

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.112
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

25 January 2023: PLA fighter planes track, monitor foreign aircraft on Chinese New Year in South China Sea airspace

On Sunday, the day of the Chinese New Year, two fighter planes of a naval aviation brigade under the PLA Southern Theater Command took off from Yongxing Island in the Xisha Islands to track and monitor foreign aircraft over the South China Sea, the PLA Southern Theater Command revealed on Tuesday on WeChat.

In the face of the approaching foreign aircraft, the PLA aircraft changed their flight attitude considerably several times to ensure that the target was within monitoring range and maintained the position until the foreign aircraft flew away.

After the first round of the mission, the returning PLA aircraft slid into the hangar, where ground carried out checks, refueling, nitrogen filling and other support work on the aircraft, so as to get the aircraft ready for mission at any time.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202301/1284236.shtml>

24 January 2023: After fresh incident with China Coast Guard, DFA asserts Ayungin part of Philippines

The Department of Foreign Affairs maintained that Ayungin Shoal (or Second Thomas Shoal) is part of the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of the Philippines, therefore giving Filipino fishermen the right to “take whatever they are due” while in the area.

[This comes after the Philippine Coast Guard reported that a Chinese Coast Guard vessel \(CCGV\) drove away a Filipino fishing boat while in the area on January 9](#), just days after President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. went on a state visit to China from January 3 to 5.

The department added that the Philippines is “entitled to exercise sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the area, without any intervention from another country,” citing domestic and international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 2016 Hague ruling that China continues to ignore.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/01/24/2239879/philippines-maintains-ayungin-shoal-part-territory-following-incident-chinese-vessel>

18 January 2023: China’s navy conducts South China Sea combat drills involving aircraft carrier

The battle group of China’s CNS Shandong aircraft carrier recently carried out a combat exercise in the South China Sea to open its annual training operations, said the People’s Liberation Army Navy

Several J-15 fighter jets took part in an air-defence drill to intercept “incoming enemy aircraft”, and pilots conducted a series of sophisticated tactical manoeuvres before locking on their targets and simulating missile strikes, the PLA Navy said in an article on its WeChat account.

The Shandong - China’s second aircraft carrier and the first wholly designed and built in the country - displaces at least 50,000 metric tonnes of water. It has a conventional propulsion system and uses a ramp to launch J-15s, the spearhead of the Chinese carrier force.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-s-navy-conducts-south-china-sea-combat-drills-involving-aircraft-carrier>

12 January 2023: Indonesia Challenges China With \$3 Billion Offshore Gas Project

Last week, the Indonesian government approved a \$3 billion development plan for the Tuna offshore natural gas field.

The field lies between Indonesia and Vietnam, meaning the development will involve the Indonesian navy and will have serious geopolitical implications.

Although China does not have a claim to the field itself, it does have fishing rights nearby and is notoriously protective of all its claims in the South China Sea.

<https://oilprice.com/Energy/General/Indonesia-Challenges-China-With-3-Billion-Offshore-Gas-Project.html>

12 January 2023: China ‘sending a signal’ by deploying largest coastguard vessels near Indonesia’s Natuna

Beijing’s decision to send its largest coastguard vessels to patrol Indonesia’s Natuna Islands is a bid to “send a signal” to the region as it becomes increasingly assertive in the South China Sea, said regional maritime experts.

Last week, reports citing ship tracking data said the Chinese coastguard’s leading ship had been sailing the waters around the Natunas, located north of Indonesia’s province of Riau Islands.

The CCG 5901, the world’s largest coastguard vessel, reportedly left China’s Sanya port in Hainan Island on December 16 and arrived in Indonesia’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) on December 30, according to BenarNews and Radio Free Asia citing ship tracker Marine Traffic.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3206445/china-sending-signal-deploying-largest-coastguard-vessels-near-indonesias-natunas>

In relation: 14 January 2023: Indonesia deploys warship to monitor China coast guard vessel

Indonesia has deployed a warship to its North Natuna Sea to monitor a Chinese coast guard vessel that has been active in a resource-rich maritime area both countries claim as their own, the head of the country’s navy has said.

A warship, maritime patrol plane and drone have been deployed to monitor the Chinese vessel, Laksamana Madya Muhammad Ali, the chief of the Indonesian navy, told the Reuters news agency on Saturday.

“The Chinese vessel has not conducted any suspicious activities. However, we need to monitor it as it has been in Indonesia’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for some time,” he said.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/14/indonesia-deploys-warship-to-monitor-china-coast-guard-vessel>

10 January 2023: Philippines top court voids old South China Sea energy deal

The Supreme Court in the Philippines on Tuesday declared the country’s 2005 energy exploration agreement with Chinese and Vietnamese firms was illegal, ruling the constitution does not allow foreign entities to exploit natural resources.

The decision, on an agreement that expired in 2008, could complicate efforts by China to revive oil and gas exploration talks with the Philippines in areas of the South China Sea that are not in dispute. The court gave no explanation for why the ruling came 14 years after a petition was filed.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/philippines-top-court-voids-old-south-china-sea-energy-deal-2023-01-10/>

More on this Agreement for your perusal:

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/jmsu-tale-bilateralism-and-secrecy-south-china-sea>

http://ph.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zt/nhwt/200503/t20050315_1334600.htm

5 January 2023: China, Philippines agree to handle disputes 'peacefully', boost cooperation

China and the Philippines have agreed to set up direct communication channels on the South China Sea and handle disputes peacefully, both countries said in a joint communique released by the Chinese Foreign Ministry on Thursday:

(https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202301/t20230105_11001064.html) .

The joint statement, which contained 14 agreements aimed at cooling security tensions and boosting economic cooperation, comes as both sides strive to mend a relationship hurt after the Philippines sought a 2016 arbitral ruling that invalidated China's expansive claims in the South China Sea.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-direct-communications-channels-south-china-sea-xi-jinping-marcos-beijing-visit-3184216>

4 January 2023: China to hold military drills in South China Sea

The Chinese military will hold a six-day shooting drill in the South China Sea.

The military exercises will be conducted in designated waters to the west of the Leizhou Peninsula in the South China Sea for six days beginning Thursday, People's Daily reported on Wednesday.

Entry into the area has been prohibited, according to Guangdong Maritime Safety Administration.

Meanwhile, it is expected that China's T-shaped space station will enter normal operation mode this year. China also hinted at launching around 50 missions this year.

Beijing is also working to complete the maiden flight of the home-built Long March-6C carrier rocket.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/china-to-hold-military-drills-in-south-china-sea/2779549>

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

24 January 2023: China's fighter pilots rushed into anti-US action

China's newly-trained fighter pilots are being rushed into action to intercept increasing foreign reconnaissance flights, according to recent news reports. This gives its novice pilots operational experience, reveals China's responses to air incursions by the US and its allies, and adds new impetus to China's reforms to its pilot training program.

Last week, South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported that People's Liberation Army – Air Force (PLA-AF) fighter pilots fresh out of training had been sent to intercept increasing incursions by US and other foreign aircraft in the East and South China Seas. The report

notes that in some cases pilots are put into action just a month after completing their training pipeline.

<https://asiatimes.com/2023/01/chinas-fighter-pilots-rushed-into-anti-us-action/>

13 January 2023: US carrier strike group begins operating in South China Sea as tensions with China simmer

A US carrier strike group began operating in the South China Sea on Thursday, the Navy announced, amid heightened tensions with Beijing, which claims much of the body of water as its sovereign territory.

Two Chinese ships are already tailing the US group, a defense official told CNN, which consists of an aircraft carrier, a guided missile cruiser, and three guided missile destroyers. The Nimitz Carrier Strike Group, which has lethal and non-lethal capabilities from “space to undersea, across every axis, and every domain,” according to its commander, entered the South China Sea for the first time as part of its current deployment.

The deployment comes as the US military bolsters its presence in the region in an effort to deter China, which is undergoing a rapid modernization and expansion of its own military and nuclear capabilities.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/13/politics/us-strike-group-south-china-sea/index.html>

11 January 2023: Joint Statement of the US – Japan Security Consultative Committee (“2+2”)

They also reiterated their strong objections to China’s unlawful maritime claims, militarization of reclaimed features, and threatening and provocative activities in the South China Sea. The Ministers reaffirmed their support for unimpeded lawful commerce and full respect for international law, including freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea. In this context, they recalled with emphasis that the July 12, 2016, Award in the South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People’s Republic of China), constituted under the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), is final and legally binding on the parties to that proceeding.

<https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-of-the-security-consultative-committee-22/>

7 January 2023: US Cuts Taiwan Transits Even as China Steps Up Military Pressure

The decline in US naval activity contrasts with the roughly 1,700 warplanes that China sent into Taiwan’s sensitive air-defense identification zone last year, nearly double the number of 2021. Those incursions are a key aspect of Chinese leader Xi Jinping’s efforts to escalate pressure on Taiwan because President Tsai Ing-wen rejected the “one country, two systems” Beijing proposed for the self-run island.

The shift by the US also comes as ties with China have improved since a meeting in November between Xi and President Joe Biden at the Group of 20 summit in Indonesia. Reducing the number of voyages through the strait or the South China Sea — where several nations and Taiwan have territorial disputes with China — would be a way for the US to eliminate some friction.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-07/us-cuts-taiwan-transits-even-as-china-steps-up-military-pressure>