

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.113
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

28 February 2023: Philippines' Marcos Jr urges military to focus on South China Sea

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has said his country's military must urgently focus on the protection of territorial integrity as disputes between Manila and China multiply amid growing rivalry in the region between Beijing and Washington.

Marcos Jr made his comment in a speech to his armed forces just weeks after he summoned China's ambassador in Manila to protest against the use of a military-grade laser by the Chinese coastguard that briefly blinded crew members of a Philippine patrol vessel in the South China Sea.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/28/philippines-marcos-jr-urges-military-to-focus-on-south-china-sea>

24 February 2023: Chinese fighter jet confronts US Navy plane with CNN crew aboard as tensions simmer in the South China Sea

A Chinese J-11 fighter jet, armed with air-to-air missiles, intercepted a US patrol aircraft near the Paracel Islands over the South China Sea on Friday, a report said.

The US Navy P-8 Poseidon, was flying 21,500 feet over the South China Sea, when the pilot saw a Chinese jet with a red star on the tail fins and the missiles it was armed with, CNN reported.

The Chinese jet, which settled a few hundred feet from the wing of the US aircraft, escorted it for 15 minutes before turning away

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/24/asia/us-navy-south-china-sea-flyover-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

22 February 2023: ASEAN chair Indonesia, China to intensify negotiations for South China Sea code of conduct

Current rotating chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Indonesia and China have said that both countries will intensify the negotiations for a South China Sea code of conduct.

Indonesian foreign minister Retno Marsudi and her Chinese counterpart Qin Gang said this to the media on Wednesday (Feb 22) during Mr Qin's working visit to Indonesia.

She said that Indonesia and ASEAN want to produce an effective, substantive and actionable code of conduct.

The ministers did not mention when the negotiations would take place but earlier this month, Mdm Marsudi had said that they would take place in March.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/asean-chair-indonesia-china-intensify-negotiations-south-china-sea-code-conduct-3296211>

In relation: 21 February 2023: China values South China Sea code and Asean's role, Beijing tells Singapore

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3210945/chinas-foreign-minister-tells-singapore-south-china-sea-code-and-aseans-role-are-important-beijing>

19 February 2023: China military: PLA sends H-6K bomber on long-range joint drill over South China Sea

China's H-6K bomber coordinated with fighter jets and early warning aircraft in simulated attacks over the South China Sea, according to a state media report.

The report, published by the Chinese military's mouthpiece the PLA Daily on Tuesday, said the bomber flew more than 5,000km (3,100 miles) in a drill that lasted more than seven hours.

Bomber can carry nuclear weapons and is held up as capable of attacking US carrier battle groups in the Pacific

Mission shows how Chinese aviation units can carry out missile strikes within first island chain, says US analyst

https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3210616/china-military-pla-sends-h-6k-bomber-long-range-joint-drill-over-south-china-sea?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3210616

13 February 2023: Philippines accuses China of aiming 'military-grade' laser at coast guard vessel in South China Sea

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has accused a Chinese coast guard ship of directing a "military-grade" laser at one of its vessels, putting the Filipino crew in danger.

The PCG vessel was supporting a rotation and resupply mission of the Philippine Navy in Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea – a name given by Manila to disputed territories it claims in the South China Sea – on Feb 6. China claims almost all of the South China Sea.

The China Coast Guard (CCG) ship with bow number 5205 shone a green light twice towards the BRP Malapascua, causing temporary blindness to crew members on duty on the bridge, or main command centre, after 6pm as the ship reached 10 nautical miles from the shoal, the PCG said.

The Philippines said that the Chinese ship crossed the bow of the PCG ship at a distance of 4 nautical miles, which was followed by "dangerous manoeuvres", with CCG 5205 a close distance of about 137m from the starboard quarter of the Philippine vessel before the Chinese ship shone its laser

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said the Philippine boat had intruded into China's sovereign waters without permission

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-accuses-china-of-aiming-military-grade-laser-at-coast-guard-vessel-in-south-china-sea>

In relation: **14 February 2023: US backs Philippines in South China Sea laser dispute:**

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/us-backs-philippines-in-south-china-sea-laser-dispute>

In relation: **15 February 2023: Philippines president summons Chinese ambassador over laser incident:**

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/15/philippines-president-summons-chinese-ambassador-over-laser-incident>

04 February 2023: Indonesia to Drive Talks Over Disputed South China Sea

Indonesia plans to intensify talks with China and other Southeast Asian countries to finalize a code of conduct (COC) for the disputed South China Sea, its foreign minister said Saturday, amid escalating tensions in the strategic waterway.

Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi was speaking in Jakarta at the close of a meeting between foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the 10-member regional bloc chaired by Indonesia this year.

Negotiations on the COC — a proposed framework to help tackle territorial and maritime disputes in the waterway — have stalled for years as some members states prioritized bilateral ties with China over a regional consensus.

Indonesia is preparing to host a round of negotiations on the COC this year, the first taking place in March, the foreign minister said.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/indonesia-to-drive-talks-over-disputed-south-china-sea-/6948162.html>

31 January 2023: Chinese patrols in disputed South China Sea hit new peak amid high tensions

China's Coast Guard maintained near-daily patrols at key features across the disputed South China Sea last year, ramping up its presence as tensions over the waterway with South-east Asian neighbours remain high, new tracking data shows.

Patrols in the waters surrounding the Vanguard Bank off Vietnam, an area known for its oil and gas reserves and the site of repeated stand-offs between Chinese and Vietnamese vessels, more than doubled to 310 days in 2022, according to the Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.

The number of days Chinese ships patrolled near Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands, where the Philippines maintains a garrison, increased to 279 from 232, while those at Luconia Shoals, near important Malaysian oil and gas operations, rose to 316 from 279, according to the analysis.

The patrols show Beijing's determination to assert control over its claim to more than 80 per cent of the South China Sea, the analysis of ship identification data says, and raise the risk of a mishap at sea that regional officials worry could lead to a larger conflict.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/chinese-patrols-in-disputed-south-china-sea-hit-new-peak-with-tensions-high>

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

28 February 2023: Japan and Australia may conduct South China Sea patrols with U.S. and Philippines, ambassador says

The Philippines is in talks to possibly include Australia and Japan in planned joint South China Sea patrols with the United States, a senior diplomat said on Monday, in another sign of concern over Beijing's activities in the strategic waters.

"Meetings have already been set and probably we may have the Japanese and the Australians join in," Philippine Ambassador to the United States Jose Manuel Romualdez said.

"They would like to join in for joint patrols to make sure that there's the code of conduct and there's freedom of navigation," adding it was still "an idea under discussion."

If the plan materializes, it will be the first time the Philippines has joined multilateral maritime patrols in the South China Sea, a move that would likely anger Beijing, which claims most of the sea as its territory.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/02/28/asia-pacific/south-china-sea-patrols/>

22 February 2023: Australia, Philippines discuss joint patrols in South China Sea

The Philippines and Australia on Wednesday (Feb 22) discussed pursuing joint patrols in the South China Sea, days after the Southeast Asian country held similar talks with the United States to counter China's growing assertiveness in the disputed waterway. Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles met with his Philippine counterpart, Carlito Galvez, in Manila, something they said they plan to do yearly in a bid to deepen the countries' security ties.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/australia-philippines-discuss-joint-patrols-south-china-sea-3295621>

20 February 2023: Philippines, U.S. discuss joint coast guard patrols in South China Sea

The Philippines and the United States are discussing conducting joint coast guard patrols, including in the South China Sea, a Manila official said on Monday.

Jay Tarriela, the Philippine Coast Guard's (PCG) spokesperson on South China Sea issues, told CNN Philippines that talks with the United States have advanced beyond the infancy stage and the likelihood of carrying out joint patrols is high.

Tarriela did not provide details on the scale or timing of the proposed patrols, which come after the Pentagon said this month the United States and the Philippines had "agreed to restart joint maritime patrols in the South China Sea".

Rommel Jude Ong, former vice commander of the Philippine Navy, told Reuters on Monday, the idea of a coast guard deployment in the South China Sea instead of the navy will "mitigate any miscalculation and prevent China from finding an excuse to escalate tension" in the waterway.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/philippines-us-discuss-joint-coast-guard-patrols-south-china-sea-2023-02-20/>

12 February 2023: US holds drills in South China Sea amid tensions with China

The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps are holding joint exercises in the South China Sea at a time of heightened tensions with Beijing over the shooting down of a suspected Chinese spy balloon.

The 7th Fleet based in Japan said Sunday that the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group and the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit have been conducting "integrated expeditionary strike force operations" in the South China Sea.

It said exercises involving ships, ground forces and aircraft took place Saturday (11 February) but gave no details on when they began or whether they had ended.

In its news release, the 7th Fleet said the joint operation had "established a powerful presence in the region, which supports peace and stability."

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-holds-drills-south-china-sea-amid-tensions-97065412>

03 February 2023: US, Philippines to restart joint patrols in South China Sea

The United States and the Philippines have agreed to restart joint patrols in the South China Sea as the longtime allies seek to counter China's military rise, a US Defense Department statement said.

The two countries had suspended maritime patrols in the hotly contested area under the rule of former president Rodrigo Duterte.

During a visit to Manila by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, he and Philippine counterpart Carlito Galvez "agreed to restart joint maritime patrols in the South China Sea to help address (security) challenges", the statement said on Thursday (Feb 2).

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/south-china-sea-philippines-united-states-joint-patrols-china-3252356>

2 February 2023: US seeks deal on Philippines bases to complete arc around China

If you look at a map of East Asia, you can see an arc of US alliances stretching from South Korea and Japan in the north to Australia in the south.

But smack in the middle of that is a missing link - the Philippines, which borders two of the biggest potential flashpoints, Taiwan and the South China Sea, or the West Philippine Sea as Manila insists on calling it.

America hopes to finally stitch that gap when Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin meets Philippine President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr in Manila on Thursday.

Philippine sources say the deal would expand US access to military bases in the country - a key bit of real estate which would offer a front seat to monitor the Chinese in the South China Sea and around Taiwan.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64479712>

In relation: Philippines grants US greater access to bases amid China concerns

Washington would be given access to four more locations under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Philippines' Defense Secretary Carlito Galvez said in a joint news conference.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-grants-us-greater-access-bases-amid-china-concerns-3248846>