

access to resources, are not synonymous with environmental stress. The Spratly Islands dispute is a good example.

A major source of potential conflict in the Asia-Pacific is the competing claims to the Nansha/Spratly and Xisha/Paracel Islands. These groups of islands in the South China Sea have led to China having territorial disputes with Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. China's view is that these islands have always been part of Chinese territory, and that sovereignty of the islands has in the past been violated by Japan and Western powers.¹¹ As well as historic reasons, China's interest in the island groups flows from an interest in the access to resources, including oil and natural gas, which would accompany ownership of the islands. Yet, while a regional security issue with a resource access dimension, in no sense are the current disputes over the islands an environmental stress issue.

In considering linkages between the environment and national security in China, it is therefore not only important to clarify how the term national security is being defined, but also to identify as clearly as possible what type of "environmental factor" (i.e., access to resources or environmental stress) is being discussed. In the case of fresh water availability issues that may lead to national security threats, resource access as well as environmental stress concerns may arise. Moreover, these factors can be interrelated. For example, upstream pollution may reduce downstream access to fresh water and contribute to resource scarcity. In this case, environmental degradation would be contributing to the resource scarcity (i.e., "we don't have enough water because of degradation of the resource"). But this is intellectually distinct from a case where a country or sub-national region faces a water problem because of local population, social or economic growth pressures (i.e., "we would like to grow high-yield crops but don't have enough water for irrigation"). A region may simply desire to have more water than currently available locally. In this second case, resource scarcity rather than environmental stress defines the situation and often requires different solutions. The bottomline is that it is misleading to cast the net so wide that all conflicts over resources, intrastate or international, are characterized as "environmental stress" conflicts.

3.2 Types of Environmental Stress

Different types of environmental stress are likely to raise different national security issues. Below are three analytical categories of environmental stress: in

¹¹Rex Li, "China and Asia-Pacific Security in the Post-Cold War Era", *Security Dialogue*, Volume 26, Number 3, September 1995, p. 336.