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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

29 July 2023: China to conduct military training in some areas in South China Sea July 29 to Aug 2

China will conduct military training in the South China Sea from July 29 to Aug 2, China's Maritime Safety Administration said in a notice on Friday.

It will cover a large area including the Paracel Islands and Macclesfield Bank.

Vessels are banned from entering the area during the military training, the notice said.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-to-conduct-military-training-in-some-areas-in-south-china-sea-july-29-to-aug-2>

28 July 2023: Philippines cautious on joint drills with China after Beijing's South China Sea aggression

Amid heightened tensions in the South China Sea, Beijing has floated a daring idea of a joint military drill with the Philippines, a country with which it has a longstanding maritime dispute.

The Philippine media reported the Chinese offer on Thursday, quoting Manila's military chief.

China's offer comes at a time when Manila has been increasingly accusing Chinese forces of displaying aggression in the South China Sea.

<https://www.wionews.com/world/beijings-south-china-sea-aggression-cautions-manila-from-philippines-china-joint-drills-620145>

27 July 2023: China offers military drills with the Philippines amid sea tensions

China has offered to hold joint military drills with the Philippines against the backdrop of elevated tensions over disputed waters.

Beijing's ambassador to Manila made an "informal" proposal for defence exercises, Philippine military chief Romeo Brawner said late on Wednesday, adding that his office would study China's pitch.

The joint drills will not be held in the disputed South China Sea if it pushes through, he said. "We are opening up to any country who would like to help us," General Brawner told reporters in Manila. More modern countries can help the Philippines with its anti-insurgency efforts, he said.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/china-offers-military-drills-with-the-philippines-amid-sea-tensions>

25 July 2023: Marcos vows to protect Philippine territory in key policy speech

The Philippines will continue to use diplomatic approaches to protect its territory in the South China Sea and elsewhere, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said Monday in his second State of the Nation address.

"We will protect our sovereign rights and preserve our territorial integrity, in defense of a rules-based international order," Marcos said.

The Philippines' security policy has centered on deepening cooperation with security partners like the U.S. and Japan and actively pursuing diplomacy with countries around the world.

"With our national interest paramount, we will always pursue constant dialogue and diplomatic approaches to the resolution of any issue that may arise," Marcos said in Monday's speech.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Marcos-vows-to-protect-Philippine-territory-in-key-policy-speech>

18 July 2023: Xi Jinping calls on ex-Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte to continue boosting ties

Chinese President Xi Jinping has called on a former Philippine president to “play an important role” in promoting ties between their countries amid territorial disputes in the South China Sea and Manila’s growing defence ties with the US.

Xi praised Rodrigo Duterte’s contributions to friendly exchanges between China and the Philippines as he welcomed the former president to the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on Monday, Xinhua state news agency reported.

During his presidency, which ended last year, Duterte “resolutely made the strategic choice of improving relations with China, with an attitude of being responsible to the people and history” and had put bilateral relations “back on the right track” to prosper, Xi said on Monday.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3228072/south-china-sea-xi-jinping-calls-duterte-continue-boosting-ties-despite-rodigos-presidency-ending>

14 July 2023: China and Asean agree on guidelines to expedite South China Sea negotiations

China and South-east Asian countries have agreed on a set of guidelines to speed up negotiations for a code of conduct (COC) in the disputed South China Sea.

The guidelines were adopted during a meeting between Asean foreign ministers and China’s top diplomat Wang Yi in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta on Thursday.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi hailed the development as an important milestone and an achievement that “should continue to build positive momentum” on a partnership that advances inclusivity and openness, respects international law, and promotes dialogue and collaboration.

On the progress made towards realising a rulebook for the South China Sea, Mr Wang said: “China welcomes the successful conclusion of the second reading of the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea, and supports all parties in accelerating the formation of the guidelines, with the hope that the guidelines will continue playing a constructive role.”

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/china-and-asean-agree-on-guidelines-to-expedite-south-china-sea-negotiations>

12 July 2023: Philippines launches website on South China Sea arbitration win

The Philippines on Wednesday launched a website containing "official information" about Manila's arbitration victory against Beijing in their South China Sea territorial dispute.

Marking the seventh anniversary of the July 12, 2016, ruling that voided China's sweeping claims over the contested waterway, the site's launch represents the latest effort by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s administration to firm up Manila's position in the dispute.

The homepage quotes a portion of Marcos' State of the Nation address to Congress last year: "I will not preside over any process that will abandon even one square inch of territory of the Republic of the Philippines to any foreign power.":

<https://sites.google.com/dfa.gov.ph/wpstest/home>

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippines-launches-website-on-South-China-Sea-arbitration-win>

In relation: 12 July 2023: China says it does not accept Philippines’ 2016 South China Sea arbitration win

China does not accept or recognise the Philippines' South China Sea arbitral tribunal ruling from 2016, which concluded Beijing's claim to almost the entire South China Sea was groundless, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday.

"With its ruling, the tribunal violated the principle of state consent, went beyond its authority to hear the case and perverted law," ministry spokesman Wang Wenbing said at a regular news conference.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/china-says-it-does-not-accept-philippines-2016-south-china-sea-arbitration-win>

11 July 2023: Philippines mulls higher defence budget to tackle South China Sea 'harassment'

The Philippines is considering increasing its defence budget to tackle Chinese "harassment" of the country's vessels near a reef in the contested South China Sea, as Beijing warned that any attempt to involve a third party to resolve the maritime dispute could turn the resource-rich waterway into a "sea of war".

Lawmaker Joey Salceda, head of the ways and means committee called on the department to explain what resources were required to achieve sufficient readiness to deal with China's aggression, adding his panel had the financial muscle to bump up the funding as it seeks to pursue more aid from European countries.

Salceda said Manila would also be buying US-made High Mobility Artillery Rocket System and India's BrahMos anti-ship cruise missiles this year to strengthen its military posturing, as the coastguard vowed to reinforce patrols to "drive away" dozens of Chinese fishing boats near the energy-rich Recto Bank in the South China Sea.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3227316/philippines-mulls-higher-defence-budget-tackle-south-china-sea-harassment>

11 July 2023: Dispute could turn SCS into 'sea of war'

A Chinese foreign ministry official believes that Beijing and Manila can resolve their maritime dispute on their own, but a "third party" could turn the South China Sea (SCS) into a "sea of war."

Counselor Zhou Li of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) information department underscored the volatile situation in the South China Sea in her tweet Sunday. Zhou did not identify the third party.

Zhou said China and the Philippines agree that negotiation "is the only way to resolve disputes" in the vast waterway.

"We have [the] ability to handle it well but have to stay high-alert that South China Sea might be turned into the sea of war by the third party," Zhou said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2023/07/11/news/dispute-could-turn-scs-into-sea-of-war/1899961>

8 July 2023: Keeping up pressure, China sends warships and fighter jets near Taiwan during Yellen's Beijing visit

China's People's Liberation Army sent 13 aircraft and 6 vessels into airspace and waters around Taiwan over the past 24 hours as of early Saturday, overlapping with United States Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's visit to Beijing aimed at mending strained relations.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said it is monitoring the situation from the air and sea, and land-based missile systems were prepared to respond. It said four Chinese aircraft — two SU-30 fighters, one BZK-005 reconnaissance plane and one Y-8 anti-submarine warfare plane —

crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait that serves as a de-facto border between the sides, and had entered Taiwan's southwestern air defense identification zone.

<https://apnews.com/article/china-us-yellen-taiwan-strait-df2b516a7c2d943d5d7be28f04aae58f>

5 July 2023: Philippines accuses China of more 'harassment' near disputed reef

The Philippines on Wednesday accused China's coast guard of harassment, obstruction and "dangerous manoeuvres" against its vessels, after another incident near a strategic feature of the South China Sea that has become a flashpoint between them.

Philippine coast guard boats were assisting a naval operation on June 30 when they were "constantly followed, harassed, and obstructed by the significantly larger Chinese coast guard vessels", Philippine coast guard spokesperson Jay Tarriela, said in a Tweet.

It took place near the Second Thomas Shoal, a submerged reef over which the Philippines stakes a claim to sovereignty via a handful of troops who live aboard a rusty World War Two-era American ship that was intentionally grounded in 1999.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-accuses-china-more-harassment-near-disputed-reef-2023-07-05/>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

28 July 2023: Japan issues annual defense whitepaper: Japan welcomes thaw with South Korea in gloomy annual security assessment

Japan welcomed a thaw in relations with South Korea in its annual defence paper on Friday (https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/index.html) but otherwise offered a gloomy assessment of the threat of China's territorial ambitions, its security partnership with Russia and a belligerent North Korea.

"Amid the increasing severity and difficulties we face, the need for Japan and South Korea to align has become increasingly important," the Ministry of Defence said in the 2023 Defence White Paper.

The defence paper said partners include Australia, India, European countries such as Britain, and South Korea. Japan is also pursuing stronger ties with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

This year's white paper is the first since Japan announced, in December, a plan to double defence spending over the next five years to fund the acquisition of new weapons and capabilities, including longer range missiles that Japan says will help deter China from resorting to military action.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-welcomes-thaw-with-south-korea-gloomy-annual-security-assessment-2023-07-28/>

***In relation:* 29 July 2023: Foreign ships, aircraft in East and South China Seas escalating tensions, China's defence ministry says**

The frequent dispatch of ships and aircraft by certain unnamed countries to "show off their military force for self-interest" has raised tensions in the East and South China Seas, China's defence ministry said on Saturday.

In comments about a Japanese defence report flagging Chinese threats, ministry spokesperson Tan Kefei said the actions have seriously aggravated regional tensions, even as overall situation in the East China Sea and South China Sea was generally stable.

Tan said Japan's annual defence paper projected a "wrong perception" of China, and "deliberately exaggerates the so-called Chinese military threat".

China has lodged stern representations to Tokyo, expressing resolute opposition to the paper, he said.

He also reiterated that Japan has continuously interfered in China's internal affairs, violated international relations norms, undermined the foundation of Sino-Japanese relations and aggravated the situation in the Taiwan Strait.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/foreign-ships-aircraft-east-south-china-seas-escalating-tensions-chinas-defence-2023-07-29/>

25 July 2023: Japan-Australia military exercise in South China Sea: Consolidating defence cooperation?

The Australian and Japanese military conducted Exercise Trident 2023 in the South China Sea. The notion of a two-nation bloc patrolling in the waters together would send a unified message to China, which maintains a continual presence of hundreds of warships across the South China Sea to assert its rights.

The drill was part of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's Indo-Pacific Deployment 2023. Australia and Japan are both regarded as 'Special Strategic Partners' in the Indo-Pacific area. This exercise is critical for continued strategic collaboration between Japan and Australia in the Indo-Pacific area, and it offers substantial strategic potential for promoting Indo-Pacific multilateralism.

The exercise was carried out with the Royal Australian Navy frigate HMAS Anzac (FFH150) and a Royal Australian Air Force P-8A Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) in the South China Sea by helicopter destroyer JS Izumo (DDH-183) and destroyer JS Samidare (DD-106).

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/japan-australia-military-exercise-in-south-china-sea-consolidating-defence-cooperation>

22 July 2023: Indian Navy chief to 'gift' warship Kirpan to Vietnam in South China Sea today

The Indian Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar will gift an operational indigenous warship 'Kirpan' to the Vietnamese navy there at a military base in the South China Sea. The indigenously built Missile Corvette INS Kirpan entered Cam Ranh International Port on July 08, 2023, and was received by the Vietnamese People's Navy.

The warship, with the Tricolour, undertook her final passage from India to Vietnam, proudly displaying the Indian Naval Ensign at sea for the final time.

"The warship is reaching a Vietnamese naval base and there it will be first decommissioned from Indian Navy and then handed over to the Vietnamese Navy by the Indian Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar," top government officials told India Today.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/indian-navy-chief-gift-warship-kirpan-vietnam-navy-south-china-sea-today-2410248-2023-07-22>

14 July 2023: Blinken says U.S. still committed to freedom in South China Sea

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated his country's commitment "to upholding freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea" on Friday, the day after he held "candid and constructive discussions" with Chinese top diplomat Wang Yi in Jakarta.

The two diplomats met on the sidelines of a series of meetings involving the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and partner countries. For Blinken and Wang, it was their second face-to-face encounter in the span of about a month, after the American secretary traveled to Beijing in June -- the first such visit in five years.

"Like many countries in the region, we're concerned by the PRC's [People's Republic of China's] increasing assertiveness in the South and East China seas and in the Taiwan Strait," Blinken told a news conference Friday evening. "We remain committed to upholding

freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, a critical thoroughway for global commerce and connectivity."

He soon added that "the United States will continue to responsibly manage our relationship with China, including by strengthening channels of communication."

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Blinken-says-U.S.-still-committed-to-freedom-in-South-China-Sea>

12 July 2023: EU says arbitral ruling on South China Sea legally binding

On the seventh anniversary of the international arbitral ruling in The Hague invalidating China's claim over almost the entire South China Sea, European Union member-countries and their embassies have lauded the landmark decision, which has also reaffirmed the Philippines' maritime entitlements.

Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Romania, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden issued a statement calling the arbitral award "a significant milestone, which is legally binding upon the parties to those proceedings, and a useful basis for peacefully resolving disputes between the parties."

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/07/12/2280484/eu-says-arbitral-ruling-south-china-sea-legally-binding>

10 July 2023: French Embassy raises concerns on developments in South China Sea

The French Embassy in Manila expressed concern over the recent incidents in the South China Sea.

In a press statement issued on Monday, the embassy called for respect for international law and the resolution of disputes through a dialogue.

"We are resolutely opposed to any use of force or threat to do so. We recall, in this regard, the Arbitration award rendered under UNCLOS on the 12th of July 2016," the embassy said. The Philippine military conducted an air patrol last June 30 in which it was observed that more than 50 Chinese fishing vessels were "anchored in groups of five to seven and no fishing activities were noticed."

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/875311/french-embassy-raises-concerns-on-developments-in-south-china-sea/story/>

6 July 2023: Japan says Beijing's 'dangerous behavior' in South China Sea a 'grave concern'

Japanese Ambassador Kazuhiko Koshikawa said Beijing's dangerous behavior in the South China Sea and continuing defiance of the 2016 arbitral award by an international tribunal in The Hague is a serious concern.

"As China's unilateral actions such as repeated intrusions into Japan's waters around the Senkaku Islands in the ECS (East China Sea), China's dangerous behavior in the South China Sea in defiance of the 2016 arbitration award is a grave concern for regional peace and stability," the Japanese envoy said in a tweet.

Ambassador Koshikawa also attached a link of the report of the Philippine Coast Guard indicating that Chinese Coast Guard vessels "dangerously maneuvered" to block two Philippine ships during a recent resupply mission in Ayungin Shoal in the West Philippine Sea.

<https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2023/7/6/japan-beijing-south-china-sea-dangerous-behavior.html>

4 July 2023: Carrier USS Ronald Reagan Back in the South China Sea, Details of Talisman Sabre Exercise Emerge

The Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group is back in the South China Sea after wrapping a port visit to Vietnam on Friday. Meanwhile, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force detailed their participation in the Australian-led multinational exercise Talisman Sabre 2023 held in Australia from July 22 to Aug. 4.

USS Ronald Reagan (CVN-76) and cruisers USS Antietam (CG-54) and USS Robert Smalls (CG-62) and arrived in Danang on June 25 for a five-day port. “Ship visits are a routine part of key cooperation among partners,” said Rear Adm. Pat Hannifin, Commander, Task Force (CTF) 70/Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 5 stated in a Navy release

<https://news.usni.org/2023/07/04/carrier-uss-ronald-reagan-back-in-the-south-china-sea-details-of-talisman-sabre-exercise-emerge>