

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.74
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

29 October 2019: PH, China eye marine research, protection in South China Sea

"Both sides had further frank discussions on issues of concern, and considered to undertake mutually agreed practical maritime cooperation initiatives, covering maritime search and rescue, maritime safety, and marine research or marine environment protection and fisheries cooperation in the South China Sea," the Philippines and China said in a joint statement.

<https://www.rappler.com/nation/243671-philippines-china-eye-marine-research-protection-south-china-sea>

29 October 2019: Joint Press Release: Fifth Meeting of the Philippines-China Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea

The Republic of the Philippines and the People's Republic of China convened the fifth meeting of the Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea (BCM) on 28 October 2019 in Beijing, China.

<https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/dfa-releasesupdate/24872-joint-press-release-fifth-meeting-of-the-philippines-china-bilateral-consultation-mechanism-on-the-south-china-sea>

29 October 2019: South China Sea: Beijing escalating tensions as ASEAN countries fear renewed violation

Beijing has declared it wants the South China Sea Code of Conduct signed by 2022, but many within ASEAN countries fear it could be used to legitimise China's belligerent behaviour in the maritime region.

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1196922/south-china-sea-beijing-spratly-islands-cardio-asean-sea-code-of-conduct>

25 October 2019: Philippines to lift moratorium on foreign research ships in its waters

The Philippines will lift a 2018 moratorium on foreign scientific research in its exclusive economic zone so it can exploit marine resources, the national security adviser said on Friday.

<https://af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFL3N27A1RL>

24 October 2019: Chinese Ship Leaves Vietnam's Waters After Disputed South China Sea Surveys

A Chinese oil survey vessel that has been embroiled in a tense standoff with Vietnamese vessels in the South China Sea left Vietnamese-controlled waters on Oct. 24 after more than three months, marine data showed.

https://www.theepochtimes.com/chinese-ship-leaves-vietnams-waters-after-disputed-south-china-sea-surveys_3126012.html

23 October 2019: China could be first country to exploit deep sea minerals

China is in pole position for the global race to start deep sea mining operations to extract valuable minerals used in smartphones and electric car batteries from the seabed. The head of the International Seabed Authority (ISA) said China was likely to become the first country in the world to start mining seabed minerals if the international rules for exploitation were approved next year.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3034267/china-could-be-first-country-exploit-deep-sea-minerals>

23 October 2019: Vietnam orders car importer to ditch navigation maps showing 'nine-dash line' in South China Sea

Vietnam has ordered a vehicle importer to remove navigation apps that show maps reflecting Chinese territorial claims that are rejected by Hanoi, adding to a wave of resistance against maps showing the "nine-dash line".

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3034207/vietnam-orders-car-importer-ditch-china-map-app-over-nine>

21 October 2019: Defence minister says 'no force' can stop China reunification

"The South China Sea islands and Diaoyu islands are inalienable parts of China's territory. We will not allow even an inch of territory that our ancestors have left to us to be taken away," Defence minister Wei Fenghe tells security forum.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/defence-minister-force-stop-china-reunification-191021014233161.html>

21 October 2019: Warships in South China Sea will invite conflict, says Dr M

Malaysia and Asean will continue to push for a peaceful resolution of the South China Sea dispute, said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. He said the increase in China and the US' military presence in the region could destabilise the vital shipping route.

<https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/10/21/warships-in-south-china-sea-will-invite-conflict-says-dr-m/1802234>

20 October 2019: Why China's Coast Guard Spent 258 Days in Waters Claimed by Malaysia

Chinese coast guard vessels spent 70% of the past year patrolling in a tract of the South China Sea claimed by Malaysia, an American think tank says. Malaysia did little to push back. The coast guard presence, especially long-term for a Chinese mission in the widely disputed South China Sea, followed by Malaysia's muted response gives China an ever-stronger upper hand over the Southeast Asian country and more clout in a broader six-way maritime dispute that has grabbed attention as far away as Washington. China already has a military and technological edge in the dispute.

<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/why-chinas-coast-guard-spent-258-days-waters-claimed-malaysia>

20 October 2019: 'Abominable' film axed in Malaysia after rebuffing order to cut China map

DreamWorks' animated movie "Abominable" will not be released in Malaysia after its producers declined to meet a censor board requirement to cut a scene showing China's "nine-dash line" in the South China Sea, the movie distributor said on Sunday (Oct 20).

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2019/10/20/039abominable039-film-axed-in-malaysia-after-rebuffing-order-to-cut-china-map#6AgSk9x3utr42hMB.99>

17 October 2019: Malaysia needs to be ready for the worst in South China Sea: foreign minister

Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah said Malaysia could issue protest notes if a major power were to encroach on its territory but the lack of naval and maritime enforcement assets left it at a disadvantage in the event of a conflict. Saifuddin said Malaysia's naval assets would struggle to even match up to the Chinese Coast Guard, which he said has a near 24-hour presence around the South Luconia Shoals off the east Malaysian state of Sarawak.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-southchinasea/malaysia-needs-to-be-ready-for-the-worst-in-south-china-sea-foreign-minister-idUSKBN1WW0EU?il=0>

17 October 2019: Malaysia orders China map cut from 'Abominable' film as furore widens

"The animated film titled "Abominable"... has been given approval for screening in Malaysia under the condition that the controversial map is removed from the film," the board's chairman Mohamad Zamberi Abdul Aziz said in an emailed statement to Reuters.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2019/10/17/malaysia-orders-china-map-cut-from-abominable-film-as-furore-widens#SOGx8MeuFduHLvTb.99>

16 October 2019: Philippines' top diplomat calls for cut to 'Abominable' over China map

The foreign minister of the Philippines called on Wednesday for a cut to a scene in DreamWorks' animated film "Abominable" that shows China's unilaterally declared "nine-dash line" in the South China Sea.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-southchinasea-film/philippines-top-diplomat-calls-for-cut-to-abominable-over-china-map-idUSKBN1WV1AU>

16 October 2019: Chinese investors make a beeline for Vietnam's luxury real estate, until their passports run into a wall over South China Sea dispute

Under Vietnamese law, foreign buyers are required to submit their passports to secure a document from the government to grant them ownership of a flat. Since Chinese passports depict the disputed Paracel Islands – known as Xisha in Chinese, and Hoang Sa in Vietnamese – as Chinese territory, buyers from mainland China typically encounter difficulties in securing ownership.

<https://www.scmp.com/business/article/3032976/chinese-investors-make-beeline-vietnams-luxury-real-estate-until-their>

16 October 2019: Chinese Nuclear Submarine May Have Been Involved In Incident In South China Sea

Vietnamese fishermen recently may have gotten a big surprise: an 11,000-ton submarine surfacing among their boats. The incident reportedly occurred in September but has only recently come to light via social media. The Chinese Navy Jin Class ballistic missile submarine was said to have been operating near the Paracel Islands. The islands, known as Xisha in Chinese, are in a strategic location in the South China Sea. They are controlled by China but also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2019/10/16/chinese-nuclear-submarine-involved-in-incident-in-south-china-sea/#64efa5c091b7>

15 October 2019: Seeking clues in the case of the Yuemaobingyu 42212

In the middle of the night on June 9, Chinese fishing vessel Yuemaobinyu 42212 collided with Philippine fishing boat F/B Gem-Ver, which was riding at anchor near Reed Bank in the South China Sea. The Chinese ship fled the scene, leaving 22 Filipino fishers aboard a sinking Gem-Ver in peril until they were rescued by a passing Vietnamese boat. The Yuemaobinyu 42212's actions during and after the incident, combined with sparse details about the vessel itself, raise questions about whether it may belong to China's maritime militia operating throughout the South China Sea. There is not enough publicly available information about the vessel for a definitive answer. But data gathered by AMTI and the Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS) strongly suggests that the 42212 is more than just a normal fishing boat.

<https://amti.csis.org/seeking-clues-in-the-case-of-the-yuemaobinyu-42212/>

14 October 2019: Vietnam blocks 'Abominable' film over depiction of Beijing's nine-dash line in South China Sea

Vietnam has pulled the animated DreamWorks film Abominable from cinemas over a scene featuring a map which shows China's unilaterally declared "nine-dash line" in the South China Sea, state media reported on Monday.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3032796/abominable-film-blocked-vietnam-over-depiction-beijings>

11 October 2019: New Philippines military chief sees no 'shooting war' in South China Sea despite disputes

The new head of the Armed Forces of the Philippines has said he does not expect a "shooting war" to occur in the South China Sea, despite Manila's diplomatic protests against China's intrusions into its territorial waters.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3032547/new-philippines-military-chief-sees-no-shooting-war-south-china>

9 October 2019: China ignores Duterte's drug war as Philippines softens stand on South China Sea — report

China ignored President Rodrigo Duterte's bloody war on drugs while the Philippines has scaled down its opposition against Beijing's activities in the disputed South China Sea, a London-based think tank reported.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/10/09/1958798/china-ignores-dutertes-drug-war-philippines-softens-stand-south-china-sea-report>

9 October 2019: South China Sea used by Beijing ‘used to smuggle crude oil’ to avoid global sanctions

A huge 910,000 tonnes of crude oil was offloaded at Chinese ports during the month of September after it was transferred in the South China Sea, according to Bloomberg. This amount is three times as much as the month of August. The US has warned that there will be repercussions for anyone who buys Iranian oil.

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1188731/south-china-sea-iran-news-oil-sanctions-beijing-world-war-3-donald-trump>

7 October 2019: Chinese Naval Training Ship Spreads Goodwill While Flexing Maritime Muscle

A Chinese military vessel is touring the contested South China Sea and beyond to meet foreign peers and train its own sailors, spreading goodwill while tightening its claim to a disputed sea and disrupting Australia’s traditional sphere of influence.

<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/chinese-naval-training-ship-spreads-goodwill-while-flexing-maritime-muscle>

4 October 2019: Vietnam Says Chinese Ships Escalating Tension in South China Sea

Vietnam accused a Chinese oil-surveying vessel and coast guard escorts of territorial violations by widening their activities after entering the country’s exclusive economic zone and operating within offshore blocks for three months.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-04/vietnam-says-chinese-ships-escalating-tension-in-south-china-sea>

02 October 2019: Vietnam to raise South China Sea situation in security dialogue with India

Vietnam will raise the situation in the South China Sea, including four intrusions by Chinese vessels into its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) since July, in the upcoming annual security dialogue with India this month, Vietnamese ambassador Pham Sanh Chau has said.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/vietnam-to-raise-south-china-sea-situation-in-security-dialogue-with-india/story-FaXORvjfJJ8CborvqwfPmO.html>

02 October 2019: Philippine official tweets order for new protest vs China

The Philippine foreign secretary used Twitter to order the immediate filing of a diplomatic protest against China on Wednesday after Chinese coast guard ships reportedly neared a Philippine-occupied shoal in the disputed South China Sea. Locsin tweeted: "Do I have to fly home to file the goddamned diplomatic protest myself? That's the military speaking. Not some friggin' civilian media outlet. File now!!!"

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/article235702122.html>

30 September 2019: Foreign Affairs told of Chinese ships near disputed South China Sea shoal

The Philippine military has reported the unannounced entry of Chinese vessels near Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea to the Foreign Affairs department for

appropriate diplomatic action, its newly appointed chief said yesterday. “The mere presence there if there is no request for passage prior to that will have to be reported,” Armed Forces Chief of Staff Noel S. Clement told reporters at the Senate. “Whether it is a violation or not will be up to our Department of Foreign Affairs,” he added.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/foreign-affairs-told-of-chinese-ships-near-disputed-south-china-sea-shoal/>

30 September 2019: Vietnam Stands Alone Challenging China’s South China Sea Conquest at U.N

Vietnam warned against China’s belligerence in the South China Sea at the U.N. General Assembly, concluding on Monday. However, Vietnam stood alone among nations whose territory China claims, in part due to the U.N. banning Taiwan from participating.

<https://www.breitbart.com/asia/2019/09/30/vietnam-stands-alone-challenging-south-china-sea-conquest/>

ASEAN AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

28 October 2019: Duterte to raise South China Sea code of conduct at this weekend's ASEAN Summit

President Rodrigo Duterte is heading to Thailand later this weekend to attend the 35th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit where he will again push for the completion of the proposed code of conduct in the disputed South China Sea that has been pending for over 20 years.

<https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/10/28/Duterte-ASEAN-Summit-Thailand.html>

27 October 2019: EAS leaders to focus on South China Sea situation in November Summit

South China Sea (SCS) situation in the backdrop of China’s aggression in Vanguard Bank -- the westernmost reef in the resource-rich Spratlys -- within Vietnam’s exclusive economic zone and continental shelf will be in spotlight at the next East Asia Summit (EAS) that Bangkok is hosting early November.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/eas-leaders-to-focus-on-south-china-sea-situation-in-november-summit/articleshow/71782023.cms>

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

30 October 2019: South China Sea shock: How UK will team up with US and Dutch in bold mission in 2021

Britain’s new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, will make her maiden operational deployment as part of a joint US-Dutch-UK naval mission to the South China Sea in 2021.

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1197401/south-china-sea-news-hms-queen-elizabeth-us-navy-vietnam-nine-dash-line-world-war-3>

30 October 2019: Beijing Continues to Bully Others in South China Sea: US

The US Pacific Fleet Commander has said there has been no reduction in Beijing's assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea, a vital trade route in the global supply chain, and it continues to bully other nations in the strategic region.

<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/world-news-beijing-continues-to-bully-others-in-south-china-sea-us/341365>

28 October 2019: South China Sea: Trump and Xi in fiery clash after Chinese vessel disaster in Vietnam

China and the US are once again squabbling over the South China Sea after a Washington diplomat questioned Beijing's sincerity in plans to agree a code of conduct as Xi Jinping withdraws vessel from Vietnamese waters.

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1196718/south-china-sea-china-trump-clash-beijing-vessel-vietnam-world-war-3-spt>

28 October 2019: Putin accepts Duterte invite, just before Manila-Beijing South China Sea oil talks. Coincidence?

The timing of Moscow's announcement over the weekend that President Vladimir Putin has accepted an invitation to visit Manila has raised eyebrows, as it comes on the eve of crucial bilateral talks between the Philippines and China on joint oil exploration in the South China Sea.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3035217/putin-accepts-duterte-invite-just-manila-beijing-south>

25 October 2019: McRaven: 'China's massive military buildup is 'holy shit' moment for US'

Former Navy SEAL Adm. William McRaven last month said China's efforts to expand its military and threaten U.S. hegemony is a "holy shit" moment for the United States. "As we talk about the rise of China, the gap [between American and Chinese innovation] is narrowing," McRaven said.

<https://americanmilitarynews.com/2019/10/mcraven-chinas-massive-military-build-up-is-holy-shit-moment-for-us/>

24 October 2019: US Army developing 1,000 mile 'supercannon' to counter Chinese military capabilities in the Pacific

The U.S. Army is working on what it believes could be a "game-changing" weapon in its efforts to counter advanced adversaries like China. The Strategic Long-Range Cannon (SLRC) project is aiming to deliver an artillery piece that can enable precision strikes from beyond a 1,000 miles away. The technology is still in its development stages but the Army hopes to test this artillery piece by 2023, according to the Washington Times.

<https://americanmilitarynews.com/2019/10/us-army-developing-1000-mile-supercannon-to-counter-chinese-military-capabilities-in-the-pacific/>

20 October 2019: China, Australia complete joint army training exercise in Hainan: Xinhua

The Chinese and Australian armies have concluded a joint military training exercise in China's southern island province of Hainan, the official Xinhua news agency reported on Sunday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-australia-defence/china-australia-complete-joint-army-training-exercise-in-hainan-xinhua-idUSKBN1WZ06P>

19 October 2019: US official denounces China's action on SCS

United States Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs David Stilwell stressed this on October 16 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

“We remain skeptical of the PRC’s (People’s Republic of China) sincerity to negotiate a meaningful Code of Conduct [in the South China Sea] that reinforces international law,” Stilwell said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2019/10/19/news/national/us-official-denounces-chinas-action-on-scs/634024/>

17 October 2019: US Navy Admiral George Wikoff hails Beijing as ‘cordial, professional’ in South China Sea

“They remain respectful in accordance with what we anticipate a professional would do, and we respond or initiate in kind when we believe that there is a situation,” said Wikoff aboard the USS Ronald Reagan on Wednesday, after taking over command of Task Force 70 two weeks ago.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3033335/us-navy-admiral-george-wikoff-hails-beijing-cordial>

15 October 2019: China's controversial South China Sea map is entering pop culture thanks to US companies

An obscure map used by China to claim ownership of virtually the entire South China Sea, but rejected internationally, is now finding its way into mainstream media thanks to an unlikely and perhaps unwitting accomplice: US companies.

<https://qz.com/1727522/chinas-illegal-south-china-sea-map-made-it-into-abominable/>

15 October 2019: US, Philippines, Japanese forces conduct maneuvers

More than 2,000 U.S. and Philippine military personnel, along with a small contingent of Japanese forces, are holding annual combat exercises aimed at responding rapidly to crises and natural disasters and underscoring their commitment to keep the region “free and open.”

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/10/14/us-philippine-japanese-forces-conduct-maneuvers/>

12 October 2019: South China Sea: Like Vietnam, Duterte Teams Up with Russia to Stop China

“Russia, unlike China, is not claiming sovereign rights over the South China Sea and its companies are willing to explore for natural resources as contractors of states with such rights,” says Ranada. “Awarding service contracts to firms would not violate the Philippine Constitution since these deals explicitly state the areas involved are covered by Philippine sovereignty or sovereign rights. The companies would be coming in as mere service contractors to the government.”

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/panosmourdukoutas/2019/10/12/south-china-sea-like-vietnam-duterte-teams-up-with-russia-to-stop-china/#e2f57b52f57e>

12 October 2019: Littoral Combat Ship: America's Secret Naval Weapon Against China or Waste of Money?

In 2013 journalist Kyle Mizokami put the speedy, 3,000-ton-displacement vessel to the test. Booting up Command: Modern Naval/Air Operations -- a high-end computer war game -- Mizokami pitted simulated LCSs against a Chinese flotilla. "The result isn't good — and a harrowing lesson to be cautious about how we equip the U.S. military," Mizokami wrote.

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/littoral-combat-ship-americas-secret-naval-weapon-against-china-or-waste-money-87306>

10 October 2019: ESPN criticised over China-NBA coverage for using 'nine-dash line' map

The sports network ESPN faced fresh criticism of its coverage of a row between the National Basketball Association (NBA) and China after using a map that appeared to endorse the country's claims to both Taiwan and disputed territories in the South China Sea.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/china-basketball-nba-espn/espn-criticised-over-china-nba-coverage-for-using-nine-dash-line-map-idUSL3N26U2HE>

10 October 2019: Why not counter China's 'watching Kashmir' remark with 'we are watching South China Sea': Congress asks govt.

"Xi Jinping says he is watching Kashmir but why does @PMOIndia/MEA not say 1) We are watching Pro-Democracy protests muzzled in Hong Kong. 2) We are watching human rights violations in Xinjiang. 3) We are watching continued oppression in Tibet 4) We are watching South China Sea (sic)," Congress' national spokesperson Manish Tewari said in a tweet on Thursday.

<https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/why-not-counter-chinas-watching-kashmir-remark-with-we-are-watching-south-china-sea-congress-asks-govt/501971>

10 October 2019: South China Sea crisis: Will Trump's Middle East policy hand control to Beijing?

Donald Trump has received widespread criticism after withdrawing troops from northern Syria and therefore giving Turkey free reign to attack Kurdish forces, and this has left a crucial South China Sea ally baffled, potentially causing a rift that could benefit China in the region.

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1188969/south-china-sea-trump-syria-policy-china-australia-spt>

9 October 2019: American troops begin annual military exercise with Philippine, Japan forces

More than 2,000 U.S. and Philippine military personnel, along with a small contingent of Japanese forces, began annual combat exercises on Wednesday aimed at responding rapidly to crises and natural disasters and underscoring their commitment to keep the region "free and open.

<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2019/10/09/american-troops-begin-annual-military-exercise-with-philippine-japan-forces/>

9 October 2019: PH says war games with US, Japan ‘not related to South China Sea’ dispute

The annual Kamandag, which also stands for “Kaagapay Ng Mga Mandirigma Ng Dagat,” or “Cooperation of Warriors of the Sea,” kicked off on Wednesday in Subic Bay. <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/180925/ph-says-war-games-with-us-japan-not-related-to-south-china-sea-dispute>

9 October 2019: South China Sea: Russia interested in Philippine 'power' in blow to China's dominance

Russia and the Philippines look set to conclude a monumental infrastructure project according to reports. President Rodrigo Duterte recently travelled to Russia where he met with senior Russian officials. Following the visit, Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez III announced that Moscow was very interested in agreeing on an energy partnership in a huge blow to China's dominance in the region. Mr Dominguez said: "You have to remember that we don't have a big relationship with Russia, and I think that the trip of the President opened the avenues for increased contact with Russians." <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1188250/south-china-sea-news-world-war-3-Russia-Philippines-China-oil-Putin-Duterte>

8 October 2019: South China Sea: US Navy puts on major show of force in region as tensions hot up

The US Navy confirmed on Sunday that it had staged “high-end war fighting exercises” in the South China Sea together with the Indian and Japanese navies. The exercises were meant to send a clear message to China, which has increasingly been involved in multiple territorial disputes with its smaller neighbours in the region. The joint exercises involved ships from the US 7th fleet and included maritime strike operations, air defence and anti-submarine warfare operations. Rear Admiral George Wikoff, commander of the Task Force 70 told reporters that “our operations in the Indo-Pacific are focused on maintaining regional stability and security”. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1187766/south-china-sea-world-war-3-China-US-navy-India-Japan-Philippines-Duterte>

8 October 2019: Philippines’ hopes for South China Sea exploration deal with Russia depends on Moscow’s ties to China, experts say

The Philippines is following Vietnam in courting Russia as an oil and gas exploration partner in the South China Sea, where China also lays claim to the waters. Observers said that while relations with Beijing are high on President Vladimir Putin’s agenda as part of his pivot to the East policy, Russia is unlikely to upset China. In a move that may further complicate the situation in one of the world’s busiest and most resource-rich waterways, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines urged Russia’s state oil giant Rosneft to consider oil and gas exploration deal in the South China Sea. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3031872/philippines-hopes-south-china-sea-exploration-deal-russia>

30 September 2019: Did Chinese Warships Surround USS Ronald Reagan in The South China Sea?

A user of the social media site Sina Weibo, the Chinese version of Twitter, has published a satellite image that appears to show U.S. aircraft carrier, the USS Ronald Reagan, surrounded by at least seven Chinese warships. Normally, U.S. carriers are escorted by other warships in a carrier battle group that will include guided-missile cruisers, destroyers, frigates, a supply ship and even a couple of submarines. This image shows that the USS Ronald Reagan was alone near the contested waters of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

<https://www.ibtimes.com/did-chinese-warships-surround-uss-ronald-reagan-south-china-sea-2836369>