

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 121
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

30 October 2023: Defence Ministry to procure two aircraft to detect submarines in South China Sea

The Defence Ministry is in the midst of procuring two Maritime Patrol Aircrafts (MPA) from Italy that have the ability to detect the presence of submarines in the South China Sea area, especially in the Sabah region.

Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan said this is because the long-range radar (LRR) of the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) at the Labuan Naval Air Base could not detect submarines and was only able to monitor the airspace which was now more focused towards the South China Sea which has been "busy" lately.

"We are also in the process of procurement, which has been approved by the National Security Council, to acquire another LRR that we will place in Pulau Layang-layang because the ones in Labuan cannot see that far.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/10/30/defence-ministry-to-procure-two-aircraft-to-detect-submarines-in-south-china-sea>

30 October 2023: PLA intercepts Philippine warship in South China Sea

The Chinese military said on Monday that it had intercepted a Philippine warship that had illegally trespassed into the waters near Huangyan Island in the South China Sea.

Tian Junli, spokesperson for the People's Liberation Army's Southern Theater Command, said in a statement that on Monday, a Philippine frigate illegally entered the waters near China's Huangyan Island without the approval of the Chinese government.

The PLA Southern Theater Command organized naval and air forces to follow, monitor, warn, and intercept the Philippine warship according to law, Tian said.

He added that the Philippines' action seriously violated China's sovereignty, international law, and basic norms governing international relations, and is highly likely to lead to misunderstanding and miscalculation.

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202310/30/WS653fad88a31090682a5eb832.html>

22 October 2023: China, Philippines trade accusations over collision in South China Sea

China and the Philippines traded accusations over a collision in disputed waters of the South China Sea as Chinese vessels blocked Philippine boats supplying forces there on Sunday (Oct 22) in the latest of a series of maritime confrontations.

The two countries have had numerous run-ins in the South China Sea in recent months, especially near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal, part of the Spratly Islands.

The Philippines has sent supplies to troops stationed on a rusted WWII-era transport ship used as an outpost on the shoal, prompting China's coastguard to repeatedly deploy vessels to block the resupply missions.

In the incident early on Sunday, China's coastguard said there had been a "slight collision" between one of its ships and the Philippine boat while the coastguard was "lawfully" blocking the boat from transporting "illegal construction materials" to the warship.

Manila responded by condemning "in the strongest degree" the "dangerous blocking manoeuvres" of the Chinese vessel and summoned the Chinese ambassador to the Philippines.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-south-china-sea-disputed-shoal-3864271>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-summons-chinese-envoy-declares-its-firm-resolve-after-collision-in-south-china-sea>

Follows-up: US renews warning it will defend Philippines after incidents with Chinese vessels in South China Sea

In its statement on 22 October 2023, the US said: “The United States stands with our Philippine allies in the face of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) Coast Guard and maritime militia’s dangerous and unlawful actions obstructing an October 22 Philippine resupply mission to Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea.

By conducting dangerous maneuvers that caused collisions with Philippine resupply and Coast Guard ships, the PRC Coast Guard and maritime militia violated international law by intentionally interfering with the Philippine vessels’ exercise of high seas freedom of navigation.”

<https://sg.usembassy.gov/u-s-support-for-our-philippine-allies-in-the-face-of-repeated-prc-harassment-in-the-south-china-sea/>

Follows-up: 23 October 2023: China slams U.S. endorsement for Philippines over latest incident in South China Sea

The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Monday deplored and rejected the U.S. attempt to endorse the Philippines' acts during a recent incident in the South China Sea.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning on Monday noted that the U.S. State Department's statement goes against the spirit of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

"In disregard of facts, it made baseless attacks against China's legitimate and lawful law enforcement activities to safeguard our rights at Ren'ai Jiao in China's Nansha Qundao," Mao noted.

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2023-10-23/China-slams-U-S-endorsement-for-Philippines-over-maritime-incident-1o8OX5wB7c4/index.html>

16 October 2023: Philippines hits out at Chinese military’s ‘dangerous, offensive’ behaviour after fresh near miss

The Philippines’ military has called out China to stop “dangerous and offensive manoeuvres” in the South China Sea, after it said a Chinese navy ship shadowed and attempted to cut off a Philippine navy vessel conducting a resupply mission late last week.

A Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessel came as close as 320 metres (350 yards) of the BRP Benguet as it tried to cross in front of the Philippine ship southwest of Thitu island, Manila’s biggest and most strategically important outpost in the South China Sea that’s also known as Pag-asa, according to armed forces chief Romeo Brawner.

The crew of the Philippine vessel, which was *en route* to a military station on Friday for a regular rotation and resupply mission, cited the violation of collision regulations in its radio challenges and demanded the Chinese ship to steer clear. It received a counter response from People’s Liberation Army Navy Ship 621, which cited China’s nine-dash line, according to the statement.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3238047/south-china-sea-philippines-hits-out-chinese-militarys-dangerous-offensive-behaviour-after-fresh>

14 October 2023: Philippines in historic US-backed military base expansion

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr is overseeing a historic expansion in military cooperation with the United States, putting the Southeast Asian nation on a collision course with China in the South China Sea.

A new report by the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) of the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington DC shows in graphic detail how

the Philippines is rapidly upgrading a whole host of military bases under its Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the US Pentagon. Combining open-access information, public statements by senior Filipino officials and high-resolution satellite imagery, AMTI has tracked accelerated construction activities across as many as nine EDCA bases across the Philippine archipelago.
<https://asiatimes.com/2023/10/philippines-in-historic-us-backed-military-base-expansion/>

12 October 2023: China says sends fighter jets to warn US Navy plane in Taiwan Strait
China said on Thursday it had sent fighter jets to monitor and warn a U.S. Navy patrol aircraft that flew through the Taiwan Strait.

China claims sovereignty over democratically-governed Taiwan, and says it has jurisdiction over the narrow waterway. Taiwan and the United States dispute that, saying the Taiwan Strait is an international waterway.
<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/china-says-sends-fighter-jets-to-warn-us-navy-plane-in-taiwan-strait>

11 October 2023: In U-turn, Philippine navy acknowledges gunboat presence near disputed Scarborough Shoal

The Philippine military has confirmed its navy ship and a Chinese coastguard vessel engaged in a brief encounter in the disputed South China Sea's Scarborough Shoal, after previously saying it had no security presence there as tensions deepen over the waterway. Military chief General Romeo Brawner acknowledged the gunboat was on a maritime patrol during Tuesday's incident but rejected claims it was chased away by China's coastguard. "We verified that we have a navy ship in Bajo de Masinloc but its mission is for maritime patrol. It was sailing and China's coastguard was there to challenge it. The navy ship continued to sail and it was not driven away," Brawner said.
<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3237547/u-turn-philippine-navy-acknowledges-gunboat-presence-near-disputed-scarborough-shoal>

10 October 2023: China drives away Philippine gunboat near disputed Scarborough Shoal

China's coastguard says it drove away a Philippine navy gunboat near the contested Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea on Tuesday. The coastguard said the ship had ignored verbal warnings so it had followed and monitored the vessel before forcing it to leave the area, where China claims sovereignty. The coast guard said it took "necessary measures", such as forcing the gunboat out and controlling its route, after repeated dissuasion and warnings from the Chinese side were ignored.
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3237441/china-drives-away-philippine-gunboat-near-disputed-scarborough-shoal>

Follows-up: 11 October 2023: Philippine military chief denies navy ship driven away by Chinese coast guard in disputed shoal

The Philippines' military chief has denied its navy vessel was driven away by the Chinese coast guard in Scarborough Shoal, saying it was part of China's propaganda. "We are having it verified but nothing like that happened. In our view, it's Chinese propaganda," said Philippine armed forces chief Romeo Brawner Jr.
<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-drives-away-philippines-navy-gunboat-from-scarborough-shoal-waters>

06 October 2023: China Coast Guard Harass Second Thomas Shoal Resupply Mission

The Philippines conducted a successful resupply mission on Wednesday (04 October) to its outpost on BRP Sierra Madre (LS-57), grounded at Second Thomas Shoal in the disputed Spratly Islands, despite China's attempts at obstruction.

The mission consisted of two chartered commercial boats escorted by Philippine Coast Guard patrol vessels BRP Sindangan (MRRV-4407) and BRP Cabra (MRRV-4409). Philippine Coast Guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarriela stated in a social media post on Friday that a total of four China Coast Guard ships assisted by five People's Maritime Militia ships attempted to block the supply ships. CCG 21556 carried out dangerous maneuvers and came within 1 meter of Sindangan.

In a media conference the same day, Tarriela said that to avert a collision, Sindangan had to put its engines in reverse as CCG 21556 crossed its bow. The China Coast Guard and maritime militia carried out a total of eight dangerous maneuvers against the Philippines ships, according to Tarriela.

<https://news.usni.org/2023/10/06/china-coast-guard-harass-second-thomas-shoal-resupply-mission>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

27 October 2023: Chinese fighter jet got within 10 feet of US bomber over South China Sea, US military says

A Chinese fighter jet came within 10 feet of a US Air Force B-52 bomber flying over the South China Sea on Tuesday, according to the US military.

The Chinese pilot "flew in an unsafe and unprofessional manner, demonstrated poor airmanship by closing with uncontrolled excessive speed, flying below, in front of, and within 10 feet of the B-52, putting both aircraft in danger of collision," US Indo-Pacific Command said in a Thursday statement. "We are concerned this pilot was unaware of how close he came to causing a collision."

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/26/politics/china-fighter-jet-us-bomber-south-china-sea/index.html>

26 October 2023: Biden Warns China After Incidents Involving Philippine Ships

President Joe Biden warned China that the US would be forced to intervene if Beijing attacks Philippine vessels in the South China Sea, after two separate collisions in the disputed waterway over the weekend.

"Just this past week, the PRC vessels acted dangerously and unlawfully as our Philippine friends conducted a routine resupply mission within their own exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea," Biden said at the White House on Wednesday during a joint news conference with Australian Prime Minister Anthony

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-26/biden-warns-china-not-to-attack-philippine-ships-after-incidents?embedded-checkout=true#xj4y7vzkg>

18 October 2023: US, Philippines wrap up naval drill amid clashes in South China

The United States and the Philippines have wrapped up joint naval drills near the Asian nation that focused on replenishment at sea, naval warfare, and human assistance and disaster response.

The exercise took place amid ongoing tension in the South China Sea, with resupply operations stoking diplomatic spats between the Philippines and China.

Drills includes anti-surface, anti-submarine and electronic warfare scenarios — critical areas given the Philippines only recently acquired and equipped its guided-missile frigate BRP

Antonio Luna for South China Sea operations, according to Philippine Commodore Joe Orbe, the officer in charge of Sama Sama.

<https://www.defensenews.com/training-sim/2023/10/18/us-philippines-wrap-up-naval-drill-amid-clashes-in-south-china/>

18 October 2023: US Says China Has Stepped Up ‘Risky’ Behavior in South China Sea

Chinese aircraft have sharply increased what the US says is “coercive and risky” behavior in the South China Sea in the last two years, US officials said, calling it a campaign to deny the US and its allies their right to fly in international airspace.

The US has recorded some 300 incidents since September 2021 that it characterized as unprofessional and potentially dangerous encounters by People’s Liberation Arm aircraft, said Ely Ratner, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs. Of those 300 incidents, 180 involved the US military, Ratner said.

All of the incidents involved Chinese People’s Liberation Army planes that “performed reckless maneuvers or discharged chaff or shot off flares or approached too rapidly or too close to U.S. aircraft,” Ely Ratner, the Pentagon’s top official for Asia, told a news conference.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-17/us-says-china-has-stepped-up-risky-behavior-in-south-china-sea?embedded-checkout=true#xj4y7vzkg>

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/10/18/asia-pacific/politics/china-military-coercive-behavior/>

10 October 2023: No set area yet but Philippines-Australia joint sail in SCS to proceed - envoy

The Australian and Philippine governments have yet to disclose details on their upcoming joint sail in the South China Sea but Australia's envoy assured that the activity is going to proceed.

“We're not making an announcement on when but the intention remains as the leaders announced for a joint sail in the West Philippine... in an appropriate maritime location (that) is yet to be announced,” said Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong in a press conference on Tuesday.

The future joint sail will come as Manila and Canberra seek increased engagements as strategic partners in the region.

Wong reaffirmed that Australia would continue to help enhance the Philippines’ maritime capabilities through technical training, activities on the monitoring and protection of oceans and provision of new equipment to the Philippine Coast Guard.

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1211478>

03 October 2023: Philippines, U.S. begin joint naval drills amid South China Sea tensions

The Philippines and the U.S. kicked off a two-week joint naval exercise on Monday, part of efforts to bolster international cooperation amid Beijing's increasingly assertive activity in the South China Sea.

Named "Samasama," which means "together" in Tagalog, the exercise aims primarily to strengthen the Philippines' naval capabilities. The drills will be conducted in and around the northern Philippine island of Luzon, and will last until Oct. 13.

"Addressing various dimensions of modern naval operations, from anti-submarine warfare, to electronic warfare, this exercise enhances our readiness to confront a wide spectrum of security challenges," Philippine Navy chief Vice Adm. Toribio Adaci Jr. said at an opening ceremony Monday.

As part of the exercise, the Philippine and U.S. navies are conducting interoperability drills with forces from Japan, the U.K., Canada, France and Australia. The New Zealand and Indonesian navies are also taking part as observers.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/Philippines-U.S.-begin-joint-naval-drills-amid-South-China-Sea-tensions>