursive process through which an inter-subjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object and to enable a call for an urgent and exceptional measure to deal with the threat. Indeed, desecuritization is defined as the “the discursive process by which a political community downgrades or ceases to threat something as a threat”. The mutual concern requires that all actors should view an issue as dangerous and linked to a mutual define object. In sum, the Regional Security Complex is also a set of units interlinked by major processes of securitization-desecuritization which cannot be analyzed or resolved apart from one another.

2 Ibid. P. 45
3 Ibid. P. 48
4 Ibid. P. 71
5 Ibid. P. 491
6 Ibid. P. 489
Consequently, the formative dynamics and structure of the security complex is a pattern of rivalry, balance of power, and alliance among states within regions and external powers.\(^7\)

1.1-The Regional Security Complex Theory levels, variables and evolution

The RSCT works as theoretical framework that organizes the empirical studies at different levels (domestic, regional, inter-regional and global), where regional level is the more likely to identify the theoretical framework’s patterns. This means that the RSCT could offer a systematic linked study of states vulnerabilities, inter-states relations, region’s interactions with other (s) region (s), and the role of global players among regions.\(^8\) Thus the regional structure of the RSCT represents four variables: boundary (which differentiates the RSC from its neighbor), anarchic structure (the RSC must be composed of two or more autonomous units), polarity (which cover the distribution of power among the units), and social construction (which cover the patterns of amity and enmity among units).\(^9\)

And there are three possible evolutions of the RSC: Maintenance of the Status Quo (which means that there are not significant changes in its essential structure); internal transformation (which means that changes occur within the context of its existing structure, this could means change in the anarchy structure to polarity and social construction); external transformation (which means outer boundary contracts or expands, changing the membership of the RSC, and probably transforming its structure in others ways).\(^10\)

1.2-The Southeast Asian Security Complex

The Regional Security Complex Theory could be a significant tool for providing valuable insight into the understanding of the Southeast Asian regional security environment, and the definition framework of its actual security by exploration at regional level and global

\(^8\) Ibid. P. 51
\(^9\) Ibid. P. 47
\(^10\) Ibid. P. 53
level. The Spratly Islands’ conflict and China’s artificial islands constructions have linked the Southeast Asian Region security concerns closely together.

The South East Asian Region is still comprised of States-actors with self interests who have accepted the need for economic and security interaction and cooperation to survive, nevertheless proximity and familiarity could draw regions together, and on the other hand, historical and cultural aspects could pull them apart.
II-LAND RECLAMATION AND CHINA’S ARTIFICIAL ISLAND CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

The South China Sea encompasses an area of 1.4 million square miles of ocean and several hundred small islands, atolls, rocks, and shoals with a *cumulative* land area of about six square miles. The islands have no indigenous population and only a small number of inhabitants settled by regional countries designed to advance their claims. The area is rich in marine resources, historically exploited by a number of countries in the region, and an unknown amount of oil and gas, most of it difficult to develop and thus far relatively unexploited. More than half of the world’s commerce that travels by sea and about half of the world’s oil tanker shipments pass through its waters.11

There are four island groups in the South China Sea: the Pratas Islands in the northeast, the Paracel Islands to the north, the Spratly Islands to the south, and Scarborough Shoal in the central east. The Spratly Islands are situated in the southern part of the South China Sea and comprise a number of over 230 shoals, reefs, and small islets that are spread over roughly a 150,000 square mile area. The Spratly Island lies 120 miles west of the Philippine island of Palawan, 150 miles northwest of the Malaysian State of Sabah, 230 miles of the Vietnamese coast and 900 miles south of China’s Hainan Island.12

Most of the construction activities in the south china sea are done in the Spratly Islands, the southern portion of the South china Sea that consist of a cluster of lands, rock, reefs, and shoals. China actually occupied 7 features in the Spratly Island, Malaysia has 8, the Philippines have 9, Taiwan has 1, and Vietnam has the most number of occupied features at 22.13 The reasons for the claims are different for each one, but in the case of the Spratly Islands, they could be divided as follow: China, Taiwan and Vietnam are claiming for historical background reasons. The Philippines claims for the right of discovery. Malaysia and Brunei are claiming for reasons that are related to their shelves and the Law of the Sea Convention.14 The conflicting and overlapping boundaries are complicated by

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12 Ibid. P.4
13 QUINTOS, Mary Fides A. Artificial Islands in the South China Sea and Theirs Impact on Regional (In) Security, in Foreign Service Institute Editorial Team (Center for International Relations & Strategic Studies-CIRSS), vol. II, No. 2 March 2015, p.2
various entitlement intentions; China, Taiwan, and Vietnam argue for the entitlement of the entire Spratly Islands area; the Philippines argues for 60 islets; rocks, and atolls called Kalayaan (Freedom Land). And Malaysia maintains three islands and four group of rock at the Southern boundary of the Spratly Islands while Brunei demands a reef from the area.\footnote{RASMEEFUENG Natas, \textit{op.cit.} P.8}

\section*{2.1-The Spratly Island Conflict}


Each of the areas under reclamation-including Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reef, Hughes Reef, Johnson Reef, Mischief Reef, Subi Reef (See map Annexed) is disputed between China and other claimants, including the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.\footnote{DOLVEN Benet et Al., \textit{Ibid.} p. 5} By way of comparison, Taiwan has reclaimed approximately five acres of new land over two years at one location. Malasya has reclaimed approximately 60 acres over 30 years at one location. Vietnam has reclaimed 50-60 acres over five years at one location. However, China has reclaimed at least 2,000 acres over a year in seven different locations.\footnote{Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “Sandcastles of Their Own: Vietnamese Expansion in the Spratly Islands.” \url{http://amti.csis.org/vietnam-island-building}. DOLVEN Benet et Al., cited by \textit{Ibid.}}

It should be mentioned that some claimant parties in the South China Sea have transformed their occupied features, especially those submerged at high tide, into artificial islands in order to make them permanently above sea level, where they can

\footnotetext[15]{RASMEEFUENG Natas, \textit{op.cit.} P.8}
\footnotetext[17]{DOLVEN Benet et Al., \textit{Ibid.} p. 5}
construct structures and install equipment for various purposes. These are the cases of Malaysia\textsuperscript{19} and Vietnam’s\textsuperscript{20} occupied features.

2.2-Legal Implications of Chinese Reclamations and the China’s Artificial Islands construction in the Spratly

Some questions surrounding China’s reclamation and construction activity is whether it can be considered legal, what additional rights China may seek to claim based on features, and whether the activities in any way affect the rights of other parties to navigate in the waters and airspace surrounding the features.\textsuperscript{21}

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), governs the rights of states with respect to maritime zones, which may claim maritime zones in which they may exercise certain rights, in special in this case, when we speak of the: Territorial Sea, which a coastal state is entitled to claim a belt of sea adjacent to its coast extended up to 12 nautical miles as its territorial sea, and where the Coastal State may exercise full sovereignty (UNCLO, arts. 2-3). Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which a coastal state is entitled to claim a belt of sea adjacent to its coast extended up to 200 nautical miles and where the state has sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or not living (UNCLOS, arts. 55-57), it continuous this coastal state has the “ exclusive right to construct and to authorize and regulate the construction, operation and use of… artificial Island and certain other installations” (UNCLOS, art.60). Continental Shelf, which a coastal state has the legal right to control and exploit the natural resources of its continental shelf, up to 350 nm from its coast (UNCLOS 76-77). These Maritime zones may extend not only the primary land area of a costal state, but also from any islands aver which it is sovereign (UNCLOS, art. 121).

An Island is defined as a “naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide”. On the other hand, rocks which cannot sustain human

\textsuperscript{21} DOLVEN Ben, ELSEA Jennifer, LAWRENCE Susan V., O’ROURKE Ronald, RINEHART Ian E., op.cit. P. 5
habitation or economic life of their own are entitled only to a 12-mile territorial sea, not an EEZ or continental shelf. (UNCLOS, art. 21). An artificial Island is “all man made structure, installations, and other devices on the seas”, more specifically is “…all man made alluvium formed by placing soil and/or rocks in the sea in which partakes thus of the nature of the territory. It´s non-naturally-formed structure permanently attached to the seabed and surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide.” 22

For instance, infrastructure above pre-existing naturally-formed piece of land that is always above water; and which does not involve changing or altering the natural configuration land territory, is not considered an artificial island. The only entitlement of artificial islands could generate is a maximum of 500 m safety zone to ensure the safety both of navigation and of the artificial islands, installations and structures. (UNCLOS, Art. 60). Also, artificial island cannot be considered as port, which is an integral part of the harbor system that forms part of the coast where the territorial sea is to be delimited.

Previous the China’s current reclamation activities in the Spratly Islands and the South China sea, none of the original features appears to have been natural island that could support human habitation of its own, and artificial islands do not generate their own maritime zones, indeed, is like that China only could hope to establish a 12 Mile belt of territorial waters surrounding features that qualified as rocks prior to the land reclamation effort.23 Nonetheless, various scholars, charts, and hydrographic surveys reveals that most of the features in the Spratly Island are low tide elevations or reef, including those that are currently under control by a claimant party24.

2.3-Commercial and Economic Aspects of the Spratly Islands

The Spratly Islands are located on both sides of the sea lines of communication (SLOCs), which are significant commercial routes for the region and the world, connecting the

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23 DOLVEN Ben, ELSEA Jennifer, LAWRENCE Susan V., O’ROURKE Ronald, RINEHART Ian E., op.cit. P. 6
Malacca Strait, which provides maritime traffic proceeding for to Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Indochina ad the West Pacific. Others great powers, as Japan and India, need to use sea lines for significant sea import of oil and goods through this area, including the United States in accordance with the Strategy for accessing a route for the United States’s fleet between Pacific and Indian Oceans. On the other hand, an economic aspect in the Spratly Islands is the potential for natural resources, in special oil and gas. It is estimated that the Spratly Islands territory lay have a billion tons of oil and gas, which are significant for supporting economic and military growth in the future. Also, the Spratly Islands are an important fishery area for all the littoral countries of the area, fact that is reflected that the most recent incidents among countries involved around violations of fishing claims in Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines by China (and vice versa). So a nation with sovereign control over the Spratly Islands territory would have power and a commanding position to influence trade and geopolitical strategy throughout this region.

2.4-Military and Strategic significance of artificial Islands in the Spratly Island

China has mandated its South Sea Fleet based in Guangdong province to patrol the entire South China Sea covering the Paracel and Spratly Islands. However the distance from China to Hainan is 580 miles compared to that of Vietnam’s “Cam Ranh” base which is only 250 miles, and the Philippines’s “Puerto Princesa” which is 310 miles. This geographical constraint makes logistically costly, for China, to deploy and maintain a larger number of military forces and vessels in the South China Sea, for this reason is necessary the construction of militaries bases in the South China Sea.

China has been bolstering the naval and air force capability of its South China Sea Fleet to assert its claims in the South China Sea by equipping it with submarines, destroyers, frigates, amphibious vessels, and fighter jets. An artificial island in the Spratly, could work as a permanent and more strategically located military base that can host naval

27 RASMEEFUENG Natas, op.cit. P. 23
28 Ibid. P.8
assets from China’s South China Sea Fleet, including surface vessels and aircraft and depending of the capacity of the artificial island, it could support sub surface vessels, as submarines. And is a more effective “aircraft carrier” because is unsinkable and can sustain longer operations; this is especially important now, that China only has one aircraft carrier, the “Liaoning”, which is vulnerable against the submarines of others countries claimants.30

30 Nguyen. S. *op.cit.* Cited by IBID P. 5
III. THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY COMPLEX AND CHINA’S ARTIFICIAL ISLAND CONSTRUCTION

The regional actors socially construct the regional security complex because they are the ones defining the problem as such and they are interacting to produce a regional formation over the issue.\(^ {31}\) In this case the principal actors are: Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan which at the same time all are ASEAN’s members’ countries. According by almost all of them the security threats is the China aggressiveness showed by their fast track construction of artificial islands in the Spratly Islands. However this region is defined by political instability, movable cooperation and economic developing region. In this sense, mutual interest, economic cooperation, sovereignty over its territory, and the assertiveness of China could be the imminent security terms that lead to the settlement of the regions security dynamics.\(^ {32}\)

3.1-China’s Artificial Island activities and Social Construction

States respond differently to an issue based on their own perceptions of threat. China’s total resources, including its military capability seems to have increased over the years; military spending in 2013 was estimated at US$188 billion of dollars, from US$91 billion of dollars in 2008, and US$34 billion of dollars in 2003, compared to the collective expenditure by Southeast Asian states to be around US$35 billion in 2013, US$24 billions of dollars in 2008, and US$14 billion of dollars in 2003.\(^ {33}\) This huge gap in military capability automatically puts the developing countries, especially those that have claims in the South China Sea at a position of weakness compared to China; actually, China’s economic and maritime power is one of the motivations behind naval modernization in the Southeast Asian region.\(^ {34}\)

The permanent nature of artificial islands as a land territory can contribute to China’s proximity to the region. It will be easier for China to access resources in the Disputed South China Sea, to gain control of the sea lines of communication, to deploy forces for

\(^ {31}\) RASMEEFUENG Natas, \textit{op.cit.} P. 12
\(^ {32}\) Ibid
military operations such as patrol or surveillance activities, or to deny other claimant states freedom of navigation. Naval modernization in the region indicates that futures are no longer limited to surface combat but also include the use of Submarines with nuclear capabilities.35 By other side, the presence of Chinese vessels in the South China Sea will be a common especially with the convenience brought by artificial islands in the Spratly Islands, serving as their military base, which could result in a greater sense of insecurity in the region. These sense of insecurity may lead China’s neighbors to increase their naval presence in the South China Sea, resulting in greater risk of accidental conflict that can escalate in a major diplomatic standoff, possible involving not only of parties but also extra-regional players.

3.2- Balancing of power and Southeast Asian internal transformation

More significant than claimant construction responses are the visible diplomatic and military shifts. Regional states have sought new military capabilities, increased the frequency and pursued new types of military exercises, and advanced new political partnership within the region.36

- Military Capabilities

Since early 2014, South China Sea claimant states have invested heavily in the purchase of new military capabilities, most of which have clear maritime applications. Some of these investments were part of ongoing military modernization programs and cannot solely attribute to China’s recent assertiveness in the Spratly Islands. For example: The Philippines has announced a 15-year force modernization plan that includes plans to procure fast attack craft; stealth frigates; anti-submarine warfare (ASW) helicopters, and submarines and The Philippines Air Force also decide to grant to the United States access to two Philippine bases that will allow for rapid ingress to the South China Sea.37

Vietnam is seeking to buy maritime patrol boats, aircrafts, unarmed drones and fighter jets. It has already purchased 3rd. generation Kilo-class submarines from Russia. Taiwan

35 QUINTOS, Mary Fides A. op.cit, P. 7
37 Ibid
has announced that it will develop eight diesel-electric submarines indigenously beginning in 2016, as well Taiwan commissioned two coast guard patrol vessels. And Malaysia in October 2014, announced a 10% increase in its defense budget, including six percent in procurement research. We could think that the claimants’ recent investment is a clear indicator of their concern.

- Military Exercises

As tensions have risen in the region, South China Sea claimant states have added new training exercises to aid in their defensive preparations. These have included exercises with new partner militaries, as well novel drills that are explicitly focused on defense in the maritime domain.38 The Philippines has exercised near the South China Sea and with new partners. The 2014 bilateral U.S.-Philippines Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise was held 80 miles from Scarborough Shoal. The Philippines and Japan held their first naval exercise in May 2015.39 In August 2014, Vietnam held new exercises with India near its coast. The United States has conducted six consecutive years of non-combat Naval Engagement Activities with the Vietnamese military.40 In 2014, Taiwan’s navy and marines simulated a simultaneous retaking of Itu Aba. The United States and Malaysia have held new military exercises their annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) joint bilateral exercise.41

-Diplomatic implications

China’s assertiveness has also encouraged new diplomatic and political relationships. In 2014-2015, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia have all pursued new strategic partnerships. The Philippines has established a strategic partnership with Vietnam, which will pave the way for more information sharing, and training. Vietnam and Japan have established a strategic partnership to promote military-to-military cooperation and capacity building. Vietnam and India released a joint statement pledging defense cooperation and mutual interests in the South China Sea. Vietnam and Australia have agreed to establish a strategic partnership in the future, with an emphasis on security

39 Ibid. P. 4
40 Ibid. P. 4
41 Ibid. P. 5
cooperation, training, and the South China Sea. The United States and Vietnam have agreed to deepen military cooperation.\textsuperscript{42}

*Malaysia* and Indonesia took steps towards settling their territorial disputes and improving bilateral relations. Malaysia and Japan penned a new strategic partnership in May 2015, and this will include coast guard capacity building as well as the possibility of defense equipment and technology transfers. In April 2014, Malaysia hosted President Obama for the first visit by a U.S. president in 50 years, and the two countries have upgraded their relationship to a comprehensive partnership.\textsuperscript{43}

Countries in the region have also reacted to China’s assertiveness through multilateral mechanisms. The Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has repeatedly called on all parties to undertake full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC-SCS) and the early conclusion of a legally binding Code of Conduct in 2014 in different sessions and summits of ASEAN, indicating that ASEAN recognizes that the issue of the South China Sea is not only between China and some ASEAN members states, but of the region as a whole.\textsuperscript{44}

- **Level of Amity and Bandwagoning with China**

Despite these multifaceted efforts to counteract China’s assertiveness, regional states have not sought exclusively to balance Beijing. Many see an interest in maintaining positive strategic relationships with China, including on security issues and the South China Sea disputes. Indeed the China’s activities in the Spratlys, in October 2014, Vietnam and China pledged to repair their ties and better manage their maritime and territorial disputes. Malaysia and China held their first-ever bilateral military exercise, entitled “Peace and Friendship,” in December 2014.

Several of the South China Sea claimants are likely to participate in China’s Maritime Silk Road initiative and may be the recipients of infrastructure aid, participate in China’s


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid

\textsuperscript{44} QUINTOS, Mary Fides A. *op.cit.* P. 8
Trans-Asia Railway, and are likely to continue to boost bilateral trade ties. Even if claimant states do not explicitly align themselves with China, their desire to maintain positive relations with Beijing, there are not an unequivocal balancing behavior. This means that Washington cannot assume that opposing sovereignty claims will always beget strictly opposing policies and strategies.

3.3- Balancing of power and external transformations in the South China Sea

Japan is undertaking a historic overhaul of its national security policy. This has allowed Tokyo to pursue new strategic partnerships and exercises with the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia. The leadership in Tokyo has also been outspoken in its objections to China’s Spratly construction activities. Japanese officials have consistently reaffirmed Japan’s commitment to freedom of navigation, respect for international law, and the peaceful resolution of disputes in the region. Japan’s interest in patrols should certainly be taken as an indicator of its concern for the security and stability of the South China Sea.

Australia’s foreign and defense ministers have been outspoken in their opposition to China’s land reclamation and militarization of its South China Sea outposts. They would oppose any efforts by China to interfere with freedom of navigation or overflight in the South China Sea, and would contest an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Australia has held two recent military exercises with the Philippines, and donated vessels to Manila. It has also signed comprehensive partnership with Hanoi, which may be upgraded to a strategic partnership in the future.

India has announced and begun to implement an “Act East Policy” to bolster Delhi’s ties with the region. At the 2014 India-ASEAN and East Asia Summits, Indian officials emphasized freedom of navigation, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the importance of international law. In June 2015, India and the United States signed a defense framework that includes a pledge to increase capability to secure freedom of navigation across sea lines of communication.” In June 2015, India also sent a four-ship

46 Ibid
47 Ibid. p. 7
naval flotilla to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Australia, as part of a visit to the South China Sea.

### 3.4- China’s Security Discourse

China has dismissed these concerns because there is nothing irregular in the construction of artificial islands in the Spratly which refers to as “Nansha” Islands, in addition, China argues that criticism of international community implies double standard. On April 9, 2015, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying for the first time sought to explain the intentions underlying China’s reclamation and construction work in the Spratlys. China’s goals are: “optimizing” the functions of the islands and reefs; “improving the living and working conditions of personnel stationed there”; “better safeguarding territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests”; “better performing China’s international responsibility and obligation[s]”; and “satisfying the need of necessary military defense.”

China officers have claimed that China’s activities: “fall within the scope of China’s sovereignty, and are lawful, reasonable and justified”; “do not affect the freedom of navigation and overflight enjoyed by all countries in accordance with international law in the South China Sea”; and have not and will not “cause damage to the marine ecological system and environment in the South China Sea.” The theme of restraint is common in Chinese narratives related to the reclamation work. They generally depict China as playing catch-up to rival claimants, who are portrayed as having engaged in decades of construction and land reclamation work on features in the sea, as well as exploitation of economic resources, including oil.

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3.5-Polarity and the U.S. Strategy

The question of whether the United States has a strategy for dissuading China from continuing its land reclamation activities, or for responding to those activities, and if so, whether that strategy is adequate, is part of a larger question. That larger question is whether the United States has an overarching strategy for countering China’s various so-called “salami slicing” tactics for incrementally gaining a greater degree of control over land features, waters, and air space in the East and South China Seas, and if so, whether that overarching strategy is adequate. It is judged that the United States does not have a coordinated overarching strategy for countering China’s salami-slicing tactics, or that the current U.S. strategy is inadequate. U.S. officials have expressed strong concerns about China’s land reclamation activities on the grounds that they are destabilizing and inconsistent with commitments China has made under the non-binding 2002 DOC, and have also asked China to halt the activities. More generally, the United States is taking steps to increase its security cooperation with Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia, and to increase Manila and Hanoi’s maritime capabilities. This has included providing equipment and infrastructure support to the Vietnamese coast guard, helping the Philippines build a National Coast Watch System to improve its maritime domain awareness, and conducting sea surveillance exercises with Indonesia which recently included flight portions over the South China Sea for the first time. In short, a direct U.S. military intervention, it is not clear, even less, what United States can do to directly stop China’s land reclamation activities. Meanwhile, U.S. options for responding to those activities thus appear to consist of potential actions for imposing costs on China for continuing those activities. With many of these options, as with current policy, there is a risk that the United States may either provoke strong Chinese reactions or, even worse, US could be seen as ineffectual if China does not change course.
CONCLUSION

On one hand, it is evident that China’s artificial island constructions in the Spratly Islands have been realized with the objective of expanding the land mass of features that currently it already occupied and to exercise effective occupation and assert its sovereignty claims. These artificial islands may have a military and strategic utility, allowing to conduct and to sustain operations in the South China Sea, allowing forward presence, but in terms of rights, artificial Islands cannot exercise none maritime zone. China also compromises others aspects of its security and damage its relations with its neighbors. In others words, the construction of China’s artificial islands in the South China Sea have generated a sense of insecurity among China’s neighbors especially when aggregate power, proximity, and assertiveness in the South China Sea are taking into account.

On the other hand, this paper has showed the significance of the China’s artificial islands construction and how this is affecting the Southeast Asian region (at regional level) and the United States’ balancing of the rise of China (at the global level) in terms of strategy, economy, and maritime transportation. And this case could be seen as a trigger that could lead to a major concern of the Southeast Asian security complex due to its significance. But, the security aspect of the Southeast Asian Region should be usually revisited since the policy factors have changed and securitization in the region is fluctuating all the time as the nature of the Regional Security Complex, as could be showed by the recently China’s construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea.

Finally, others potential triggering events related to China’s land reclamation activities that should be taken into account include the subsequent: evidence that China has completed construction of specific infrastructure on reclaimed features; and Chinese’s public statements or legal filings claiming that previously submerged features or rocks now qualify as islands.

54 QUINTOS, Mary Fides A. *op.cit.*, P. 8
55 DOLVEN Ben, ELSEA Jennifer, LAWRENCE Susan V., O’ROURKE Ronald, RINEHART Ian E., *op.cit.* P. 9
56 For purposes of claiming territorial waters and an exclusive economic zone (EEZ).
I. BOOKS


II. ACADEMICS ARTICLES

- QUINTOS, Mary Fides A. Artificial Islands in the South China Sea and Theirs Impact on Regional (In) Security, in Foreign Service Institute Editorial Team (Center for International Relations & Strategic Studies-CIRSS), vol. II, No. 2 March 2015, 10 p.

III.SENIOR THESIS

IV. ON LINE SOURCES:


ANNEX

Figure. Reclamation and Construction on China-Occupied Reefs in the Spratlys

Reclamation and construction activity
Indicated by satellite photographs
As of June 1, 2015, reclamation and construction are ongoing

- China-occupied reefs
- Reefs occupied by other claimants
- Reefs not shown to scale

Fiery Cross Reef: Reclamation began in 2014. Construction includes an airstrip, a harbor capable of supporting tankers, and several structures.

Quarteron Reef: Reclamation began in 2013. Construction includes multiple new structures, and possibly a new helipad.

Gaven Reef: Reclamation began in 2014. Construction includes a structure with possible anti-aircraft tower.

Hughes Reef: Reclamation began in 2014. Construction includes a structure with possible anti-aircraft tower.

Johnson South Reef: Reclamation began in 2014. Construction includes several structures, including possible radar facility.

Mischief Reef: Reclamation began in 2015.

Subi Reef: Reclamation began in 2014.

Sources: Map boundaries and information generated by Hannah Fischer using Department of State Boundaries (2011); Esri (2014); and CRS communication with Department of State (2015). Reclamation and construction activity information from IHS-Jane's, Center for Strategic and International Studies. Graphic created by CRS.