

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS UPDATE No. 60
March 2018

ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

27 March 2018: Satellite images reveal show of force by Chinese navy in South China Sea

The photos, taken on Monday, show what appear to be at least 40 ships and submarines flanking the carrier Liaoning in what some analysts described as an unusually large display of the Chinese military's growing naval might.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/satellite-images-reveal-show-of-force-by-chinese-navy-in-south-10080350>

26 March 2018: Philippine defense chief says China sea dispute still a challenge

The territorial dispute with Beijing over the South China Sea remained a security challenge despite an improvement in bilateral ties, the Philippine defense chief said as he accepted three maritime surveillance planes from Japan.

<https://au.news.yahoo.com/a/39632529/philippine-defense-chief-says-china-sea-dispute-still-a-challenge/>

26 March 2018: Philippines to patrol disputed shoal despite China protest

When asked if the Philippine military will stop the surveillance of Scarborough Shoal following the protests from Beijing, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the flights will continue because the area is within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

<http://www.fresnobee.com/news/nation-world/world/article206810889.html>

25 March 2018: Chinese air force holds drills over South China Sea, Western Pacific in 'preparation for war'

China's air force used a number of its latest bombers and fighters in combat patrols over the South China Sea and drills in the Western Pacific after passing over Japan's southern islands – its first military exercise in the area in more than three months.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2138792/chinese-air-force-jets-bombers-drill-over-south-china>

24 March 2018: China Announces South China Sea Exercise

China announced it will conduct combat exercises in the South China Sea.

<https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/china-announces-south-china-sea-exercise#gs.rOHIuNs>

23 March 2018: China condemns US navy operation in South China Sea

China's Defence Ministry said on Friday (Mar 23) the United States had seriously harmed the country's sovereignty and security after a US Navy destroyer carried out a "freedom of navigation" operation in the disputed South China Sea.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/china-condemns-us-navy-operation-in-south-china-sea-10071656>

23 March 2018: Vietnam halts South China Sea oil drilling project under pressure from Beijing

A source with direct knowledge of the situation said government ministries in Vietnam had paused the project while the decision-making politburo debates whether to suspend or indefinitely terminate the contract. It would be the second time in less than a year that Vietnam has had to suspend a major oil development in the busy South China Sea waterway under pressure from China.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-vietnam/vietnam-halts-south-china-sea-oil-drilling-project-under-pressure-from-beijing-idUSKBN1GZ0JN>

22 March 2018: Vietnam rejects China's fishing ban

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Le Thi Thu Hang stated Vietnam's fierce opposition to the ban during a regular press conference in Hanoi.

<http://www.hanoitimes.vn/news/defend-the-sovereignty/2018/03/81e0c396/vietnam-rejects-china-s-fishing-ban-in-east-sea/>

21 March 2018: China says to have 'prudent' oil exploration with Philippines

“We will enhance maritime dialogue and pursue equal footed and friendly consultation and in a prudent and steady way advance cooperation on offshore oil and gas exploration,” Wang said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-philippines/china-says-to-have-prudent-oil-exploration-with-philippines-idUSKBN1GX1WO>

21 March 2018: China, Philippines discuss joint South China Sea projects

“Our relationship is in a golden period,” Cayetano said. He expressed confidence that China and the Philippines will find “a suitable legal framework” for their different viewpoints on the South China Sea.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-philippines-discuss-joint-south-china-sea-projects/2018/03/21/ff8bb394-2cc5-11e8-8dc9-3b51e028b845_story.html?utm_term=.985a438ddc96

20 March 2018: CNOOC announces start of production at Weizhou 6-13 field, in the South China Sea

“Weizhou 6-13 oil field not only commenced production ahead of schedule, but also exceeded its ODP’s [overall development plan] estimates in both reserves and production,” CNOOC CEO Yuan Guangyu said

<https://www.epmag.com/cnooc-starts-production-weizhou-6-13-oil-field-south-china-sea-1691041>

13 March 2018: New PH Air Force intel unit to boost surveillance in West Philippine Sea

A newly-set up intelligence unit of the Philippine Air Force is seen to boost the military’s intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities in the South China Sea.

<http://globalnation.inquirer.net/164947/intelligence-unit-surveillance-west-philippine-sea-reconnaissance-south-china-sea#ixzz59mUAt9Ue>

9 March 2018: General says China needs to arm South China Sea islands

China needs to build defensive structures on islands in the South China Sea to display its claim to sovereignty over virtually the entire crucial waterway, a leading Chinese general said.

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803090033.html>

8 March 2018: Beijing accuses ‘external powers’ of flexing muscles after US carrier docks in Vietnam

“Sending a fully armed vessel and aircraft to show off its military powers in the South China Sea has become the greatest disturbance to the peace and stability in the South China Sea,” Wang said.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2136408/beijing-accuses-external-powers-flexing-muscles-south>

8 March 2018: China committed to South China Sea peace, stability: FM

China follows a responsible approach to the South China Sea issue, taking into account interests of the Chinese people, historical facts, regional peace and the international rule of law, Wang said.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/08/c_137024222.htm

7 March 2018: China speeds up research on combustible ice in S.China Sea

China has launched all-out research efforts into production of combustible ice, a potential game-changer in the fossil fuel industry already identified as occurring naturally in the South China seas.

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1092306.shtml>

7 March 2018: Beijing proposes 'marine park' for disputed South China Sea

Its proposal for a "marine park" to "further protect the region's ecology" comes after a landmark tribunal ruling in 2016 said that China's island building had caused “severe harm to the coral reef environment

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/07/beijing-proposes-marine-park-disputed-south-china-sea-amid-tensions/>

6 March 2018: China increases military spending for 2018

China unveiled an 8.1 percent rise in defence spending, fuelling an ambitious military modernisation programme and making its neighbours nervous.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/china-defends-hike-in-military-spending-as-proportionate-and-low-10016564>

6 March 2018: Roque: No need to assert PH rights to foreign companies eyeing joint exploration

“It's not necessary because this joint exploration, by way of compromise, let's not fight about the issue of who has sovereign rights there, let's first just take advantage of the resources,” Roque said.

<https://www.rappler.com/nation/197526-harry-roque-philippine-rights-foreign-companies-joint-exploration>

5 March 2018: Palace insists joint exploration in West Philippine Sea with China constitutional

"How much more in an area where there is only sovereign rights?" Roque said in a press briefing.
<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/645504/palace-insists-joint-exploration-in-west-philippine-sea-with-china-constitutional/story/>

5 March 2018: Joint exploration of South China Sea a 'common practice,' Roque says

Roque said China and Vietnam's joint exploration deal could serve as a "model" for Manila's impending joint venture with Beijing.

<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/manila/local-news/2018/03/05/joint-exploration-south-china-sea-common-practice-roque-says-592019>

2 March 2018: Philippines earmarks two sites for possible joint oil exploration with China

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman, Harry Roque, said the areas being considered were sites covered by service contracts 57 and 72, which are exploration permits issued by Manila's energy ministry.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-earmarks-two-sites-for-possible-joint-oil-exploration-with-china>

1 March 2018: Philippines says any South China Sea energy deal must be with Chinese company, not government

"We are not entering into a sovereign agreement for exploration. It will be an agreement, if we do, between two corporate entities," Roque said.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/philippines-says-any-south-china-sea-energy-deal-must-be-with-chinese-company--not-government-10001742>

1 March 2018: China's offer of joint exploration in disputed areas is 'co-ownership', says Duterte

"Now their (Beijing's) offer is joint exploration, which is like co-ownership. It's like the two of us would be the owners. I think that's better than fighting," he said.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/chinas-offer-of-joint-exploration-in-disputed-areas-is-co-ownership-says-duterte>

ASEAN AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

19 March 2018: ASEAN emphasizes non-militarization of troubled waters

"We emphasize the importance of non-militarization and the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities and avoid actions that may complicate the situation," the statement says.

<http://www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking-news.php?id=104462&sid=6>

16 March 2018: Indonesia pushes for South-east Asian patrols of disputed waters

"For the South China Sea, I went around to friends - Asean defence ministers - so that each country that faces the South China Sea patrols up to 200 nautical miles, around 230 kilometres," Ryacudu said. "If we look at the (borders) from Vietnam down to Indonesia and to the Philippines, we can see we have secured almost half of the South China Sea (in areas) we are already patrolling," he added.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/australianz/indonesia-pushes-for-south-east-asian-patrols-of-disputed-waters>

15 March 2018: PM Lee warns against formation of rival regional blocs, as fresh alignments take shape

"Interested states can help keep the situation under control by observing international law and international norms, and agreeing to rules which minimise the risk of incidents and escalation," he added.

<http://www.todayonline.com/world/pm-lee-warns-against-formation-rival-regional-blocs-fresh-alignments-take-shape>

15 March 2018: Singapore, Australia share common interests in South China Sea issue, says PM Lee

"Like Australia, Singapore depends on a peaceful and stable region which supports and promotes free trade and open markets. We share similar outlooks on the importance of international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes," he said.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/politics/singapore-australia-share-common-interests-in-south-china-sea-issue-says-pm-lee>

13 March 2018: Asean has 'no automatic right' to be at centre of regional architecture: PM Lee

"Asean has to recognise this diversity. But we are still able to find common ground because all member states share certain common interests on this issue (such as) ensuring Asean's relevance, upholding the international rule of law, securing regional peace and stability, and maintaining freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea," he added.

<https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/asean-has-no-automatic-right-be-centre-regional-architecture-pm-lee>

11 March 2018: ASEAN military chiefs agree to be cautious on actions in South China Sea

During the meeting, the ASEAN military chiefs stressed the "need for cautious actions" in the region and pursuing "peaceful resolution of disputes" which is in line with international law.

<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/646216/asean-military-chiefs-agree-to-be-cautious-on-actions-in-south-china-sea/story/>

11 March 2018: ASEAN military chiefs push for peace in South China Sea

Military chiefs of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) pushed for peace in the disputed South China Sea, as they also stressed the need to avoid moves "that may complicate the situation."

<https://www.rappler.com/world/regions/asia-pacific/197902-asean-military-chiefs-south-china-sea-dispute>

28 February 2018: China, ASEAN to hold joint meeting on DOC implementation in Vietnam

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang told a daily news briefing that relevant parties will exchange views on implementing the DOC, promoting maritime cooperation as well as consulting on the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/28/c_137006272.htm

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

24 March 2018: U.S. warship sails within 12 nm of disputed South China Sea island

The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the destroyer Mustin traveled close to Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands and carried out maneuvering operations. China has territorial disputes with its neighbors over the area.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-southchinasea/exclusive-u-s-warship-sails-near-disputed-south-china-sea-island-officials-say-idUSKBN1GZ0VY>

23 March 2018: French Navy Frigate Conducts FONOP in South China Sea

The French Navy (Marine Nationale) announced that the frigate Vendémiaire conducted a patrol in the South China Sea. The Floréal-class surveillance frigate is deployed for nearly two months in Asia with the aim of asserting the French presence in the Pacific region.

<https://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2018/march-2018-navy-naval-defense-news/6081-french-navy-frigate-conducts-fonop-in-south-china-sea.html>

14 March 2018: US, Japan Conduct Anti-Submarine Warfare Drill in South China Sea

The Carl Vinson Strike Group kicked off a bilateral naval exercise that includes practicing joint anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations with the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) in the South China Sea.

<https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/us-japan-conduct-anti-submarine-warfare-drill-in-south-china-sea/>

13 March 2018: Australia stresses international law in South China Sea dispute

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop hailed the role of international law in settling regional conflicts.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-australia/australia-to-stress-international-law-in-south-china-sea-dispute-idUSKCN1GP0NM>

13 March 2018: Vietnam sees role for Australia in resolving South China Sea tensions

Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc has flagged closer co-operation with Australia to deal with tensions in the South China Sea as he warned all sides to refrain from using force and intimidation.

<http://www.afr.com/news/politics/world/vietnam-sees-role-for-australia-in-resolving-south-china-sea-tensions-20180313-h0xf4s#ixzz59mTcmseB>

13 March 2018: Japan sending military adviser to Malaysia, boosting regional presence in face of assertive China

Tokyo also sent military attachés to the Philippines and Vietnam.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2136981/japan-sending-military-adviser-malaysia-boosting-regional>

12 March 2018: PH, France boost military cooperation amid South China Sea dispute

"[T]he Philippines and France are increasing their cooperation in the military and security fields. We demonstrated this just last week, when a high-level delegation from the French Ministry of Defense came to Manila to participate in the first Filipino-French joint cooperation committee," he said.

<http://globalnation.inquirer.net/164912/philippines-france-south-china-sea-west-philippine-sea-military-cooperation-dispute-southeast-asia-defense-peace#ixzz59actWI35>

10 March 2018: India, France security accord has China in mind

Under the deal signed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Emmanuel Macron, each country will open its naval bases to warships from the other.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/india-france-security-accord-has-china-in-mind>

9 March 2018: Britannia backs the rule of law on the South China Sea's waves

"If I have the full authority of international law or the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on my side, then what I'm doing is precisely in accordance with the norms and customs expected of all nations," HMS Sutherland commanding officer Andrew Canale said.

<http://www.afr.com/news/britannia-backs-the-rule-of-law-on-the-south-china-seas-waves-20180308-h0x8ut#ixzz59VPF2C00>

8 March 2018: Foreign Minister Julie Bishop won't provoke in the South China Sea

"These are our most important trading routes so of course we exercise freedom of navigation and freedom of over-flight," she told Sky News. "What we won't do is unilaterally provoke an increase in tensions in the South China Sea" by sailing too close to the islands, she said. "There are a number of claimants, there are a number of disputed territories and there are negotiations under way."

<http://www.afr.com/news/politics/world/foreign-minister-julie-bishop-wont-provoke-in-the-south-china-sea-20180308-h0x7nr#ixzz59CWix9qR>

6 March 2018: Top US naval officer criticises China's lack of transparency on South China Sea

"It's not quite clear what's going to happen down there, and I think that angst and that lack of transparency is potentially disruptive to the security and stability of the region. And that causes concern," Vice Admiral Phillip G. Sawyer said.

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/top-us-naval-officer-criticises-chinas-lack-of-transparency-on-south-china-sea>

5 March 2018: India, Vietnam Tout International Law, Freedom of Navigation in South China Sea

In the statement, both leaders "reiterated the importance of achieving a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region where sovereignty and international law, freedom of navigation and overflight, sustainable development and a free, fair and open trade and investment system are respected."

<https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/india-vietnam-tout-international-law-freedom-of-navigation-in-south-china-sea/>

4 March 2018: US aircraft carrier in Vietnam for historic visit aimed at Beijing

The 95,000-ton carrier anchored two nautical miles off the port of Danang.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/03/asia/vietnam-us-uss-vinson-intl/index.html>

1 March 2018: Australia Bolsters Military Posture in South China Sea

Australia said it has boosted its naval presence in the South China Sea in response to concerns about regional stability.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/australia-bolsters-military-posture-in-south-china-sea-1519891384>