

**SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS UPDATES No. 72**  
**March 2019**

**ACTS OF CLAIMANTS**

**28 March 2019: Vietnam opposes China's live-fire drills, construction plans in South China Sea**

"These activities have seriously violated Vietnam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa Islands and gone against basic principles on settling maritime issues between the two countries," Hang said. Hang asserted that China has violated the spirit of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DOC) in the South China Sea, complicated the situation in the waters and caused trouble for negotiations on the Code of Conduct between China and ASEAN.

<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-opposes-china-s-live-fire-drills-construction-plans-in-south-china-sea-3901582.html>

**28 March 2019: Duterte assures China that PH gov't had no hand on ICC complaint vs Xi**

"President Duterte also clarified the case filed by former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales and former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario against Chinese President Xi Jinping before the International Criminal Court, noting that the administration had no participation in such activity," the Malacañang statement said.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/173916/duterte-assures-china-that-ph-govt-had-no-hand-on-icc-complaint-vs-xi#ixzz5jWk6ec42>

**25 March 2019: Palace: China controls West Philippine Sea**

The Philippine government can only do so much as protest China's actions as Beijing has control over the area, Malacañang said.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/03/25/1904421/palace-china-controls-west-philippine-sea#9Lh2XYECssFVhOBp.99>

**24 March 2019: ICC case vs China's Xi Jinping 'a futile exercise' – Palace**

"The filing of the complaint may be a futile exercise," Pabello said in a statement. "They may have the right to file the complaint against (Xi) before the ICC as individuals over a perceived violation committed against their country or their countrymen."

<https://www.panaynews.net/icc-case-vs-chinas-xi-jinping-a-futile-exercise-palace/>

**22 March 2019: Vietnam denounces Taiwan's live-fire drill in South China Sea**

"The fact that Taiwan, despite Vietnam's protest, has repeatedly performed live-fire drills in the seas surrounding the Ba Binh (internationally known as Itu Aba) Island in the Truong Sa (Spratly) Islands of Vietnam is a serious violation of Vietnam's sovereignty over the archipelago", Hang said.

<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-denounces-taiwan-s-live-fire-drill-in-south-china-sea-3898274.html>

**22 March 2019: Vietnam files protest over South China Sea boat sinking**

"The Chinese vessel committed an act that violated Vietnam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa archipelago, threatened the lives and damaged the properties and the legitimate interests of Vietnamese fishermen," the ministry said in the statement, referring to the Paracel islands by their Vietnamese name.

<https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/03/22/19/vietnam-files-protest-over-south-china-sea-boat-sinking>

**22 March 2019: Chinese ambassador issues veiled warning to Britain against engaging in 'gunboat diplomacy'**

"Asserting their nation's right to freedom of navigation has long been an excuse for certain Western politicians to flex their military muscle by sending naval vessels to the South China Sea," Liu said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3002932/chinese-ambassador-issues-veiled-warning-britain-against>

**22 March 2019: China to build deep-sea navigation system in South China Sea**

The blue water navigation system, codenamed UGPS, will provide crucial technological support for China's branching into the domain of deep water, especially for the country's deep-sea submersibles, according to the Shanghai Acoustic Laboratory under the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1143087.shtml>

**21 March 2019: China to start building its first floating nuclear power plant**

China will start building its first floating nuclear power plant this year, Chinese papers quoted an official with the state-owned China National Nuclear Corp as saying.

<https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/03/article/ocean-going-nuclear-plants-for-south-china-sea/>

**21 March 2019: Duterte says ICC case vs Xi won't affect PH-China relations**

Asked if the case would affect ties between the Philippines and China, Duterte said: "No, I'm sure it won't.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1098567/duterte-says-icc-case-vs-xi-wont-affect-ph-china-relations#ixzz5j9809Qla>

**21 March 2019: Ex-PH officials file ICC communication vs. Xi Jinping over actions in South China Sea**

Former Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Secretary Albert del Rosario and former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales filed a communication before the International Criminal Court outlining the crimes Chinese President Xi Jinping and other Chinese officials supposedly committed in their "systematic plan to control" the South China Sea.

<http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/3/21/Xi-Jinping-South-China-Sea-communication-ICC.html>

**20 March 2019: Chinese, Philippine FMs vow to finish South China Sea COC negotiation by 2021**

"China will work together with the Philippines and other ASEAN countries, to remain determined, exclude interference, and strive to finish negotiations of the Code of Conduct at the South China Sea by the end of 2021, and make it a real stabilizer for the South China Sea situation", Wang said.

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414f796b444e33457a6333566d54/index.html>

**18 March 2019: China says it will push ahead with plans to build an 'island city' in the disputed South China Sea**

The statement did not give further details of the plan but said officials in Sansha must "take active steps and demonstrate their initiatives" to provide a "satisfactory report card" to the party leadership.

<https://amp.businessinsider.com/china-says-it-will-build-island-city-in-the-disputed-south-china-sea-2019-3>

**17 March 2019: Manila, Hanoi renew call for SCS Code of Conduct**

"[We discussed] how to navigate the issue in the face of Chinese increased activity. We both agreed that the CoC should be pursued and concluded in the fastest time possible," Lorenzana told reporters.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/manila-hanoi-renew-call-for-scs-code-of-conduct/526870/>

**13 March 2019: Beijing hits back at US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's 'irresponsible' South China Sea energy claims**

"Nations in the region are capable of resolving and managing the disputes in their own ways," Lu said.

"Nations outside the region should refrain from stirring up trouble and disrupting the harmonious situation."

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3001491/mike-pompeo-accuses-beijing-creating-debt-traps-and-energy>

**11 March 2019: Vietnam Investigates Fishing Boat Sinking in South China Sea**

Vietnamese Foreign Ministry officials stated that they were investigating the sinking of a fishing boat last week in the South China Sea.

<https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/vietnam-investigates-fishing-boat-sinking-in-south-china-sea/>

**10 March 2019: Duterte stresses Philippines not equipped to wage war with China**

"If we go to war against China, I would lose all my soldiers just as they are leaving for the war. It will be a massacre. We don't have the capacity to fight them," the president said.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/03/10/1900300/duterte-stresses-philippines-not-equipped-wage-war-china#JyX0EqzXQZu4J1ri.99>

**8 March 2019: Vietnam says fishing boat rammed and sunk by Chinese ship in South China Sea**

The fishing boat was near Discovery Reef in the Paracel island chain when it was rammed by a Chinese vessel, the National Committee for Incident, Natural Disaster Response and Search and Rescue said.

<https://www.news.com.au/world/south-china-sea-tensions-at-new-high-after-vietnamese-boat-rammed-and-sunk/news-story/10188f3d7c1d7336bcaffafd742defab>

**8 March 2019: Philippines, Malaysia press freedom of navigation in South China Sea**

"We affirmed our commitment to collaborate in regional and multilateral platforms, particularly within ASEAN to advance the rule of law in Southeast Asia and beyond," Duterte said. "This is, without resort to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law."

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/03/08/1899734/philippines-malaysia-press-freedom-navigation-south-china-sea#zWysZ8pOloLjtAcy.99>

**7 March 2019: Malaysia: Mahathir asks China to define claim on South China Sea**

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said China should define its "so-called ownership" so other claimant countries can start to gain benefits from the resource-rich waters.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/malaysia-mahathir-asks-china-define-claim-south-china-sea-190307082421266.html>

**6 March 2019: Delfin Lorenzana warns vs sustained US operations in South China Sea**

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana cautioned yesterday that sustained US Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea might drag the Philippines into a conflict not of its own making but due to ambiguity in the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with America.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/03/06/1899081/delfin-lorenzana-warns-vs-sustained-us-operations-south-china-sea#kOm5QGVvpFwHtvIC.99>

**5 March 2019: China's 'Fisherman Navy' Takes Control of Sandbars near Thitu Island**

Beijing has snatched another patch of the South China Sea, with its "militia" seizing control of a string of sandbars and denying fishermen access.

<https://www.news.com.au/finance/chinas-latest-island-grab-fishing-militia-makes-move-on-sandbars-around-philippines-thitu-island/news-story/7805269e5fe270f59e7657328f0c6382>

**5 March 2019: Palace: DFA's call to protest harassment of PH fishers**

Malacañang is leaving it to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to decide whether to lodge a diplomatic protest to stop Chinese vessels from driving away Filipinos from fishing grounds close to Philippine-occupied Pag-asa (Thitu) Island in the South China Sea.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1092040/palace-dfas-call-to-protest-harassment-of-ph-fishers#ixzz5hT1IYTrn>

**28 February 2019: China voices resolute opposition to provocations in South China Sea**

"China resolutely opposes any country taking such freedom as a pretext to conduct illegal and provocative moves in the South China Sea, undermining sovereignty and security of littoral countries, and doing harm to regional peace and stability," Ren said.

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/28/c\\_137858102.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-02/28/c_137858102.htm)

**ASEAN AND SOUTH CHINA SEA****9 March 2019: More Asean states agree to speed up talks on South China Sea pact: Beijing**

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that an increasing number of Asean countries have agreed with China's proposal to speed up negotiations for a pact on the South China Sea.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/more-asean-states-agree-to-speed-up-talks-on-s-china-sea-pact-beijing>

**1 March 2019: China, ASEAN see "smooth progress" on COC in South China Sea: FM**

"During the meeting, with the momentum of dialogue and cooperation, China and ASEAN countries continued to carry forward the examination and reading of the COC text in an efficient and orderly manner, building consensus all the time," Lu said. "We have seen overall smooth progress so far on the consultation of the COC text," he added.

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/01/c\\_137861136.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/01/c_137861136.htm)

## **OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA**

### **23 March 2019: US offers help to ASEAN countries on oil and gas exploration ventures**

"The US wants to promote energy security in those ASEAN countries, we want to help them to have access to their own energy resources and not fall into debt traps," Pompeo said.

<https://business.mb.com.ph/2019/03/23/us-offers-help-to-asean-countries-on-oil-and-gas-exploration-ventures/>

### **16 March 2019: 2 US B-52s fly over South China Sea, second time in a month**

"Two B-52H Stratofortress bombers took off from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, and conducted routine training in the vicinity of the South China Sea on March 13, 2019 [Hawaii Standard Time], before returning to base," Pacific Air Forces said in a statement.

<https://www.foxnews.com/world/us-sends-nuclear-capable-bombers-to-south-china-sea-for-second-time-amid-chinas-growing-militarization>

### **14 March 2019: US Secretary of State Criticizes China's South China Sea Practices**

"By blocking development in the South China Sea through coercive means, China prevents ASEAN members from accessing more than \$2.5 trillion in recoverable energy reserves," the U.S. secretary of state said.

<https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/us-secretary-of-state-criticizes-chinas-south-china-sea-practices/>

### **7 March 2019: US sees rising Chinese military activity in South China Sea**

"It's building, it's not reducing in any sense of the word," Adm Davidson said. "There has been more activity with ships, fighters and bombers over the last year than in previous years, absolutely".

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/us-sees-rising-chinese-military-activity-in-south-china-sea>

### **5 March 2019: US B-52 bomber flies near contested islands in South China Sea**

"One bomber conducted training in the vicinity of the South China Sea before returning to Guam, while the other conducted training in the vicinity of Japan in coordination with the US Navy and alongside our Japanese air force counterparts before returning to Guam," the statement said.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/05/politics/us-b-52-bomber-training-south-china-sea/index.html>

### **1 March 2019: US assures Philippines: Any armed attack in South China Sea will trigger MDT**

"As the South China Sea is part of the Pacific, any armed attack on Philippine forces, aircraft or public vessels in the South China Sea would trigger mutual defense obligations under Article 4 of our Mutual Defense Treaty," Pompeo said.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/03/01/1897776/us-assures-philippines-any-armed-attack-south-china-sea-will-trigger-mdt>