

The Military Functions and Geostrategic Significance of (Small) Islands

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Introduction / Background

In regards to geostrategy, islands are very interesting geographic features. Their location at sea and isolation from the continental landmasses often provide a very advantageous position to armed forces for defence, surveillance, support and special activity purposes. This advantage, which has been exploited since ancient times, was critical to great powers from the colonial era to the cold war era, and still remains of great significance today.

This module explores the multiple military roles small islands have played historically and continue to play today, their geostrategic significance in regional and international geopolitics and in great powers' military strategies, as well the role and importance of local military forces.

Tentative Content

I. Military roles of small islands, past and present

- Reminder: Usual missions of armed forces
- Military roles of small islands: Fortresses and other defence structures, military bases/camps and support facilities, espionage/watch/communication posts, missile facilities/missile test sites, special experimentation sites, prisons/detention camps
- Some examples: Bermuda (UK), Diego Garcia (BIOT/USA), Singapore, Lampedusa (Italy), Nuclear testing in the Pacific, Grosse île (Canada), Angel Island (USA)

II. Location still matters: Geostrategic significance of small islands in regional and global great powers' military strategies

- Global/regional military deployments and great/regional powers
- Some examples: US global military deployment and small islands, France's Southern Indian Ocean Maritime Zone, Australia in the South Pacific, India in the Indian Ocean

III. Contested islands: Military presence and territorial conflicts

- Securing a position, defending a territory, overtaking an island/archipelago
- Fighting for an island/archipelago: The Falklands (South Atlantic)
- Some examples of disputed islands: Spratley Is. and Paracels Is. (South China Sea), Japan's island disputes (North-West Pacific), Iles Éparses/Scattered Is (Indian Ocean)

IV. The role and significance of local (small island) armed forces

Suggested short readings in preparation for the seminar

Dosch, Jörn (2011) “The Spratly Islands Dispute: Order-Building on China’s Terms?”, *The Harvard International Review*, August 18, 2011. Available online at: <http://hir.harvard.edu/the-spratly-islands-dispute-order-building-on-china-s-terms?page=0,0>

Khalid, Mohammed (2012) “French Islands in the Indian Ocean: A Geostrategic Presence and Antarctic Dimension”, *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies*, Vol.20, No.3, December 2012, pp.406-417. Available online at: <http://fr.scribd.com/doc/120584791/French-Islands-in-the-Indian-Ocean-A-geostrategic-Presence-and-Antarctic-Dimension>

Lutz, Catherine (2010) “US Military Bases on Guam in Global Perspective”, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 30-3-10, July 26, 2010. Available online at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/american-military-bases-on-guam-the-us-global-military-basing-system/20405>

Sakhuja, Vijay (2012) “Seychelles Exercises Strategic Autonomy”, *South Asia Defence & Strategic Review*, 1/14/2012. Available online at: <http://www.defstrat.com/exec/frmArticleDetails.aspx?DID=332>

Ballesteros Martín, Miguel Ángel (2013) *El valor geoestratégico de las Islas Canarias* (The Geostrategic Value of the Canary Islands). Madrid: Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, DIEEEA09-2013, 16 p. Available online at: http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2013/DIEEEA09-2013_ValGeoestrategicoICanarias_GBBallesterosMartin.pdf