

Reece Lewis

University of Bristol

PhD Candidate, Teacher

reece.lewis@bristol.ac.uk

Supervisors:

Professor Sir Malcolm D. Evans

Dr. Eirik Bjorge

Status of Insular Features: The Perpetuation of Legal Fiction

I know not
| *“seems”*
(Hamlet
1.ii.76)

When can we pretend?

Can the law pretend?

The South China Seas Arbitration (2016)

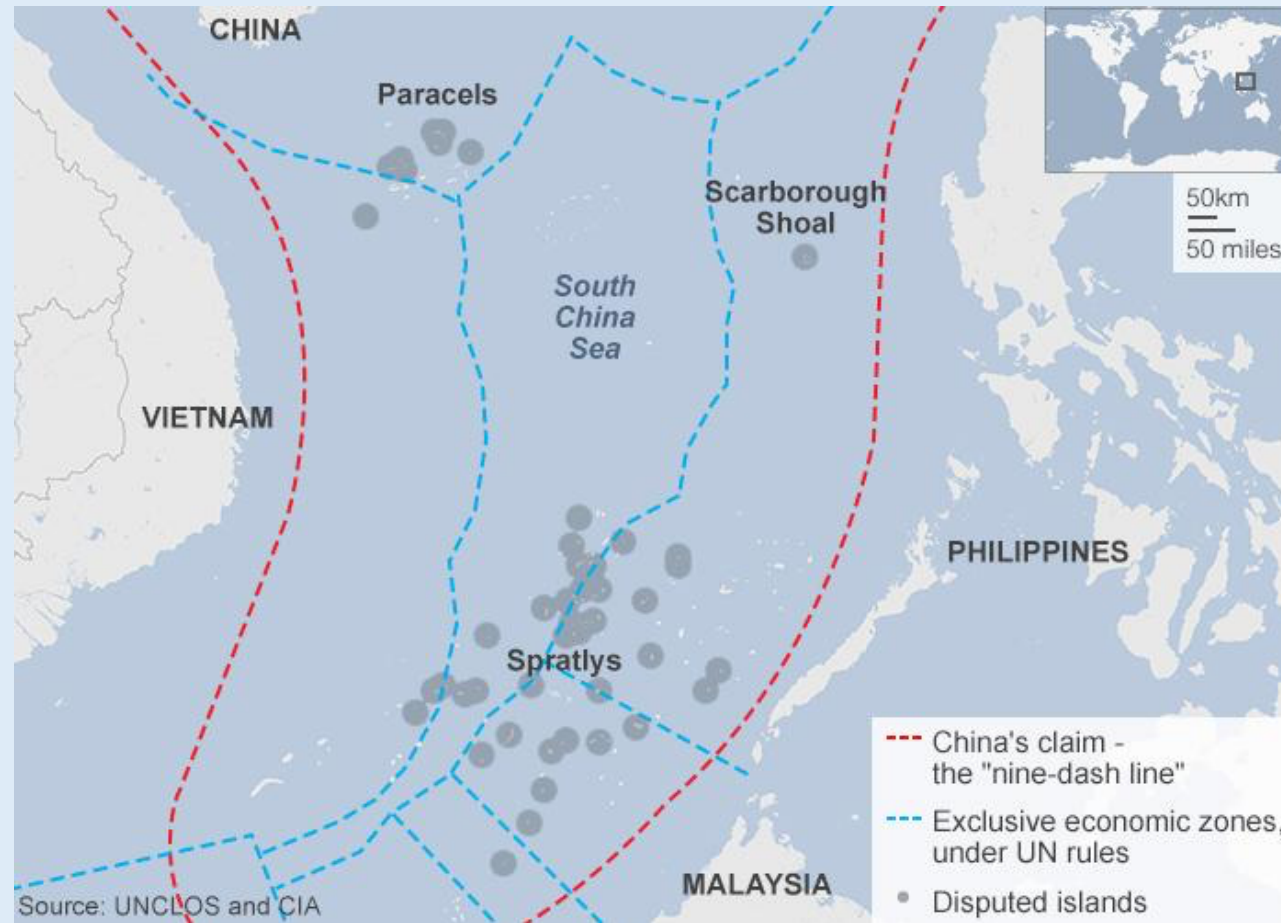


Figure 1: South China Seas Dispute

BBC News, 'China's Island Factory' <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idx-1446c419-fc55-4a07-9527-a6199f5dc0e2>>

Fiery Cross Reef: Then

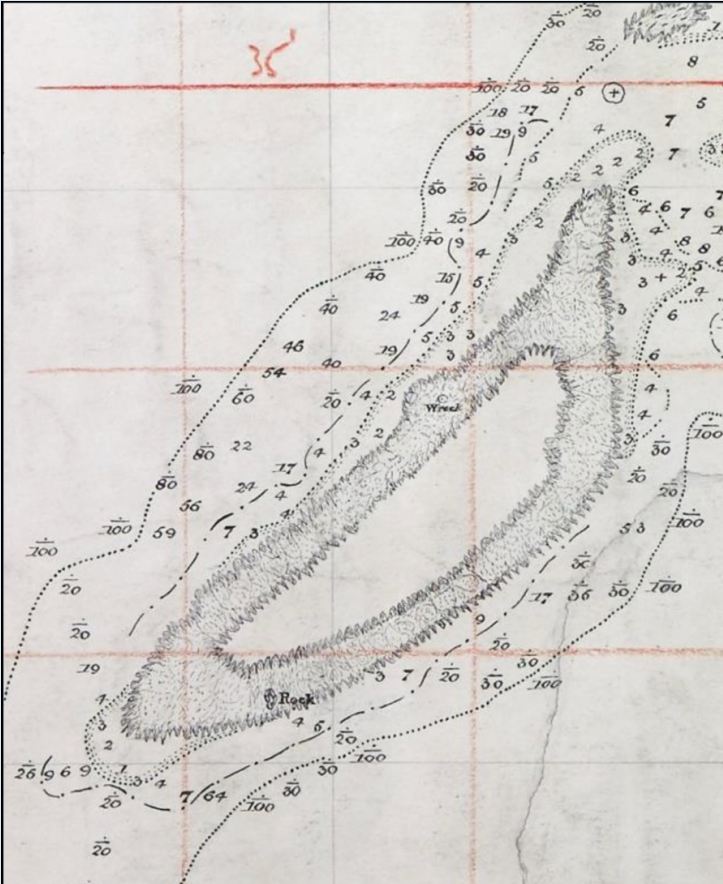


Figure 2: Fiery Cross Reef. Survey by HMS Rifleman (1866) (with enlargement)

The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v The People's Republic of China) (12 July 2016) Award on the Merits, PCA Case No. 2013-19, at p. 149.



Figure 3: The status of Fiery Cross Reef, January 22 2006.

Center for Strategic & International Studies, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “Fiery Cross Reef Tracker,” available at https://amti.csis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/fierycross_jan22_2006_qb02_overview_28886104116_o.jpg

Fiery Cross Reef: Now

Figure 4: The status of Fiery Cross Reef, June 3 2016. Clearly showing extensive scale of the modification efforts.

Center for Strategic & International Studies, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “Fiery Cross Reef Tracker,” available at https://amti.csis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/fierycross_6_3_16_r1c1-1_28842320051_o.jpg



Mischief Reef: Then

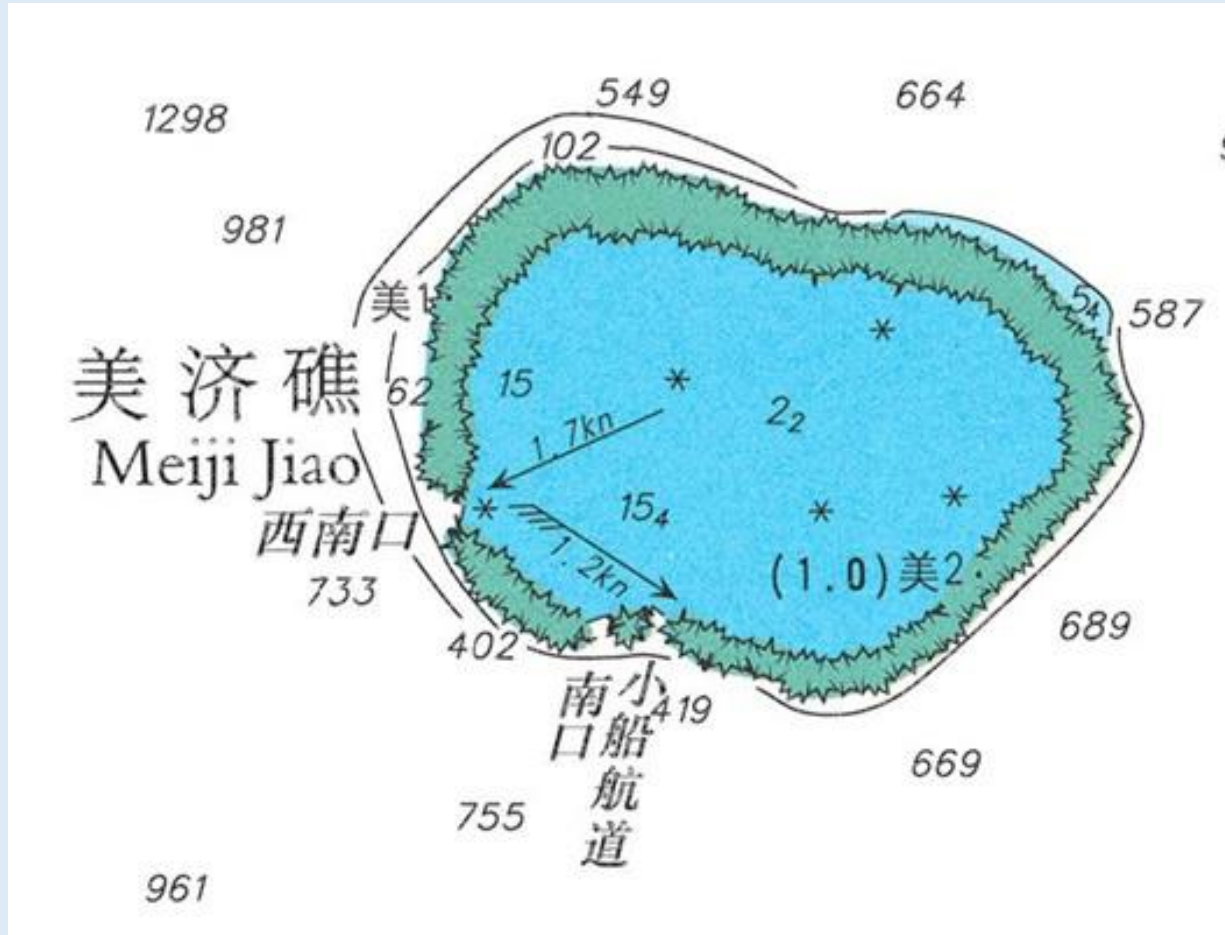


Figure 5: China Chart No. 18500 (depicting height of 1.0 metres above Mean Sea Level in S.E. corner)

The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v The People's Republic of China) (12 July 2016) Award on the Merits, PCA Case No. 2013-19, at p. 171.

Mischief Reef: Now



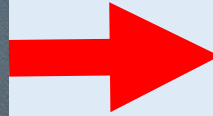
Figure 6: Mischief Reef, July 22 2016.

Center for Strategic & International Studies, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “Fiery Cross Reef Tracker,” available at < https://amti.csis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/mischief_stitched_28316476233_o.jpg >

What is the effect of this on the status of the features?

- ‘The inclusion of the term “naturally formed” in the definition of both a low-tide elevation and an island indicates that the status of a feature is to be evaluated on the basis of its natural condition. As a matter of law, human modification cannot change the seabed into a low-tide elevation or a low-tide elevation into an island. A low-tide elevation will remain a low-tide elevation under the Convention, regardless of the scale of the island or installation built atop it.’ (*The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v The People’s Republic of China)* (12 July 2016) Award on the Merits, PCA Case No. 2013-19, [305], referring to Articles 13 and 121(1) LOSC.)
- ‘China’s construction on [these features], however extensive, cannot elevate its status from rock to fully entitled island.’ (*The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v The People’s Republic of China)* (12 July 2016) Award on the Merits, PCA Case No. 2013-19, [565])

Application of this principle



Retention of its original status?

Legal Fictions: a working definition and its application

The supposition of the truthfulness
of an untruth

Conscious falsity

To achieve some utility or purpose

Is this an appropriate thing for
UNCLOS to *do*?

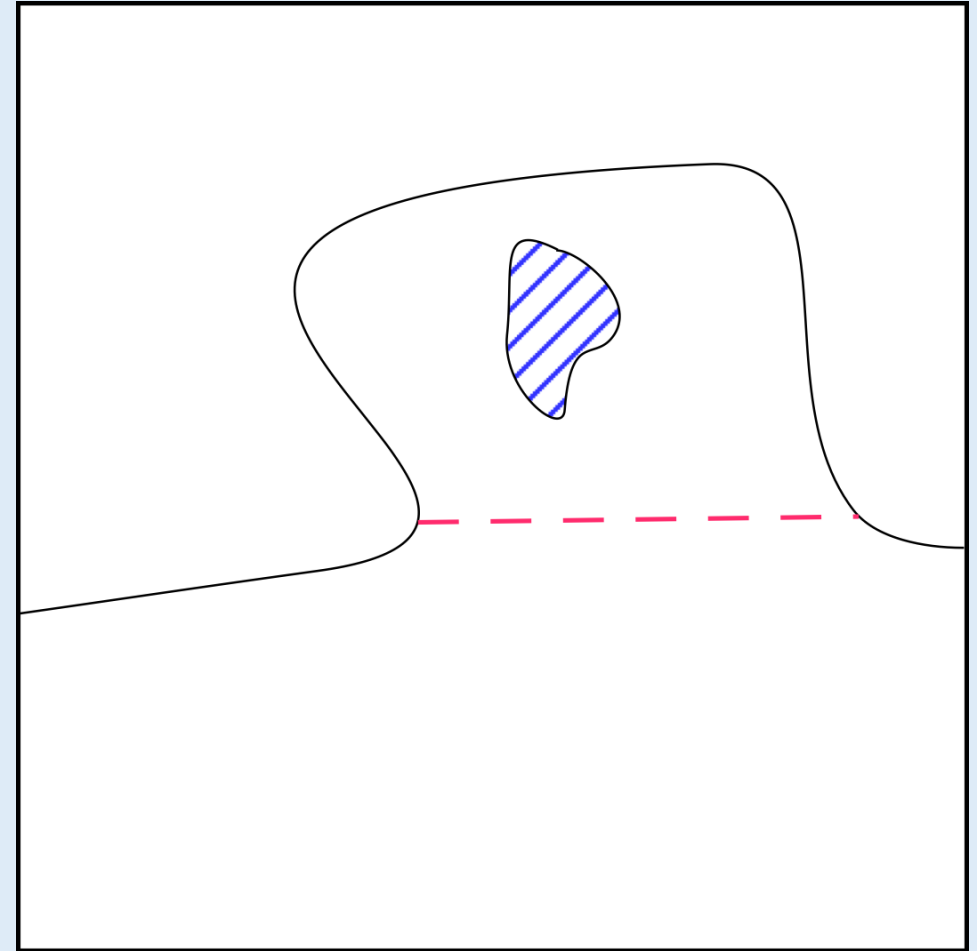
Denying the reality its supposed to
grapple with?

UNCLOS and Fiction

Fiction of Geographic Reality

- Ambulatory effect of baselines and ability to “freeze” reality.
- Islands within bays: Art 10(3)

“Islands within an indentation shall be included as if they were part of the water area of the indentation.”



Reece Lewis



University of Bristol Law School

Wills Memorial Building

Queen's Road

Bristol BS8 1RJ

reece.lewis@bristol.ac.uk

