

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.93
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

29 April 2021: South China Sea: Taiwan unveils coastguard vessel that doubles as warship

Taiwan has commissioned the first of a fleet of coastguard ships that can be converted into warships to bolster defence of Taipei-controlled islands in the South China Sea, amid growing threats from mainland China. Delivery of the new 5,000-tonne patrol vessel Chiayi – Taiwan’s largest – to the island’s coastguard, along with the launch of another similar frigate on Thursday, came two weeks after the Taiwanese navy launched its first modern amphibious assault and transport vessel, Yushan, to meet its needs in the disputed waters.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3131625/south-china-sea-taiwan-unveils-coastguard-vessel-doubles>

28 April 2021: China urges PH: Respect our sovereignty and rights, stop drills in South China Sea

The Chinese Foreign Ministry is urging the Philippines to respect their sovereignty, rights, and interests in the South China Sea, and to stop any action that will complicate the situation in the area. “We urge the relevant side to respect China's sovereignty and rights and interests, and stop actions complicating the situation and escalating disputes,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Tuesday.

<https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/4/28/Chinese-Foreign-Ministry-sovereign-rights-stop-drills-in-South-China-Sea.html>

26 April 2021: Vietnam, China defence ministers meet amid South China Sea tensions

Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe and his Vietnamese counterpart Phan Van Giang strengthened the two nations' military cooperation and discussed tensions in the South China Sea during a three-day visit to Hanoi. Wei, who is visiting Hanoi from April 24-27, said in closed-door meetings on Sunday that cooperation on defence between the two nations remained vital to securing peace and stability in the region, the Vietnamese Defence Ministry said in a statement late on Sunday.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2021/04/26/vietnam-china-defence-ministers-meet-amid-south-china-sea-tensions>

25 April 2021: Philippines Holds Maritime Drills in South China Sea

The coast guard said it deployed eight ships along with the fisheries bureau, as they trained on navigation, small boat operations, maintenance and logistical operations in Scarborough Shoal and Pag-asa Island. The maritime exercises come days after the Philippines fired diplomatic protests over the continued presence of Chinese vessels in a disputed reef.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-04-25/philippines-holds-maritime-drills-in-south-china-sea>

25 April 2021: EU should 'stop sowing discord' in South China Sea: Chinese spokesperson

Security risks in the South China Sea mainly come from outside the region, a spokesperson of the Chinese Mission to the European Union (EU) said Saturday, urging the EU to stop sowing discord. "The South China Sea should not become a tool for certain countries to contain and suppress China, still less a wrestling ground for major-power rivalry," said the spokesperson. The comments came in response to a statement issued by the European External Action Service (EEAS) earlier Saturday. The EU's diplomatic service claimed that tensions in the region, "including the recent presence of large Chinese vessels at Whitsun Reef," endanger peace and stability.

<http://www.ecns.cn/news/2021-04-25/detail-ihakufzf0696186.shtml>

24 April 2021: 3 new world-class warships commissioned together, shoring up 'nuke retaliation, S.China Sea security, island seizing'

President Xi Jinping commissioned three main battle warships into the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy on Friday, the service's 72nd founding anniversary, with analysts saying on Saturday that the unprecedented, concentrated warship commissioning represents the rapid development of the PLA Navy and Chinese shipbuilding industry amid the grave military struggle pressure China is facing.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1221970.shtml>

23 April 2021: Japan to hold 1st large-scale military drills with US and France amid South China Sea tensions

The exercise will start in the south of Japan from May 11, marking the first time the three nations will have held a drill with ground troops, as tensions simmer with Beijing over activity in the East and South China Seas. The announcement of the joint exercise was made by the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) and the defense minister on Friday, as the nation aims to strengthen its military cooperation with allies in the region. "By strengthening cooperation between Japan, the United States and France, we'd like to further improve the tactics and skills of the Self-Defense Forces in defending remote island territories," Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said, in an apparent jab at China's claim over islands in the East and South China Seas.

<https://www.rt.com/news/521905-japan-military-drills-us-france-south-china-sea/>

14 April 2021: China Trademarked Hundreds of South China Sea Landmarks

Not content with claiming sovereignty over nearly every crag of rock and spit of sand in the South China Sea, China has taken the unusual step of registering trademarks over hundreds of land features scattered throughout those disputed waters, a BenarNews investigation has found. That action is meeting with disapproval from other South China Sea claimants. Taiwan and Vietnam have rejected the legitimacy of the trademarks, which experts described as a possible attempt by the People's Republic of China to control how domestic and even foreign companies use South China Sea branding.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/14042021-china-trademarked-hundreds-of-south-china-sea-landmarks/>

13 April 2021: Officials: the Philippines Expanding South China Sea Patrols Near Disputed Reef

The Philippines has sent additional ships on Tuesday to its maritime territory that is subject to China's expansive claims in the South China Sea, officials announced on Tuesday. The Task Force-West under the National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea deployed another Coast Guard cutter, four Navy ships and two other vessels from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to the South China Sea and Kalayaan Island Group (KIG), where Whitsun Reef is located, for maritime patrol.

<https://news.usni.org/2021/04/13/officials-the-philippines-expanding-south-china-sea-patrols-near-disputed-reef>

12 April 2021: Philippines, U.S. launch military drills amid South China Sea tensions

Philippine and U.S. soldiers started two weeks of military exercises on Monday against a backdrop of rising tensions in the South China Sea, though the drills were reduced in scale due to the coronavirus pandemic. The countries are proceeding with the exercises, which were postponed last year due to the pandemic, after Manila recently accused China of territorial incursions by hundreds of its vessels manned by militias in the South China Sea.

<https://whbl.com/2021/04/12/philippines-u-s-launch-military-drills-amid-south-china-sea-tensions/>

12 April 2021: Runway upgrade at Taiwan-held South China Sea island back on track

A long-stalled runway upgrade project on a Taiwan-held island in the South China Sea has finally begun despite rising military threats from China and should be completed by February 2022, a Ministry of National Defense (MND) report said Monday.

<https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202104120011>

11 April 2021: Philippines' defence chief says discusses S.China Sea situation with U.S. counterpart

The Philippine defence chief discussed the situation in the South China Sea with his U.S. counterpart in a telephone conference on Sunday, and said both sides were looking forward to conducting a joint military exercise called "Balikatan".

<https://www.reuters.com/article/philippines-usa-southchinasea-idUSL4N2M402O>

10 April 2021: Distorted information on South China Sea doesn't change facts, says Vietnam

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokesperson of Vietnam Government has condemned content falsely portraying the South China Sea issue. Any content that falsely reflects history and international laws is invalid and cannot change the reality that Việt Nam enjoys sovereignty over the Truong Sa (Spratly) and Hoang Sa (Paracel) islands and the underlying South China Sea issue, foreign spokesperson Le Thị Thu Hang said.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2021/04/10/distorted-information-on-south-china-sea-doesn039t-change-facts-says-vietnam>

9 April 2021: China Turning South China Sea Supply Ships into Mobile Surveillance Bases

China is upgrading two of its civilian South China Sea supply ships with new high-tech surveillance equipment to help the vessels track ships from the United States, Vietnam and other foreign countries, new Chinese government procurement documents show. This is just the latest instance of the Chinese government leveraging civilian assets to pursue its national security interests in the South China Sea, a common practice under China's strategy of "military-civil fusion."

<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/surveillance-ships-04092021173155.html>

9 April 2021: Chinese scientists drill in contested South China Sea amid rising tensions

Chinese scientists have carried out deep-sea drilling in the disputed South China Sea to obtain sediment core, according to state media, a move that is expected to fuel tensions in the region. They retrieved the sediment core – measuring 231 metres (758 feet) – using a Chinese-made drilling system, the "Sea Bull II", on Wednesday. It was taken from a depth of 2,060 metres (6,758 feet) in an unknown location of the waterway, state news agency Xinhua reported on Thursday.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3128971/chinese-scientists-drill-contested-south-china-sea-amid-rising>

9 April 2021: Filipino vessel chased down by 2 Chinese missile attack craft in West PH Sea

The Chinese Navy deployed two missile attack craft to chase down a Filipino vessel in the West Philippine Sea Thursday, the first recorded use of Chinese military vessels against civilians since the West Philippine Sea controversy began.

<https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/04/09/21/filipino-vessel-chased-down-by-2-chinese-missile-attack-craft-in-west-ph-sea>

7 April 2021: U.S. Navy, Malaysia's air force hold South China Sea bilateral exercises

The USS Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group completed exercises in the South China Sea with Malaysia's air force, the U.S. Navy said on Wednesday. The aircraft carrier and Carrier Wing 11, escorted by the guided missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill and destroyers USS Russell and USS John Finn, conducted the bilateral exercise with the Royal Malaysian Air Force on Tuesday and Wednesday.

<https://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2021/04/07/malaysia-navy-airforce-exercises-southchinasea/3031617822606/>

7 April 2021: Taiwan says may shoot down Chinese drones in South China Sea

Taiwan has spotted Chinese drones circling the Taipei-controlled Pratas Islands in the South China Sea and may shoot them down if they stray too close, a government minister said on Wednesday, a move that could dramatically increase tensions with Beijing. Speaking at parliament, Lee Chung-wei, who heads the Ocean Affairs Council under whose purview the Coast Guard falls, said that they had recently spotted Chinese drones

circling the Pratas, though they have not flown over the islands. "They have never entered our restricted waters and airspace, they've just flown around them at a certain distance," Lee said. "After it enters it will be handled under the rules. If we need to open fire, we open fire."

<https://whtc.com/2021/04/07/taiwan-says-may-shoot-down-chinese-drones-in-south-china-sea/>

6 April 2021: Chinese aircraft carrier holds drills near Taiwan as US carrier steams into South China Sea

A Chinese carrier group drilled in waters off Taiwan as a U.S. carrier group entered the South China Sea amid rising tensions over China's refusal to call back dozens of ships from the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ). China's first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, accompanied by five other People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessels, steamed through the Miyako Strait toward the Pacific Saturday (April 3) to conduct "regular exercises" near Taiwan. Meanwhile, Nimitz-class supercarrier the USS Theodore Roosevelt and its strike group (TRCSG) returned to the South China Sea Sunday (April 4).

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4169773>

5 April 2021: Philippines and China intensify war of words over South China Sea

The Philippines on Monday accused Beijing of promoting a "false narrative" of its "illegitimate" claims in the disputed South China Sea, marking Manila's latest move in a weeklong feud that has strained diplomatic ties. Philippine and Chinese embassy officials have been locked in a war of words since last month over the presence of nearly 200 Chinese ships which were first detected in the Whitsun Reef before spreading out to other areas in the disputed waters.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippines-and-China-intensify-war-of-words-over-South-China-Sea>

5 April 2021: Malaysia, Brunei agree to jointly develop oilfields straddling common maritime border

Malaysia and Brunei have agreed to jointly develop the Gumusut-Kakap and Geronggong-Jagus East oilfields which straddle the countries' maritime boundary. This was formalised by the Unitisation Agreement (UA) between Brunei National Unitisation Secretariat (NUS) and Petroliam Nasional Bhd (Petronas) during Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's visit to the kingdom today.

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/04/679819/malaysia-brunei-agree-jointly-develop-oilfields-straddling-common>

5 April 2021: Construction activities continue on Woody Island in South China Sea

The pace of construction on Woody Island remains high as China continues to install new facilities and structures there, according to a United States-based technology firm. The island is located in the Paracel Island group in the highly contested South China Sea. Even though the Philippines does not have any claim on Woody Island, it serves as China's blueprint for future military developments in other Chinese-occupied South China Sea islands, including the Spratlys.

<https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/4/5/Construction-activities-continue-Woody-Island-South-China-Sea-.html>

3 April 2021: H&M upsets Vietnam after kowtowing to Beijing over ‘problematic map’

Swedish fashion retailer H&M is facing a new protest, this time from social media users in Vietnam who accuse it of kowtowing to China over a map of disputed territories in the South China Sea. The controversy began on Friday when the Shanghai branch of the Cyberspace Administration of China said it had been alerted by members of the public to a “problematic map of China” on H&M’s website.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3128218/hm-upsets-vietnam-after-kowtowing-beijing-over-problematic-map>

1 April 2021: PLA launches drills in S.China Sea on 20th anniversary of fatal mid-air collision

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) started a series of exercises in the South China Sea on Thursday, as Chinese netizens commemorated the death of a heroic PLA pilot whose plane collided with a US spy aircraft conducting close-in reconnaissance on China 20 years ago.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1220085.shtml>

1 April 2021: Illegal structures spotted in PH feature in WPS: AFP

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)'s maritime patrol off Pagkakaisa Banks last March 30 have resulted in the discovery of illegal man-made structures constructed in some of its features. "During this patrol, we were able to document man-made structures that were built on some of the features. These structures are illegal," said AFP chief-of-staff Lt. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, in a statement Thursday.

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1135583>

ASEAN AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

2 March 2021: Chair’s Statement on the Informal ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (IAMM)

We exchanged views on regional and international issues of concern, including the situation in the South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula. We underscored the need to maintain our unity, centrality and relevance in the region and to collectively address common challenges.

<https://asean.org/storage/FINAL-Chairmans-Statement-on-the-IAMM.pdf>

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

28 April 2021: Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pledges Deeper Cooperation with Japan

Yesterday, Vietnam’s newly appointed Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son spoke on the phone with his Japanese counterpart Motegi Toshimitsu, during which the pair flagged areas of common interest and pledged to advance their nations’ strategic partnership. As per the coverage in Vietnamese state media, the topic of the discussion between the two close partners was relatively anodyne, ranging from COVID-19 cooperation to trade and

investment. According to the media paraphrase, Son said that Vietnam considers Japan “a long-term strategic partner of utmost importance and wants to bolster cooperation with the country.” Notably (and unsurprisingly), the ministers “also exchanged views on international and regional matters of shared concern, including East Sea issues,” as Vietnam refers to the disputes in the South China Sea. Recent weeks have been marked by tensions between China and the Philippines in disputed parts of the Spratly Islands, due to Beijing’s deployment of an intimidating flotilla of maritime militia vessels around Philippine-occupied features.

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/vietnamese-foreign-minister-pledges-deeper-cooperation-with-japan/>

27 April 2021: UK to send Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier to Japan, S Korea

The United Kingdom’s HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier will lead a flotilla of Royal Navy ships through Asian waters on port visits to Japan and South Korea on its maiden deployment, the British embassy in Tokyo has announced, as Australia warned of threats of conflict in the region.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/27/uks-queen-elizabeth-aircraft-carrier-to-deploy-to-japan-s-korea>

24 April 2021: EU raises concern over South China Sea situation; bats for binding Code of Conduct

The European Union (EU) has raised concern over the tension in the South China Sea and urged the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and all concerned parties to craft a legally binding Code of Conduct in the disputed waters.

<https://mb.com.ph/2021/04/24/eu-raises-concern-over-south-china-sea-situation-bats-for-binding-code-of-conduct/>

22 April 2021: US Senate committee approves China strategic competition bill; backs enhanced security ties with India

A powerful Senate committee has overwhelmingly approved the key China strategic competition bill which among other things supports the QUAD grouping and enhances security partnership with India.

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/senate-committee-approves-china-strategic-competition-bill-backs-enhanced-security-ties-with-india/articleshow/82193093.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

22 April 2021: French Navy and Royal Australian Navy Ships Patrol The South China Sea Together

After entering the South China Sea, the ships of the JEANNE D’ARC mission (namely the Mistral-class LHD Tonnerre and the La Fayette-class Frigate Surcouf), conducted a joint patrol with the Australian ships of Task Group (TG) 635.1, the first-in-class frigate HMAS Anzac and the supply ship HMAS Sirius.

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/04/french-navy-and-royal-australian-navy-ships-patrol-the-south-china-sea-together/>

19 April 2021: EU sets out Indo-Pacific plan, says it's not 'anti-China'

The European Union resolved on Monday to step up its influence in the Indo-Pacific region, using areas from security to health to protect its interests and counter China's rising power, although the bloc insists its strategy is not against Beijing. Led by France, Germany and the Netherlands, which first set out ways to deepen ties with countries such as India, Japan and Australia, the 27-member bloc wants to use the nascent plan to show Beijing that it is against the spread of authoritarianism.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/eu-sets-out-indo-pacific-plan-says-its-not-anti-china-2021-04-19/>

17 April 2021: Biden and Japan's Suga project unity against China's assertiveness

President Joe Biden on Friday sought to present a united front with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to counter an increasingly assertive China as the U.S. leader held his first face-to-face White House summit since taking office. The talks offered the Democratic president, inaugurated in January, a chance to work further on his pledge to revitalize U.S. alliances that frayed under his Republican predecessor Donald Trump.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/biden-welcome-japans-suga-first-guest-key-ally-china-strategy-2021-04-16/>

13 April 2021: Japan proposes joint naval drill with Germany

Japan on Tuesday proposed holding a naval drill with Germany when a German frigate visits Asia later this year, the Japanese government said, as Tokyo aims to bolster security ties with other democracies in the face of China's maritime expansion.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-germany/japan-proposes-joint-naval-drill-with-germany-idUSKBN2C01HC>

12 April 2021: Sajjan targets Chinese claims in South China Sea, battles Tories over Beijing ties

Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan took aim at recent Chinese military expansions into the South China Sea on Monday, even as he pushed back against Conservative allegations that the Liberal government has been pandering to Beijing.

<https://www.thestar.com/politics/2021/04/12/sajjan-targets-chinese-claims-in-south-china-sea-battles-tories-over-beijing-ties.html>

11 March 2021: Philippines, US to start two-week joint military drills amid South China Sea tensions

The Philippine armed forces will hold joint exercises with hundreds of US soldiers over the next two weeks, its military chief said on Sunday, amid growing tensions with Beijing in the South China Sea.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3129132/philippines-us-start-two-week-joint-military-drills-amid>

31 March 2021: U.S., Philippines officials discuss Chinese activities in South China Sea

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan, in a call with Philippines national security adviser Hermogenes Esperon on Wednesday, discussed their shared concerns over Chinese activities at Whitsun Reef in the South China Sea, the White House said. <https://whtc.com/2021/03/31/u-s-philippines-officials-discuss-chinese-activities-in-south-china-sea/>

31 March 2021: Canadian warship transits South China Sea amid heightened diplomatic tensions

Canadian warship sailed through sensitive waters near China this week amid heightened tensions between the two countries. The Department of National Defence says HMCS Calgary passed through the South China Sea while travelling from Brunei to Vietnam on Monday and Tuesday. The passage did not go unnoticed by China, which a Defence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, says shadowed the Canadian ship. <https://www.newsoptimist.ca/canadian-warship-transits-south-china-sea-amid-heightened-diplomatic-tensions-1.24301839>