

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 83
June 2020

ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

29 June 2020: CNOOC announces new discovery in South China Sea

CNOOC Ltd, a listed branch of China National Offshore Oil Corp, said on Monday it had made a significant discovery in the eastern part of the South China Sea. The field, named Huizhou 26-6, was tested to produce around 2,020 barrels of oil and 15.36 million cubic feet of gas each day

<https://af.reuters.com/article/energyOilNews/idAFL4N2E62A9>

28 June 2020: Freshwater reservoir found at one of Beijing's artificial islands in the South China Sea

A fast-expanding body of fresh water has appeared under one of Beijing's controversial man-made islands in the South China Sea, a Chinese study has found. The fresh water was discovered beneath Fiery Cross Reef, known as Yongshu in China, and is believed to be growing at a rate of about 1 metre (3.3 feet) per year – more than twice the speed observed on naturally formed islands.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3090761/freshwater-reservoir-found-one-beijings-artificial-islands-south>

26 June 2020: Lorenzana: Illegal to have China air defense zone in South China Sea

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Thursday said China's plan to set up an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over the South China Sea would be considered illegal and a violation of international laws by many countries and he hoped that Beijing would back off for the sake of peace and stability in the region.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/188906/lorenzana-illegal-to-have-sino-air-defense-zone-in-south-china-sea>

23 June 2020: China warns risk of naval incident with US on the rise

The US military is deploying "unprecedented" numbers to the Asia-Pacific region, raising the risk of an incident with China's navy, a senior Chinese official said Tuesday. Tensions between the two superpowers have soared on multiple fronts since President Donald Trump took office in 2017, with both countries flexing their diplomatic and military muscle. The United States' regular "freedom of navigation" operations in the South China Sea -- where China and neighbouring countries have competing claims -- angers Beijing, and China's navy usually warns off the US ships.

<https://www.france24.com/en/20200623-china-warns-risk-of-naval-incident-with-us-on-the-rise>

23 June 2020: U.S., Japan navies exercise together in South China Sea

Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS 10) and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) Kashima class-training vessel JS Kashima (TV-3508) and Shimayuki-class training vessel JS Shimayuki (TV-3513) conducted bilateral exercises while sailing together in the South China Sea, June 23. Gabrielle Giffords, Kashima and Shimayuki met at sea to practice and enhance bilateral interoperability

between the two navies and to emphasize the importance of communications and coordination while operating together. In April, Gabrielle Giffords sailed with JMSDF Akizuki-class destroyer JS Teruzuki (DD 116) in the Andaman Sea.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/372708/us-japan-navies-exercise-together-south-china-sea>

23 June 2020: China not discounting ADIZ over South China Sea

China is not discounting the possibility of establishing an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the volatile South China Sea depending on the “threats” it is getting in the area, a Chinese foreign ministry official said Monday night. In the light of the air security threats China faces above relevant waters of the South China Sea, China will carefully and prudently study the relevant issue taking into account all factors,” Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian said during the ministry’s regular press briefing. He stressed that every country has the right to establish an ADIZ and to decide whether to establish one based on the intensity of the threats that Beijing faces in air defense security.

<https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/06/23/china-not-discounting-adiz-over-south-china-sea/>

22 June 2020: US patrols in South China Sea not linked to VFA, says Locsin

The Philippines’ top diplomat on Monday said the presence of three US Navy aircraft carriers in the South China Sea had nothing to do with President Rodrigo R. Duterte’s decision to keep a military agreement with Washington on the deployment of troops for war games.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/us-patrols-in-south-china-sea-not-linked-to-vfa-says-locsin/>

22 June 2020: Taiwan redeploys soldiers to South China Sea for training: source

Taiwanese marines have been temporarily deployed to the Pratas Islands in the South China Sea amid reports the Chinese military plans to conduct drills in the area in August, a defense official confirmed Monday. The Ministry of National Defense (MND) official, who asked not to be named due to the sensitivity of the issue, said a number of Marines are on the Pratas Islands, also known as the Dongsha Islands, for what the official described as a training mission.

<https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202006220025>

22 June 2020: 7th Chinese fighter sighted near Taiwan could be from new deployment in SCS

For the seventh time in less than two weeks, a Chinese fighter jet approached Taiwan’s airspace on Sunday (June 21) in what could be part of a new deployment in the South China Sea (SCS) or combat training originating from deep within China.

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3951492>

21 June 2020: China further integrates coast guard into military

China has introduced a law that will further integrate its coast guard into the military. The amended law on the People’s Armed Police Force went into effect on Sunday after the revision was approved by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress the previous day.

https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/20200621_19/

21 June 2020: Philippines seeks to resume exploration for oil and gas in South China Sea

The Department of Energy (DoE) and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) are seeking ways to resume exploration in the West Philippine Sea as pandemic restrictions ease, citing the need to assert sovereignty in disputed waters. “While we are protecting our territories, the DoE is trying to work together with the DFA on how we can continue exploration in the area,” Energy Secretary Alfonso G. Cusi was quoted as saying in a statement Sunday.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/philippines-seeks-to-resume-exploration-for-oil-and-gas-in-south-china-sea/>

17 June 2020: Yet Another S. China Sea Survey by China, near Taiwan-occupied Pratas

China has begun a new deep-sea survey in the South China Sea, near the Taiwan-occupied feature of Pratas, ship-tracking software shows. The Hai Yang Di Zhi 9, a research and survey vessel affiliated with China’s State Oceanic Administration and China’s marine geological survey agency, entered waters approximately 40 nautical miles southwest of Pratas on June 10. Its back-and-forth path in the area since then strongly suggests it is conducting a survey.

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/survey-taiwan-06172020190731.html>

12 June 2020: China Rams Vietnamese Fishing Vessel Near Paracel Islands

A Chinese ship rammed a Vietnamese fishing boat operating in the Paracel Islands, Vietnamese state media reported Friday, in what may be the first case of China enforcing its unilateral fishing ban in parts of the South China Sea against vessels of another nation.

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/fishing-06122020192908.html>

12 June 2020: Beijing sends warplane to buzz Taiwan after missile test

A Chinese People’s Liberation Army warplane briefly approached Taiwan on Friday, a day after the island test-fired two missiles off its coast amid rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait. The PLA Yun-8 transport plane crossed the median line in the strait on Friday, crossing the unofficial airspace boundary between the two parties. Taiwan’s defence ministry said it responded by scrambling jet fighters. “We detected the Chinese Communist Yun-8 aircraft flying southwest into Taiwan this morning and immediately dispatched our fighter jets to shadow it and disperse through radio warning,” the ministry said.

https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3088755/taiwan-fires-missile-test-part-asymmetric-warfare-against?utm_medium=email&utm_source=mailchimp&utm_campaign=enlz-scmp_china&utm_content=20200612&MCUID=cf7776827f&MCCampaignID=ce7e58a4d8&MCAccountID=3775521f5f542047246d9c827&tc=5

12 June 2020: US navy patrols Indo-Pacific for first time in three years, as US-China tensions deepen

For the first time in nearly three years, three US aircraft carriers are patrolling the Indo-Pacific waters, a massive show of naval force in a region roiled by spiking tensions between the United States and China and a sign that the US Navy has bounced back from the worst days of the coronavirus outbreak.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/diplomacy/article/3088776/us-navy-patrols-indo-pacific-first-time-three-years-us-china>

11 June 2020: US Air Force launches spy drones over South China Sea

The Air Force is now flying B-1B bombers and Global Hawk spy drones over the South China Sea and other areas within the Pacific theater as part of a broader strategy to sustain surveillance and deterrence missions in the region, following the increased U.S.-Chinese tensions.

<https://www.foxnews.com/tech/air-force-launches-spy-drones-over-south-china-sea>

10 June 2020: Chinese intimidation forces Filipinos to avoid traditional fishing grounds

In the West Philippine Sea, Chinese intimidation is forcing residents and fishermen of Pag-asa Island to stay away from what used to be their fishing grounds.

<https://news.abs-cbn.com/video/spotlight/06/10/20/chinese-intimidation-forces-filipinos-to-avoid-traditional-fishing-grounds>

9 June 2020: Philippines set to fix airstrip on South China Sea island

Philippines on Tuesday said it completed the construction of a beaching ramp on Thitu Island in the South China Sea, allowing it to proceed with runway repairs. The development bolsters Manila's maritime defense position amid ramped-up efforts by Beijing to assert its expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea. The Department of National Defense said it held a formal turnover ceremony on the Manila-controlled island on Tuesday. A sheltered port for Philippine fishing vessels was also built.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippines-set-to-fix-airstrip-on-South-China-Sea-island>

9 June 2020: Chinese warplanes enter Taiwan Strait after US flyover

A group of Chinese warplanes flew into the Taiwan Strait and briefly approached Taiwan, just hours after a US transport plane passed over the island on Tuesday. Taiwan scrambled its warplanes to warn off the People's Liberation Army fighter jets which crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait on Tuesday morning, the island's defence ministry said in a statement. "The military detected multiple numbers of Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jets flying southwest into Taiwan briefly this morning," it said, adding the air force immediately scrambled jets to shadow, intercept and disperse them through radio warnings.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3088218/chinese-warplanes-enter-taiwan-strait-after-us-flyover>

8 June 2020: China Works on Undersea Cables between Paracel Island Outposts

A Chinese ship appears to be laying undersea cables between Chinese outposts in the disputed Paracel Islands, vessel tracking software and satellite imagery shows. Experts

said the cables likely could have military uses and potentially strengthen China's ability to detect submarines. The cable ship began operations in the area nearly two weeks ago after departing from a shipyard in Shanghai. If the expert assessment of the intention is correct it could signal another step by China to militarize the South China Sea.

<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/sea-cables-06082020165013.html>

5 June 2020: China's giant aquaculture ship can help the environment and South China Sea ties, expert says

China is building the world's biggest offshore fish farm ship in a bid to meet its massive demand for the foodstuff in a more environmentally friendly way. The 249-metre (816 feet) long, 45-metre wide aquaculture vessel is being built by the state-owned China State Shipbuilding Corporation at its shipyard in Qingdao, Shandong province and is scheduled for completion in March 2022. With a displacement of more than 100,000 tonnes, it will be powered by an all-electric propulsion system and have a top speed of 10 knots.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3087801/chinas-giant-aquaculture-ship-can-help-environment-and-south>

5 June 2020: US military commander says China pushing South China Sea claims under cover of COVID-19

China is using the coronavirus as a cover to push territorial claims in the South China Sea through a surge in naval activity meant to intimidate other countries that claim the waters, the commander of United States Forces in Japan said on Friday. "Through the course of the (COVID-19) crisis we saw a surge of maritime activity," he told Reuters in a phone interview. He said Beijing had also increased its activity in the East China Sea, where it has a territorial dispute with Japan. Beijing's increased level of activity would likely continue, predicted Schneider: "I don't see troughs, I see plateaus," he said.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/south-china-sea-covid-19-territorial-claims-security-us-12808716>

3 June 2020: China reiterates its sovereignty and rights in South China Sea

A Chinese spokesperson said Wednesday that China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea would not be altered by unjustified accusations from any country. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian made the remarks at a press briefing in response to the US accusations against China over the South China Sea. China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea were established throughout a long course of history and have been upheld by successive Chinese governments, Zhao said.

<https://www.shine.cn/news/nation/2006039494/>

2 June 2020: Philippines Backs off Threat to Terminate Military Pact with U.S.

In a strategic setback for China, the Philippines government reversed itself Tuesday and said it would maintain a longstanding military pact with the United States that President Rodrigo Duterte has criticized as unfair.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/world/asia/philippines-military-pact-us-duterte.html>

1 June 2020: Taiwan set to commission its largest patrol ship to strengthen South China Sea claims

Taiwan is expected to commission its first 4,000-tonne coastguard offshore patrol vessel early next year to strengthen the island's presence in the disputed South China Sea, which has become a flashpoint amid growing confrontation in the region between mainland China and the United States.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3087044/taiwan-set-commission-its-largest-patrol-ship-strengthen-south>

31 May 2020: Beijing's plans for South China Sea air defence identification zone cover Pratas, Paracel and Spratly islands, PLA source says

Beijing has been making plans for an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea since 2010, the same year it said it was considering the introduction of similar airspace controls over the East China Sea in a move that was widely criticised around the world, a military insider said. The proposed ADIZ encompasses the Pratas, Paracel and Spratly island chains in the disputed waterway, according to a source from the People's Liberation Army, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3086679/beijings-plans-south-china-sea-air-defence-identification-zone>

ASEAN AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

29 June 2020: Duterte to ASEAN: Avoid escalating sea dispute

Addressing the 36th ASEAN summit via video conference on Friday, Duterte said the dispute must be solved peacefully, aligned with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

"Even as our region struggles to contain COVID-19, alarming incidents in the South China Sea occurred. We call on parties to refrain from escalating tensions and abide by responsibilities under international law, notably the 1982 UNCLOS," Duterte said.

"We urge all parties to adhere to the rule of law and to their commitments to international instruments, including the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea," he added.

<https://www.khmertimeskh.com/739087/duterte-to-asean-avoid-escalating-sea-dispute/>

27 June 2020: ASEAN leaders cite 1982 UN treaty in South China Sea dispute

South-east Asian leaders said a 1982 UN oceans treaty should be the basis of sovereign rights and entitlements in the South China Sea, in one of their strongest remarks opposing China's claim to virtually the entire disputed waters on historical grounds.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/27/asean-leaders-cite-1982-un-treaty-in-south-china-sea-dispute>

27 June 2020: Amid pandemic, ASEAN warn of 'alarming' South China Sea incidents

Vietnam and the Philippines raised concerns over repeated violations of maritime rules at a summit of Southeast Asian leaders amid growing grievances with China over its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/06/27/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/asean-south-china-sea/>

24 June 2020: Resumption of South China Sea Code of Conduct negotiations to be determined soon—Vietnamese diplomat

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and China are expecting to set the time and date for resumption of delayed negotiations on the highly anticipated Code of Conduct (COC) for the South China Sea as part of their discussions on cooperation issues. Vietnamese deputy foreign minister Nguyễn Quốc Dũng disclosed the information during Tuesday's press briefing in Hà Nội regarding the 36th summit of the 10-member Southeast Asian grouping summit slated for June 26. "It's regrettable that due to COVID-19 pandemic, we haven't had any meeting regarding COC since the beginning of 2020," Dũng said, adding that the last meeting was held in Đà Lạt, Vietnam, last October when the participating countries were ready to go into the second reading of the Single Draft COC Negotiating Text in 2020.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/188861/resumption-of-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-negotiations-to-be-determined-soon-vietnamese-diplomat#ixzz6QLjqrBWt>

20 June 2020: With defence budgets trimmed, ASEAN vulnerable in territorial dispute with China

As Southeast Asian nations cut their defence budgets to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, they have been left with fewer resources to respond to China's territorial claims in the region. With most Southeast Asian countries making economic recovery from the pandemic a top priority, defence spending seems to have taken a back seat as it does not provide an immediate economic boost. The defence sector has become an easy target for cuts to fund more urgent measures but it has come at a cost.

<https://www.nst.com.my/world/region/2020/06/601997/defence-budgets-trimmed-asean-vulnerable-territorial-dispute-china>

18 June 2020: South China Sea rules cannot be negotiated virtually: Indonesian official

Indonesia's point man for ASEAN affairs, Jose Tavares, has insisted that negotiations on the COC would require officials from both sides to be physically present in one place. "It will be very hard to negotiate the COC draft virtually, so we'll wait until the situation improves and we can resume the talks [in person]," Jose told reporters on Wednesday.

<https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/06/18/south-china-sea-rules-cannot-be-negotiated-virtually-ri-official.html>

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

29 June 2020: 4 US spy planes spotted prowling south of Taiwan

Aircraft spotting sites noticed at least four U.S. spy planes and one refueling aircraft flying to the south and southwest of Taiwan on Monday (June 29). At 8:32 a.m. on Monday morning, aircraft spotting Twitter account Callsign: CANUK78 spotted a US Navy Lockheed EP-3E ARIES II electronic warfare and reconnaissance aircraft flying over the Bashi Channel just off the southern coast of Taiwan bound for the South China Sea, Eluanbi. At 8:53 a.m. aircraft spotting Twitter account Golf9 spotted a Boeing RC-

135U reconnaissance aircraft taking off from Kadena Air Force base in Japan and passing over the Bashi Channel on its way to the South China Sea.

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3955586>

28 June 2020: South China Sea is not China's maritime empire: Pompeo

The United States has welcomed the statement by members of the ASEAN countries that South China Sea disputes should be resolved in line with the international law, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said on Saturday (local time).

“The United States welcomes ASEAN Leaders’ insistence that South China Sea disputes be resolved in line with international law, including UNCLOS (United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea). China cannot be allowed to treat the SCS as its maritime empire. We will have more to say on this topic soon,” Pompeo tweeted.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/south-china-sea-disputes-should-be-resolved-in-line-with-international-law-pompeo/story-Hsg6yHzX4yvNASJ702nqGK.html>

26 June 2020: South China Sea: US Air Force ‘heads out again on search for Chinese submarines’

The US Air Force sent military planes to the Bashi Channel en route to the South China Sea for a sixth day in a row on Friday in what observers said was a mission to track mainland Chinese submarines.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3090766/south-china-sea-us-air-force-heads-out-again-search-chinese>

26 June 2020: US, Japanese Navies conduct joint exercises in South China Sea

Gabrielle Giffords, Kashima and Shimayuki met at sea to practice and enhance bilateral interoperability between the two navies and to emphasise the importance of communications and co-ordination while operating together.

<https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/maritime-antisub/6343-us-japanese-navies-conduct-joint-exercises-in-south-china-sea>

25 June 2020: US Air Force on surveillance missions in South China Sea, Beijing think tank says

A Chinese think tank has accused the United States of sending military aircraft to conduct surveillance missions over waters near Taiwan. According to the South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative (SCSPI), which operates out of Peking University’s Institute of Ocean Research, three US warplanes flew over the Bashi Channel and South China Sea on Thursday. “On the morning of June 25, US P-8A and RC-135 are conducting reconnaissance in the #SouthChinaSea, staying focused on the waters east of #Bashi Channel, meanwhile, a C-17A Globemaster III is flying over the SouthChinaSea,” it said in tweet accompanied by an image of the aircrafts’ supposed movements.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3090603/us-air-force-surveillance-missions-south-china-sea-beijing>

21 June 2020: Three U.S. aircraft carriers operating on doorstep of South China Sea

For the first time since 2017, the U.S. Navy has positioned three of its aircraft carriers on the doorstep of the disputed South China Sea, as tensions between Washington and Beijing continue to soar. Analysts said the dispatch to the Western Pacific of the three vessels was likely intended to send a message to China that, despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the United States military would continue to maintain a strong presence in the region.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/06/21/asia-pacific/three-us-aircraft-carriers-south-china-sea/#.XvAz82gzaUk>

5 June 2020: U.S. warship sails through Taiwan Strait on Tiananmen anniversary

A U.S. warship sailed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait on Thursday, the U.S. and Taiwanese militaries said, on the same day as the 31st anniversary of China's bloody crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in and around Tiananmen Square.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-security-usa/u-s-warship-sails-through-taiwan-strait-on-tiananmen-anniversary-idUSKBN23C02V>

4 June 2020: India and Australia sign pacts to strengthen military ties as tensions simmer in South China Sea

India and Australia signed two bilateral military agreements Thursday in the "first step in deepening of the defense relationship" between the two Indo-Pacific powers, according to statements from both countries.

<https://kesq.com/news/national-world/2020/06/04/india-and-australia-sign-pacts-to-strengthen-military-ties-as-tensions-simmer-in-south-china-sea/>

3 June 2020: U.S. urges China to comply with Hague ruling, rejects 'excessive' sea claims

The United States has added its weight to Southeast Asian countries' recent oppositions against China's claims in the South China Sea, as it rejected Beijing's "excessive" claims and urged it to comply with the landmark 2016 Hague ruling. The United States asserted its position in a note verbale addressed to United Nations Secretary General António Guterres on June 1, where it hit China's "provocative" activities in the strategic waters.

<https://www.rappler.com/world/regions/us-canada/262706-united-states-urges-china-comply-with-hague-ruling-rejects-excessive-claims-south-china-sea>