

**SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.79**  
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**ACTS OF CLAIMANTS**

**26 February 2020: Narendra Modi joins Donald Trump to oppose China's bid to tweak South China Sea code in its favour**

India has joined the United States to oppose China's move to tweak the proposed Code of Conduct on the South China Sea in order to keep its rivals and other nations outside the region away from the disputed waters. The United States has endorsed India as the net provider of security in the Indian Ocean region, where China has been trying to spread its tentacles over the past few years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and American President Donald Trump also sent out a message to China, underscoring in a joint statement that a close partnership between their two nations was "central to a free, open, inclusive, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region".

<https://www.deccanherald.com/national/narendra-modi-joins-donald-trump-to-oppose-china-s-bid-to-tweak-south-china-sea-code-in-its-favour-808240.html>

**24 February 2020: LOOK: PH Air Force sends 3 jet trainers for patrol duty in West Philippine Sea**

Three trainer AS-211 aircraft were deployed to Palawan on Monday to increase maritime patrols in the West Philippine Sea. The jet trainers were expected to support the Philippine military's Western Command in its mission to protect Philippine territorial integrity in its jurisdiction, which included the West Philippine Sea.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/185592/look-ph-air-force-sends-3-jet-trainers-for-patrol-duty-in-west-philippine-sea#ixzz6F7G29bGC>

**24 February 2020: How Vietnam is using fishing trawlers to keep an eye on China's military**

Vietnamese trawlers – some with militia on board – are intruding repeatedly into Chinese waters near the southern island of Hainan as Hanoi steps up its presence in the South China Sea, according to Chinese diplomatic observers. At least 34 Vietnamese boats sailed near Hainan between January 19 and January 31, with most of the vessels going within the 12 nautical mile territorial limit, the South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative, a think tank at Peking University, said in a report released this month. Thirty of the vessels gathered "peculiarly" on the southeast side of the island, particularly near the coast of Sanya and Lingshui, the think tank said, citing automatic identification system data used for maritime monitoring.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3051962/how-vietnam-using-fishing-trawlers-keep-eye-chinas-military>

**22 February 2020: Malaysia, China and Vietnam in 'dangerous, ongoing game of chicken' in South China Sea**

A fresh stand-off over energy exploration in the disputed South China Sea that involves Malaysia, China and Vietnam has been brewing for weeks out of the public eye, a Washington-based think tank said on Saturday, as it questioned why the two smaller countries were confronting each instead of putting up a united front against Beijing.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3051889/malaysia-china-and-vietnam-dangerous-ongoing-game-chicken-south>

### **21 February 2020: Palace says Duterte not keen on new military pacts: ‘Not even with China**

President Rodrigo Duterte is not interested in forging military alliances with other countries following his decision to abrogate the Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States, Malacañang said Friday. Reporters later asked Panelo if Duterte would want a military pact with Asian power China. Panelo said, “Not even.” He reiterated that Duterte wanted to strengthen the country’s defense capabilities instead.

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/726841/palace-says-duterte-not-keen-on-new-military-pacts-not-even-with-china/story/>

### **20 February 2020: Defense chief confirms ‘intermittent’ presence of Chinese ships near Pag-asa Island**

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana confirmed that Chinese ships have been present near Pag-asa Island, one of the biggest islands occupied by the Philippines in the disputed Spratlys in the South China Sea. “There were presence there intermittently but varying in numbers,” Lorenzana said in a text message shared Thursday to Defense reporters.

[https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/2/20/Delfin-Lorenzana-Chinese-ships-Pag-asa-Island.html?fbclid=IwAR3PDCckDtIXM\\_-RgfV6kV8GhRKABpjvgktyEj8kLatGYdCr6hrPt0qXL\\_U](https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/2/20/Delfin-Lorenzana-Chinese-ships-Pag-asa-Island.html?fbclid=IwAR3PDCckDtIXM_-RgfV6kV8GhRKABpjvgktyEj8kLatGYdCr6hrPt0qXL_U)

### **16 February 2020: Malaysia seeks pact to stop illegal fishing by Vietnamese**

Malaysia intends to enter into an agreement with Vietnam to overcome encroachment of deep-sea fishermen from the republic into the country’s territorial waters, said Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah.

<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2020/02/16/malaysia-seeks-pact-to-stop-illegal-fishing-by-vietnamese/>

### **13 February 2020: Manila’s termination of military pact will upset US meddling in South China Sea**

The termination of the pact will to some extent influence the political mutual trust between the two countries. The US-Philippine alliance has been maintained since the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1951. Although the US hasn't made a high-profile response to the Duterte administration's rhetoric and moves, the termination of the VFA will surely undermine bilateral ties. The termination of the agreement will also have a substantial impact on US-Philippine military cooperation. Without the accord, it remains unclear how the US will engage in conventional military cooperation with the Philippines, and whether and how the US will send troops to this Southeast Asian country. The impact on US-Philippine military cooperation will affect the situation in the South China Sea. Washington has repeatedly meddled in regional affairs through various means, such as sending its warships to conduct so-called freedom of navigation operation, and joint military exercises with other claimants, including Vietnam. Without the VFA, US interference with the South China Sea will be constrained. The scrapping of the deal will also impair the US' Indo-Pacific Strategy. The key countries involved are

Japan, India, and Australia, and the nixing of the agreement in the Philippines will not fundamentally strike a blow to the strategy, yet, the end of the VFA will impact US strategy in the South China Sea, and thus complicate its Indo-Pacific Strategy.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1179439.shtml>

### **11 February 2020: Philippines officially terminates VFA with US**

Abrogating the agreement would mean the departure of US special forces and training teams and potentially the end of intelligence sharing - a blow in the fight against Islamist radicals. That, in turn, could impact on Australia as a partner in that fight and neighbour. But we wouldn't just lose out in the fight against terrorism. Cancelling the agreement, even if the US-Philippines Mutual Defence Treaty remains in place, would have major implications for strategic balance in the region. In the great power contest underway throughout south-east Asia, Australia's preeminent ally, the US, will have lost one of its regional strategic footholds - and China will be the beneficiary.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/185186/fwd-breaking-philippines-officially-terminates-vfa-with-us#ixzz6DddGW7jJ>

### **10 February 2020: Chinese warplanes make second Taiwan incursion in space of two days**

Taiwan sent warplanes to intercept a group of mainland Chinese jets that had briefly approached the island on Monday, the second such incident in two days. The incident came as the island's vice-president-designate William Lai Ching-te concluded an eight-day visit to the US that had angered Beijing. The mainland warplanes, including H-6 bombers, briefly crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait on their way to the western Pacific through the Bashi Channel in the morning for long-haul training exercises, Taiwan's defence ministry said in a statement on Monday. "Our air force scrambled fighter jets to shadow, intercept and disperse the communist warplanes through radio broadcasting," the ministry said, adding the mainland planes later left the area.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3049884/chinese-warplanes-make-second-taiwan-incursion-space-two-days>

### **10 February 2020: As fate of VFA hangs, PH and US forces take to the skies for exercise**

As the future of the country's Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the United States hangs, Philippine and American forces have been discreetly training at a military base northwest of Manila, striving to keep their alliance afloat despite threats to sink it.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/185120/as-fate-of-vfa-hangs-ph-and-us-forces-take-to-the-skies-for-exercise#ixzz6DWE80ZGq>

### **9 February 2020: China sends military aircraft to circle half of Taiwan**

China deployed its military aircraft on Sunday morning (Feb. 9) to the West Pacific by circling half of Taiwan, said the island nation's Ministry of National Defense in the afternoon, adding that the authorities had responded immediately and appropriately to the Chinese military activity.

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3873812>

### **8 February 2020: Japan urges ASEAN, Malaysia to make firm stand on South China Sea**

Making the call, Japan's former deputy foreign minister Hitoshi Tanaka said that "Silence could no longer be golden" and it is high time ASEAN countries, as stakeholders, put their foot down courageously. "Japan has great concerns over developments and tensions in the South and even North China Sea, as it can have severe repercussions for maritime nations in the region. "Hence, Japan is committed towards the well-being of ASEAN which has the potential to be in the 'driver's seat' in the region even though the countries in the pact are not as economically or militarily strong as the larger aggressor nations. "Someone needs to remind the super powers to pay greater attention to ASEAN which has a strategic role in ensuring peace and stability in the SCS and Pacific," said Tanaka, who is now the Institute for International Strategy chairman at the Japan Research Institute Limited.

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/02/563674/japan-urges-asean-malaysia-make-firm-stand-south-china-sea>

### **7 February 2020: Philippines signs deal with Japanese firm for 2 patrol ships**

Japanese shipbuilder Mitsubishi Shipbuilding Co. Ltd. has signed a P6.7 billion (JPY 14.5-B) deal to build two 94-meter patrol ships for the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), in a bid to beef up its maritime capabilities. "These new assets will further boost the capabilities of the PCG in responding to offshore and coastal maritime incidents," said PCG spokesperson Capt. Arman Balilo.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1225749/philippines-signs-deal-with-japanese-firm-for-2-patrol-ships#ixzz6DbY1pT9X>

### **7 February 2020: Coronavirus, South China Sea politics fuel anti-Chinese sentiment in the Philippines**

The situation is complicated because the Philippine government has two different problems: the virus, and the racist backlash arising from the fact the virus originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Making things worse, critics of President Rodrigo Duterte's administration see the coronavirus as an opportunity to flay the government for its perceived cosiness with Beijing.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3049567/coronavirus-south-china-sea-politics-fuel-anti-chinese-sentiment>

### **7 February 2020: Indonesia risks creating internal rifts among South China Sea fishermen in its efforts to ward off China**

Local Natuna fishermen have rejected the government's plan to send more fishermen from other areas of the country. Fishermen from Java with better-equipped boats and more modern fishing equipment have the commercial advantage. Natuna fishermen fear being entirely squeezed out of their local market and waters. Local fishermen also fear that the larger vessels and their fishing methods will cause lasting damage to the ecosystem. Java fishers use trawlers, which are known to cause harm to the marine environment by damaging seafloors, coral reefs, and catching juvenile fish, which can lead to overfishing.

<https://www.aseantoday.com/2020/02/indonesia-risks-creating-internal-rifts-among-south-china-sea-fishermen-in-its-efforts-to-ward-off-china/>

**6 February 2020: Philippines vulnerable in South China Sea without US support, foreign secretary Locsin warns**

The Philippine foreign secretary on Thursday warned that President Rodrigo Duterte's threat to abandon a security accord with the US would undermine his country's security and foster aggression in the disputed South China Sea.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3049389/philippines-vulnerable-south-china-sea-without-us-support>

**3 February 2020: PH will show flag 'at all times' in West Philippine Sea – Navy chief**

Rear Adm. Giovanni Carlo Bacordo, who took the helm of the Philippine Navy on Monday, said that they would continue to establish their presence in the West Philippine Sea, which refers to the part of the South China Sea that is claimed by the Philippines. "We will continue to maintain the nine occupied features in the West Philippine Sea. We will continue to replenish and rotate our personnel in the West Philippine Sea," he told reporters after the change of command ceremony. "At all times, we will show the flag in the West Philippine Sea," he said.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/184815/ph-will-show-flag-at-all-times-in-west-philippine-sea-navy-chief#ixzz6D4Wtrfb3>

**1 February 2020: China Coast Guard entering foreign waters via artificial islands**

China is now capitalizing on its artificial island military bases in the West Philippine Sea to advance its massive maritime and territorial claims deeper into Indonesian, Malaysian and Brunei waters in the South China Sea, a US-based think tank reported.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/02/01/1989515/china-coast-guard-entering-foreign-waters-artificial-islands>

**ASEAN AND SOUTH CHINA SEA**

**4 February 2020: Five ASEAN leaders to attend 'olive branch' summit with US**

Leaders from Vietnam, Laos, Singapore, Cambodia and Thailand will attend a summit between the U.S. and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations next month, diplomatic sources told Nikkei.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Five-ASEAN-leaders-to-attend-olive-branch-summit-with-US>

**OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA**

**28 February 2020: US says Chinese warship fired military laser at US aircraft**

A Chinese destroyer pointed a laser at an American maritime patrol aircraft over the western Pacific Ocean last week, the US Navy said, calling the incident "unsafe and unprofessional". The US Pacific Fleet said in a statement on Friday that the destroyer targeted the P-8A Poseidon aircraft as it flew over international waters about 610km (380 miles) west of Guam on February 17.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3052852/us-navy-says-chinese-warship-pointed-laser-patrol-aircraft-near>

**17 February 2020: Ahead of Trump's visit, Navy warship takes fuel supplies from US ship near South China Sea**

Ahead of US President Donald Trump's visit to India, an Indian Navy warship was seen taking fuel supplies from US Navy warship near the South China Sea during a recent overseas deployment where the Indian fleet travelled to ports in countries including Japan, Indonesia and Philippines, according to Indian Navy sources.

<https://aninews.in/news/national/general-news/ahead-of-trumps-visit-navy-warship-takes-fuel-supplies-from-us-ship-near-south-china-sea20200217192023/>

**16 February 2020: Ending Philippines-US military pact will affect South China Sea disputes: analysts**

After years of threatening to abandon the Philippines' military alliance with the United States, President Rodrigo Duterte last week confirmed plans to terminate the agreement governing the presence of American troops, a key part of one of Southeast Asia's major security partnerships. The announcement was widely interpreted as an attempt by Duterte to extract concessions from Washington, which regards military cooperation with Manila as crucial to countering Beijing's activities in the South China Sea. US President Donald Trump, however, told reporters he had no concerns about the treaty being scrapped. "I really don't mind, if they would like to do that," Trump said on Wednesday. "We'll save a lot of money."

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3050833/ending-philippines-us-military-pact-will-affect-south-china-sea>

**16 February 2020: U.S. identifies warship that sailed through Taiwan Strait Saturday**

The U.S. warship that sailed through the Taiwan Strait on Saturday has been identified as the USS Chancellorsville, according to a Facebook post by the U.S. Seventh Fleet late Saturday. The post released on the U.S. Seventh Fleet's Facebook page reads, "the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Chancellorsville CG-62 conducts normal underway operations transiting from the East China Sea to the South China Sea." The post also has four photographs showing the warship and its crew.

<https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202002160010>

**16 February 2020: 'South China Sea should not become proxy warzone for superpowers'**

Malaysia has called on Western superpowers to play their role in maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea and not bring Middle East-like proxy wars to Asia. Defence Minister Mohamad Sabu called on the United States and European nations to engage in discussions to maintain peace in the Southeast Asian region. He said despite Russia's weak economy, the superpower nevertheless possesses various weapons, including a new generation of missiles.

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/02/566045/south-china-sea-should-not-become-proxy-warzone-superpowers>



**15 February 2020: Nations to build trust and confidence and find solutions to solve South China Sea conflict: Ng Eng Hen**

Countries should build trust and confidence and support diplomatic efforts to find solutions to the conflicting and overlapping claims in the South China Sea, Minister for Defence Ng Eng Hen said on Friday (Feb 14) at a security conference in Munich, Germany.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/nations-to-build-trust-and-confidence-and-find-solutions-to-solve-south-china-sea-conflict>

**14 February 2020: US admiral warns Beijing is willing to punish Australia economically**

The leader of the US military's Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Philip Davidson, said Australia was right to be concerned about the possibility of a Chinese military base in the Pacific region. Addressing the Lowy Institute, Admiral Davidson used Australia as an example of China's willingness to take retribution against economic partners that criticise Beijing. "Beijing has shown a willingness to intervene in free markets and to hurt Australian companies simply because the Australian Government has exercised its sovereign right to protect its national security," Admiral Davidson said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-14/us-admiral-warns-beijing-is-willing-to-punish-australia/11964104>

**12 February 2020: Taiwan Says U.S. Flies Bombers Near Island After China's Drills**

Three U.S. Air Force planes, including two B-52 bombers, flew near Taiwan on Wednesday, the island's defense ministry said, after Taiwan's air force scrambled earlier in the week to intercept Chinese jets.

<https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2020/02/12/world/asia/12reuters-taiwan-china-usa.html>

**12 February 2020: An end to the US-Philippines military agreement is bad news for Australia**

Abrogating the agreement would mean the departure of US special forces and training teams and potentially the end of intelligence sharing - a blow in the fight against Islamist radicals. That, in turn, could impact on Australia as a partner in that fight and neighbour. But we wouldn't just lose out in the fight against terrorism. Cancelling the agreement, even if the US-Philippines Mutual Defence Treaty remains in place, would have major implications for strategic balance in the region. In the great power contest underway throughout south-east Asia, Australia's preeminent ally, the US, will have lost one of its regional strategic footholds - and China will be the beneficiary.

<https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/an-end-to-the-us-philippines-military-agreement-is-bad-news-for-australia-20200211-p53zup.html>

**8 February 2020: Scary reality: China's secret Cambodian military base**

It's supposed to be an international airport. It's supposed to be part of a large-scale holiday resort on a pristine piece of Cambodian coastline. But it's not. Some 45,000 hectares of an unspoilt national park is being ripped up to build it. Deep-water channels

are being dredged through the clear waters. Little wonder the Koh Kong Beachside Resort has failed to attract visitors to its casino and hotel facilities.

<https://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/military/scary-reality-chinas-secret-cambodian-military-base/news-story/59908e35b8865375e6ca7a55c20fea0c>

### **5 February 2020: Canadian envoy to China grilled by opposition MPs over past business ties to Beijing**

Canada's ambassador to China faced tough grilling from opposition MPs on Wednesday night over his role as the head of an international consulting company that has close ties to Beijing and advised a Chinese state-owned firm that was involved in building militarized islands in the South China Sea.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canadian-envoy-to-china-grilled-by-opposition-mps-over-past-business/>

### **1 February 2020: Japan envoy slams militarisation of South China Sea**

Making clear his country's unease with Chinese military assertiveness in the South China Sea without naming Beijing, Japanese deputy chief of mission in New Delhi, Toshihide Ando, has said Japan "remains seriously concerned about the situation on the ground attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo and militarisation of disputed features", adding that Japan "considers India as an indispensable strategic partner to work hand-in-hand to realise a free and open Indo-Pacific.

<https://www.asianage.com/india/all-india/010220/japan-envoy-slams-militarisation-of-south-china-sea.html>