

**SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.82**  
**May 2020**

**ACTS OF CLAIMANTS**

**30 May 2020: China's first homegrown aircraft carrier conducting sea trials**

China's Defense Ministry said the navy's only entirely home-built aircraft is carrying out sea trials to test weapons and equipment and enhance training of the crew. Ministry spokesperson Ren Guoqiang said Friday the exercises were being conducted as planned, apparently unaffected by the country's coronavirus outbreak.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/05/30/asia-pacific/china-first-homegrown-aircraft-carrier-military/#.XtOQ1DozaUk>

**29 May 2020: Neighbours reaffirm South China Sea's peace commitment**

The Philippines and Vietnam have reaffirmed their commitment to pursue peace and stability in the South China Sea, Malacanang Palace said. According to a statement by the presidential communications operations office, President Rodrigo Duterte and Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc spoke over the phone on Tuesday evening where they "reiterated their commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes" in the South China Sea.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2020/05/29/neighbours-reaffirm--south-china-seas-peace-commitment>

**28 May 2020: Indonesia rejects China's claims in the South China Sea; says not bound by claims contravening international law**

Indonesia has rejected Chinese claims in the South China Sea in a letter written by Indonesia's permanent mission to the United Nation to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the sea of the body. The letter as seen by WION said, "Indonesia reiterates that the nine-dash line map implying historic rights claim lacks international legal basis and is tantamount to upset UNCLOS 1982".

<https://www.wionews.com/world/indonesia-rejects-chinas-claims-in-the-south-china-sea-says-not-bound-by-claims-contravening-international-law-301513>

**27 May 2020: Palace: PH, Vietnam agree to promote peaceful settlement of disputes in South China Sea**

According to a statement by the Presidential Communications Operations Office, President Duterte and Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc spoke over the phone on Tuesday evening where they "reiterated their commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes" in the South China Sea.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/187993/palace-ph-vietnam-agree-to-promote-peaceful-settlement-of-disputes-in-south-china-sea#ixzz6NkA4OF9I>

**24 May 2020: PLA drill in South China Sea about combat readiness, not seizing Taiwanese islands, experts say**

Aircraft carriers from the PLA Navy are set to take part in combat readiness exercises this summer in the South China Sea, and while the drills are likely to raise concerns in Taipei, their aim is not to seize Taiwan-controlled territory, military observers say.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3085823/pla-drill-south-china-sea-about-combat-readiness-not-seizing>

**22 May 2020: Philippine Defense Chief: Repairs on South China Sea Island Not Yet Finished**

The Philippines has made significant progress in upgrading facilities in an island it controls in contested waters of the South China Sea, but it will “take another year at least” to finish all the construction work, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said Friday  
<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/Thitu-Island-05222020075029.html>

**20 May 2020: Bayer Vietnam CEO Fined Over Disputed South China Sea Map**

Bayer Vietnam Chief Executive Officer Lynette Moey Yu Lin faces a fine of as much as 70 million dong (\$3,007) for including a disputed map of the South China Sea in a document about the novel coronavirus outbreak, according to a post on the Ho Chi Minh City government’s website. The map reflects China’s so-called “nine-dash line” in the South China Sea, according to the post.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-20/bayer-vietnam-ceo-fined-over-disputed-south-china-sea-map>

**19 May 2020: Milestone: PH Navy ship docks on Pag-asa Island for 1st time**

BRP Ivatan (LC-298) docked at the port on the island, which is in the final stages of construction, last May 13, said Lt. Maivi Neri, acting public affairs officer of Naval Forces West. This makes it “the first ever PN vessel that berthed thereat.” She couldn’t say, however, when the beaching ramp would be finished.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/187781/milestone-ph-navy-ship-docks-on-pag-asa-island-for-1st-time#ixzz6MwmMAobv>

**18 May 2020: Discover China: South China islanders guard whales' "dining hall"**

As the tide was still on the ebb at 6 a.m. on Weizhou Island in south China, Chen Mo, a marine biologist, got up, donned a wetsuit and grabbed his sampling tools, rushing to the intertidal zone of the islet's northern coast. At 7:10 a.m., Chen set foot in the shoal, sporting a waterproof camera. "The best time to search for any kind of marine organisms in the intertidal zone is about an hour before the low tide," he said. His research on the marine biodiversity of Weizhou is part of the fundamental works to help conserve Bryde's whales, a member of the baleen whale family that has been recently spotted off Weizhou after decades of absence.

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/18/c\\_139066423.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/18/c_139066423.htm)

**18 May 2020: No indication China able to establish South China Sea ADIZ**

China has previously declared its intention to establish an ADIZ in the disputed South China Sea, which it claims as part of its territory, Lieutenant General Ye Gou-huei (葉國輝), in charge of military operations and planning at the Ministry of National Defense (MND), said at a Legislative session. However, there is no indication Beijing is able to do so, he said, emphasizing that China would have to consider a number of factors before seeking to establish an ADIZ.

<https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202005180016>

**18 May 2020: Malaysia needs to pay attention to increased activities by big powers in the South China Sea: King**

Speaking during his parliamentary address at the Dewan Rakyat, the king said that Malaysia's defence strategy needs to take into account the importance of defence diplomacy, a pragmatic foreign policy, international treaties and its international geopolitical position in the Asia Pacific region. "The increased activities by big powers in the South China Sea recently needs to be paid attention to," he added. "Hence, Malaysia needs to be always sensitive to the maritime domain, while crafting a strategy that supports our geopolitical aspirations," he said.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/malaysia-king-south-china-sea-pay-attention-parliament-12744852>

**15 May 2020: Chinese, Malaysian defense ministers talk over phone on COVID-19 response**

Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister Wei Fenghe on Friday spoke over the phone with Malaysian Defense Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob on epidemic prevention and control. Noting that China has achieved major strategic achievements in containing the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic and made great contributions to the global pandemic response, Wei said the slandering against China by some politicians from certain countries has severely violated international morality and disrupted global anti-virus efforts. Wei said Chinese and Malaysian militaries should actively step up pragmatic cooperation in all fields and join hands in safeguarding regional peace and stability while implementing epidemic control measures.

[https://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/15/c\\_139060404.htm](https://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/15/c_139060404.htm)

**15 May 2020: China Marine Corps on Show in the South China Sea**

On May 5, the PLANMC undertook an anti-piracy exercise near the Paracel Islands that showed off its capabilities to China's neighbors at a time of rising tensions in the region. The exercise simulated covert, amphibious assaults by the PLANMC with fast-moving speedboats and naval aviation aircraft, integrating the corps' operations with the People's Liberation Army Navy.

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/southchinasea-marines-05152020135655.html>

**15 May 2020: Chinese ship leaves M'sian waters after month-long South China Sea standoff**

A Chinese survey ship that had been involved in a month-long standoff with a Malaysian oil exploration vessel in the South China Sea has left Malaysia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), shipping data showed today.

<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/525903>

**15 May 2020: US sails warship near Taiwan ahead of presidential inauguration**

The United States's navy said on Thursday it had sailed a guided-missile destroyer through the sensitive Taiwan Strait, a week before Tsai Ing-wen's inauguration for a second term as president.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/sails-warship-taiwan-presidential-inauguration-200514014830857.html>

### **12 May 2020: Satellites Show Scale Of Suspected Illegal Dredging In South China Sea**

On April 17 the Taiwanese Coast Guard reportedly chased 40 illegal dredging vessels from an area at the northern end of the South China Sea. The above satellite image, taken on April 13, shows this activity. Another image, taken on May 3 confirms that the vessels returned and continued dredging.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/05/12/satellites-show-scale-of-suspected-illegal-dredging-in-south-china-sea/#189e83b34310>

### **12 May 2020: Malaysian oil exploration vessel leaves South China Sea waters after standoff**

An oil exploration vessel contracted by Malaysian state energy company Petronas that was involved in a standoff with a Chinese survey vessel in the South China Sea left the disputed waters on Tuesday, three security sources and the vessel operator said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-security-malaysia/malaysian-oil-exploration-vessel-leaves-south-china-sea-waters-after-standoff-idUSKBN22O1M9>

### **12 May 2020: Chinese military to conduct exercise staging takeover of Taiwan's Pratas islands**

On Monday (May 12) it was reported that China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is planning to conduct a large-scale landing exercise in August in the South China Sea with the aim of one day capturing the Taiwan-controlled Dongsha islands (Pratas Islands, 東沙群島).

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3932533>

### **10 May 2020: Navy maintains West Philippine Sea patrols amid COVID-19 response**

The Philippine Navy on Sunday assured the public that its sailors and marines would continue to secure the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) despite the naval service's commitment to the coronavirus disease 2019(COVID-19) response.

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/737597/navy-maintains-west-philippine-sea-patrols-amid-covid-19-response/story/>

### **7 May 2020: Vietnam weighs South China Sea claim**

Vietnam is reportedly moving closer to launching an international arbitration against China over maritime rights in the South China Sea, as officials in Beijing continue to assert control in the disputed waters. The *Asia Times* reports today that Vietnamese government officials are seriously considering bringing a case against China, like the one launched and later won by the Philippines at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague.

<https://globalarbitrationreview.com.libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/article/1226619/vietnam-weighs-south-china-sea-claim#.XroVeZ-Upys.mailto>

#### **6 May 2020: Air Force, Marines train near China amid heightened tensions**

The Air Force and Marines have both reported engaging in training maneuvers in the East and South China Sea in recent weeks amid escalating tensions in the region. Earlier this week the Pacific Air Forces and U.S. Air Force announced on Twitter that the Air Force had conducted a training mission in the in the East China Sea "in support of the National Defense Strategy objectives of being strategically predictable and operationally unpredictable."

[https://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2020/05/06/Air-Force-Marines-train-near-China-amid-heightened-tensions/2651588786579/?rc\\_fifo=1](https://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2020/05/06/Air-Force-Marines-train-near-China-amid-heightened-tensions/2651588786579/?rc_fifo=1)

#### **5 May 2020: China Coast Guard Increases Presence at Scarborough Shoal**

The China Coast Guard deployed three ships to the Scarborough Shoal on Tuesday, days after China announced a ban on fishing there and at other disputed parts of the South China Sea, ship-tracking software shows. Scarborough Shoal is contested by China and the Philippines. While it is not uncommon for China Coast Guard (CCG) ships to patrol near disputed islands and reefs, the simultaneous presence of three CCG ships at one location often coincides with a more intense pressure campaign or providing an escort for another Chinese mission at sea.

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/coastguard-scarborough-05052020185039.html?fbclid=IwAR0OE3JJBcoONoy9RSMW6xRHCpBfkhDOIdycy7jyv79oMBMCbQq6PLEsA2A>

#### **5 May 2020: China to set up ADIZ in South China Sea**

The Ministry of National Defense (MND) on Monday morning (May 4) confirmed that China is planning to set up an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea. An ADIZ is a country's airspace in which all civilian aircraft must identify themselves and announce their location. The MND clarified Monday night that although China has stated that it would establish an ADIZ in the South China Sea, it has yet to formally announce one. The Philippines' ADIZ is currently the only designated airspace in the disputed region, CNA reported.

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3928503>

#### **4 May 2020: Act of Piracy': China Blasts US Navy Proposal for South China Sea Privateers**

Beijing is crying foul after writers at a US Navy-connected think tank proposed a return to the 18th century, reviving the ancient practice of awarding privateers letters of marque to prey on foreign vessels. The proposal aims to turn the tide in the contested South China Sea against numerically superior Chinese maritime fleets.

<https://sputniknews.com/asia/202005041079196739-act-of-piracy-china-blasts-us-navy-proposal-for-south-china-sea-privateers/>

#### **3 May 2020: Beijing says it opposes 'countries from outside the region' bolstering naval presence in South China Sea**

China's Ministry of National Defense (MND) said on 30 April that it opposes what it referred to as "countries from outside the region" bolstering their naval presence in the South China Sea (SCS), as the US Navy (USN) continues to carry out freedom-of-

navigation operations (FONOPs) and joint exercises with allied navies in the disputed waters. Referring to joint manoeuvres conducted earlier in April by the USN and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), MND spokesperson Senior Colonel Wu Qian said that such actions are "detrimental to peace and stability in the region", and described the United States as "a troublemaker" and "the biggest facilitator of the militarisation of the South China Sea".

<https://www.janes.com/article/95917/beijing-says-it-opposes-countries-from-outside-the-region-bolstering-naval-presence-in-south-china-sea>

### **3 May 2020: China plays divide and rule in South China Sea**

On April 20, an intruding Vietnamese fishing boat capsized and sank with the loss of four lives after repeatedly trying to ram an Indonesian patrol craft. Two other Vietnamese vessels and their crews were detained in the encounter west of the Natuna Islands. The incident had not been made public for a week as the two Southeast Asian neighbors sought to smooth the situation through diplomatic channels.

Both appear aware that China has sought to exacerbate the episode through social media, part of its divide and conquer strategy aimed at the four Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members bordering on the contested South China Sea.

<https://asiatimes.com/2020/05/china-plays-divide-and-rule-in-south-china-sea/>

### **01 May 2020: Summer fishing ban starts in South China Sea**

The summer fishing moratorium started Friday noon in the waters north to 12 degrees north latitude of the South China Sea, with the coast guard and fishery authorities launching law enforcement work. The annual fishing ban this year is expected to end at noon on Aug. 16. More than 50,000 fishing boats will suspend operations during the three-and-a-half-month moratorium, according to the South China Sea branch of China Coast Guard.

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/01/c\\_139024157.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/01/c_139024157.htm)

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

### **28 May 2020: US warship again challenges China's South China Sea claims**

The US Navy once again challenged Chinese claims in the South China Sea Thursday, sailing the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Mustin near the Paracel Islands. The US Navy has twice sailed warships in a similar effort to challenge Chinese claims to the Paracel and Spratly islands in the last month and carrying out another such operation near the Paracels in March.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/28/politics/us-navy-south-china-sea/index.html>

### **27 May 2020: Air Force sends pair of B-1B bombers on mission over South China Sea**

Two Air Force B-1B Lancer bombers flew over the South China Sea on Tuesday, the latest in an increasing number of U.S. military demonstrations in the region. Bombers deployed to Guam flew the mission to demonstrate the Air Force's ability to operate anywhere international law allows, "at the time and tempo of our choosing," Pacific Air Forces said via Twitter on Wednesday.

<https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/air-force-sends-pair-of-b-1b-bombers-on-mission-over-south-china-sea-1.631302>

**27 May 2020: U.S., Singapore navies exercise together in the South China Sea**

The Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS 10) and the Republic of Singapore Navy Formidable-class multi-role stealth frigate RSS Steadfast (FFS 70) conducted a bilateral exercise in the South China Sea, May 24-25. The events were an opportunity for Gabrielle Giffords and Steadfast to practice and enhance bilateral interoperability between the two navies, with emphasis on the importance of communications and coordination while sailing together.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/370808/us-singapore-navies-exercise-together-south-china-sea>

**21 May 2020: US warns India of China 'aggression' at border, likens situation to South China Sea**

The United States on Wednesday (May 20) accused China of employing border clashes with India to try to shift the status quo, and encouraged New Delhi to resist. Alice Wells, the top US diplomat for South Asia, drew parallels between the growing skirmishes in the Himalayas and Beijing's years of increasing assertiveness in the dispute-rife South China Sea. "For anyone who was under any illusions that Chinese aggression was only rhetorical, I think they need to speak to India," Wells told the Atlantic Council think tank. "If you look to the South China Sea, there's a method here to Chinese operations, and it is that constant aggression, the constant attempt to shift the norms, to shift what is the status quo. "It has to be resisted," said Wells, speaking as she retires from the State Department.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/us-warns-india-of-china-aggression-at-border-likens-situation-to-south-china-sea>

**20 May 2020: Pentagon says China's military is challenging the US with 'risky' run-ins in the South China Sea during the pandemic**

The Pentagon said the US military has had "unsafe" encounters with the Chinese armed forces in the South China Sea during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is also a source of deepening tension between the two countries. There have been "at least nine" concerning incidents involving Chinese fighter jets and US aircraft in the skies above the contested waterway since mid-March, Reed Werner, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for Southeast Asia, told Fox News on Tuesday, adding that China continues to engage in "risky and escalatory behavior." A defense official told Insider that some incidents were considered unsafe, though the specific details behind the incidents are unclear.

<https://www.businessinsider.sg/us-chinese-militaries-tension-south-china-sea-during-pandemic-2020-5?r=US&IR=T>

**15 May 2020: Navy P-8 With Secretive Radar Pod Surveils Massive Chinese Naval Base in South China Sea**

On May 15, 2020, online plane spotter and Twitter user Golf9 spotted the P-8A, which carries the Navy Bureau Number 169010, flying a route through the South China Sea that took it around Hainan and into the Gulf of Tonkin. The Poseidon then turned around and

exited the area along a similar path. The plane came within approximately 30 miles of the southern coast of the island, including passes by the sprawling Yulin Naval Base.

<https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/33482/navy-p-8-with-secretive-radar-pod-surveils-massive-chinese-naval-base-in-south-china-sea>

### **12 May 2020: U.S. Navy maintains persistent presence near West Capella**

A U.S. Navy ship conducted presence operations near Panamanian flagged drillship, West Capella, May 12. The Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS 10) operated in the southern South China Sea marking the second time that an LCS patrolled there since USS Montgomery (LCS 8) sailed with USNS Cesar Chavez (T-AKE 14), May 7, supporting freedom of navigation and overflight.

<https://www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/130614>

### **8 May 2020: B-1s conduct training mission in South China Sea**

A 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron B-1B Lancer takes off at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, May 8, 2020. It was one of two B-1s conducting a training mission in the South China Sea in support of Pacific Air Forces' training efforts and strategic deterrence missions to reinforce the rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region. The 9th EBS is deployed from the 7th Bomb Wing, Dyess AFB, Texas. This is the first BTF deployment to the PACAF theater since the B-2 Spirit from the 393rd Bomb Squadron, Whiteman AFB, Missouri, deployed to Hawaii in January 2019.

<https://www.pacaf.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2182185/b-1s-conduct-training-mission-in-south-china-sea/>

### **8 May 2020: U.S. Sends Warships on Patrol Near South China Sea Standoff**

The U.S. Navy sent a pair of ships to patrol in the vicinity of a mineral rights dispute between Malaysia and China in the South China Sea for the second time in a month, U.S. officials told USNI News. Littoral Combat Ship USS Montgomery (LCS-8) and replenishment ship USNS Cesar Chavez (T-AKE-14) conducted a presence operation in the South China Sea on Thursday near Panamanian-flagged drill ship West Capella. The drill ship is under contract to conduct surveying operations in Malaysia's exclusive economic zone for Malaysian state oil company Petronas. Chinese People Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warships and China Coast Guard vessels have also operated near the Malaysian-contracted drilling ship.

<https://news.usni.org/2020/05/08/u-s-sends-warships-on-patrol-near-south-china-sea-standoff>

### **6 May 2020: Japan-Based Carrier USS Ronald Reagan is Underway as SECDEF Warns of Chinese Military Moves in South China Sea**

The U.S. aircraft carrier forward deployed to Japan is back at sea for trials after its annual repair period and ahead of its spring patrol in the Western Pacific, USNI News has learned. USS Ronald Reagan (CVN-76) left on Monday from its berth in Yokosuka following an extended quarantine period for the crew of the carrier, as well as its escorts, as part of the Navy's attempts to keep the COVID-19 virus off of the carrier, service officials confirmed to USNI News earlier this week.

<https://news.usni.org/2020/05/06/japan-based-carrier-uss-ronald-reagan-is-underway-as-secdef-warns-of-chinese-military-moves-in-south-china-sea>

**4 May 2020: Defense Secretary Mark Esper says China continuing 'provocations' in disputed South China Sea**

About a week after Chinese officials claimed they expelled an American Navy destroyer from disputed waters in the South China Sea, the U.S. Department of Defense is continuing to track “very aggressive” behavior from naval and air units of the People’s Liberation Army. During an online discussion sponsored by the Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution, Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper on Monday said Beijing has not been consistent in how it follows international maritime norms. “They’re claiming territory or space that simply is not theirs,” Mr. Esper said.

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/may/4/mark-esper-defense-chief-says-china-continuing-pro/>

**3 May 2020: US deploys heavy bombers, hundreds of airmen to Guam to ‘Deter China’**

The deployment comes following the quiet withdrawal of five B-52 nuclear-capable Stratofortress bombers from Guam to the US mainland in mid-April, which temporarily froze the Pentagon’s 16-year-long ‘Continuous Bomber Presence’ mission on the Pacific island. The US Air Force has transferred four B-1B Lancer conventional strike bombers and a complement of about 200 airmen from a base in Texas to the Andersen Air Force Base on the island of Guam, US Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) has confirmed.

<https://nation.com.pk/03-May-2020/us-deploys-heavy-bombers-hundreds-of-airmen-to-guam-to-deter-china>