

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.111
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

22 December 2022: Vietnam, Indonesia agree on EEZ boundaries

Vietnam and Indonesia have finalized an agreement on boundaries separating their exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

Following a meeting between President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and his Indonesian counterpart Joko Widodo on Thursday, the two leaders announced that EEZ negotiations had been completed and an agreement had been made in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-indonesia-complete-negotiations-to-determine-eez-boundaries-4551585.html>

21 December 2022: China accused of building on unoccupied reefs in South China

China is building up several unoccupied land features in the South China Sea, according to Western officials, which they said was part of Beijing's long-running effort to strengthen claims to disputed territory and potentially bolster its military presence in a region critical to global trade.

Fishing fleets that operate as *de facto* maritime militias under the control of authorities in Beijing have carried out construction activities at four features in the Spratly Islands over the past decade, according to officials with knowledge of the matter, who asked not to be identified to discuss sensitive information.

Some sandbars and other formations in the area expanded more than 10 times in size in recent years, they said.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-accused-of-building-on-unoccupied-reefs-in-south-china-sea>

17 December 2022: 'Rocket Showdown': Philippines Furious With China Over Unacceptable Swarming Of PLA Vessels In South China Sea

Senior Undersecretary Jose Faustino Jr, officer-in-charge of the Philippines' Department of National Defense (DND), said there was "great concern" over the "reported swarming of Chinese vessels in Iroquois Reef and Sabina Shoal in the West Philippine Sea."

Faustino's remarks came after a Philippine military commander confirmed last week the presence of Chinese vessels believed to be operated by militias in the Iroquois Reef and Sabina Shoal since early this year.

Iroquois Reef is 237 kilometers from Palawan's Rizal town and 148 kilometers southwest of Recto (Reed) Bank. This area is rich in oil and gas, and China intends to conduct a joint exploration with the Philippines within the country's EEZ.

<https://eurasianimes.com/rocket-showdown-philippines-furious-with-china-over-unacceptable-swarming-of-pla-vessels-in-south-china-sea/>

15 December 2022: Why costly weapons alone can't help Indonesia tackle China's 'grey-zone coercion'

Jakarta is set to spend US\$125 billion on new weapons, but it faces a range of challenges to modernise its military amid maritime dispute with Beijing in the Natunas. However, expensive weapons can't solve all of Indonesia's defence challenges. Its reliance on several foreign

suppliers – including Russia – over the years means its existing hardware is burdened by interoperability problems.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3203355/south-china-sea-why-costly-weapons-alone-cant-help-indonesia-tackle-chinas-grey-zone-coercion>

14 December 2022: Vietnam’s Major Spratly Expansion

Vietnam has accelerated and expanded dredging and landfill work at several of its outposts in the Spratly Islands in the second half of 2022, creating roughly 420 acres of new land this year and bringing its total in the last ten years to 540 acres. The work includes expanded landfill work at four features identified by AMTI earlier this year and new dredging at five additional features. The scale of the landfill work, while still falling far short of the more than 3,200 acres of land created by China from 2013 to 2016, is significantly larger than previous efforts from Vietnam and represents a major move toward reinforcing its position in the Spratlys.

Vietnam’s dredging and landfill involves the use of clamshell dredgers and construction equipment to scoop up sections of shallow reef and deposit the sediment on the area targeted for landfill. This is a more time consuming and less arbitrarily destructive process than the cutter suction dredging that China used to build its artificial islands.

<https://amti.csis.org/vietnams-major-spratly-expansion/>

11 December 2022: Taiwan’s live-fire drills irked Vietnam. Was Beijing the real target?

Vietnam was quick to voice its displeasure this month at Taiwanese military drills near a South China Sea island that both claim, but analysts say the incident speaks more to Taipei’s anxiety for its outlying islands’ continued security than the state of its relations with Hanoi.

Taiwan’s live-fire exercises on November 29 near Taiping Island, which Hanoi claims as Ba Binh, were “illegal” and amounted to “a serious violation of Vietnam’s territorial sovereignty over the archipelago”, a foreign ministry spokeswoman told reporters on December 2. Later that day, Taipei responded with a foreign ministry statement of its own calling its claim to the island – located more than 1,500km southwest of Taiwan and about 600km southeast of Vietnam – “unquestionable” and Hanoi’s comments “unacceptable”.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3202694/south-china-sea-taiwans-live-fire-drills-irked-vietnam-was-beijing-real-target>

1 December 2022: Philippines will explore for oil in South China Sea even without a deal with Beijing: Marcos

The Philippines must find a way to explore for oil and gas in the South China Sea even without a deal with China, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said on Thursday, emphasizing his country’s right to exploit energy reserves in the contested waterway.

“That’s a big thing for us, that is why we need to fight (for what is ours) and take advantage if there really is oil there,” Marcos told reporters.

Talks over joint energy exploration between Manila and Beijing in the South China Sea had been terminated, the previous government said in June, citing constitutional constraints and issues of sovereignty.

“That’s the roadblock, it is hard to see how we can resolve that. I think there might be other ways so it does not have to be G-to-G (government-to-government),” Marcos said.

The Chinese embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/01/asia/philippines-marcos-south-china-sea-intl-hnk/index.html>

29 November 2022: China says US ship ‘illegally intruded’ in waters near Spratlys

China's military has said it drove away a United States naval ship that "illegally intruded" into waters near the Spratly Islands in the disputed South China Sea. "The actions of the US military seriously violated China's sovereignty and security," said Tian Junli, spokesman for the Southern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army. The US Navy's 7th Fleet said the USS Chancellorsville, a guided missile cruiser, had conducted a "freedom of navigation operation in accordance with international law" and described the statement from the Chinese as "false". The ship had recently sailed through the Taiwan Strait in a similar exercise.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/29/china-says-us-ship-illegally-intruded-in-waters-near-spratlys>

24 November 2022: New joint statement signals strong call for peace, cooperation in South China Sea

On 11 November 2022, China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) issued a joint statement on the South China Sea at the 25th China-ASEAN Summit held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

In keeping with the spirit of the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), which has been in force for 20 years, the joint statement showed the world not only the common will and determination of China and ASEAN members to Create an ocean of peace, friendship and cooperation, but also their readiness for advance consultations on the Code of Conduct (COC) at Sea and the confidence to reach a consensus on the COC at the earliest.

<https://darik.news/washington/new-joint-statement-signals-strong-call-for-peace-cooperation-in-south-china-sea/848930.html>

Full-text: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/FINAL-Joint-Statement-on-the-20th-Anniversary-of-DOC-1.pdf>

22 November 2022: China making South China Sea a nuclear missile launchpad

China is one step closer to turning the South China Sea into a sanctuary for its nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), a move that would put the continental United States within range of its JL-3 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) from the semi-enclosed and hotly contested body of water.

On November 18, US Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Samuel Paparo acknowledged to military reporters in Washington that China has fielded its JL-3 SLBM on its six Type 094 SSBNs, giving it the capability to hit the US from waters closer to America's shore.

Paparo emphasized that these SSBNs were built to threaten the US and that the US Navy is keeping close track of them.

<https://asiatimes.com/2022/11/china-making-south-china-sea-a-nuclear-missile-launchpad/>

21 November 2022: China accused of seizing rocket debris from Philippines navy in South China Sea dispute

China's coast guard forcibly seized the suspected debris of a Chinese rocket that the Philippine navy was towing to its island in the South China Sea, Philippines military officials have said, in the latest confrontation in the disputed sea.

The Chinese vessel twice blocked the Philippine naval boat before seizing the floating debris it was towing on Sunday off Philippine-occupied Thitu island, Vice Admiral Alberto Carlos said on Monday. He said no one was injured in the incident.

The incident occurred just hours before US vice-president Kamala Harris arrived in the Philippines for talks with president Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/21/china-accused-of-seizing-rocket-debris-from-philippines-navy-in-south-china-sea-dispute>

14 November 2022: Philippines eyes military deal with Japan amid South China Sea tensions

The Philippines is open to an agreement to let Japanese troops conduct exercises in the country, as tensions continue to flare up in the South China Sea.

The Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) would be in line with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's desire to foster stronger ties with Japan, which has been ramping up its relations with Southeast Asian nations amid China's sweeping claims over the South China Sea.

Currently, the Japanese military is constrained to being an observer during military exercises in the Philippines. Japanese troops are also allowed to conduct humanitarian and disaster response operations.

"We share common interests with Japan, particularly our interest in the West Philippine Sea, and of course, the maritime borders that we share with Japan. Our goal really is to strengthen the defence cooperation with Japan," Senior Undersecretary Jose Faustino Jr, the Department of National Defence officer-in-charge, told reporters on Monday.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-eyes-military-deal-with-japan-amid-south-china-sea-tensions>

01 November 2022: China, Vietnam Agree To "Properly Manage" South China Sea Dispute

Xi and other Chinese leaders met with Vietnam's Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong in Beijing, holding "an in-depth and candid exchange of views on maritime issues", according to a readout on Tuesday from Chinese state news agency Xinhua. China and Vietnam agreed on Tuesday to "properly manage" territorial disputes in the South China Sea, rounding off a leaders' meeting in Beijing as part of a diplomatic blitz by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The socialist neighbours both maintain sweeping claims to sovereignty in much of the contested waterway, parts of which are also claimed by Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei.

<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/china-vietnam-agree-to-properly-manage-south-china-sea-dispute-3481085>

31 October 2022: New photos show China's artificial islands are highly developed military bases

New images have emerged showing airfields and other structures on some of China's artificial islands in the South China Sea that the U.S. said had been "fully militarized."

Getty Image's photographer Ezra Acayan obtained access to flights near a number of reefs and rocks that China has reclaimed and turned into military bases with radar stations, airstrips and artillery installations.

The photos taken on Oct. 25 show another dimension of the Chinese artificial islands, up to now mostly captured on satellite images.

U.S. Indo-Pacific commander, Adm. John C. Aquilino, said in March that China had fully militarized at least three artificial islands including Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross, all in the Spratly archipelago that Beijing claims "historical rights" over.

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/southchinasea/china-artificial-islands-10312022043801.html>

28 October 2022: Analysts Fear Philippines May Be Drawn Into Taiwan-China Conflict

The Philippines would face difficult choices during a Taiwan-China conflict that could pit its growing interest in Chinese investment against its long-term relationship with its treaty ally, the United States, according to analysts.

Manila might also find itself drawn into a conflict, whether it chooses to or not, due to the country's proximity to Taiwan, they say.

"China has radically changed the status of forces in the South China Sea, which means the U.S. and Japan don't control the southern end of the Taiwan Strait anymore. At best, we can monitor and try to interdict in the northern half, which makes the Philippines all the more important," Poling told VOA. "It's the only piece of territory close enough from which you could hypothetically both monitor and maybe even strike Chinese assets in the southern half of the Strait."

<https://www.voanews.com/a/analysts-fear-philippines-may-be-drawn-into-taiwan-china-conflict/6809229.html>

23 October 2022: 'Claimants only' Code of Conduct on South China Sea risks polarising ASEAN

The suggestion to negotiate a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea among claimant countries, rather than between Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) and China carries the risk of fracturing the 10-nation grouping, an analyst warned.

The grouping could see its unity erode should six members engage in talks with China rather than the grouping as a whole, putting Asean centrality on the line while allowing Asean's powerful northern neighbour to outmanoeuvre and dictate terms to those seeking to negotiate the CoC, Collins Chong Yew Keat a foreign affairs analyst with University of Malaya said.

"By excluding other players in this CoC management, especially key regional players and Asean, it will only create a tiered priority and level of regional cohesiveness, already severely weakened by Beijing's strategic moves in the region and Asean's ineffectiveness itself.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2022/10/23/039claimants-only-code-of-conduct-on-south-china-sea-risks-polarising-asean>

11 October 2022: More than 5,000 Chinese military staff live on islands in the South China Sea

New reports by China's state-sanctioned media have revealed the extent of the population in Chinese reclaimed and controlled islands in the South China Sea.

CGTN, the global arm of state television network CCTV, reported on Monday that a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) hospital ship, Youhao, has just completed an 18-day voyage covering 4,000 nautical miles (7,408 kilometers) and has now returned to port.

The hospital ship, commissioned in November 2020, visited 13 islands of the Paracel and Spratly archipelagos in the South China Sea, which China calls Xisha and Nansha islands, and "provided medical services to more than 5,000 people," according to CGTN.

They are "officers and soldiers stationed on Xisha and Nansha islands and reefs," the TV channel said.

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/southchinasea/chinese-islands-10112022033029.html>

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

14 December 2022: EU-Asean statement drops language about Taiwan ahead of summit

Language on Taiwan has been dropped from a joint communique on the eve of a meeting of European Union and Asean leaders in Brussels, after a sharp disagreement over how to describe Taiwan's political status.

The dispute centred on whether there was a universal "one-China principle", with Asean negotiators pushing for text that was closer to that of Beijing's position on the matter, EU sources said, ahead of the first summit between the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Wednesday.

Rather than focusing on Taiwan, the communique focuses on issues pertaining to the South China Sea.

"We reaffirm the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea, in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS," read a draft text.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3203195/eu-asean-statement-ahead-summit-drops-language-about-taiwan>

7 December 2022: US to increase rotation of forces to Australia, condemns China's 'dangerous and coercive actions' in region

The US will increase rotations of its air, land and sea forces to Australia and has condemned China's "dangerous and coercive actions" across the Indo-Pacific region. As part of the step-up in defence ties, the US plans to preposition munitions and fuel in Australia to support its military forces. Airfields in northern Australia are set to be upgraded to enable rotations of US aircraft. The defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, also said the US would not allow Australia to experience a capability gap in its naval forces and pledged to help the country acquire nuclear-powered submarines "as quickly as possible".

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/dec/07/us-to-increase-rotation-of-forces-to-australia-condemns-chinas-dangerous-and-coercive-actions-in-region>

29 November 2022: US and China in first South China Sea encounter since Xi-Biden meeting

The United States and Chinese militaries exchanged harsh words Tuesday after a US Navy warship performed the first freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) in the South China Sea since the leaders of the two powers met earlier this month in an attempt to ease tensions. In a statement, the Chinese military claimed the USS Chancellorsville, a guided-missile cruiser, "illegally entered the waters near China's Nansha Islands and reefs without the approval of the Chinese government."

The move, according to China, shows the "US is a true producer of security risks in the South China Sea." A statement from the US Navy's 7th Fleet later Tuesday called the PLA's account "false" and a continued misrepresentation of US actions in the South China Sea. The encounter is the first in the South China Sea since US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping met in person on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Indonesia two weeks ago, according to a US Navy spokesperson.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/29/asia/us-navy-freedom-of-navigation-south-china-sea-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

28 November 2022: 'Disruptive' China prompts Canadian tilt toward Indo-Pacific region

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government is boosting military spending and expanding Canadian trade ties in the Indo-Pacific region as part of a "generational" policy shift aimed at countering China's influence.

Foreign Minister Melanie Joly released her nation's Indo-Pacific Strategy Sunday morning, including nearly \$1.7 billion (2.3 billion Canadian dollars) in spending. That money is being used for more navy patrols in the region, better intelligence and cybersecurity measures, and increased cooperation with regional partners in the East and South China Seas.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/11/28/world/canada-indopacific-tilt-china/>

22 November 2022: VP Harris urges defence of sovereignty in South China Sea

The United States will stand by the Philippines in the face of intimidation and coercion in the South China Sea, US Vice President Kamala Harris has said while visiting Palawan island on the edge of the disputed waters. On board a Philippine coastguard vessel docked in Puerto Princesa Bay, Harris said on Tuesday that the United States and the broader international community "have a profound stake in the future of this region". Harris's Palawan stop was part of a three-day visit to one of the US's oldest security allies in Asia, which is also central to its bid to counter China's increasingly assertive policies in the South China Sea, and towards Taiwan.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/22/vp-harris-urges-defense-of-sovereignty-in-south-china-sea>

20 November 2022: Xi-Biden meeting on G20 margins will not ease tensions, observers say

Friendly gestures at the first in-person meeting between the Chinese and US leaders might prompt more restraint over the South China Sea, but tensions would persist, observers said.

Presidents Xi Jinping and Joe Biden met on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Bali on Monday, their first face-to-face talks since Biden took office in January 2021.

The three-hour meeting reportedly featured blunt exchanges on thorny issues such as Taiwan, human rights, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, trade practices and food security.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3200250/south-china-sea-xi-biden-meeting-g20-margins-will-not-ease-tensions-observers-say>

05 October 2022: US military surveillance in South China Sea scaled back after spike in tensions across Taiwan Strait

The number of US surveillance sorties in September decreased by around half compared with August, according to the South China Sea Probing Initiative (SCSPI), a Beijing-based think tank.

Monthly records from the SCSPI show that land-based US reconnaissance aircraft made 28 sorties during September, down from 46 in August, when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan.

The think tank used ADS-B (automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast) technology to track the planes based on broadcasts from their electronic equipment.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3194932/us-military-surveillance-south-china-sea-scaled-back-after>

03 October 2022: US and Canada, Exercise in South China Sea to Support Japan Deployment

Maritime forces from Canada, Japan, and the United States concluded exercises in the South China Sea, Oct. 1, demonstrating a shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The exercises included JMSDF's JS Izumo (DDH 183) and JS Takanami (DD 110). The multi-lateral training for the three maritime forces served to strengthen skills in maritime

operations, anti-submarine warfare operations, air warfare operations, live-fire missile events, and advanced maneuvering scenarios.

“Through increased practical exercise, together we improved tactical capabilities and interoperability between the JMSDF, the U.S. Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy, and we promoted cooperative relationship of Japan-U.S.-Canadian naval forces in order to realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” said Rear Adm. HIRATA Toshiyuki, commanding officer of Escort Flotilla 4.

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3178224/us-and-canada-exercise-in-south-china-sea-to-support-japan-deployment/>