

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No.119
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

31 August 2023: Vietnam Fisherman Says China Coast Guard Water Cannon Broke Arm

A Vietnamese fisherman operating in the South China Sea said a Chinese coast guard vessel fired a water cannon at him and his crew, leaving him with a broken arm and injuring others. The incident happened in the early hours of Monday off Vietnam's east coast, according to local media reports, and the attack was reported to authorities in Binh Hai, in the country's eastern province of Quang Ngai, where the fishermen gave statements before being taken to hospital for treatment.

Vietnam's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Pham Thu Hang told Reuters on Thursday: "Vietnam opposes the use of force against Vietnamese fishing boats operating normally at sea." Authorities were investigating the allegations made by Vietnamese fishermen, Pham said.

<https://www.newsweek.com/china-vietnam-coast-guard-water-cannon-injury-south-china-sea-1823629>

30 August 2023: China's 2023 Map reinforces their stance on South China Sea

China's publication of their latest China Standard Map for 2023 reveals that the country is unwilling to back off on their territorial claims.

"Long term, the publication of these maps (which are required by Chinese law) demonstrate just how hard and intractable China's position on the South China Sea is," said Julian Ku, law professor at Hofstra University, New York.

"I think the publication of the map confirms the Chinese position that they have some legal claim over waters within Malaysia's EEZ, and that they are not backing down from that claim.

The 2023 China Standard Map, which was recently issued by the country's Natural Resources Ministry, includes a significant portion of Malaysian waters near Sabah and Sarawak, as well as various regions in India claimed by China.

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/08/949146/chinas-2023-map-reinforces-unyielding-stance-south-china-sea-warns-expert>

Follow-up: 1 September 2023: Vietnam Joins ASEAN Neighbors in Denouncing Chinese Map

Vietnam has joined three other Southeast Asian governments in denouncing a new map published by China's government, which depicted the country's expansive claims in the South China Sea.

Late yesterday, Pham Thu Hang, the spokesperson for Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said in a statement that the sovereignty and maritime claims outlined on the map, in particular, the inclusion of the Paracel and Spratly island chains, were "invalid." She said that they had "violated Vietnam's sovereignty over the islands, as well as its sovereignty, sovereignty rights, and jurisdiction rights over Vietnam's sea regions as determined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)."

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/vietnam-joins-asean-neighbors-in-denouncing-chinese-map/>

22 August 2023: Philippines hosts Asean's 3-day South China Sea Code of Conduct talks

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on Tuesday said the Association of Southeast Asian Nations-member states and China have resumed the Code of Conduct (COC) talks on the South China Sea, adding that the Philippines is hosting the three-day negotiations. In a message to reporters, DFA Spokesperson Ma. Teresita Daza said the event will be conducted from August 22 until August 24.

“The Philippines is hosting the 40th Meeting of the Joint Working Group on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (JWG-DOC) on August 22 to August 24 in Manila. This will be the third round of the COC negotiations this year,” said Daza.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/218186/ph-hosts-aseans-3-day-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-talks>

19 August 2023: Vietnam said to plan military buildup on South China Sea footholds

Vietnam reportedly plans to fortify its military presence on the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, where it is locked in territorial disputes with China and the Philippines.

The project, led by Vietnam's Defense Ministry and navy, involves constructing and expanding military and other facilities on Pearson Reef and Pigeon Reef, over which Hanoi holds effective control, the Manila Times reports.

The plan, with an estimated budget of 6.4 trillion dong (\$270 million), reportedly includes dredging and landfill work to create land for a massive dock, as well as upgrades to missile and anti-aircraft installations.

Hanoi reportedly intends to build housing for not only military personnel, but also civilians, along with transportation, energy systems, and facilities for wastewater treatment and waste disposal.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Vietnam-said-to-plan-military-buildup-on-South-China-Sea-footholds>

15 August 2023: China Is Building A Runway On Its Closest Island Outpost To Vietnam

In just the last few weeks, China has begun to build what appears to be a new airstrip on one of the islands it controls in the highly contested South China Sea. The size of the airstrip, as it currently stands, means it's hard to know exactly what purpose it's intended to serve.

However, construction of this kind at this particular location, Triton Island — the closest in the disputed Paracels archipelago to Vietnam — is significant in itself.

The new airstrip is 630 metres long (2,067 feet) and stretches from east to west across the island, according to the images taken by the European Space Agency's Sentinel-2 satellites. The runway is much shorter than others built by China, limiting the size of the warplanes that could use it.

<https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/runway-being-built-on-chinas-closest-island-outpost-to-vietnam>

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3231431/south-china-sea-beijing-appears-be-building-runway-disputed-island-claimed-vietnam>

12 August 2023: China asks Philippines to jointly work on defusing South China Sea tensions

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged the Philippines to work with China to seek an effective way to defuse tensions in the South China Sea, the official Xinhua news agency said on Saturday.

The comments come amid rising tensions between the two countries over the location of a grounded warship that serves as a military outpost in the South China Sea. The comments

were made by Wang during a visit to Singapore and Malaysia which took place on Thursday and Friday.

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/12/china-asks-philippines-to-jointly-work-on-defusing-south-china-sea-tensions.html>

09 August 2023: US and China spar over Philippine shipwreck-turned-military outpost

An international row is growing between the Philippines, the US and China over a rusting ship that has been turned into a crucial military outpost in the South China Sea.

The dilapidated second world war-era ship was deliberately run aground on a tiny reef in the South China Sea in 1999 by the Philippines, and a small contingent of troops continue to stay on board to stake the country's claim in the highly disputed water.

On Saturday, China provoked condemnation from the Philippines, the US, the EU, France, Japan and Australia after its coastguard directed water cannon at a Philippine coastguard vessel. The Philippines was trying to deliver food, water, fuel and other supplies to its troops stationed in the grounded ship, the BRP Sierra Madre, on Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands.

Marcos also said on Wednesday that the Philippines would not remove its ship from its territory.

The Philippines said the shoal was in the country's exclusive economic zone according to the 2016 arbitration ruling that invalidated China's "nine-dash line" claim in the South China Sea and its claimed rights to reefs in the Spratlys, including the Second Thomas Shoal.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/09/us-beijing-shipwreck-military-outpost-south-china-sea-philippines>

6 August 2023: Philippines says China blocked, water-cannoned boat in South China Sea

The Philippines on Sunday accused China's coast guard of blocking and water-cannoning a Philippine military supply boat in the South China Sea, condemning the "excessive and offensive actions" against its vessels.

China's coast guard countered that it had implemented necessary controls in accordance with the law to deter Philippine ships, which it accused of trespassing and carrying illegal building materials.

It said in a statement the incident occurred near the Second Thomas Shoal, which Manila calls Ayungin Shoal, a submerged reef where a handful of its troops live on a rusty World War Two-era U.S. ship that was intentionally grounded in 1999.

The Chinese coast guard's "dangerous manoeuvres" prevented a second boat from unloading the supplies and completing the mission, it said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-says-china-blocked-water-cannoned-boat-s-china-sea-2023-08-06/>

Follow-up: 20 August 2023: Defiant Philippines will resupply South China Sea troops despite Beijing's block

The Philippine armed forces said it would again seek to resupply troops stationed in a rusty World War II-era ship on a reef in the South China Sea, after China blocked a previous attempt with water cannons.

"This exercise of our sovereign rights and jurisdiction is a testament to our firm belief in the rules-based international order that underpins regional peace and stability," armed forces spokesperson Medel Aguilar said in a statement.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3231673/defiant-philippines-will-resupply-south-china-sea-troops-despite-beijings-block>

Follow-up: Philippines completes mission to disputed shoal after Chinese water cannon incident

The Philippines said it completed a resupply mission to its grounded warship on a contested atoll in the South China Sea on Tuesday, two weeks after it had to abort a similar attempt when a China Coast Guard vessel fired water cannon at its boats.

The country's task force on the South China Sea said in a statement that the mission to the Second Thomas Shoal was carried out despite attempts by the Chinese coast guard and Chinese Maritime Militia "to block, harass, and interfere".

China's coast guard said in a statement it "made temporary arrangements" for Manila to deliver food and necessities to the atoll, which it also claims, on humanitarian grounds.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-completes-mission-to-disputed-shoal-after-chinese-water-cannon-incident>

6 August 2023: Indonesia and Vietnam make giant progress in ratifying EEZ boundaries in South China Sea

Indonesia and Vietnam are working towards ratifying the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) agreement in the South China Sea, said Indonesia's Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation chairman, Dr Fadli Zon.

Fadli highlighted that the two countries are currently in the process of finalising the implementing arrangement and moving forward with the ratification of the agreement.

"The implementation is a huge progress and significant not only for our bilateral cooperation but also for regional security," he said in his speech at the policy dialogue held here Saturday.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2023/08/06/indonesia-and-vietnam-make-giant-progress-in-ratifying-eez-boundaries-in-south-china-sea>

01 August 2023: Philippine Senate passes resolution condemning China over South China Sea harassment

The Philippine Senate voted unanimously Tuesday on a resolution condemning China for its "continued harassment" of Filipino fishermen and "incursions" into Manila's waters in the contested South China Sea.

The resolution also urged the government to raise the issue of Beijing's actions in the strategic waterway before the United Nations General Assembly. These allegedly violate a 2016 international arbitration ruling that nullified Beijing's expansive claims to the potentially mineral-rich sea.

"It is hereby resolved by the Senate of the Philippines to strongly condemn the continued harassment of Filipino fishermen and the incursions in the West Philippine Sea by the Chinese coast guard and militia vessels," the resolution said, according to a copy obtained by reporters.

<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/senate-resolution-condemns-chinese-intrusion-south-china-sea-08012023115942.html>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

27 August 2023: Beijing's 'South China Sea Behavior' Must Be Challenged, US Navy Says

China's "aggressive behavior" in the South China Sea, including the use of a water canon by its coast guard against a Philippine vessel, must be challenged and checked, the commander of the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet said Sunday.

Vice Admiral Karl Thomas assured the Philippines of U.S. backing in the face of "shared challenges" in the region, saying: "My forces are out here for a reason."

"You have to challenge people, I would say, operating in a grey zone. When they're taking a little bit more and more and pushing you, you've got to push back, you have to sail and operate," Thomas told Reuters.

"There's really no better example of aggressive behavior than the activity on 5 August on the shoal," he added.

The largest of the U.S. Navy's forward-deployed fleets, the Seventh Fleet, headquartered in Japan, operates as many as 70 ships, has around 150 aircraft and more than 27,000 sailors. <https://www.voanews.com/a/beijing-south-china-sea-behavior-must-be-challenged-us-navy-says/7243313.html>

21 August 2023: Philippines, Australia conduct joint air assault drills near South China Sea

The Philippines and Australia conducted an air assault exercise near the South China Sea, marking the “first major” drills lined up for 2023 between the two armed forces amid rising tensions between Manila and Beijing.

The drills, held in Rizal town in Palawan province, involved 175 troops from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and two platoons from the Australian Defence Force (ADF), Lieutenant-Colonel Enrico Gil Iletto, chief of public affairs at the Philippine military, said in a statement on Monday.

“The exercise involved coordinated air, land and sea actions to simulate realistic combat scenarios, enhancing the forces’ preparedness and operational readiness,” according to the statement.

Lt-Col Iletto said the venue is near Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea, which is at the centre of a territorial dispute between the Philippines and China.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-australia-conduct-joint-air-assault-drills-near-south-china-sea>

21 August 2023: South Korea, India rebuke Beijing over South China Sea claims

South Korea and India have joined the U.S., Japan and European countries in supporting the Philippines in its maritime disputes with Beijing in the South China Sea, as China's recent use of water cannon against a Philippine resupply ship creates a global backlash.

U.S. President Joe Biden convened a historic three-way summit with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at Camp David on Friday.

While public attention was focused on the leaders' response to missile launches by North Korea, and China's aggressive posture toward Taiwan, China's growing hold on the South China Sea was a topic of discussion among the participants.

One jointly published document titled, "The Spirit of Camp David"

[\(https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/08/18/the-spirit-of-camp-david-joint-statement-of-japan-the-republic-of-korea-and-the-united-states/\)](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/08/18/the-spirit-of-camp-david-joint-statement-of-japan-the-republic-of-korea-and-the-united-states/) noted the three countries supported a ruling against China's expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea by an international tribunal in The Hague in 2016. The tribunal rejected China's claim that it has historical territorial rights within the so-called nine-dash line in the strategic waterway.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/South-Korea-India-rebuke-Beijing-over-South-China-Sea-claims>

Follow-up: 21 August 2023: China lodges complaints over US, South Korea, Japan Camp David statement

China said on Monday (Aug 21) that it had lodged complaints over a statement released at a first-of-its-kind summit of the leaders of the United States, South Korea and Japan in which they criticised Beijing's "aggressive behaviour".

US President Joe Biden hosted the summit - described as launching a "new chapter" of close, three-way security cooperation - at the Camp David presidential retreat.

The three leaders said in a joint statement on Friday that they opposed the "dangerous and aggressive behaviour" of China in maritime disputes in the East and South China Sea.

Beijing hit back on Monday, saying that the leaders had "smeared and attacked China on Taiwan-related and maritime issues, grossly interfered in China's internal affairs and deliberately sowed discord between China and its neighbours".

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/us-south-korea-japan-camp-david-statement-china-lodges-complaints-3712961>

20 August 2023: US, Japan and Australia plan joint navy drills in disputed South China Sea, Philippine officials say

The United States, Japan and Australia are planning a joint navy drill in the South China Sea off the western Philippines this week to underscore their commitment to the rule of law in the region after a recent show of Chinese aggression in the disputed waters, Filipino security officials said Sunday.

On Aug. 5, Chinese coast guard ships used water cannons against Philippine vessels in the contested waterway where disputes have long been regarded as a potential flashpoint and have become a fault line in the rivalry between the U.S. and China in the region.

The drill will include three aircraft and helicopter carriers sailing together in a show of force and undertaking joint drills. Their commanders are set to meet with Filipino counterparts in Manila after the offshore drills, two Philippine security officials told The Associated Press. The Philippines would not be part of this week's drills due to military logistical limitations but is open to becoming a participant in the future, the official said.

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-japan-australia-plan-joint-navy-drills-disputed-102402889>

17 August 2023: Sweden expresses support for The Philippines amid South China Sea dispute

Sweden stands with the Philippines amid the latter's territorial row with China in the South China Sea. The Department of National Defense (DND) disclosed on Wednesday, August 16. Sweden's expression of support came during a courtesy call between the Swedish Ambassador to the Philippines Annika Thunborg and Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. on August 14.

During the call, Teodoro and Thunborg discussed the "fruitful cooperation" between Manila and Stockholm, and reaffirmed both countries' common commitment to a long-term partnership.

"Exchanging regional security situation updates, Ambassador Thunborg noted the developments in the South China Sea and conveyed Sweden's support for the Philippines' position," DND spokesperson Arsenio Andolong said.

<https://scandasia.com/sweden-expresses-support-for-the-philippines-amid-south-china-sea-dispute/>

07 August 2023: International backlash grows after Chinese vessel fires water cannon on Philippine boats

China is facing a growing international backlash after one of its coast guard vessels used a water cannon against a Philippine boat in the South China Sea on Saturday, an incident analysts say escalates an already tense situation and could see the United States and its allies speed up plans for joint patrols in the waterway.

By Sunday, Manila's main ally, Washington, condemned the Chinese actions and reiterated that it would meet its mutual defense treaty obligations with the Philippines.

"The United States reaffirms an armed attack on Philippine public vessels, aircraft, and armed forces — including those of its Coast Guard in the South China Sea — would invoke US mutual defense commitments under Article IV of the 1951 US Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty," US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. US allies joined in a united front with Washington and Manila.

Australia, Japan and Germany called the Chinese actions "dangerous" and "destabilizing." And the Canadian Embassy in Manila said Ottawa "unreservedly condemns the dangerous and provocative actions taken by the Chinese Coast Guard."

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/08/07/asia/china-philippines-coast-guard-confrontation-south-china-sea-intl-hnk/index.html>

Follow-up: 11 August 2023: "Resolve Peacefully," Says India On South China Sea Issue

Referring to the recent incident of water cannon being used at Philippines supply boat by Chinese coast guard ship, India on Friday said that issues in the South China Sea need to be resolved peacefully while urging China and the Philippines to adhere to international laws.

"Let me emphasize where we are on the South China Sea developments. We've always felt that the issues need to be resolved, disputes peacefully, and the rules-based order, and we would certainly urge parties to follow that as well as ensure that no such incidents do not happen," Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said when asked whether the tension between China and Philippines concerning India.

He further stated, "I mentioned specifically that I have already made a comment regarding the need to adhere to international law. I think I'd leave it at that."

<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/resolve-peacefully-says-india-on-south-china-sea-issue-4291055>

03 August 2023: U.S. airs concerns over involvement of blacklisted China firm in Manila Bay reclamation

The United States has expressed concern over the involvement of a Chinese state-owned firm that it blacklisted for its role in constructing and militarising artificial South China sea islands in Philippine reclamation projects.

A spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy in Manila, Kanishka Gangopadhyay, said Washington also expressed to the Philippine government its concern about the "potential negative long-term and irreversible impacts" of the project and other reclamation activities on the environment.

China Communications Construction Co Ltd (CCCC) (601800.SS) was among dozens of Chinese firms the United States blacklisted in 2020 for its role in helping the Chinese military construct and militarise artificial islands in the South China Sea, most of which China claims as its own.

"We are concerned with both the impact the project will have on the environment and on the involvement of CCCC. These are separate issues," Gangopadhyay told reporters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-airs-concerns-over-involvement-blacklisted-china-firm-manila-bay-reclamation-2023-08-02/>