

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS UPDATE No. 48
March 2017

ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

29 March 2017: Beijing's airbases in South China Sea 'ready for use'

China appears to have largely completed major construction of military infrastructure on artificial islands it has built in the South China Sea and can now deploy combat planes and other military hardware there at any time.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/beijings-airbases-in-south-china-sea-ready-for-use>

29 March 2017: PH, China to craft sea row mechanism

The Philippines and China have agreed to set up a mechanism on how to “properly handle” maritime disputes and representatives from both countries will meet in May to craft a bilateral scheme, Malacañang said.

<http://www.manilatimes.net/ph-china-craft-sea-row-mechanism/319760/>

27 March 2017: PH receives 2 trainer aircraft from Japan

The Philippine Navy received two units of Beechcraft TC-90 training aircraft from Japan Ministry of Defense at the Heraclio Alano Naval Base in Sangley Point, Cavite.

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/27/17/ph-receives-2-trainer-aircraft-from-japan>

25 March 2017: China calls for cooperation mechanism among South China Sea littoral countries

It would contribute to exchanges in such areas as disaster prevention and reduction, maritime rescue, environmental protection, biodiversity, scientific research and navigation safety, Liu said

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/25/c_136157688.htm

25 March 2017: China: Even if we're putting missiles on South China Sea islands, we're not militarizing them

"China's facilities, Chinese islands and reefs, are primarily for civilian purposes and, even if there is a certain amount of defense equipment or facilities, it is for maintaining the freedom of navigation," Li said.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/china-even-if-were-putting-missiles-on-south-china-sea-islands-were-not-militarizing-them-2017-3?IR=T&r=US&IR=T>

24 March 2017: Philippines' Duterte derides U.S. for past inaction in South China Sea

"Why in hell, America, the only one who can act there, why did it want my navy to go there? It will be a massacre for my soldiers," Duterte told an audience of lawyers.

<http://www.todayonline.com/world/philippines-duterte-derides-us-past-inaction-south-china-sea>

22 March 2017: Malaysia stresses military spending amid South China Sea dispute

The program includes plans for restructuring the deployment of 15 types of ships, including Malaysia's littoral combat ship, offshore patrol vessel, littoral mission vessel, multi-role support ship and five kinds of submarines. The plan will also introduce 50 new vessels.

http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2017/03/22/Malaysia-stresses-military-spending-amid-South-China-Sea-dispute/5431490184787/

22 March 2017: China denies reports of building on disputed shoal

According to the relevant bodies in China, the reports you mention that touch upon building environmental monitoring stations on Scarborough Shoal are mistaken, these things are not true," Hua Chunying added.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-china-philippines-idUSKBN16T0TZ>

21 March 2017: Philippines to protest China's planned construction on disputed shoal

The Philippines would take necessary action to defend and protect the country's sovereignty and entitlements in the disputed maritime borders, presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella said in a statement. "President Rodrigo Duterte has repeatedly asserted that the Philippines is not giving up its claims and our entitlements over the area," he said.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-to-protest-chinas-planned-construction-on-disputed-shoal>

21 March 2017: PLA Navy's South Sea Fleet: Chinese's military dominance in South China Sea complete

The report said a military crisis in the South China Sea is "highly likely", but the likelihood that it will flare up into an all-out military conflict or war is small.

<http://m.todayonline.com/chinaindia/china/chineses-military-dominance-south-china-sea-complete-report>

21 March 2017: Vietnam seeks South Korean support in South China Sea

"The Prime Minister proposed that South Korea continue its support over the position of Vietnam and Southeast Asia on the South China Sea issue and to help the country improve its law enforcement at the sea", the government said in a statement on its website after the meeting between Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and South Korea's Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se.

<http://www.todayonline.com/world/vietnam-seeks-south-korean-support-south-china-sea>

21 March 2017: PH has 'strong case' vs China construction in South China Sea – Aguirre

Aguirre made the statement after Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio urged President Duterte to bring a formal complaint against Beijing's reported plan to build a radar station on Panatag Shoal, also known as Scarborough Shoal, located off the coast of Zambales province.

<http://globalnation.inquirer.net/153680/ph-has-strong-case-vs-china-construction-in-south-china-sea-aguirre#ixzz4c1wOtcee>

20 March 2017: Malaysia mulls naval upgrades amid IS threat, South China Sea standoff

"The LMS are designed for many aspects of maritime security such as dealing with cross-border crime, piracy, anti-terrorism and search and rescue operations," Malaysian navy chief Ahmad Kamarulzaman Ahmad Badaruddin told Reuters in an interview.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/malaysia-mulls-naval-upgrades-amid-is-threat-south-china-sea-st/3611296.html>

20 March 2017: Minister: No territorial disputes between Malaysia and China in South China Sea

"Malaysia is also of the stand that all geographical aspects or maritime features which are within Malaysia's maritime jurisdiction belongs to Malaysia," Anifah said.

<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/minister-no-territorial-disputes-between-malaysia-and-china-in-south-china#sthash.2ldtY9vk.dpuf>

19 March 2017: Duterte says Philippines can't stop Chinese moves in disputed South China Sea

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said that his militarily inferior country can't stop China's actions in contested waters, responding to a reported plan by Beijing to construct an environmental monitoring station in a disputed shoal off the northwestern Philippines.

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/19/asia-pacific/duterte-says-philippines-cant-stop-chinese-moves-disputed-south-china-sea/#.WNDF1m-GOUk>

18 March 2017: Philippines to strengthen military facilities in contested South China Sea

The Philippines said Friday it will strengthen its military facilities on islands and shoals in the disputed South China Sea and announced initial plans to build a new port and pave an existing rough airstrip. "We will build a runway and a port, a pier, for our ships" on Thitu, Lorenzana told troops at the Western Command's 41st anniversary. "We are a bit blind in that area."

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/18/asia-pacific/philippines-strengthen-military-facilities-contested-south-china-sea/#.WM9F12-GOUk>

17 March 2017: Duterte, Chinese vice premier meet, reaffirm peace

Wang and Duterte also witnessed the signing of the 6-year development program. Abella said this demonstrates the "sincerity of China which he (Wang) hoped will result in concrete outcomes."

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/17/17/duterte-chinese-vice-premier-meet-reaffirm-peace>

17 March 2017: Taiwan's stance on proposed South China Sea code of conduct

MOFA said no code of conduct in the South China Sea will be binding on Taiwan if it is cast out of the negotiations and dialogues aimed at creating a set of rules to avoid conflict among rival claimants in the waters.

<http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201703170025.aspx>

17 March 2017: China Pledges Firm Response If Japan Interferes In South China Sea

"If Japan persists in taking wrong actions, and even considers military interventions that threaten

China's sovereignty and security... then China will inevitably take firm responsive measures," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a regular press briefing.

<http://www.malaysiandigest.com/frontpage/29-4-tile/664041-china-pledges-firm-response-if-japan-interferes-in-south-china-sea.html>

17 March 2017: Philippine military says halts lawmakers trip to South China Sea island

One senior Philippine general said the cancellation of this week's trip to Thitu Island, known locally as Pagasa, had more to do with concerns over how China would react.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/philippine-military-says-halts-lawmakers-trip-to-south-china-sea/3603990.html>

17 March 2017: China plans 1st structure on disputed South China Sea shoal

The top official in Sansha City that has administered China's island claims since 2012 was quoted by the official Hainan Daily newspaper as saying that preparations were underway to build an environmental monitoring station on Scarborough Shoal off the northwestern Philippines.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/china-plans-1st-structure-disputed-south-china-sea-071835349.html>

15 March 2017: China begins new work on disputed South China Sea island

An image of North Island in the Paracels group taken on March 6 shows recent work including land clearing and possible preparation for a harbor to support what experts believe may be eventual military installations. Initial work was damaged in a typhoon last year.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-china-paracels-idUSKBN16L2SS>

15 March 2017: China says it will push forward with talks on code of conduct for South China Sea

Addressing a news conference at the end of the annual meeting of China's parliament, Li said that "substantive progress" has been made on the code.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-says-it-will-push-forward-with-talks-on-code-of-conduct-for-south-china-sea>

14 March 2017: China waits to hear why Japanese warship going to South China Sea

"If it's only a normal visit, going to several countries, and passing normally through the South China Sea, then we've got no objections, and we hope this kind of normal exchange between relevant countries can play a role promoting regional peace and stability," Hua said. "But if going to the South China Sea has different intentions, then that's a different matter," she added.

<http://news.asiaone.com/news/asia/china-waits-hear-why-japanese-warship-going-south-china-sea#sthash.AvDCyMdn.dpuf>

13 March 2017: China: Philippines can't claim Benham Rise

Geng noted that the UN commission approved the Philippines' submission in 2009 claiming Benham Rise is on its extended continental shelf, but the spokesperson also claims that the UN approval does not mean that the region is part of the Philippines' territory.

<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/03/13/1680673/china-philippines-cant-claim-benham-rise>

13 March 2017: Vietnam demands China stop cruises in South China Sea

"Vietnam strongly opposes this and demands that China respect Vietnam's sovereignty over the Paracel Islands and international law and immediately stop and not repeat those activities," foreign ministry spokesperson Le Hai Binh said.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/vietnam-demands-china-stop-cruises-in-south-china-sea/3590892.html>

12 March 2017: China's Supreme Court extends its jurisdiction to cover all seas under its control, including South China Sea

China's Supreme Court has extended its maritime jurisdiction to cover all seas under the country's 'sovereign control', as Beijing firmed up its hold over the disputed South China Sea.

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2017/mar/12/chinas-supreme-court-extends-its-jurisdiction-to-cover-all-seas-under-its-control-including-south-1580587.html>

11 March 2017: China dismisses Philippine concerns: Vessels are research ships so have right of navigation

China's foreign ministry spokesman, Geng Shuang, said its ships had every right of freedom of navigation

in those waters, and its “research ships” did pass through seas northeast of Luzon Island last year. “But this is purely carrying out normal freedom of navigation and right of innocent passage, and there were no so-called other activities or operations,” he said.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2078073/china-dismisses-philippine-concerns-over-marine>

10 March 2017: PH seeks clarification from China over ship spotted in Benham Rise

“The Philippines has expressed concerned about the reported presence of a Chinese ship in Benham Rise, which has been recognized by the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf as Philippine waters,” the DFA said in a statement. Earlier, Presidential Spokesperson Ernesto Abella said the government said the reported presence of the ship in Philippine territory has gotten the Duterte administration “concerned.”

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/10/17/ph-seeks-clarification-from-china-over-ship-spotted-in-benham-rise>

10 March 2017: China to Step Up Patrols to Create First Class Navy

China has put into service its new generation J-20 stealth fighter, a warplane it hopes will narrow the military gap with the United States, as senior naval officers said the country was building a “first class” navy and developing a marine corps.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/china-to-step-up-patrols-to-create-first-class-navy/3584120.html>

10 March 2017: Philippines 'disturbed' by activities of Chinese ships

“The very concerning thing is they have several service ships plying this area, staying in one area sometimes for a month as if doing nothing. But we believe they are actually surveying the seabed,” Lorenzana said.

<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/03/10/1679698/china-survey-ships-spotted-benham-rise>
<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/philippines-disturbed-by-activities-of-chinese-ships>

10 March 2017: Philippine Defence Minister suspicious of Chinese ship activities

Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said Chinese ships had been monitored in recent months at various locations close to the Philippines. A warship was detected 70 miles (113km) off its western coast in the South China Sea and survey ships were seen at the north and south of the eastern seaboard.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippine-defence-minister-suspicious-of-chinese-ship-activities>

10 March 2017: Philippines launches piracy patrols with Malaysia and Indonesia in SCS

“We are inaugurating some time in April or May a joint patrol of the three nations in that area,” Lorenzana said.

<http://europe.newsweek.com/philippines-launches-piracy-patrols-malaysia-and-indonesia-south-china-sea-565675?rm=eu>

9 March 2017: China to deploy most advanced rescue ship in South China Sea

China today said it will deploy a new rescue ship capable of conducting air, sea and underwater searches simultaneously in the disputed South China Sea.

<http://www.financialexpress.com/world-news/china-to-deploy-most-advanced-rescue-ship-in-south-china-sea/579965/>

9 March 2017: Philippines' Duterte appoints new acting foreign secretary after top diplomat dumped

The change at the helm of the country’s foreign ministry came at a time when the Philippines is holding ASEAN chairmanship, and amid the Duterte administration’s shift to friendlier relations with China and less reliance on long-time ally the United States.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/diplomacy/article/2077392/philippines-duterte-appoints-new-acting-foreign-secretary-after>

9 March 2017: Duterte’s defence chief signals Scarborough Shoal is off-limits for Chinese rigs

“Once the Chinese start exploring, putting rigs there, we’ll talk to them,” Lorenzana quoted Duterte as saying to him.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2077439/philippines-very-concerned-chinese-survey-ships-enter-its>

8 March 2017: China not to allow South China Sea stability to be disturbed: FM

"At this moment, if someone should try to make waves and stir trouble, they will have no support and face common opposition of the entire region," Wang said.

<http://www.ecns.cn/2017/03-08/248414.shtml>

7 March 2017: China to Step Up Observations, Tourism in South China Sea

The government is planning to build an underwater observation system to provide real-time information on many different seabed conditions.

<http://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/china-expands-presence-in-south-china-sea-with-planned-observation-system-and-increased-tourism/3752080.html>

7 March 2017: Beijing Plans to Launch Air Tours to Disputed Paracel Islands in South China Sea

Tourists have been allowed to visit the Paracel Islands on cruise ships since April 2013. On Friday, China reportedly launched a new cruise ship capable of carrying 499 people.

<https://sputniknews.com/asia/201703071051328738-china-tours-paracel-islands/>

6 March 2017: China to augment military manpower in South China Sea

Li's proposal includes plans to increase military manpower in "offshore locations" that could mean continued buildup of forces in the South China Sea, where Beijing has built artificial islands.

<http://www.breitbart.com/news/china-to-augment-military-manpower-in-east-south-china-seas/>

5 March 2017: China launches world's largest oil exploration sea platform

The Bluewhale I is designed specifically for the South China Sea, where untapped oil reserves can lay buried 3,000 metres and more below sea level. The rig has a total deck area about the size of a soccer field with a sophisticated drilling system that can reach the seabed at a depth of 3,658 metres and bore a further 15,240 metres into the earth's crust

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2076179/china-launches-worlds-largest-oil-exploration-sea-platform>

4 March 2017: China to increase military spending by 7% in 2017

It means that total spending will account for about 1.3% of the country's projected GDP in 2017, the same level as in recent years, said government spokeswoman Fu Ying.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-39165080>

4 March 2017: Top Philippine officials fly to US carrier in disputed South China Sea

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez and Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre II visited the USS Carl Vinson along with three Philippine security officials.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/world/top-philippine-officials-fly-to-us-carrier-in-disputed-south-china-sea-4554336/>

2 March 2017: Taiwan's navy and air force step up training around South China Sea in response to China's growing military power

"The navy, during its regular South China Sea patrols, will conduct joint training with the air force in protecting fishermen and supply transports, and in humanitarian rescue drills to expand the combat readiness of our sea and air patrols," Feng said.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/r-taiwan-navy-air-force-to-train-in-south-china-sea-due-to-growing-security-threat-2017-3?IR=T&r=US&IR=T>

28 February 2017: PH, China reviving oil exploration talks

Pangilinan said PXP initiated talks with CNOOC on how best to move forward on service contract 72 (Recto Bank), but clarified the tenor of discussions should be bound by Philippine and Chinese laws.

<http://thestandard.com.ph/business/power-technology/230553/ph-china-reviving-oil-exploration-talks.html>

28 February 2017: Vietnam slams Chinese fishing ban in South China Sea

Foreign Ministry spokesman Le Hai Binh said in a statement that Vietnam opposes and rejects the ban, adding Vietnam has the legal grounds and historical evidence to back up its sovereignty claims.

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/vietnam-slams-chinese-fishing-ban-south-china-sea-45816949>

26 February 2017: China to implement strictest fishing moratorium in history

According to the adjusted regulation, the moratorium now starts at 12 p.m. on May 1 every year in all of China's national waters, including the Bohai Sea, Yellow Sea, East China Sea and South China Sea north of the 12 degrees north latitude (Beibu Gulf included). The new adjustment extends the length of the moratorium and restrict more types of fishing operations.

<http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/0221/c90000-9180737.html>

MAJOR POWERS AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

16 March 2017: Australia urges South China Sea ruling as basis for 'code of conduct'

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said that Australia "certainly does not support militarization of any part of the features of the South China Sea."

<http://www.todayonline.com/world/australia-urges-south-china-sea-ruling-basis-code-conduct>

14 March 2017: Japan's largest warship to 'tour South China Sea'

The Izumo helicopter carrier, commissioned only two years ago, will make stops in Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka before joining the Malabar joint naval exercise with Indian and US ships in the Indian Ocean in July. It will return to Japan in August, the sources added.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/japans-largest-warship-to-tour-south-china-sea>

7 March 2017: Australia says no plan for joint South China Sea patrols with Indonesia

"We are not going to undertake any actions which would increase tensions in the South China Sea," said Turnbull, when asked by a reporter whether Indonesia had raised the prospect of conducting joint patrols.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/australia-says-no-plan-for-joint-south-china-sea-patrols-with-in/3574520.html>

6 March 2017: Julie Bishop denies Indonesian president suggested joint patrols in South China Sea

"He was talking about cooperation in maintaining freedom of overflight and freedom of navigation throughout the South China Sea because both Indonesia and Australia have a deep interest in unimpeded trade through these waters and through the skies of the South China Sea area," Ms Bishop said. Indonesian Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Luhut Pandjaitan later said: "I don't know it is necessary for us to do joint patrol over there".

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/julie-bishop-denies-indonesian-president-suggested-joint-patrols-in-south-china-sea-20170306-gurxlb.html>

28 February 2017: US envoy stresses peaceful resolution in South China Sea

Ambassador Kim said that the US was not a claimant in the maritime disputes, but it hopes that countries would refrain from taking unilateral actions, such as building structures and intensifying militarization. He added that the US cares deeply about respect for fundamental rights, like freedom of navigation.

<http://interaksyon.com/article/137363/us-envoy-stresses-peaceful-resolution-in-south-china-sea>

ASEAN AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTES

8 March 2017: China says first draft of South China Sea code of conduct ready

Wang said talks last month had made "clear progress" and had formulated a first draft of a framework for the code. "China and ASEAN countries feel satisfied with this," he said.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/china-says-first-draft-of-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-ready/3577984.html>