



Vietnam Asserts Historical Claims in Maritime Dispute with China

OE Watch Commentary: China has occupied the Paracel Islands ever since the 1974 naval confrontation between Chinese and then-South Vietnamese forces. However, Vietnam still claims sovereignty over them. According to the excerpted Vietnamese article, on 3 April, Chinese vessels sank a Vietnamese fishing boat near the Paracel Islands. The Chinese navy further seized eight Vietnamese fishermen before eventually releasing them back to Vietnamese authorities.

While the return of the fisherman quelled tensions, if not the broader diplomatic dispute, Vietnamese officials were adamant in justifying their claim to the islands. The article, for example, notes that the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated that Vietnam had both historical and legal grounds to assert sovereignty over the Paracel Islands. Besides this, Vietnam asserted that China unnecessarily jeopardized the lives of the Vietnamese fishermen and violated mutual understandings between the leaders of China and Vietnam.

According to the article, Vietnam submitted these complaints to the Chinese Embassy in Vietnam. In addition, Vietnam requested that China agree not to pursue such actions in the future and to compensate the fishermen for the damage to their boat. Based on the article, it appears that this dispute has been mostly resolved diplomatically but the underlying historical tensions over the islands remain. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Heritage and Freedom Flag in the Memorial for Battle of the Paracel Islands.
Source: Huyme via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Heritage_and_Freedom_Flag_in_the_Memorial_for_Battle_of_the_Paracel_Islands.JPG, CC by 2.0

“As has been repeatedly affirmed, Vietnam has sufficient historical evidence and legal grounds to assert Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands in accordance with international law.”

Source: “Việt Nam yêu cầu Trung Quốc xử nghiêm, bồi thường vụ đâm chìm tàu cá ở Hoàng Sa (Vietnam requests China strictly punish and compensate it for sinking fishing vessels in the Paracel Islands).” *Tuoitre.vn*, 3 April 2020. <https://tuoitre.vn/viet-nam-yeu-cau-trung-quoc-xu-nghiem-boi-thuong-vu-dam-chim-tau-ca-o-hoang-sa-20200403230645957.htm>

Vietnam handed over an complainnt asking the Chinese to investigate and react swiftly to the Chinese civil servants and police who sank the Quang Ngai fishing boat in Hoang Sa. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam provided a response to the information about the fishing vessel and 8 Vietnamese fishermen in trouble in Phu Lam island area, Hoang Sa, Vietnam. The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Le Thi Thu Hang said: “As has been repeatedly affirmed, Vietnam has sufficient historical evidence and legal grounds to assert Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands in accordance with international law. The action of an official Chinese official ship violated Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Paracel Islands, causing damage to property, threatening the safety and lives and the legitimate interests of Vietnamese fishermen, and went against the unified common perception of the leaders of the two countries on the humane treatment of fishermen from the Agreement on Basic Principles Guiding the Settlement of Sea-related Issues. The actions complicate the situation and are not conducive to bilateral relations as well as to the maintenance of peace, stability, and cooperation in the South China Sea.”

According to Thu Hang, the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has communicated with the representative of the Chinese Embassy and presented the protest note, requesting the Chinese side to investigate and clarify the situation of civil servants and ships.