

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 81
April 2020

ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

28 April 2020: China Says PLA Scrambled Aircraft, Ships to ‘Expel’ U.S. Warship from South China Sea Island Chain

Chinese authorities said they sortied ships and aircraft to “track, monitor, verify, identify and expel” a U.S. warship from the Paracel Island chain in the South China Sea on Tuesday, People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officials said on Chinese social media. Navy officials confirmed to USNI News that guided-missile destroyer USS Barry (DDG-52) conducted a freedom of navigation operation in the vicinity of the island chain off Vietnam. “These provocative acts by the U.S. side ... have seriously violated China’s sovereignty and security interests, deliberately increased regional security risks and could easily trigger an unexpected incident,” reads a statement from PLA Southern Theatre Command spokesman Li Huamin, reported the South China Morning Post. Barry’s FONOP was “incompatible with the current atmosphere as the international community is fighting pandemic ... as well as the regional peace and stability.”

<https://news.usni.org/2020/04/28/china-says-pla-scrambled-aircraft-ships-to-expel-u-s-warship-from-south-china-sea-island-chain>

27 April 2020: Beijing seeks boost for armed police, coastguard as tensions rise in South China Sea

China is moving to boost the power of its armed police and the role of its coastguard in maritime law enforcement at a time of renewed tensions with its neighbours in the South China Sea. A draft law revision submitted to the country’s top legislature on Sunday proposes changes including centralising command of the People’s Armed Police and giving it more resources, state news agency Xinhua reported. It also specifies punishment for anyone who obstructs armed police officers carrying out law enforcement, the report said, without elaborating. China’s 1.5 million-strong armed police is a paramilitary force mainly responsible for internal security, riot control, anti-terrorism, law enforcement and protecting maritime rights. The country’s coastguard, whose vessels are increasingly seen in the disputed waters of the South China Sea, is controlled by the armed police.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3081789/beijing-seeks-boost-armed-police-coastguard-tensions-rise-south>

27 April 2020: Taiwan test fires cruise missile capable of reaching central China

Taiwan has reportedly test-fired a new missile capable of striking targets within inner China, which will soon enter mass production. The National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST) is said to have fired a slew of medium-range missiles and rockets earlier this month at the Jiupeng military base in Pingtung, the southernmost county of Taiwan, wrote UDN. The tests are believed to have included the Yun Feng missile, a supersonic land-attack cruise missile that has a range of 1,500 kilometers, according to the UDN article. The missile, fitted with a ramjet engine, can carry a semi-armor piercing high explosive and fragmentation warhead.

https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3923516?fbclid=IwAR0YQ75Hm-P4ULda0b99K56FddoiMXIG2zsQn_1H4ABT0-EgjWJKQIAMXx0

25 April 2020: Coronavirus song: Filipinos outraged over Chinese embassy's South China Sea 'propaganda video'

A music video the Chinese embassy in Manila says is aimed at celebrating a “new era of partnership” between the Philippines and China amid the coronavirus outbreak was lambasted on Saturday by outraged Filipinos. The video of the song, Iisang Dagat (One Sea), was released on social media by the Chinese embassy on Friday. Since then, it has received at least 65,000 dislike votes and angry reactions by Filipinos who criticised the video's imagery of a sea shared by both countries, contrary to the situation in the disputed South China Sea.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3081557/coronavirus-chinese-embassy-one-sea-friendship-video>

23 April 2020: Palace 'hopeful' China will keep promise of no further reclamation in West Philippine Sea

Asked about the chief executive's response to Chinese structures in the West Philippine Sea, Malacañang said Thursday that it hopes the regional giant that it recently described as our "BFF" will cease any further reclamation activities in the country's waters. In a press briefing on Thursday afternoon, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said that China had promised the Philippines that it will not conduct new reclamation activities in the West Philippine Sea, the portion of the South China Sea within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/04/23/2009307/palace-hopeful-china-will-keep-promise-no-further-reclamation-west-philippine-sea?fbclid=IwAR3m4KINrFR1M2QWn9GdgLjivieRg591vOTmAtij0egQpUhJrUJ-Sg99Ask&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook

23 April 2020: Beijing slams 'certain US politicians' for meddling in South China sea issue

China's Foreign Ministry has accused "certain US politicians" of attempting to interfere in the South China Sea issue, noting that such attempts are doomed to fail. Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang made the statement while speaking to reporters at a daily news briefing in Beijing. The comment comes as Beijing issued a proclamation of sovereignty over dozens of geographical features in the disputed South China Sea. Additionally, the US Navy on Wednesday announced that they had carried out flight operations over the sea for almost a week.

<https://nation.com.pk/23-Apr-2020/beijing-slams-certain-us-politicians-for-meddling-in-south-china-sea-issue>

23 April 2020: Taiwan says Chinese carrier group has ended South China Sea mission

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said on Thursday that a Chinese aircraft carrier group which this month sailed down Taiwan's east coast had ended its mission in the South China Sea on Wednesday. The group, led by China's first carrier to enter service, the Liaoning, is now heading east through the Bashi Channel, which separates Taiwan from the Philippines, the ministry said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-china-southchinasea-taiwan/taiwan-says-chinese-carrier-group-has-ended-south-china-sea-mission-idUSKCN22515N>

23 April 2020: Malaysia calls for peaceful end to months-long South China Sea standoff

Malaysia called on Thursday (April 23) for disputes over the South China Sea to be resolved by peaceful means, amid a standoff between Chinese and Malaysian vessels that a US think tank said had been going on for months. Malaysia also said it remained committed to safeguarding its interests in the South China Sea. "While international law guarantees the freedom of navigation, the presence of warships and vessels in the South China Sea has the potential to increase tensions that in turn may result in miscalculations which may affect peace, security and stability in the region," foreign minister Hishammuddin Hussein said in his first official remarks on the standoff.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-committed-to-safeguarding-its-interests-in-south-china-sea-foreign-minister>

23 April 2020: WESCOM says Chinese warship readied guns vs PH Navy ship in PH territory

A warship of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) readied its guns for firing at a Philippine Navy ship near the Philippine-occupied Rizal (Commodore) Reef in the West Philippine Sea last February, according to a ranking Philippine military official on Thursday (April 23).

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/187078/wescom-says-chinese-warship-readied-guns-vs-ph-navy-ship-in-ph-territory#ixzz6KQRnxn6E>

22 April 2020: PH protests China's aggressive moves in South China Sea during pandemic

Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr on Wednesday, April 22, said the Philippines lodged two formal protests against China's recent moves to assert its claims in the South China Sea. Locsin said two diplomatic protests were filed against China's recent pointing of a radar gun at a Philippine Navy ship in Philippine waters, as well as its declaration that portions of Philippine territory were part of Hainan province. "Both (are) violations of international law and Philippine sovereignty," Locsin tweeted. China had recently announced its creation of two new districts in the South China Sea, which included the Paracel island group near Vietnam and the Spratly island group in the West Philippine Sea. Beijing said the new districts were placed under the control of the Chinese city of Sansha in Hainan province.

https://www.rappler.com/nation/258728-philippines-protests-china-aggressive-expansion-south-china-sea-april-2020?fbclid=IwARIA-j4arzLv_1-Zx4C3f5sFIDo0IF2R4KeQDQgOPsEwGduKisDY8aVdX-U

20 April 2020: China sets up mental health stations for its troops in West Philippine Sea, says report

On April 7, Jiang Chunlei, a psychology professor of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Naval Medical University, went to Fiery Cross (Kagitingan) Reef to provide mental health counseling for soldiers, the Chinese PLA news website said in a report on

Friday (April 17). After the visit, the first batch of mental health service stations was launched in Chinese bases in the Spratly Islands. Each station is equipped with a counseling room, an anger-venting room, and a psychological evaluation room. These are manned by professional psychologists and part-time counselors among Chinese troops, the report said.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/186993/china-sets-up-mental-health-stations-for-its-troops-in-west-philippine-sea-says-report#ixzz6KIjADDUg>

20 April 2020: Beijing marks out claims in South China Sea by naming geographical features

China has given names to 80 geographical features in the disputed South China Sea in the latest move to assert its territorial claims in the face of increasing opposition from Vietnam. According to a notice jointly released by China's Natural Resources Ministry and Civil Affairs Ministry, it has given names to features in the Paracel and Spratly islands. These include 25 islands, shoals and reefs and 55 oceanic mountains and ridges. The last such exercise was carried out in 1983, when China named 287 features in the area, where multiple nations have competing territorial claims.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3080721/beijing-marks-out-claims-south-china-sea-naming-geographical>

19 April 2020: Vietnam denounces China's district formations on Vietnamese islands

Vietnam has strongly protested China's flouting of international laws and violation of Vietnam's sovereignty in forming districts on East Sea archipelagos. The denouncement and condemnation followed news that China was forming the so-called "Xisha District" and "Nansha District" on Vietnam's Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) Islands.

<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-denounces-china-s-district-formations-on-vietnamese-islands-4087093.html>

18 April 2020: Beijing moves to strengthen grip over disputed South China Sea

Beijing has moved to tighten its grip over the South China Sea by setting up new administrative structures in the disputed waters. The two new districts will be under the authority of the local government in Sansha, a city in the southern island of Hainan. The new districts will govern the Paracels and Macclesfield Bank – an area claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan – as well as the Spratly Islands and their adjacent waters, where there are multiple overlapping claims.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3080559/beijing-moves-strengthen-grip-over-disputed-south-china-sea>

18 April 2020: Washington: China should stop 'bullying behavior' in South China Sea

The United States called on China on Saturday to stop "bullying behavior" in the South China Sea and said it was concerned by reports of China's "provocative actions" aimed at offshore oil and gas developments in the disputed waters. Three regional security sources said on Friday that a Chinese government survey ship was tagging an exploration vessel operated by Malaysia's state oil company Petronas in those waters.

<https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/04/18/20/washington-china-should-stop-bullying-behavior-in-south-china-sea>

16 April 2020: Chinese ship seen moving south near Malaysia amid rising South China Sea tensions

A Chinese government survey ship embroiled in a standoff with Vietnamese vessels moved south near Malaysia, shipping data showed Thursday, amid accusations that China is using the pandemic to assert its presence in the South China Sea. The Haiyang Dizhi 8 was spotted off Vietnam this week, returning after being closely tracked last year in the resource-rich waters, a potential global flashpoint as the United States challenges China's sweeping maritime claims.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-china-southchinasea/chinese-ship-seen-moving-south-near-malaysia-amid-rising-south-china-sea-tensions-idUSKCN21Y0GL>

14 April 2020: Chinese ship returns to waters off Vietnam amid virus 'distraction' charges

A Chinese ship embroiled in a standoff with Vietnamese vessels last year has returned to waters near Vietnam as the United States accused China of pushing its presence in the South China Sea while other claimants are pre-occupied with the coronavirus.

<https://whtc.com/news/articles/2020/apr/14/chinese-survey-ship-returns-to-vietnams-exclusive-economic-zone/1006293/?refer-section=world>

14 April 2020: Duterte thanks China for 'COVID-19' support, overlooking recent aggression in South China Sea

President Rodrigo Duterte in his recorded national address late Monday once again thanked Chinese President Xi Jinping for his supposed support to the country amid the pandemic. This, despite the reported activities of Beijing in the disputed South China Sea. The chief executive mentioned that his Chinese counterpart expressed "his full support" to Manila in fighting the novel coronavirus and dismissed the rumors that it was manufactured in a laboratory.

<https://www.interaksyon.com/politics-issues/2020/04/14/166259/duterte-thanks-china-covid-19-support-overlooking-recent-aggression-south-china-sea/>

12 April 2020: Taiwan scrambles warships as PLA Navy aircraft carrier strike group heads for the Pacific

Taiwan scrambled warships on Saturday night to monitor the movements of a mainland Chinese carrier strike group after it was spotted by Japan heading towards the western Pacific. The fleet, led by China's first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, was seen passing through the Miyako Strait near Okinawa, and then turning south, the Japanese Ministry of Defence said. Although the precise location or heading of the group was unknown, the Taiwanese navy scrambled ships from the northeastern port of Suao to monitor the situation, the island's defence ministry said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3079546/taiwan-scrambles-warships-pla-navy-aircraft-carrier-strike>

09 April 2020: China Sends Coast Guard Ship to Scarborough Shoal

China has deployed a Coast Guard patrol ship to the Scarborough Shoal, the latest salvo in its sustained pressure campaign against Philippine-claimed features in the disputed South China Sea, ship-tracking data shows. The China Coast Guard (CCG) ship 3302 was at Scarborough Shoal as of Wednesday. It left the port of Sanya, Hainan province, China, on Sunday.

<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/scarborough-boat-04092020160555.html>

08 April 2020: Sea test this year for China's new 'skiing' plane after coronavirus delay: reports

China is making up for time lost during the coronavirus outbreak by resuming preparations to test its largest amphibious aeroplane, which will be able to cover all of the South China Sea, state media has reported. The prototype of AG600 "Kunlong" amphibious aircraft is being worked on in Jingmen – in the outbreak's initial epicentre of Hubei province – and will have its maiden maritime flight later this year from Zhuhai, neighbouring Hong Kong, China Central Television (CCTV) reported. The project had been suspended for over a month due to the Covid-19 epidemic in Hubei, and the prototype plane was at risk of damage without maintenance. Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) sent a reinforcement team to Hubei in mid-March, during the province's lockdown, to start preparing for tests of the plane, according to CCTV. The developers in AVIC's Hubei subsidiaries have now resumed working at full capacity.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3079044/chinas-new-skiing-plane-have-sea-test-year-after-coronavirus>

08 April 2020: DFA expresses concern over sinking of Vietnamese fishing vessel in South China Sea

The Department of Foreign Affairs expressed "deep concern" over reports that the Chinese Coast Guard rammed and sunk a Vietnamese fishing vessel last week in the South China Sea, warning that such incidents undermine relations between Southeast Asian nations and Beijing. "Given the positive momentum on the discussions on a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, it is crucial that such incidents be avoided and that differences be addressed in a manner that enhances dialogue and mutual trust," the department said in a statement Wednesday.

<https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/4/8/Philippines-Vietnam-fishing-boat-sinking.html>

08 April 2020: China urges U.S. not to associate South China Sea issues with COVID-19 pandemic

China reiterated its legitimate claim to the South China Sea Tuesday, condemning the U.S. for associating the issue with the COVID-19 pandemic, Zhao Lijian, spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry told reporters. The remarks came after the United States accused China of exploiting the global coronavirus pandemic to further expand its "unlawful claims" in the South China Sea.

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-07/China-urges-U-S-not-to-associate-South-China-Sea-with-pandemic-PuQW67wI1y/index.html>

06 April 2020: PH Coast Guard's biggest ship arriving April 7

The Philippine Coast Guard said its biggest ship, the offshore patrol vessel (OPV) BRP Gabriela Silang, will arrive on Tuesday (April 7). The 83.6 meter OPV, built by French shipbuilder OCEA, was supposed to arrive in the Philippines in January. While en route to Manila, it was diverted to Malta to provide assistance to Filipinos in the Middle East who wanted to be repatriated. The Philippines and OCEA signed the contract for the OPV worth P5.6 billion in 2014. PCG earlier received four fast patrol boats as part of the project.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/186628/ph-coast-guards-biggest-ship-arriving-april-7#ixzz6IqNFwKf8>

06 April 2020: Kalayaan, Batanes remain free of COVID-19 worries

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Palawan, Philippines — The Kalayaan Group of Islands in Palawan province, the country's last frontier town at the West Philippine Sea, and Batanes, its northernmost province, are still undisturbed by the threat of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that has been plaguing the world.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1254333/kalayaan-batanes-remain-free-of-covid-19-worries>

04 April 2020: Chinese research vessel returns to Hainan's Sanya after expedition

The research vessel Tanso-1 returned to Sanya's port on April 2 following an expedition to the South China Sea, according to China Central Television (CCTV). During the expedition, the manned bathyscaphe "Shanghai Yunshi" ("Deep Warrior"), which is able to study resources, flora and fauna with immersion up to 4.5 km below sea level, performed a number of scientific research tasks. One of the mission's discoveries, which was supported the Chinese Academy of Sciences, was the discovery of whale remains about three meters long at a depth of 1,600 meters. This is the first such discovery made in the South China Sea.

<https://tass.com/science/1140849>

03 April 2020: Chinese ship, Vietnamese fishing boat collide in South China Sea

A Vietnamese fishing boat with eight crew members on board was sunk after being hit by a Chinese ship near the disputed Paracel Islands, local authorities said on Friday, a move that may increase tension in the South China Sea. "This is the first time a Chinese ship has hit and sunk boats in our commune this year," said Nguyen Van Hai, a local official from the Quang Ngai province, a few hundred kilometres from the Paracel Islands.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3078286/chinese-ship-hits-and-sinks-vietnamese-fishing-boat-south>

01 April 2020: China Coast Guard Patrols Near Philippine-Occupied Second Thomas Shoal

A China Coast Guard ship that was deployed during recent pressure campaigns in the South China Sea in Malaysian and Indonesian waters is now patrolling near land features claimed by the Philippines, ship-tracking data shows. The deployment of the ship, which has the call-sign "China coastguard 5302," near the Philippine-occupied Second Thomas Shoal and two other features claimed by Manila underscores China's willingness to press

its expansive territorial claims, despite a diplomatic détente with the Southeast Asian nation. It also comes as China provides medical aid to the Philippines to help combat the coronavirus.

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/coastguard-shoal-04012020192136.html>

31 March 2020: China Chases Indonesia ‘s Fishing Fleets, Staking Claim to Sea’s Riches

Dedi knows where the fish run strongest in Indonesian waters off the Natuna islands. The Chinese know, too. Backed by armed Chinese Coast Guard ships, Chinese fishing fleets have been raiding the rich waters of the South China Sea that are internationally recognized as exclusively Indonesia’s to fish. While Mr. Dedi catches the traditional way, with nets and lines, the steel Chinese trawlers scrape the bottom of the sea, destroying other marine life. So not only does the Chinese trawling breach maritime borders, it also leaves a lifeless seascape in its wake. “They come into our waters and kill everything,” said Mr. Dedi, who like many Indonesians goes by a single name. “I don’t understand why our government doesn’t protect us.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/31/world/asia/Indonesia-south-china-sea-fishing.html>

ASEAN AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

23 April 2020: Mike Pompeo Accuses China of Pushing Territorial Ambitions Amid Coronavirus Pandemic

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told his Southeast Asian counterparts on Thursday that China is taking advantage of the world’s preoccupation with the coronavirus pandemic to push its territorial ambitions in the South China Sea. Pompeo made the accusation in a meeting via video to discuss the outbreak with the foreign ministers of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations. “Beijing has moved to take advantage of the distraction, from China’s new unilateral announcement of administrative districts over disputed islands and maritime areas in the South China Sea, its sinking of a Vietnamese fishing vessel earlier this month, and its ‘research stations’ on Fiery Cross Reef and Subi Reef,” Pompeo said. Most other participants focused in their statements on health, economic and social problems resulting from COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus.

<https://time.com/5826202/mike-pompeo-south-china-sea-coronavirus/>

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

30 April 2020: B-1s conduct South China Sea mission, demonstrates global presence

Two U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancers from the 28th Bomb Wing, Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D. flew a 32-hour round-trip sortie to conduct operations over the South China Sea as part of a joint U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) Bomber Task Force (BTF) mission April 29, 2020.

<https://www.stratcom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2170523/b-1s-conduct-south-china-sea-mission-demonstrates-global-presence/>

30 April 2020: US Navy stages back-to-back challenges to Beijing's South China Sea claims

A United States Navy warship conducted a "freedom of navigation operation" Wednesday aimed in part at challenging China's claims in the South China Sea, the second such operation in as many days near disputed islands that the US has accused Beijing of militarizing. The operations come amid heightened tension between Washington and Beijing over the handling of the coronavirus and after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused China of exploiting attention given the pandemic to "bully" its neighbors in the South China Sea (SCS). The guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill on Wednesday "asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the Spratly Islands, consistent with international law," said Cmdr. Reann Mommsen, a spokesperson for the Navy's 7th Fleet, in a statement.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/30/asia/south-china-sea-us-navy-freedom-of-navigation-intl-hnk/index.html>

27 April 2020: US praises Aust warship in South China Sea

The US Navy has heaped praise on the Royal Australian Navy for taking part in South China Sea exercises that show allies in the region both nations have the "same interest in ensuring freedom of navigation".

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6735768/us-praises-aust-warship-in-south-china-sea/?cs=14264>

24 April 2020: U.S. warship sails through Taiwan Strait, second time in a month

A U.S. warship has sailed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait for the second time in a month, Taiwanese and U.S. militaries said on Friday, amid heightened tensions between Taiwan and China and as a Chinese aircraft carrier passes near the island.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-security-usa/us-warship-sails-through-taiwan-strait-second-time-in-a-month-idUSKCN22600S>

23 April 2020: Marise Payne condemns Beijing's actions in the South China Sea

In her first comments on China's latest moves in the disputed waterway, Senator Payne said Australia was concerned about "a number of recent incidents and actions" in the South China Sea. She said this included "reported efforts to disrupt other countries' resource development activities, the declaration of new 'administrative districts' over disputed features, and the sinking of a Vietnamese fishing boat, reportedly in a collision with a Chinese coast guard vessel". While not directly laying the blame on Beijing and insisting Australia did not take sides in the disputes, Senator Payne said Australia had a "strong interest in the stability of this crucial waterway and the norms and laws that govern it". "Australia urges all states to adhere to international law, particularly the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and to uphold freedom of navigation and overflight," she said. "It is vital at this time that all parties refrain from destabilising activities and work to ease tensions so the international community can devote full attention to responding cooperatively to the COVID-19 pandemic."

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/marise-payne-lashes-beijing-s-actions-in-the-south-china-sea-20200423-p54mfe.html>

22 April 2020: Japan lodges protest against Chinese maritime intrusions near Senkakus

Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi lodged a protest Tuesday against China sending its government ships into Japanese territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. Chinese ships have intruded in waters near the Japanese-controlled islets seven times this year, most recently last Friday when four coast guard vessels sailed through the area for about 90 minutes before leaving. China calls the islets Diaoyu and claims them as its own.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/04/22/national/japan-protest-chinese-intrusions-senkakus/#.XqESOWgzaUk>

22 April 2020: South China Sea tensions rise as Australian frigate exercises with US warships

In a tweet published early on Wednesday morning, the US Navy confirmed three of its warships had transited the South China Sea "in support of security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region". The Defence Department said "over the past few days", the ANZAC-class frigate exercised with the US ships as they passed through the contested region. "HMAS Parramatta has been undertaking an extended deployment throughout South and South-East Asia for the last two months, to help strengthen the stability and security of the region," a Defence spokesperson said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-22/tensions-rise-in-south-china-sea-after-us-australia-exercises/12171806?fbclid=IwAR29SPIVKKt7eIECKZLHKeMWtftoBbA2ykqh9Vgt9xmTFkptabKc5B18eo0>

21 April 2020: Two U.S. warships in South China Sea amid China-Malaysia standoff

Two U.S. warships are operating in the South China Sea, the Navy said on Tuesday, with three regional security sources saying they were near an area of a standoff between China and Malaysia. The USS America amphibious assault ship and the USS Bunker Hill, a guided missile cruiser, have been deployed and were operating in the South China Sea, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command spokeswoman Nicole Schwegman said on Tuesday. "Through our continued operational presence in the South China Sea, we are working ... to promote freedom of navigation and overflight, and the international principles that underpin security and prosperity for the Indo-Pacific," Schwegman said in an emailed statement to Reuters.

https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-china-security-malaysia-idUKKBN2230J4?fbclid=IwAR1T1Mc_R8FG3S6NzeqPQo-hDYX6bYN7V0_AsvGzmEE554i6lpOE02AooHU

20 April 2020: USS America conducts massive flight operations in South China Sea

The Sailors and Marines assigned to amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6) conduct massive flight operations in the South China Sea. An F-35B Lightning II fighter aircraft, MV-22B Osprey and CH-53E Super Stallion assigned to the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, Marine Medium Tiltrotor (VMM) 265 (Reinforced) conducted flight operations during naval operations in support of U.S. national interests in the Indo-Pacific

area of operations. America, with the embarked 31st MEU and VMM 265 Reinforced is conducting operations in the South China Sea after completing Exercise Cobra Gold in the Kingdom of Thailand, March 7.

<https://defence-blog.com/news/uss-america-conducts-massive-flight-operations-in-south-china-sea.html>

18 April 2020: US military plane flies near Taiwan

A US military reconnaissance plane was reported flying close to the nation's southern airspace yesterday morning, the ninth time US military aircraft have been observed operating near Taiwan this month. A US RC-135U Combat Sent was operating in the South China Sea, according to a flight chart posted on Twitter yesterday by Aircraft Spots, a military tracker. The Ministry of National Defense did not directly confirm the sighting, except to say that the nation's armed forces closely monitor the surrounding waters and airspace.

<https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/04/18/2003734843>

15 April 2020: US military planes spotted after China sends naval ships past Taiwan

A US military reconnaissance jet was reportedly spotted flying near Taiwan's airspace — the 12th time in the past three weeks that American military planes had been detected near the area.

<https://nypost.com/2020/04/15/us-military-planes-spotted-after-china-sends-ships-past-taiwan/>

11 April 2020: U.S. Navy destroyer transits Taiwan Strait on same day as Chinese drills

A U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer sailed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait on Friday, the U.S. and Taiwan militaries said, the same day that Chinese fighter jets drilled in waters close to the democratically-ruled island.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-security-usa/u-s-navy-destroyer-transits-taiwan-strait-on-same-day-as-chinese-drills-idUSKCN21T02C>

10 April 2020: Risch, Menendez, Gardner, Markey Comment on Chinese Coast Guard's Sinking of a Vietnamese Fishing Boat, Deployment of Military Aircraft in South China Sea

U.S. Senators Jim Risch (R-Idaho) and Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), chairman and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, along with Senators Cory Gardner (R-Colo.) and Ed Markey (D-Mass.), chairman and ranking member of the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy, today released the following statements in response to reports of the Chinese Coast Guard sinking a Vietnamese fishing boat near the Paracel Islands and the deployment of military aircraft in the South China Sea, among other things.

<https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/risch-menendez-gardner-markey-comment-on-chinese-coast-guards-sinking-of-a-vietnamese-fishing-boat-deployment-of-military-aircraft-in-south-china-sea>

9 April 2020: China Coast Guard Sinking of a Vietnam Fishing Vessel

The Department of Defense is greatly concerned by reports of a China Coast Guard vessel's collision with and sinking of a Vietnam fishing vessel in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea.

The PRC's behavior stands in contrast to the United States' vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, in which all nations, large and small, are secure in their sovereignty, free from coercion, and able to pursue economic growth consistent with accepted international rules and norms. The United States will continue to support efforts by our allies and partners to ensure freedom of navigation and economic opportunity throughout the entire Indo-Pacific.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of the rules based international order, as it sets the conditions that enable us to address this shared threat in a way that is transparent, focused, and effective. We call on all parties to refrain from actions that would destabilize the region, distract from the global response to the pandemic, or risk needlessly contributing to loss of life and property.

<https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2143925/china-coast-guard-sinking-of-a-vietnam-fishing-vessel/fbclid/IwAR1p5oa7AwtVh4bTCiDnR-fWz1s5qKOBmQ5RKi22Sj9YgF0Mya1EzYTzA/>

6 April 2020: PRC's Reported Sinking of a Vietnamese Fishing Vessel in the South China Sea

We are seriously concerned by reports of the PRC's sinking of a Vietnamese fishing vessel in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea.

This incident is the latest in a long string of PRC actions to assert unlawful maritime claims and disadvantage its Southeast Asian neighbors in the South China Sea.

Since the outbreak of the global pandemic, Beijing has also announced new "research stations" on military bases it built on Fiery Cross Reef and Subi Reef, and landed special military aircraft on Fiery Cross Reef. The PRC has also continued to deploy maritime militia around the Spratly Islands. China's Nine-Dashed Line was deemed an unlawful maritime claim by an arbitral tribunal convened under the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention in July 2016, a position shared by the U.S. Government.

We call on the PRC to remain focused on supporting international efforts to combat the global pandemic, and to stop exploiting the distraction or vulnerability of other states to expand its unlawful claims in the South China Sea.

<https://www.state.gov/prcs-reported-sinking-of-a-vietnamese-fishing-vessel-in-the-south-china-sea/>

31 March 2020: U.S. military aircraft fly near Taiwan for 4th time this month

United States military aircraft was reported flying near Taiwan's southern airspace Tuesday, marking the fourth time this month a U.S. warplane had been spotted operating near the country. The U.S. Navy P-3C submarine-hunting aircraft was operating in the South China Sea, according to a flight chart posted on Twitter on Tuesday by Aircraft Spots, a military air movement tracker. Asked to comment, Taiwanese military spokesman Shih Shun-wen did not directly confirm the movement, saying only that the nation's armed forces are closely monitoring the country's surrounding waters and airspace.

<https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202003310023>

