

**SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.115**  
**April 2023**

**ACTS OF CLAIMANTS**

**27 April 2023: Philippines confronts Chinese coastguard over sea claims in tense face-off**

A Chinese coastguard ship blocked a Philippine patrol vessel steaming into a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, causing a frightening near-collision in the latest act of Beijing's aggression in the strategic waterway.

The high seas face-off on Sunday between the larger Chinese ship and the Philippine coastguard's BRP Malapascua near the Second Thomas Shoal was among the tense moments it and another Philippine vessel encountered in a weeklong sovereignty patrol in one of the world's most hotly contested waterways.

The Philippine coastguard had invited a small group of journalists, including three from Associated Press, to join the 1,670km (1,038-mile) patrol for the first time as part of a new Philippine strategy aimed at exposing China's increasingly aggressive actions in the South China Sea, where an estimated US\$5 trillion in global trade transits each year.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3218634/south-china-sea-philippines-confronts-chinese-coastguard-over-sea-claims-tense-face>

The coast guard said that during the April 18 to April 24 mission, it identified more than 100 "alleged Chinese maritime militia vessels, a People's Liberation Army Navy corvette class and two China Coast Guard vessels" within the Philippines' 322km exclusive economic zone.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-reports-confrontation-with-chinese-vessels-in-south-china-sea>

**Related news: 01 May 2023: Singapore Voices 'Grave Concern' Over South China Sea Tensions**

Singapore's top diplomat expressed "grave concern" over altercations in the South China Sea following a near collision between Chinese and Philippine vessels in the highly-contested region.

Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said his government wants all nations, including superpowers, to work together to ensure "free access and opportunities" in Southeast Asia and its sea lanes.

Singapore's foreign minister said it was important to "head off these situations" and emphasized the importance of Asean's ongoing negotiations for a code of conduct in the South China Sea.

"It will not resolve the disputes over sovereignty but it can help build confidence," he said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-05-01/singapore-voices-grave-concern-over-south-china-sea-tensions?leadSource=verify%20wall>

**22 April 2023: Philippines, China to set up more lines of communication to resolve maritime issues**

The Philippines and China have agreed to establish more lines of communication to manage issues in the disputed South China Sea.

This follows a meeting between President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang in Manila on Saturday (Apr 22).

"We agreed to establish more lines of communications so that any event that occurs in the West Philippine Sea that involves China and the Philippines can immediately be resolved," Marcos said, according to a statement released by the presidential palace.

At the start of the talks, Qin said the two countries needed to work together to continue a tradition of friendship, deepen cooperation and properly resolve differences. Working together would help promote peace and stability of the region and the world, he added. Manalo reaffirmed the Philippines' adherence to the One China Policy, while at the same time expressing concern over the escalating tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-china-marcos-qin-gang-south-china-sea-communication-channels-3437336>

### **20 April 2023: Vietnam opposes China's unilateral South China Sea fishing ban**

Vietnam took aim at China on Thursday for imposing an annual ban on fishing in a vast area of the South China Sea, calling it a violation of its sovereignty and urging Beijing not to complicate matters.

China has imposed the ban each year since 1999 and Vietnam routinely opposes it. China says the ban, which will apply from May 1 to Aug. 16, is to promote sustainable fishing and improve marine ecology.

It covers waters 12 degrees north of the equator and includes parts of Vietnam's 200-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as well as the Paracel islands, which the two countries have both occupied and have contested for decades.

"China's so-called fishing ban violates Vietnam's sovereignty over Hoang Sa and the sovereign rights and jurisdiction in Vietnamese waters and its exclusive economic zone," Doan Khac Viet, a Vietnam's foreign ministry spokesperson told a regular news briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/vietnam-opposes-chinas-unilateral-south-china-sea-fishing-ban-2023-04-20/>

### **11 April 2023: China-Taiwan: Aircraft carrier 'seals off' island on third day of drills**

China has finished three days of military drills around Taiwan, which included "sealing off" the island and simulating targeted strikes.

Taiwan said it had detected jets to its east, while China said its Shandong aircraft carrier had taken part.

Beijing began the exercises on Saturday after Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen met the US House Speaker in California.

After the drills ended, Taiwan's defence ministry said it would not stop strengthening its combat preparedness.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65229003>

### ***In relation:* 10 April 2023: US Navy Challenges Beijing in South China Sea Amid Taiwan Drills**

A US Navy destroyer passed through waters claimed by Beijing in the South China Sea in a show of force that comes as the nation's military holds drills around Taiwan.

The USS Milius guided missile destroyer conducted "freedom of navigation" operations Monday in the South China Sea near the Spratly Islands, the US Seventh Fleet said in a statement. The ship sailed within 12 nautical miles (22 kilometers) of Mischief Reef, where China has its largest outpost on artificial islands in the South China Sea and the closest to Philippine territory.

The People's Liberation Army said it followed and monitored a US warship after it "illegally" passed close to the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea on Monday, as Chinese military drills around Taiwan entered their third and final day.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-10/us-navy-challenges-beijing-in-south-china-sea-amid-taiwan-drills?leadSource=verify%20wall>

### **03 April 2023: Malaysia open to talks with Beijing over dispute in South China Sea**

Malaysia is prepared to negotiate with China over a dispute between them in the South China Sea, state news agency Bernama reported on Monday (Apr 3), citing Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

The issue was raised at a meeting between Anwar and Chinese President Xi Jinping in China last week as Malaysia has energy exploration projects in the area, Bernama cited Anwar as saying at an address on Monday at the prime minister's department.

Bernama did not specify which dispute or which area of the South China Sea Anwar was referring to.

"China is also staking claim over the area. I said as a small country that needs oil and gas resources, we have to continue, but if the condition is that there must be negotiations, then we are ready to negotiate," Anwar said.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/malaysia-open-talks-beijing-south-china-sea-dispute-pm-anwar-3393126>

#### ***Related news:***

### **04 April 2023: PM Anwar says Petronas project in South China Sea is in Malaysian territory**

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on Tuesday said he had told China that an exploration project by state energy company Petronas in the South China Sea was within Malaysian waters, in a reference to an overlapping claim in the area by Beijing.

China was worried that "Petronas has carried out a major activity at an area that is also claimed by China", Datuk Seri Anwar said in response to a parliamentary question about his discussions on the South China Sea during his visit to China last week.

"I stressed... that Malaysia sees the area as Malaysian territory, therefore Petronas will continue its exploration activities there," he said, without specifying the offshore project or location.

But if China feels this is their right, Malaysia is open to negotiations, Mr Anwar said, reiterating comments made earlier this week.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-pm-anwar-says-petronas-project-in-south-china-sea-is-in-malaysian-territory>

## **OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA**

### **01 May 2023: US demands Beijing stop 'provocative and unsafe' acts in South China Sea**

The United States called on China on Saturday to stop its "provocative and unsafe conduct" in the disputed South China Sea, after a Chinese coast guard ship recently cut off a Philippine patrol vessel there, causing a near-collision.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller, in a statement two days before President Joe Biden is to host his Philippine counterpart Ferdinand Marcos Jr at the White House, called images of the incident a reminder of China's "harassment and intimidation" of Philippine vessels in the contested waterway.

"We call upon Beijing to desist from its provocative and unsafe conduct," he said, adding that any attack on Philippine armed forces would trigger a US response.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/us-demands-beijing-stop-provocative-and-unsafe-acts-in-south-china-sea>

### **26 April 2023: US and Philippine forces fire on mock enemy warship in South China Sea military exercise**

United States and Philippine forces fired on a mock enemy warship in the South China Sea on Wednesday, the latest display of American firepower in Asia as tensions with China continue to rise.

The exercise, watched live by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, was part of the annual Balikatan drills, which are scheduled to run until April 28 and involve more than 17,600 military personnel – the largest such exercises ever conducted by the two longtime treaty allies.

US aircraft, including F-35 and F-16 fighter jets, as well as HIMARS rocket systems and Cobra helicopters joined with Philippine FA-50 fighter jets, helicopters and artillery to fire on a decommissioned warship towed to a site within Philippine territorial waters off the island of Luzon, a Philippine military release said.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/26/asia/us-philippines-balikatan-military-exercises-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

### **24 April 2023: Australia To Ramp Up Ties With India, Japan In Indo-Pacific Amid China's Aggressive Actions**

Australia said it will deepen its diplomatic and defence partnerships with key allies in the strategic Indo-Pacific, including India and Japan, in response to China's growing assertion of sovereignty over the South China Sea and its threat to the global rules-based order.

Unveiling the Defense Strategic Review in Canberra, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government set out a blueprint for Australia's strategic policy, defence planning, and resources over the coming decades.

The public version of the final report did not label China a direct military threat to Australia but said Beijing's assertion of sovereignty over the disputed South China Sea "threatens the global rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific in a way that adversely impacts Australia's national interests".

It labelled the competition between China and the United States "the defining feature of our region and our time" and noted that America is "no longer the unipolar leader of the Indo-Pacific".

<https://www.bqprime.com/business/australia-to-ramp-up-ties-with-india-japan-in-indo-pacific-amid-chinas-aggressive-actions>

### **16 April 2023: Nimitz Carrier Strike Group Back in South China Sea, Chinese Carrier Still on Pacific Patrol**

The Nimitz Carrier Strike Group is in the South China Sea and the Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group is operating in the Sulu Sea, according to the USNI News Fleet and Marine Tracker. Meanwhile, the People's Liberation Army Navy Shandong Carrier Strike Group continues its training patrol in the Pacific.

The Nimitz CSG is operating in the South China Sea, conducting training among surface, air, and undersea assets, as well as flight operations with fixed and rotary wing aircraft, according to a Navy news release issued Sunday.

This is the third time the CSG has operated in the South China Sea during its deployment to the Indo-Pacific, the release noted.

<https://news.usni.org/2023/04/17/nimitz-carrier-strike-group-back-in-south-china-sea-chinese-carrier-still-on-pacific-patrol>

### **11 April 2023: Joint Statement of the U.S.-Philippines 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue**

Secretary of State Blinken, Secretary of Defense Austin, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Manalo, and Senior Undersecretary and Officer in Charge (OIC) of National Defense Galvez

(referred to collectively as “the Secretaries”) convened the third U.S. Philippines 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in Washington, D.C., on April 11, 2023.

Acknowledging that the futures of our countries are not only intertwined with each other’s but also that of the region and the rest of the world, the Secretaries 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. They exchanged views on key regional and global developments that threaten global peace and the international rules-based order.

<https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-of-the-u-s-philippines-22-ministerial-dialogue/>

***In relation: 13 April 2023: China denounces 'false accusations' in Philippines-US joint statement***

China on Wednesday denounced a joint statement by the Philippines and the United States objecting to its activities in the West Philippine Sea and stressed that "pandering to forces outside the region" will not resolve disputing maritime claims in the South China Sea.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/04/13/2258625/china-denounces-false-accusations-philippines-us-joint-statement>

**11 April 2023: US gains military access to Philippine bases close to Taiwan and South China Sea**

The Philippines on Monday identified the locations of four new military bases the US will gain access to, as part of an expanded defense agreement analysts say is aimed at combating China.

The four bases include three on the main island of Luzon, close to Taiwan, and one in Palawan province in the South China Sea (SCS).

The US has stepped up efforts to expand its Indo-Pacific security options in recent months, amid mounting concerns over China’s aggressive territorial posturing throughout the region. The new locations, opened up under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Arrangement (EDCA), will allow the US to rotate troops to a total of nine bases throughout the Philippines, including on the strategically important Balabac Island close to Chinese installations in the South China Sea.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/04/asia/us-philippines-military-base-access-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

**11 April 2023: US, Philippines begin largest-ever drills after China exercises**

The US and the Philippines are holding their largest-ever joint military drills a day after China concluded large-scale exercises around Taiwan.

Beijing staged three days of drills simulating blockades of Taiwan in response to the island's leader meeting the US House Speaker last week.

The US had called on Beijing to show restraint. Meanwhile, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen on Monday said China's actions were "irresponsible".

The US drills were earlier scheduled.

Both the US and Philippines flagged last month that their annual Balikatan exercise would be their largest-ever, after Washington earlier this year secured a new defence deal with the South-East Asian nation.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65236459>

#### **04 April 2023: US gains military access to Philippine bases close to Taiwan and South China Sea**

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