

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 123
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

26 December: China warns rocket remnants to hit South China Sea

China warned that remnants of a rocket would hit an area in the South China Sea on Dec 26, following the sixth deployment of its most powerful launch vehicle 11 days ago.

Rocket debris, which generally burns up in the atmosphere on re-entry, is expected to fall off the coast of China's island province of Hainan between 11am and noon, said the China Maritime Safety Administration.

China launched a Long March 5 rocket on Dec 15 from Hainan's Wenchang launch site, a sixth launch of the rocket type since its first flight in 2016.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/china-warns-rocket-remnants-to-hit-south-china-sea-maritime-safety-authority>

25 December: China says Philippines' South China Sea actions 'extremely dangerous'

Chinese state media accused the Philippines on Monday of repeatedly infringing on China's territory in the South China Sea, spreading false information and colluding with extraterritorial forces to cause trouble.

The Philippines has relied on U.S. support to continually provoke China, with such "extremely dangerous" behavior seriously harming regional peace and stability, The People's Daily, a Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece, wrote in a commentary on Monday.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/China-Philippines-South-China-Sea-actions-extremely-dangerous>

***Follows-up:* 26 December: Philippines is not provoking conflict in South China Sea, its military says**

The Philippines is not provoking conflict in the South China Sea, its military spokesperson said on Tuesday (Dec 26), responding to China's accusation that Manila was encroaching on Beijing's territory.

It was the latest salvo amid rising tension as the two have traded accusations in recent months over a series of maritime run-ins, including China allegedly ramming a ship this month carrying the Philippines' military chief.

"The Philippines is not provoking conflict," Medel Aguilar told state broadcaster PTV.

"We follow international law and we are only implementing our domestic law, meaning the limits of our territorial waters and exclusive economic zone, where we have sovereign rights."

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-not-provoking-conflict-south-china-sea-its-military-says-4010931>

22 December: Marcos shrugs off Beijing's warning, says Philippines will assert maritime rights

The Philippines will continue asserting its rights in the South China Sea, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said after China warned the nation against causing "trouble" in disputed waters.

The Southeast Asian nation "remains a force and voice of reason" despite "many attempts at provocation," Marcos said in a statement quoting his speech before the military on Thursday.

He also said that his country exemplifies "responsible and dignified behaviour in resolving issues in accordance with international law."

The Philippine leader's remarks came after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the two nations' ties are "facing serious difficulties." Wang also said Manila "must act with caution" and warned against colluding with "malicious external forces."

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3245945/south-china-sea-marcos-shrugs-beijings-warning-says-philippines-will-assert-maritime-rights>

17 December: Philippines wants to start new energy exploration projects in South China Sea

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said his country is working to resolve "exploration issues" in the South China Sea so it could start new energy exploration projects in the resource-rich waterway to meet his nation's energy needs.

Marcos, in an interview with Japanese media on Saturday, said tensions in the South China Sea have "increased rather than diminished" in recent months, warning that a "more assertive China" posed a "real challenge" to its Asian neighbours.

The Philippines and China have resumed discussions about jointly exploring oil and gas resources in the South China Sea, where the two nations have sparred for decades over sovereign rights to develop natural resources in the strategic waterway.

But "very little progress" has been made with regard to the talks, Marcos said, according to a press release from his office as he attends a Tokyo summit of Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-marcos-says-tensions-south-china-sea-have-increased-2023-12-17/>

10 December: Philippines and China accuse each other of South China Sea collisions

The Philippines and China have traded accusations over a collision of their vessels near a shoal in the South China Sea amid rising tensions in the disputed waters.

The latest incident took place near Second Thomas Shoal, which lies about 200 kilometres (124 miles) from the western Philippine island of Palawan, and more than 1,000 kilometres from China's southern Hainan island. Chinese and Philippine vessels faced off in multiple clashes in the South China Sea over the weekend as tensions continued to escalate between the two countries over maritime territory.

The Philippine coast guard accused China of firing water cannons and ramming resupply vessels and a coast guard ship, causing "serious engine damage" to one, while China's coast guard said the Philippine vessel intentionally rammed its ship.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/10/philippines-and-china-accuse-each-other-of-south-china-sea-collisions>

Follows-up: 11 December: Philippines to Summon China Envoy After Weekend Sea Clashes

The Philippines said it will summon Beijing's envoy in Manila after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. slammed China's "dangerous actions" in the South China Sea over the weekend, including ramming a Filipino boat.

The Southeast Asian nation has lodged formal complaints with Beijing, Department of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Teresita Daza said in a briefing on Monday. "We are also

summoning the ambassador from the Chinese embassy in Manila later this afternoon to protest the incidents,” she added.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-12-10/philippines-marcos-slams-china-s-dangerous-actions-at-sea>

Follows-up: 11 December: China says moves on Philippine ships in South China Sea 'professional, restrained'

China said on Monday (Dec 11) that moves by its Coast Guard against Philippine vessels in the disputed South China Sea were "professional" and "restrained", adding it had "lodged stern representations" with Manila.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said Beijing's Coast Guard "took necessary measures against the Philippine ships in accordance with domestic and international law".

"The operations were professional, restrained, reasonable and legal," she said.

Beijing's foreign ministry, Mao added, "has lodged stern representations with the Philippines and expresses its strong protest”.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/china-philippines-south-china-sea-coast-guard-vessels-water-cannon-3980036>

4 December: Beijing accuses US of threatening peace and stability after warship passes disputed South China Sea reef

The USS Gabrielle Giffords, an Independence-class littoral combat ship, conducted combined operations with the Philippine Navy in the South China Sea a few days before its voyage past the reef, which has been at the centre of recent confrontations between Chinese and Philippine vessels.

The Chinese military described the United States as “the biggest threat to peace and stability” in the South China Sea after an American warship sailed close to a disputed reef on Monday. The People’s Liberation Army said a US ship had entered waters near the Second Thomas Shoal “illegally” and without its permission. It did not say which laws it thought were being breached.

“The United States has deliberately disrupted the South China Sea, seriously violated China’s sovereignty and security, severely undermined regional peace and stability, and seriously violated international law and basic norms governing international relations,” the PLA’s Southern Theatre Command said.

“This fully illustrates that the US is the biggest threat to peace and stability in the South China Sea.”

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3243709/chinas-military-says-us-combat-ship-illegally-entered-territorial-waters-south-china-sea>

1 December: Philippines’ ‘advanced’ coastal station to step up monitoring of Chinese vessels in South China Sea

The Philippines said on Friday it was establishing a coastguard station on the largest island it holds in the disputed South China Sea, to improve monitoring of Chinese vessels asserting Beijing’s claims in the waters.

The system, expected to be completed in 2024 is planned to be equipped with advance technology, including radar, satellite communication, coastal cameras and vessel traffic management.

National Security Adviser Eduardo Ano made the announcement during a visit to the Philippine-held Thitu Island, which is part of the hotly contested Spratly Islands.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3243532/philippines-advanced-coastal-station-step-monitoring-chinese-vessels-south-china-sea>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfF_75tFWWh8

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

25 December: Carrier USS Carl Vinson Back in the South China Sea After Singapore Port Visit

Aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70) and its escorts are back underway in the South China Sea following a short port visit to Singapore. The Vinson Carrier Strike Group is one of the few extra-regional naval forces currently operating in South East Asia over the Christmas period with other navies having all wrapped up their deployments.

The strike groups – composed of carrier Vinson with embarked Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 2, cruiser USS Princeton (CG-59) and destroyers USS Kidd (DDG -100) and USS Sterett (DDG-104) – arrived in Singapore for a scheduled port visit on Dec. 17

<https://news.usni.org/2023/12/25/carrier-uss-carl-vinson-back-in-the-south-china-sea-after-singapore-port-visit>

18 December: Japan and Malaysia sign \$2.8 mln maritime security assistance deal

Japan and Malaysia signed a security assistance deal on Saturday including a grant of 400 million yen (\$2.8 million) to boost Malaysia's maritime security, as Asian nations seek to counter an increasingly assertive China.

Japan will provide equipment such as rescue boats and supplies under the official security assistance deal, signed by the two countries' foreign ministers on the sidelines of a Tokyo summit marking 50 years of ties between Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Japanese Prime Minister Kishida welcomed the elevation of the Japan-Malaysia relationship to a "comprehensive strategic partnership", Japan's foreign ministry said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-malaysia-sign-28-mln-maritime-security-assistance-deal-2023-12-16/>

12 December: US and UK condemn China over incidents in the South China Sea against Philippines

The United States called on Sunday (Dec 10) for Beijing to halt its "dangerous and destabilising" actions in the disputed South China Sea, after a Philippine boat and China Coast Guard ship collided near a contested reef.

"These actions reflect not only reckless disregard for the safety and livelihoods of Filipinos, but also for international law," Miller said.

Britain on Dec 11 condemned what it called "unsafe and escalatory tactics deployed by Chinese vessels" against the Philippines over the weekend in the South China Sea.

"The UK opposes any action which raises tensions, including harassment, unsafe conduct and intimidation tactics which increase the risk of miscalculation and threaten regional peace and stability," the foreign office said in a statement.

"Both China and the Philippines must adhere to the findings of the 2016 Arbitral Award proceedings, which are legally binding on both parties, it added.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/us-beijing-dangerous-actions-south-china-sea-philippines-3979436>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/uk-condemns-china-over-incidents-in-the-south-china-sea-against-philippines>

7 December: G7 warns China on military activities in South China Sea

The G7 on Wednesday (06/12) issued a pointed warning on China's militarisation of the South China Sea.

We remain seriously concerned about the situation in the East and South China Seas. We strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion.

There is no legal basis for China's expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea, and we oppose China's militarization activities in the region. We emphasize the universal and unified character of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and reaffirm UNCLOS's important role in setting out the legal framework that governs all activities in the oceans and the seas. We reiterate that the award rendered by the Arbitral Tribunal on July 12, 2016, is 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.scmp.com/news/china/article/3244131/g7-warns-china-military-activities-south-china-sea-urges-it-press-russia-exit-ukraine>

4 December: France urges Beijing to help avert 'crisis' in South China Sea

French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, speaking at the Australian Press Club in Canberra, said China should play its part to reduce tensions in the Asia-Pacific region.

Australia criticised Beijing last month for its "unsafe and unprofessional" conduct at sea, saying one of its navy divers was injured by sonar pulses from an approaching Chinese warship.

"We are of course concerned by what happened a few days ago to the Australian navy, as well as what happened to the Philippines a few weeks ago," she said

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/world/france-urges-beijing-south-china-sea-avert-crisis-3963996>