

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS UPDATES No. 70
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

29 January 2019: China Establishes South China Sea Rescue Center

The Ministry of Natural Resources has recently launched marine observation centers on Fiery Cross Reef and two other reefs in the area.

<https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/china-establishes-south-china-sea-rescue-center>

25 January 2019: Freedom of navigation a joint responsibility of all nations: Vietnam

"Maintaining peace, stability, security, safety, freedom of navigation and aviation in the East Sea is the mutual benefits and responsibility of countries inside and outside the region," foreign ministry spokeswoman Le Thi Thu Hang said, using the Vietnamese name for the disputed waters.

<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/freedom-of-navigation-a-joint-responsibility-of-all-nations-vietnam-3873698.html>

24 January 2019: Vietnam seeks more trade with China but will defend interests: PM

Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc expressed his desire to enhance economic ties with China but reasserted that his country will defend its interests and sovereignty in the South China Sea.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-Relations/Vietnam-seeks-more-trade-with-China-but-will-defend-interests-PM>

23 January 2019: Philippines to send first ship to join PLA Navy fleet review

Philippine Vice Admiral Robert Empedrad was quoted as saying that plans to send a ship to China for an event that marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of Chinese navy were in hand.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2183198/philippines-bridges-troubled-south-china-sea-waters-sending>

18 January 2019: Lorenzana sees 'lower tension' until Duterte ends term

"Considering everything I think I'm happy with that... No misunderstanding, no miscalculations between troops so there would be no trouble," the Defense chief said.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/01/18/1886174/lorenzana-sees-lower-tension-west-philippine-sea-until-duterte-ends-term#IWpl9GzhvX0EMIji.99>

18 January 2019: China: We're a role model in complying with international rules

"China is a role model in observing regional and international rules," Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying said.

<http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/01/18/China-role-model-international-rules-United-States-Taiwan-South-China-Sea.html>

17 January 2019: Philippine Defence Chief Urges Review of US Treaty amid SCS Tensions

Manila should review its defence agreement with Washington to clarify when the United States will come to its aid, as tensions in the South China Sea are the Philippines' "most difficult" security challenge, its Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2182578/philippine-defence-chief-urges-review-us-treaty-amid-south>

17 January 2019: Vietnam frustrated by slow pace of talks on South China Sea code of conduct

Vietnam said it expressed concerns about some "complicated recent developments in the South China that are not conducive to peace, stability and cooperation in the region", without elaborating further.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2182392/vietnam-frustrated-slow-pace-talks-south-china-sea-code-conduct>

16 January 2019: Lorenzana: Chinese bases changed equation in Philippine military security

"It's very clear that the Chinese is trying to extend its influence in the South China Sea, West Philippine Sea and the fact that they have built, reclaimed islands there, buit islands out of shoals and reefs and turned them into practically a military base or naval base," Lorenzana told the Senate.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/01/16/1885589/lorenzana-chinese-bases-changed-equation-philippine-military-security#UeijUyY4AeivZETe.99>

15 January 2019: Palace leaving increased South China Sea presence to security agencies

"I'm sure whoever is authorized to oversee that area knows what to do if they feel there is a security threat... We also go to areas they claim to be theirs and they allow us to fish. There is no problem if they are just fishing," Panelo said at a press briefing.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/01/15/1885213/palace-leaving-increased-south-china-sea-presence-security-agencies#sMOZ0sJCGvsRIXtx.99>

14 January 2019: Panelo: No problem if China fishes in Spratlys

It is unclear if the Chinese vessels were actually fishing in the disputed waters, but Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said Malacañang sees no problem if they were.

<http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/01/14/South-China-Sea-Chinese-fishing-vessels-Spratlys.html>

10 January 2019: China mobilises DF-26 ballistic missiles capable of sinking US warships

Beijing announced that it has deployed intermediate ballistic missiles to the country's north-west region, saying the weapons have the capacity to destroy US ships entering disputed waters in the South China Sea.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-01-10/china-mobilises-ballistic-missiles-capable-of-sinking-us-ships/10705594>

10 January 2019: Satellite imagery shows Chinese fishing vessels in Philippine EEZ

Satellite imagery also shows that fishing very often in the area is not sustainable as the size and quantity of Chinese ships suggest a massive overcapacity.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/01/10/1883925/satellite-imagery-shows-chinese-fishing-vessels-philippine-eez-study#7Tc5bb1SOg7cqV2v.99>

10 January 2019: Lorenzana: Philippines mulls parting strategic ways with America

"When that [treaty] was [negotiated], there was this raging Cold War. [But] [d]o we still have a Cold War today? Is it still relevant to our security? Maybe not," Lorenzana said.

<http://www.atimes.com/article/philippines-mulls-parting-strategic-ways-with-america/>

9 January 2019: Vietnam requests other countries to respect international law

"Vietnam has sufficient legal grounds and historical evidence testifying its sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa (Spratly) archipelagoes in conformity with international law," the spokesperson said. She stressed that Vietnam always respects the right to freedom of navigation and aviation other states in line with international law, especially the UNCLOS 1982.

<https://en.vietnamplus.vn/vietnam-requests-other-countries-to-respect-international-law/144890.vnp>

9 January 2019: Vietnam reaffirms respect to free maritime navigation as US ship sails near Paracels

The respect is always given to the navigation in the sea by any country as long as the action is in accordance with the international laws which stated in UNCLOS, Hang said.

<http://www.hanoitimes.vn/news/defend-the-sovereignty/2019/01/81e0d1cd/vietnam-reaffirms-respect-to-free-maritime-navigation-as-us-ship-sails-near-para/>

9 January 2019: China officer says island fortification driven by threats

China may further fortify man-made islands in the South China Sea depending on threats faced by the outposts, a Chinese naval officer said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-officer-says-island-fortification-driven-by-threats/articleshow/67455408.cms>

3 January 2019: China Coast Guard vessels hit Vietnamese fishing ships near Paracels

"According to the information we have, the Chinese government ships have been carrying out their normal patrolling duties in the relevant waters under China's jurisdiction", Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang said.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1626865.shtml

3 January 2019: China starts restoration of ruined reefs in South China Sea

China reportedly started recovery work on Fiery Cross, Mischief and Subi Reefs, three of its biggest artificial islands in the Spratly Islands

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/01/03/1882028/china-starts-restoration-ruined-reefs-south-china-sea#14dtjrMmY1keqx1Q.99>

1 January 2019: Hanoi pushes for a ban on any new Air Defence Identification Zone

Beijing officials have not ruled out a similar move - in which all aircraft must identify themselves to the Chinese authorities - over the South China Sea.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/tough-talks-expected-over-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct>

31 December 2018: China will resolutely defend sovereignty, push ahead with BRI in 2019: Xi Jinping

"Looking at the world at large, we're facing a period of major change never seen in a century. No matter what these changes bring, China will remain resolute and confident in its defence of its national sovereignty and security," he said.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/china-will-resolutely-defend-sovereignty-push-ahead-with-bri-in-2019-xi-jinping/articleshow/67327660.cms>

ASEAN AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

18 January 2019: ASEAN expresses 'concerns' over South China Sea

Foreign ministers of the 10 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have expressed "concerns" over land reclamations and other activities in the South China Sea, but without naming China.

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20190118_31/

18 January 2019: ASEAN FMs welcome improving cooperation with China on South China Sea issue

Don, also chairman of the retreat, said in a statement that the foreign ministers were encouraged by the progress of the substantive negotiations toward the early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) on a mutually agreed timeline.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-01/18/c_137755591.htm

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

29 January 2019: China likely to step up militarisation in South China Sea: US intelligence report

"China's military capabilities and reach will continue to grow as it invests heavily in developing and fielding advanced weapons, and Beijing will use its military clout to extend its footprint and complement its broadening political and economic influence, as we have seen with its One Belt, One Road," said US intelligence chief Dan Coats.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/china-likely-to-step-up-militarisation-in-south-china-sea-us-intelligence-report>

29 January 2019: American and Chinese navies in talks to reduce risk of South China Sea miscalculation

Richardson, who concluded his second visit to China as the US Chief of Naval Operations in mid-January, said a reliable communication mechanism needs to be in place. "If something should happen, we can call each other up and de-escalate that before it gets too hot," he said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/2184017/us-naval-chief-american-and-chinese-navies-talks-reduce-risk>

27 January 2019: Australian defense chief says Beijing has raised 'anxiety' in disputed South China Sea

"Resolving disputes in the South China Sea in accordance with international law would build confidence in China's willingness to support and champion a strategic culture that respects the rights of all states," Pyne added.

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/01/28/asia-pacific/australian-defense-chief-says-beijing-raised-anxiety-disputed-south-china-sea/#.XE7_Pi2p3BI

17 January 2019: Pentagon admits China has military weapons capable of 'reaching across the globe'

The Pentagon has admitted that China has overtaken the US in the development of some advanced weapon systems – and that it is on the verge of becoming the world leader in a variety of military technologies.

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2019/01/17/pentagon-admits-china-has-military-weapons-capable-of-reaching-across-the-globe/>

17 January 2019: US, Japan discuss the South China Sea

Iwaya and Shanahan underscored their opposition to attempts to alter the status quo in the South China Sea, and pledged to cooperate in promoting the rule of law and the freedom of navigation there.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/01/17/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-u-s-vow-cooperate-north-korea-space-cyber-domains/#.XELeTi2p3BI>

16 January 2019: US, Britain conduct first joint drills in contested South China Sea

A US Navy guided missile destroyer the USS McCampbell, which is based in Japan, and a Royal Navy frigate, HMS Argyll, which is on a tour of Asia, conducted communication drills and other exercises "to address common security priorities", the US Navy said. "There's no record in recent history of operations together, specifically in the South China Sea," a US Navy spokesman said.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/britain-conduct-first-joint-drills-in-contested-south-china-sea>

16 January 2019: France, Japan Look to Increase Indo-Pacific Maritime Cooperation

The two sides have set up plans to hold a comprehensive maritime dialogue later this year, which could lead to greater Franco-Japanese military cooperation in the Pacific.

<https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/france-japan-look-to-increase-indo-pacific-maritime-cooperation/>

14 January 2019: US Navy commander hails 'constructive and candid' talks with Chinese counterparts

A senior US naval officer said that he had had a "constructive and candid" discussion with his Chinese counterpart as part of an effort to calm growing tensions between the two sides.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/2182010/chinese-naval-commanders-set-focus-taiwan-meeting-us-admiral>

11 January 2019: Russia warns British plans for military bases in South China Sea

"Against the backdrop of overall rising military and political tensions in the world ... statements about the desire to build up its military presence in third countries are counter-productive, destabilising and possibly of a provocative nature," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/11/russia-warns-could-respond-british-plans-open-new-bases-abroad/>

10 January 2019: Chinese navy activities a cause for concern: Japanese admiral

Kawano said that peace and stability throughout the Indo-Pacific region is important to Japan, and that Japan hopes to improve security and wellbeing of people in the region through capacity building and joint military exercises.

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3614316>

8 January 2019: China protests latest US Navy island sail-past

Lu said the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer was in the area Monday without China's permission and "we have made stern complaints with the U.S." "Relevant actions by U.S. vessels violate Chinese and international laws, infringe on China's sovereignty, and undermine peace, stability and good order in relevant waters," Lu said.

<https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/nation-world/world/article224008790.html#storylink=cpy>

7 January 2019: U.S. Ship Sails Near Disputed South China Sea Islands in Challenge to Beijing

The USS McCampbell conducted what the military calls a freedom of navigation operation in the Paracel Islands chain, sailing within 12 nautical miles of three islands: Tree, Lincoln and Woody, according to a Navy official.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-ship-sails-near-disputed-south-china-sea-islands-in-challenge-to-beijing-11546838050>

2 January 2019: Remember 'China, China, China', new acting US defence secretary Patrick Shanahan says

The comments came during Shanahan's first meeting with secretaries of the US military branches since taking over for Jim Mattis.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/remember-china-china-china-new-acting-us-defence-secretary-shanahan-say>