

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS UPDATE No. 47
February 2017

ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

27 February 2017: China to build first underwater platform in South China Sea

China will build its first long-term national underwater observation platform in key waters in the South China Sea to observe underwater conditions in real time

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1035049.shtml>

27 February 2017: Philippines needs clarity on China ties before lifting South China Sea exploration halt: Minister

The Philippines is waiting for clarity on its relations with China before lifting a suspension on exploration in disputed areas in the South China Sea, its energy minister said.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/philippines-needs-clarity-on-china-ties-before-lifting-south/3553206.html>

24 February 2017: Duterte says China misunderstood Philippine minister's South China Sea remarks

Duterte said there was no urgency in pressing China to abide by last year's arbitration ruling. "I would like to assure China, and this is what I had committed to do when I was there, that we will talk as friends," he said.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/duterte-says-china-misunderstood-philippine-minister-s-south-chi/3546922.html>

24 February 2017: PH not abandoning territorial claim: Yasay

"My position—and this is the position of the government, and this is the legal position also taken by the arbitral tribunal in its decision—is that the disputed territory in the South China Sea has never been adjudged to be belonging to any particular country," he said.

<http://www.rappler.com/nation/162557-yasay-ownership-west-philippine-sea-islands>

23 February 2017: China abruptly postpones commerce minister's trip to Philippines

Visit may have been put off because Beijing was annoyed by comments made about China's installation of weapons in disputed areas of South China Sea, sources say.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2073380/china-abruptly-postpones-commerce-ministers-trip>

23 February 2017: China: Yasay concern on South China Sea does not reflect ASEAN

'Yasay should follow Duterte's lead', Geng Shuang said. "I believe that they are opinions of his own, not of the whole ASEAN group".

<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/02/23/1675047/china-yasay-concern-south-china-sea-does-not-reflect-asean>

23 February 2017: Vietnam protests China's construction of structures in South China Sea

"Vietnam will verify the information", Binh said. "Vietnam requests concerned parties to behave responsibly and not to take action to complicate the situation including the militarization which threaten peace, stability, security, safety, and freedom of aviation and navigation in the East Sea," he added.

<http://english.vov.vn/politics/vietnam-protests-chinas-construction-of-structures-in-east-sea-344182.vov>

23 February 2017: China promises not to build in disputed shoal: Philippines

"President Xi has promised President Duterte they will not reclaim and build structures on Scarborough Shoal," Yasay said.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-philippines-china-idUSKBN1620K9>

23 February 2017: China military says aware of U.S. carrier in South China Sea

"China hopes the U.S. earnestly respects the sovereignty and security concerns of countries in the region," Ren said.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/china-military-says-aware-u-carrier-south-china-093131581.html>

22 February 2017: Yasay explains South China Sea award at confirmation hearing

"The official position of the Philippines so far as certain features like Pag-asa (Island) that is occupied by us is that we have possession, legal possession of this territory and it can bloom into ownership," Yasay said.

<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/02/22/1674736/yasay-explains-south-china-sea-award-confirmation-hearing>

21 February 2017: China finishing South China Sea buildings that could house missiles

China is nearly finished building almost two dozen structures on artificial islands in the South China Sea that appear designed to house long-range surface-to-air missiles.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-southchinasea-exclusive-idUSKBN161029>

21 February 2017: Beijing hits out at US patrols in South China Sea

"We are consistently opposed to relevant countries threatening and damaging the sovereignty and security of littoral countries under the flag of freedom of navigation and overflight," the spokesman said.

<https://www.rt.com/news/378148-china-us-sea-dispute/>

17 February 2017: China wraps up exercise with three warships in South China Sea

The flotilla of warships, including a destroyer that can launch guided missiles, and were now sailing to the eastern India Ocean and the Western Pacific.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/china-wraps-up-exercise-with-three-warships-in-south-china-sea/3527616.html>

15 February 2017: China warns US against fresh naval patrols in South China Sea

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said tension in the South China Sea had stabilized due to the hard work between China and Southeast Asia countries, and urged foreign nations including the U.S not to take any actions that "challenge China's sovereignty and security."

<http://www.cnbc.com/2017/02/15/china-warns-us-against-fresh-naval-patrols-in-south-china-sea.html>

14 February 2017: China plans to build floating nuclear plants in South China Sea

China has said it will develop floating nuclear power plants on a priority basis in the South China Sea as it seeks to beef up electricity supply to the islands in the disputed maritime region.

http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/57143169.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

14 February 2017: China planning to bar potentially dangerous foreign vessels: report

The Chinese government is planning to amend a law to bar foreign vessels that are seen as likely to endanger the country's maritime traffic safety.

<http://focustaiwan.tw/news/acs/201702140029.aspx>

13 February 2017: China's Navy Holding 'Confrontation Drills' at Disputed Parcel and Spratly Islands

A three-ship squadron of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) left port what PLAN described as a series of "confrontation drills" at the militarized Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands.

<http://www.chinatopix.com/articles/111467/20170213/china-s-navy-holding-confrontation-drills-disputed-paracel-spratly-islands.htm#ixzz4Ycp72czl>

12 February 2017: Taiwan monitors Chinese navy

Taiwan said it was closely monitoring the movements of the Chinese navy in the South China Sea.

<http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201702120006.aspx>

11 February 2017: China 'beefing up military' on disputed islands in the South China Sea

Beijing has constructed harbours, helipads and a full-fledged helicopter base on several islands in the island chain north of the hotly contested Spratlys.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-beefs-up-military-clout-in-s-china-sea>

9 February 2017: Vietnam speaks up after Chinese banks branch out on seized island

"Any move conducted by foreign countries in the area without Vietnam's permission is illegal," Binh said.

<http://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-speaks-up-after-chinese-banks-branch-out-on-seized-island-3538924.html>

7 February 2017: China says United States should 'brush up on' South China Sea history

The United States needs to brush up on its history about the South China Sea, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-china-usa-idUSKBN15N04N>

7 February 2017: China likely to build more islands in South China Sea: Philippines

Delfin Lorenzana said he believed China would eventually reclaim the Scarborough Shoal.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/china-likely-to-build-more-islands-in-south-china-sea-philippines>

6 February 2017: China welcomes Mattis' emphasis on South China Sea diplomacy

"This accords with the common interests of China and all countries in the region," Lu said.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/china-welcomes-mattis-emphasis-on-south-china-sea-diplomacy>

MAJOR POWERS AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

23 February 2017: US Calls on Beijing to Change

Richey-Allen said, "We call on China, as well as other claimants, to refrain from taking any steps towards the construction of new facilities, militarization of disputed features, and further land reclamation in the South China Sea, and to commit to resolving disputes peacefully with other claimants."

<http://www.voanews.com/a/trump-administration-state-department-south-china-sea/3736949.html>

23 February 2017: Indonesia to raise prospect of joint patrols with Australia in S.China Sea

"If there is no tension I think it's very important to have the patrols together. We will discuss this with PM Turnbull," said Widodo.

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/02/24/17/indonesia-to-raise-prospect-of-joint-patrols-with-australia-in-schina-sea-report>

19 February 2017: US carrier group USS Carl Vinson patrols in South China Sea

A US aircraft carrier strike group is patrolling in the South China Sea, the US Navy said, days after Beijing told Washington not to challenge its sovereignty in the waterway.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-china-usa-idUSKBN15Y010>

16 February 2017: India in talks to sell short-range Akash missiles to Vietnam

India is in talks to sell short-range surface- to-air missiles to Vietnam, the head of its defence research agency said, in what would be its first transfer of such weapons to the South-east Asian country.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/india-in-talks-to-sell-short-range-akash-missiles-to-vietnam>

15 February 2017: US Navy plans new strategy to counter Beijing in South China Sea

Both the navy and the US Pacific Command are apparently proposing to sail more warships near the man-made islands created by China in the Spratlys and Paracel Islands.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/m/142520b4-9cb4-319c-9563-df3eae7fb892/us-navy-plans-new-strategy-to.html>

12 February 2017: Julie Bishop shifts Australia's stance on South China Sea

Bishop did not mention either the South China Sea nor The Hague ruling directly. Instead, Bishop welcomed dialogue between claimant states – a position that China has been advocating

<http://www.afr.com/opinion/columnists/julie-bishop-shifts-australias-stance-on-south-china-sea-20170211-guaw7s#ixzz4YcppI500>

10 February 2017: US, Chinese Military Aircraft See Close Encounter Over South China Sea

The incident took place near Scarborough Shoal, in the eastern reaches of the South China Sea.

<http://thediplomat.com/2017/02/us-chinese-military-aircraft-see-close-encounter-over-south-china-sea/>

8 February 2017: Russia Warns Other States Against Interfering in South China Sea Dispute – Envoy

"We are not interfering in these disputes and we are warning others against such interference," Denisov said.

<https://sputniknews.com/politics/201702081050451712-south-china-sea-dispute-interference/>

7 February 2017: Tillerson tones down rhetoric on South China Sea

"If a contingency occurs, the United States and its allies and partners must be capable of limiting China's access to and use of its artificial islands to pose a threat to the United States or its allies and partners," he wrote.

http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/02/07/asia-pacific/behind-scenes-tillerson-tones-rhetoric-south-china-sea/#.WJqV_W996Uk

6 February 2017: Japan supports but won't join US 'freedom of navigation' patrols in South China Sea

"I support these efforts," Inada said. "We agree that including capacity-building initiatives, we will enhance engagement in the South China Sea."

<https://www.rt.com/news/376410-japan-us-patrols-south-china/>

4 February 2017: Trump Defense Chief Seeks Diplomatic Push in South China Sea

"What we have to do is exhaust all efforts, diplomatic efforts, to try and resolve this properly," Mattis said. "Our military stance should be one that reinforces our diplomats," he said, adding that "at this time we do not see any need for dramatic military moves at all."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2017-02-04/trump-defense-chief-seeks-diplomatic-solution-in-south-china-sea>

ASEAN AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTES

21 February 2017: South China Sea 'code of conduct' will help Asean remain 'oasis of peace, stability', says Vivian Balakrishnan

Asean is set on completing a "framework" for a code of conduct (COC) on maritime disputes by June this year to "maintain an oasis of peace and stability" in the South China Sea amid a time of great global uncertainty, Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-will-help-asean-remain-oasis-of-peace-stability-vivian>

21 February 2017: Yasay: COC framework to be completed by June

Philippine Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay said that Asean wanted the COC framework to be completed by June, and Beijing had shown it was keen for it to be finished.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-will-help-asean-remain-oasis-of-peace-stability-vivian>

21 February 2017: ASEAN unsettled by China weapon systems, tension in South China Sea

Referring to China's manmade islands in the Spratly archipelago, Yasay said ASEAN countries had "noticed, very unsettlingly, that China has installed weapons systems in these facilities that they have established, and they have expressed strong concern about this."

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-philippines-idUSKBN1600I3>

21 February 2017: ASEAN ministers call for continuous South China Sea dialogue

ASEAN foreign ministers noted the importance of sustaining the momentum of dialogue in easing the tensions in the disputed South China Sea, the Philippines' top diplomat said.

<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/02/21/1674415/asean-ministers-call-continuous-south-china-sea-dialogue>

19 February 2017: ASEAN starts high-level South China Sea talks

Southeast Asian diplomats began top-level discussions on a code of conduct framework that regional leaders hope to finish this year to help de-escalate tensions in the South China Sea.

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/02/19/17/asean-starts-high-level-south-china-sea-talks>

4 February 2017: Philippines underlined COC disconnect between ASEAN and China

"When China deals with ASEAN on the DOC, it wants (to do so) not as ASEAN and China but as individual member-states of ASEAN and China, so we are 11," De la Vega said. ASEAN wants to talk about self-restraint and cooperation, but China said, „let us not talk about self-restraint, let's talk about cooperation," she added.

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/02/06/17/asean-begins-talks-on-code-of-conduct-in-south-china-sea-amid-continued-tensions>