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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

29 September 2023: Philippines defending territory, not seeking trouble in South China Sea, president says

The Philippines will put up a strong defence of its territory and the rights of its fishers and is not looking for trouble, its president said on Friday, as a row simmers with China over access to a strategic South China Sea shoal.

The Philippine coastguard this week said it had cut a 300 metre (980 feet) floating barrier installed by China that blocked access to the hotly disputed Scarborough Shoal, an area Beijing has controlled for over a decade.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, in his first remarks over the latest flare up, said the Philippines was upholding its rights to fish in its exclusive economic zone.

"What we will do is to continue defending the Philippines, the maritime territory of the Philippines, the rights of our fishermen to catch fish in areas where they are doing it for hundreds of years already," Marcos told reporters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-leader-says-defending-territory-not-looking-trouble-over-s-china-sea-2023-09-29/>

25 September 2023: Philippines says Beijing installed floating barrier in contested area

The Philippines has accused China of installing a "floating barrier" to stop fishing boats from entering a disputed area in the South China Sea.

The Philippines' coast guard said the 300m (1,000ft) obstacle was preventing fishermen from working in a lagoon in the Scarborough Shoal.

China claims more than 90% of the South China Sea and seized the shoal in 2012.

Commodore Jay Tarriela of the Philippine coast guard said the barrier was discovered by a patrol on Friday.

Three Chinese coast guard boats and a Chinese maritime militia service boat installed the barrier when the Philippine vessel arrived, he said.

***Follows-up:* 26 September 2023: Philippines removes Chinese 'floating barrier' in South China Sea after 'special operation'**

The Philippines on Monday (September 25) said it has executed a "special operation" to remove a "floating barrier" installed by China at a prime fishing patch in an area in the South China Sea claimed as theirs by both countries.

This comes a day after Manila's coastguard and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources "strongly condemned" the move and accused the Chinese coastguard of preventing Filipinos from entering the area and fishing.

<https://www.wionews.com/world/philippines-removes-chinese-floating-barrier-in-south-china-sea-after-special-operation-639496>

27 September 2023: Beijing hits back at Manila over Scarborough Shoal barrier 'farce'

Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin dismissed the move on Wednesday and repeated that the Scarborough Shoal – known as Huangyan Island in China – was Chinese territory and Beijing would always defend its sovereignty and maritime interests over the area.

"This so-called action by the Philippine side is purely a farce for its own amazement," Wang said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3236026/south-china-sea-beijing-hits-back-manila-over-scarborough-shoal-barrier-farce>

24 September 2023: Filipino fisherman chased by China's coast guard in disputed waters

Filipino fisherman Arnel Satam guns the motor of his tiny wooden boat as he makes a dash for the shallow waters of Scarborough Shoal in the disputed South China Sea, with Chinese coast guard speedboats in hot pursuit.

In a high-seas chase lasting several minutes, Satam tries in vain to outrun the faster boats in the hope of slipping inside the ring of reefs controlled by China, where fish are more abundant.

Friday's pursuit was witnessed by AFP journalists on board the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources ship BRP Datu Bankaw, which was delivering food, water and fuel to Filipino fishermen plying the contested waters, sometimes for weeks on end.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-fishermen-chased-chinese-coast-guard-south-china-sea-disputed-waters-3794816>

20 September 2023: Philippines may file case against China before international tribunal over alleged damaged corals

The Philippines is considering pursuing a case against Beijing before an international tribunal for the alleged large-scale destruction of corals in reefs of the disputed South China Sea.

The coastguard this week released a video following underwater inspections of Iroquois Reef and Sabina Shoal, which Manila claims as its territory, revealing “severe damage” to the marine ecosystem.

The force said it also found dead corals that were cleaned and crushed before being dumped into the seabed in those areas where Chinese fishing boats had been spotted in recent months.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3235208/south-china-sea-philippines-may-file-case-against-china-international-tribunal-over-alleged-damaged>

20 September 2023: Chinese satellite ground stations installed on disputed South China Sea reefs

China has built two ground stations for its BeiDou satellite system on disputed South China Sea reefs, according to state television.

The stations, connected to China’s land-based ship automatic identification system (AIS), are installed at lighthouses located on North Reef and Bombay Reef in the Paracel Islands, which are also claimed by Vietnam and Taipei.

They use the BeiDou satellite network – completed in 2020 as a rival to the US global positioning system (GPS) – to locate the vessels and transmit signals, state broadcaster CCTV reported on Tuesday.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3235147/chinese-satellite-ground-stations-installed-disputed-south-china-sea-reefs>

19 September 2023: ASEAN troops launch maritime drills amid South China Sea tension

Troops from across Southeast Asia gather in Indonesia on Tuesday to launch their first joint maritime exercises as tensions soar over Beijing's claim to the South China Sea.

ASEAN has previously conducted drills with the U.S. and other partner countries, but this week's exercises mark a first for the 10-country bloc.

The ASEX 01-Natuna exercises will run through Saturday, with warships expected to sail from the island of Batam to an area near the Natuna Islands, which face disputed waters in the South China Sea. Planes will also participate in an air cargo support exercise.

Indonesia's military said the exercises will comprise only noncombat activities including sea and air maneuvers, search and rescue drills, and humanitarian and disaster relief.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/ASEAN-troops-launch-maritime-drills-amid-South-China-Sea-tension>

18 September 2023: Malaysia, China to have open communication over South China Sea issue

To maintain peace and stability, Malaysia and China have agreed to have continual, open communication over the South China Sea issue, Malaysia Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said after his meeting with China Premier Li Qing in Nanning, China, on Sunday.

Datuk Seri Anwar was in the southern Chinese city for a packed 14-hour visit, reported Bernama news agency. He attended the 20th China-Asean Expo, where he introduced Malaysia's jackfruit to the Chinese market, as well as the China-Asean Business and Investment Summit.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/malaysia-china-to-have-open-communication-over-south-china-sea-issue-anwar>

16 September 2023: Philippines Sees Resurgence Of Chinese Ships In Disputed Waters

The Philippine armed forces said it's doubling efforts on maritime surveillance after detecting a "resurgence" of Chinese vessels around the West Philippine Sea.

After the military successfully drove away 50 Chinese militia vessels in July, such vessels returned late August after its patrols left the area, the armed forces said in a statement. There was also "massive harvesting" of corals in disputed waters, it said.

<https://gcaptain.com/philippines-sees-resurgence-of-chinese-ships-in-disputed-waters/>

15 September 2023: Chinese Aircraft Carrier Shandong Back in South China Sea

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Shandong Carrier Strike Group returned to the South China Sea on Friday, according to a release by the Japanese Ministry of Defense. At the same time, five of the eight PLAN surface ships that had entered the Philippine Sea Monday via the Miyako Strait returned to the East China Sea Friday by the same route.

Meanwhile, Western media outlets are reporting that Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu is under investigation for corruption and will likely be removed from office.

<https://news.usni.org/2023/09/15/chinese-aircraft-carrier-shandong-back-in-south-china-sea-2>

14 September 2023: 30 Chinese fishing vessels swarm West Philippine Sea

The Philippine military on Thursday revealed a resurgence of Chinese swarming activity in the West Philippine Sea, with 30 Chinese fishing vessels spotted in Philippine waters.

Aerial patrols conducted by the Armed Forces Western Command on September 6 and 7 spotted 23 Chinese fishing vessels in Iloilo Reef located at the southern end of Reed Bank, an area northeast of the Spratly Islands thought to be rich in oil and gas.

"Additional swarming was observed in Escoda (Sabina) Shoal, where five Chinese fishing vessels were present, and in Baragatan (Nares) Bank, with two Chinese fishing vessels recorded," the Western Command said.

A routine air patrol conducted by the Philippine Navy last August 24 also spotted 33 Chinese fishing vessels in Rozul (Iroquois) Reef within the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf, "making this intrusion a violation of Philippine sovereign rights and jurisdiction."

<https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/14/23/30-chinese-fishing-vessels-swarm-west-philippine-sea>

9 September 2023: In cat and mouse game, Philippines resupplies troops in South China Sea atoll

The Philippines has completed a supply mission for troops stationed in a rusty World War Two-era ship, but not without a usual cat and mouse chase with Chinese vessels in the South China Sea.

China said the vessels entered the waters without its permission.

During the mission, two Chinese ships blocked two Philippine coast guard vessels. In another instance, a Philippine ship was surrounded by a Chinese coast guard vessel and three maritime militia vessels.

One of the Chinese ships was also seen heading dangerously close to the Philippine vessel which Reuters was onboard, while several Chinese militia vessels tried to block its path.

"We always encounter dangerous manoeuvres, shadowing activities, blocking not only from China coast guard vessels, but also from China militia vessels," Philippine Coast Guard commanding officer Emmanuel Dangate told reporters after the mission.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/cat-mouse-game-philippines-resupplies-troops-south-china-sea-atoll-2023-09-09/>

07 September 2023: Philippines' Marcos bucks use of 'militia vessels' to enforce South China Sea claims

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr told leaders at a summit in Indonesia on Thursday to oppose the use of "coast guard and maritime militia vessels" in the South China Sea, where Manila has a territorial dispute with Beijing.

Philippine ships have been harassed several times in recent months by Chinese vessels in the disputed waterway, an important trade route where other South-east Asian countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia also have claims.

Mr Marcos told the 18-nation East Asia Summit, which was attended by China, that Manila was concerned about the installation of military facilities on reclaimed features such as outcrops and reefs, as well as violations of international law.

"We are concerned over consistent actions that are in violation of obligations under international law," "We must oppose the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia vessels in the South China Sea." he said, according to a transcript of his remarks released by the presidential palace.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-marcos-bucks-use-of-militia-vessels-to-enforce-south-china-sea-claims>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

29 September 2023: PH, EU against use of force in South China Sea

THE Philippines and the European Union urged countries with conflicting claims in the South China Sea to refrain from using force that fuels uncertainty in the region.

They expressed serious concern over actions that endanger peace, security, and stability, and the rules-based international order, including recent incidents in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said the appeal was made during the meeting of the first subcommittee on maritime cooperation under the Philippine-European Union partnership and cooperation agreement in Brussels, Belgium, on Wednesday, September 27.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2023/09/29/news/national/ph-eu-against-use-of-force-in-south-china-sea/1912247>

28 September 2023: US commends Philippines on removal of Chinese barrier in South China Sea

The Philippines' removal of a Chinese floating barrier near the Scarborough Shoal in a disputed part of the South China Sea was "a bold step in defending their own sovereignty", a senior US defence official said on Thursday (Sep 28).

Manila had expressed outrage over China's placement of a long, ball-buoy barrier near the rocky outcrop, some 200km from the Philippines. It has seen years of intermittent flare-ups over sovereignty and fishing rights.

During a congressional hearing, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia Lindsey Ford commended the Philippines' action and reaffirmed Washington's security commitments to its Asian ally.

"The department has been incredibly clear that when it comes to our treaty commitments to the Philippines, we believe an armed attack against Philippine Armed Forces, public vessels, aircraft, apply to the South China Sea. That includes the Philippine Coast Guard," Ford told a House of Representatives subcommittee on foreign affairs.

"We stand by those commitments absolutely," she said.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/world/us-commends-philippines-removal-chinese-barrier-south-china-sea-3806816>

22 September 2023: Singapore, Indian navies taking part in joint battle exercises in South China Sea

Sailors from the Singapore and Indian navies are embarking on a week-long bilateral maritime exercise in the southern parts of the South China Sea from Thursday.

Warships from the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) taking part in the exercise include the two Formidable-class frigates RSS Stalwart and RSS Tenacious.

Both warships will be accompanied by an S-70B naval helicopter and the Victory-class missile corvette RSS Valour, said the Defence Ministry (Mindef) in a statement.

From the Indian Navy, the Rajput-class destroyer INS Ranvijay, Kamorta-class corvette INS Kavaratti, and a P-8I maritime patrol aircraft will be deployed.

And for the first time, both navies will deploy a submarine in the exercise, known as Simbex. Simbex, which marks its 30th outing this year, is conducted in two phases. The land phase of the exercise will involve table-top exercises and planning discussions, while the sea phase will see the navies engage in various naval drills, including anti-submarine warfare and live weapon firing.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-indian-navies-taking-part-in-joint-battle-exercises-in-south-china-sea>

20 September 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>

17 September 2023: New Japan defense chief 'very concerned' about Chinese military moves

New Defense Minister Minoru Kihara said Sunday that he is “very concerned” about China’s rapid military buildup and moves in the East and South China seas, calling trilateral security cooperation between Japan, South Korea and the United States “the cornerstone” of Tokyo’s response to an increasingly tense regional environment that also includes North Korea and Russia.

On China, Kihara reiterated what has become an often-heard stance by members of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s administration: A pledge to “assert what needs to be asserted,” while calling for responsible behavior and continued engagement in dialogue on issues of concern and areas of potential cooperation.

“Both Japan and China have an important responsibility for the peace and prosperity of the region and the international community,” Kihara said. “We need to build a constructive and stable relationship.”

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/09/17/japan/politics/japan-defense-minister-minoru-kihara-china/>

14 September 2023: Taiwan seeks U.S., Japan, Philippine support to deter Chinese navy

A security official in charge of Taiwan's submarine program has urged the U.S., Japan and the Philippines to set up a joint reporting mechanism with Taiwan to counter China's growing naval threat.

Adm. Huang Shu-kuang told Nikkei Asia in a rare interview with foreign media that Taiwan could be "doomed" if China is able to surround the island.

"If Taiwan is taken away, Japan's development and survival will face the same danger," added the senior adviser to Taiwan's National Security Council. "Also, Russia, North Korea and China pose a direct threat to Japan and South Korea. The three regimes are backing each other.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Taiwan-tensions/Taiwan-seeks-U.S.-Japan-Philippine-support-to-deter-Chinese-navy>

11 September 2023: US, Vietnam warn against 'threat or use of force' in South China Sea

The United States and Vietnam warned on Monday (Sep 11) against the "threat or use of force" in the disputed South China Sea, days after the latest clash involving Chinese vessels. President Joe Biden and Vietnam's Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong said the competing claims on the strategic waterway must be settled under international norms.

"The leaders underscored their unwavering support for the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, without the threat or use of force," Biden and Trong said in a joint statement.

They also called for "freedom of navigation and overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce in the South China Sea".

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/us-vietnam-warn-against-threat-or-use-of-force-in-south-china-sea/articleshow/103567361.cms?from=mdr>

7 September 2023: ASEAN makes deals but no progress on South China Sea

Southeast Asian leaders ended their annual summit on Thursday with their eyes on over \$38 billion worth of deals but the three days of intense talks failed to yield solutions to critical issues, including tensions in the South China Sea

Beijing threw fuel on the fire recently by unveiling a new territorial map that includes the controversial "nine-dash line," a border claim that encompasses almost the entire South China Sea. So far, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam have protested China's new map. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi did not respond to a reporter's question if the map was discussed during Wednesday's ASEAN-China meeting.

Members on Thursday reaffirmed their "shared commitment to safeguarding and promoting peace, security, and stability in the South China Sea, particularly given the recent development," an apparent reference to China's map.

The territorial issue has been simmering for years, and ASEAN leaders have tried to compile a code of conduct with China aimed at avoiding conflict. But Indonesia's statement on the issue was vague, mentioning only that the bloc looked forward to an early conclusion of an effective and substantive agreement in accordance with international law.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Location/Southeast-Asia/ASEAN/ASEAN-makes-deals-but-no-progress-on-South-China-Sea-Myanmar>

4 September 2023: Philippines, US navies conduct joint sail in South China Sea

Naval vessels from the Philippines and United States conducted a joint sail through parts of the South China Sea lying within the Southeast Asian nation's exclusive economic zone, Manila's military said on Monday.

It was the first time the Philippines and Washington have carried out a joint sail in waters west of Palawan island, the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Western Command said.

The display of cooperation between the US and Philippines comes at a time of heightened tension between Manila and Beijing, which claims much of the South China Sea.

"This event aims to provide an opportunity for the Philippine Navy and the US Indo-Pacific Navy to test and refine existing maritime doctrine," the Western Command said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-us-navies-conduct-joint-sail-south-china-sea-2023-09-04/>