

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.116
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

26 May 2023: Philippines uses tourism to advance South China Sea claims

The tourist venture is part of the Philippines' latest effort to assert its rights in the resource-rich waterway, where Beijing has made expansive claims. The tour lets visitors sail crystal clear waters, takes them along white sand beaches and gives them a view of lush green jungle.

To bolster the Philippines' claim to the waters, the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has invited the U.S. military to increase their presence in the country, granting them access to more bases while stepping up patrols to safeguard what Manila calls the "West Philippine Sea."

The tour is organized by the municipality that administers the Kalayaan group of islands more than 450 kilometers west of the island of Palawan. Kalayaan, which means "freedom," is just 14 nautical miles (26 km) from the nearest island that Beijing has reclaimed and militarized to bolster its "Nine Dash Line" claims.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippines-uses-tourism-to-advance-South-China-Sea-claims>

24 May 2023: China deploys three 'navigation' beacons in the South China Sea

China deployed three navigation beacons around the contested Spratly Islands of the South China Sea, following similar marker placements by the Philippines earlier in May, as both sides try to fortify their claims to the area.

China's Transport Ministry on Wednesday said its South China Sea maritime security centre placed the three beacons close to Irving Reef, Whitsun Reef and Gaven Reef of the Spratly Islands, which consists of many islets, reef banks and shoals.

The beacon placement is meant to "ensure the safety of ships' navigation and operations", it said.

Earlier in May, the Philippines also placed navigational buoys carrying the country's national flags within its exclusive economic zone, including at Whitsun Reef, and where hundreds of Chinese ships were moored in 2021.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/china-deploys-three-navigation-beacons-in-the-south-china-sea>

22 May 2023: Japan's Kishida, Vietnam's Pham vow to work to tackle China in nearby waters

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and his Vietnamese counterpart Pham Minh Chinh agreed on Sunday to join hands to tackle China's territorial claims in the nearby waters to ensure regional peace and stability.

Kishida and Chinh held talks on the sidelines of the Group of (G7) summit in Japan's western city of Hiroshima, in which the leaders from the advanced economies discussed how to counter China's increasing military assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region.

Tokyo and Hanoi have been deepening bilateral relations, as they have been involved in territorial disputes with Beijing in the East and South China seas, respectively.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/3221350/japans-kishida-vietnams-pham-vow-work-tackle-china-nearby-waters>

20 May 2023: PLA ‘expels ship’ near Fiery Cross Reef

Chinese military personnel stationed on a reclaimed South China Sea island “expelled” an approaching ship, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported on Friday.

The report said the incident occurred near Fiery Cross Reef, an artificial island in the disputed Spratly archipelago.

The report did not specify the nationality of the vessel, its type or when the incident occurred in the area known as Yongshu Reef in China.

It also did not air footage of eviction. Instead, it showed a re-enactment of People’s Liberation Army troops detecting the target, guarding positions on the island and sending speedboats to chase the ship away.

According to the re-enactment, soldiers at the reef’s radar station identified a suspicious target 15km (9 miles) away and approaching, prompting battalion commander Wang Kaijuan to order his troops to take forward positions.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3221243/south-china-sea-pla-expels-ship-near-fiery-cross-reef>

18 May 2023: ASEAN, Beijing agree on next step for delayed code of conduct to regulate behaviour in disputed waterway

The South China Sea code of conduct will complete its second reading this year, following an agreement between Chinese and Asean negotiating parties in their first formal meeting since June 2021, China’s foreign ministry said on Wednesday.

The legally binding document was supposed to come into effect last year to regulate behaviour in the disputed waterway, which is also at the centre of rising geopolitical tensions between Beijing and Washington.

The consensus to “accelerate the consultations and complete the second reading of the text within the year” was struck in Vietnam’s Ha Long city, at the 20th meeting by senior officials from China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, after talks which began last May.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3220974/beijing-asean-agree-next-step-delayed-south-china-sea-code>

18 May 2023: Vietnam rebukes China, Philippines over South China Sea conduct

Vietnam criticised on Thursday the recent conduct in the South China Sea of a Chinese research ship and the Philippine Coast Guard, accusing its neighbours of separate actions that it said were violating its sovereign rights.

Tensions are currently high in contested parts of the South China Sea, one of the world’s most important trade routes and a conduit for more than US\$3 trillion (S\$4 trillion) of annual ship-borne commerce.

Chinese and Vietnamese vessels confronted each other in recent days on multiple occasions, as a Chinese research ship moved within Hanoi’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for what experts said was likely a survey.

Such a survey would usually be considered hostile if conducted without notification.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/vietnam-rebukes-china-philippines-over-south-china-sea-conduct>

14 May 2023: Vietnamese And Chinese Vessels Engage In Fresh Stand-off In South China Sea: Reports

In a contested area of the South China Sea, a fresh clash occurred involving vessels from China and Vietnam when the latter attempted to extend their oil drilling activities, South China Morning Post reported citing multiple social media reports.

According to a Chinese observer, the fact that neither nation has verified the confrontations suggests that both parties are attempting to prevent the situation from worsening.

On Sunday, the South China Sea Wave social media account from China claimed in a WeChat post that over twelve vessels were engaged in the altercation. The source of the clash was reportedly an internal notification from Vietnamese authorities announcing their intentions to enlarge the drilling efforts in Block 05-1A near Vanguard Bank this month.

<https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/vietnamese-and-chinese-vessels-engage-in-fresh-stand-off-in-south-china-sea-reports-articleshow.html>

14 May 2023: Philippines places buoys in parts of South China Sea to assert sovereignty

The Philippines has placed navigational buoys within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) to assert sovereignty over the disputed Spratly islands in the South China Sea, a coast guard spokesperson said on Sunday.

The step comes amid China's increasingly aggressive actions in the South China Sea as Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr pursues warmer ties with treaty ally the United States.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said it set up five buoys carrying the national flag from May 10 to 12 in five areas within the 200-mile (322-km) zone, including the Whitsun Reef, where hundreds of Chinese maritime vessels moored in 2021.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-places-buoys-parts-schina-sea-assert-sovereignty-2023-05-14/>

11 May 2023: South China Sea — not Taiwan — more likely spark of U.S.-China conflict, former Chinese colonel says

While attention has largely focused on the Taiwan Strait as the most likely place for a U.S.-China war to erupt, the spark for conflict could be lit somewhere else entirely, a Chinese military insider has warned.

With dangerously close encounters at sea and in the air on the rise, a conflict is more likely to be triggered by an accident or miscalculation in the increasingly militarized South China Sea, said Zhou Bo, a former senior colonel in China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

A war over Taiwan would unlikely be caused by accident, given the level of scrutiny applied to every word uttered and every action taken by each side. This is not the case in the South China Sea, where U.S. and allied military ships and aircraft are deployed regularly to challenge Chinese sovereignty claims in the region, particularly in the disputed Spratly and Paracel island chains.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/05/11/asia-pacific/zhou-bo-china-us-south-china-sea-conflict/>

11 May 2023: ASEAN urges cool heads on South China Sea as summit ends

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations concluded its three-day summit on Thursday, calling on all parties to exercise self-restraint in the disputed South China Sea, while bloc chair and Indonesian President Joko Widodo lamented the lack of progress on resolving the crisis in Myanmar.

Indonesia's post-summit chair's statement called for resolving tensions in the South China Sea -- where China's sweeping claims overlap with those of several ASEAN states -- in

accordance with international law. It also stressed that countries should avoid conduct that could escalate the situation.

During a closing press briefing, Widodo highlighted various points of agreement between the leaders toward a "stronger and more independent" ASEAN, from strengthening local currency transactions and digital payment connectivity to developing a production ecosystem for electric vehicles. The Indonesian leader also called on his fellow members to focus on protecting migrant workers and victims of human trafficking.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/ASEAN-urges-cool-heads-on-South-China-Sea-as-summit-ends>

10 May 2023: Cluster of Chinese vessels spotted near Russian rig off Vietnam - ship monitors

A Chinese research vessel flanked by coast guard and nearly a dozen boats on Wednesday entered a gas block operated by Russian and Vietnamese state firms, two monitoring groups said, another potential flashpoint in the South China Sea.

It follows a pattern of assertive moves of late by Beijing in its neighbours' exclusive economic zones (EEZ), as it presses its claim to sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, testing the United States and its allies at a time of heightened regional tension.

The Chinese research ship, two coast guard and 11 fishing boats entered block 04-03 of Vietsovpetro, a venture between Russia's Zarubezhneft and PetroVietnam, and were still in the area by nightfall, data from two independent vessel monitors reviewed by Reuters showed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/cluster-chinese-vessels-spotted-near-russian-rig-off-vietnam-ship-monitors-2023-05-10/>

08 May 2023: Chinese militia boats cross Indian, ASEAN warships exercising in South China Sea

Boats belonging to a Chinese maritime militia approached an area where navies of India and ASEAN countries were taking part in drills in the South China Sea, two Indian sources said on Monday.

An independent expert in Vietnam said Beijing appeared to be using the militia to intimidate and disrupt the naval exercise.

Beijing has not responded to Reuters queries about the alleged incident and its possible motives. The Indian and Vietnamese governments declined to comment.

The two-day sea phase of the ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME 2023) began on Sunday with naval ships and aircraft from India, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Brunei taking part.

They were in the Vietnamese Exclusive Economic Zone when the Chinese boats moved towards them, the Indian sources said. However, the militia boats and naval vessels crossed each other without any face-off, they said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinese-militia-boats-cross-indian-asean-warships-exercising-south-china-sea-2023-05-08/>

OTHER STATES AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

31 May 2023: Hanoi urges Albanese to make statement on South China Sea

Vietnam would welcome a strong statement from Anthony Albanese on preserving peace in the South China Sea, its ambassador to Australia says, amid a flare-up in tensions between Hanoi and Beijing over recent Chinese incursions into its exclusive economic zone. In an interview ahead of Mr Albanese's visit to Vietnam this weekend, Nguyen Tat Thanh said maintaining the country's territorial integrity and peace, stability and order was its highest principle.

Amid Australian efforts to stabilise relations with China, Mr Albanese's trip coincides with mounting anger from Vietnam over the presence of a Chinese research ship and its five escort vessels in disputed waters in the South China Sea.

<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/hanoi-urges-albanese-to-make-statement-on-south-china-sea-20230530-p5dced>

30 May 2023: Chinese Fighter Acted 'Unnecessarily Aggressive' Near U.S. Plane Over South China Sea

The pilot of a Chinese fighter jet carried out an "unnecessarily aggressive maneuver" last week while approaching a U.S. Air Force plane over the South China Sea, American officials said Tuesday, as tensions rise over China's territorial claims in east Asia. (US Indo-Pacific Command's Statement: <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3410337/usindopacom-statement-on-unprofessional-intercept-of-us-aircraft-over-south-chi/>)

The pilot of the J-16 Chinese fighter jet "flew directly in front of the nose" of an American RC-135 aircraft, which is designed for reconnaissance, according to a statement from U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, which also released video of the incident.

The U.S. said its plane "was conducting safe and routine operations" as it moved through "international airspace" in the South China Sea.

Beijing blamed U.S. "provocation" Wednesday for an incident last week in which a Chinese plane crossed in front of an American surveillance aircraft over the South China Sea.

"The United States' long-term and frequent sending of ships and planes to conduct close surveillance on China seriously harms China's national sovereignty and security," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said when asked about the latest incident.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicholasreimann/2023/05/30/chinese-fighter-acted-unnecessarily-aggressive-near-us-plane-over-south-china-sea-officials-say/?sh=210c0577fdf9>
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/beijing-blames-us-provocation-for-south-china-sea-fighter-jet-incident/article66917017.ece>

20 May 2023: G7 issues strongest condemnation of China as it intensifies response to Beijing

The G7 has issued its strongest condemnation of China as the world's most advanced economies stepped up their response to what they called rising military and economic security threats posed by Beijing.

Criticising China over everything from its militarisation of the South China Sea to its use of "economic coercion", the G7 urged Beijing to push Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine.

The G7 members said they were "seriously concerned" about events in the East and South China Seas, and "strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion". They also called for a "peaceful solution" to tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

The group stressed that they "were prepared to build constructive and stable relations" with Beijing but recognised the importance of "engaging candidly . . . and expressing our concerns directly to China".

<https://www.ft.com/content/042d43dd-01db-48cc-9448-b6fd6e774dca>

19 May 2023: Asia's internet cable projects delayed by South China Sea tensions

Asia's subsea cables, which carry much of the world's data, are becoming a focal point of geopolitical tensions involving China, as leading telecoms and technology companies face delays stringing lines along the floor of the South China Sea, one of the world's data super highways.

Cable owners such as Japan's Nippon Telegraph and Telephone, Singapore Telecommunications and U.S. tech giants Meta and Google are increasingly trying to bypass the contested sea, which Beijing has claimed almost entirely for itself. This means higher costs to lay and operate cables.

According to people involved in the project, Chinese authorities have been slow to grant permits allowing the cable, called the Southeast Asia-Japan 2 (SJC2), to traverse the South China Sea, citing national security concerns.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Business-Spotlight/Asia-s-internet-cable-projects-delayed-by-South-China-Sea-tensions>

14 May 2023: Liz Truss Visits Taiwan, Slams China and Makes Trouble for Sunak

Liz Truss will call on the West to bolster support for Taiwan in the face of Chinese aggression during a visit to the self-governing island, the first by a former British prime minister in almost three decades.

“It is completely irresponsible for European nations to wash their hands of Taiwan,” Truss will say in a speech Wednesday in Taipei warning about China’s recent military buildup. “The only choice we have is whether we appease and accommodate – or we take action to prevent conflict.”

Britain must boost defence cooperation with Taiwan and use “hard power” to protect it from Chinese aggression, Liz Truss will say during a historic visit to the island this week.

The former prime minister is expected to say that if the West wants to avoid a war erupting in the South China Sea it must “get real” about military cooperation, taking a “coordinated approach” on what arms are sent to Taiwan.

She will also urge the UK Government to support Taiwan joining its new Pacific trade pact, calling it “the most consequential place in the world” because it is “on the front line of the global battle for freedom”.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-05-16/liz-truss-visits-taiwan-slams-china-and-makes-trouble-for-sunak?utm_source=google&utm_medium=bd&cmpId=google#xj4y7vzkg

08 May 2023: Joint Philippines-US patrols in South China Sea may begin by third quarter

Joint patrols between the Philippines and the United States in the South China Sea may begin later this year, a top diplomat said on Monday (May 8), just days after Washington clarified its commitment to defend Manila from an attack at sea.

Discussions were continuing on the joint maritime patrols, which were announced in February, said Philippine ambassador to the US, Jose Manuel Romualdez.

"An estimate would be no later than the third quarter of this year. We should have that in place," he told CNN Philippines.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/joint-philippines-us-patrols-south-china-sea-may-begin-third-quarter-envoy-3472716>

04 May 2023: US, Philippines establish ground rules to counter China in South China Sea and Taiwan Strait

The United States and the Philippines on Wednesday established ground rules for jointly countering China's activities in a region that includes the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, outlining enhanced coordination for real-time intelligence sharing.

The Pentagon on Wednesday released guidelines on US-Philippine defence cooperation after US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin met Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos, Jnr in Washington.

The Philippine leader is in the midst of a four-day US visit to bolster bilateral security ties amid tensions with China.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3219319/us-philippines-establish-ground-rules-counter-china-south-china-sea-and-taiwan-strait>