

**SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 124**  
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**ACTS OF CLAIMANTS**

**31 January: Philippines alarmed by 200 Chinese vessels at Mischief Reef, Marcos urges dialogue**

The Philippine navy has expressed alarm over the growing presence of Chinese warships and maritime militia boats around Mischief Reef in the disputed South China Sea, as President Ferdinand Marcos Jr vowed to protect the country's sovereignty and called for dialogue with Beijing.

Navy spokesman Roy Vincent Trinidad said about 200 vessels, including coastguard fleets, were swarming the outcrop some 37km away from Second Thomas Shoal, where Filipino troops are stationed on a rusty old warship.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3250405/south-china-sea-philippines-alarmed-200-chinese-vessels-mischief-reef-marcos-urges-dialogue>

**30 January: Vietnam, Philippines seal deals on South China Sea security**

Vietnam and the Philippines agreed on Jan 30 to boost cooperation among their coast guards and to prevent untoward incidents in the South China Sea, in an announcement during a state visit by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

The two memorandums of understanding on security covered "incident prevention in the South China Sea" and "maritime cooperation" among coast guards, according to a Vietnamese official who announced the deals during a formal ceremony in the country's presidential palace.

Before meeting Vietnam's President Vo Van Thuong, Mr Marcos said Vietnam was "the sole strategic partner of the Philippines" in South-east Asia and stressed that maritime cooperation was the foundation of that relation.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/vietnam-philippines-seal-deals-on-south-china-sea-security>

**29 January: China allows Philippines to supply troops at disputed reef**

The Chinese coastguard said it had made "temporary special arrangements" to allow the Philippines to deliver supplies to troops at a grounded World War Two-era vessel at a disputed reef.

The Chinese coastguard has previously deployed vessels to block missions by the Philippines to supply troops on the transport ship, which has become a military outpost at the Second Thomas Shoal, 190km off the Philippine island of Palawan.

In a statement on its official WeChat account late on Saturday, the Chinese coastguard said it had allowed necessary supplies, but also that it would resolutely defend China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests at the Second Thomas Shoal and its adjacent waters.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/south-china-sea-philippines-supply-troops-disputed-reef-second-thomas-shoal-4080671>

***Follows-up: 29 January: Philippines denies 'special arrangements' with China to supply troops on reef***

The Philippines on Monday denied China had a "temporary special arrangement" with Manila to allow the delivery of supplies to Philippine troops occupying a disputed South China Sea reef.

"This is a figment of the imagination of the Chinese coastguard. There is no truth to this." National Security Council spokesperson Jonathan Malaya told state-run broadcaster PTV-4.

"We do not need to get the permission of anyone, including the Chinese coastguard, when we bring supplies through whatever means, whether by ship or air," Malaya said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-denies-special-arrangements-with-china-supply-troops-reef-2024-01-29/>

### **24 January: China rebuts Vietnam's claims to disputed South China Sea islands**

The Chinese foreign ministry on Wednesday said China's claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea were backed by "history" after Vietnam over the weekend repeated it had sufficient evidence to claim sovereignty over the islands.

Vietnam has "full legal basis and ample historical evidence" to assert its sovereignty over the two island chains, its foreign ministry said on Saturday, in response to a query from the media on China's "invasion" of the Paracel Islands in 1974.

"Viet Nam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa Islands has been established since at least the 17th century in accordance with international law, and exercised in a peaceful, continuous and public manner by successive Vietnamese states," it said.

But the Chinese foreign ministry said China's claims are "fully supported by history and jurisprudence."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-rebuts-vietnams-claims-disputed-south-china-sea-islands-2024-01-24/>

### **23 January: Philippine-China spat over Taiwan risks putting ASEAN in crossfire**

The message from President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. posted on the X platform on 15 January -- which also said, "We look forward to close collaboration [and] strengthening mutual interests" -- marked a historic departure from established precedent for a Philippine leader and earned a quick rebuke from Beijing that Manila ought "not to play with fire" by interacting with Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory.

Marcos' congratulatory message was not just unusual for a Philippine president. By hailing Lai as president-elect, Marcos also went a step beyond the U.S., Japan, Australia, Singapore and other governments which carefully toasted Lai's victory without noting the post he had won.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning called Marcos' remarks "a serious violation of the "One China" principle, referencing Beijing's position that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China.

"[It is] a serious breach of the political commitments made by the Philippines to the Chinese side, and a gross interference in China's internal affairs," Mao said.

Gilbert Teodoro, the Philippines' defense chief, responded by slamming Mao's comments as "gutter-level talk," and dismissing her as an agent of a system "incompatible with our way of life."

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Philippine-China-spat-over-Taiwan-risks-putting-ASEAN-in-crossfire>

### **18 January: China, Philippines agree to manage conflicts in South China Sea**

China and the Philippines agreed to improve maritime communication and to properly manage conflicts and differences through friendly talks in regard to issues around the South China Sea, according to a statement from the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Nong Rong and Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Theresa Lazaro held a frank and in-depth exchange of views on the situation while co-chairing the eighth meeting of the China-Philippines Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea in Shanghai, according to the statement released late on Wednesday.

In the talks, the two sides reaffirmed that the South China Sea dispute is "not the whole story of bilateral relations."

Both officials believe "maintaining communication and dialogue is essential to maintaining maritime peace and stability," according to the statement.

The two sides agreed to properly manage maritime conflicts and differences through friendly consultations, as well as properly handle maritime emergencies, especially the situation around the Second Thomas Shoal, also known in China as Renai Reef.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/China-Philippines-agree-to-manage-conflicts-in-South-China-Sea>

### **16 January: Philippines hopes to sign troops pact with Japan in first quarter**

The Philippines hopes to sign in the first quarter of the year an agreement with Japan allowing the deployment of military forces on each other's soil, Manila's defense secretary said on Tuesday.

The Philippines is strengthening its ties with neighbors and other countries to counter what it calls an increasingly aggressive Beijing in the South China Sea.

The Philippines and Canada are also working on a memorandum of understanding for enhanced defence cooperation, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro told reporters on the sidelines of a cybersecurity forum

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippines-hopes-to-sign-troops-pact-with-Japan-in-first-quarter>

### **15 January: Philippines to develop islands in South China Sea - military chief**

The Philippines will develop islands in the South China Sea that it considers part of its territory to make them more habitable for troops, Manila's military chief Romeo Brawner told reporters on Monday.

The plans come amid heightened tensions between the Philippines and China, both of whom claim territory in the South China Sea and have traded accusations of aggressive behaviour in the strategic waterway.

Apart from the Second Thomas Shoal, locally known as Ayungin, the Philippines occupies eight other features in the South China Sea, and considers them part of its exclusive economic zone.

"We'd like to improve all the nine, especially the islands we are occupying," Brawner said after attending a command conference led by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. at the military headquarters.

The features include Thitu island, the biggest and most strategically important in the South China Sea. Known locally as Pag-asa, Thitu lies about 300 miles (480 km) west of the Philippine province of Palawan.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-develop-islands-south-china-sea-military-chief-2024-01-15/>

### **10 January: Leaders of Philippines, Indonesia hold talks on South China Sea, ASEAN**

The leaders of the Philippines and Indonesia met in Manila on Jan 10 to discuss developments in the South China Sea and efforts to build closer ties between South-east Asian nations, among a range of issues.

The meeting comes after Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said on Jan 9 that her country is ready to work with other South-east Asian nations to finalise a long-delayed code of conduct for the South China Sea.

“President Widodo and I had a fruitful and honest discussion on regional events of mutual interests,” Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, who hosted his Indonesian counterpart Joko Widodo, told a joint press conference after the meeting.

These included issues regarding the South China Sea, as well as ways to build cooperation among members of Asean, he added, without giving details.

“We agreed to... expedite revision of joint border patrol and crossing agreements, (and) also to strengthen the defence cooperation, including on military hardware,” he said.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/indonesia-philippines-discuss-south-china-sea-developments-marcos>

#### **8 January: Chinese 'monster' ship patrols near Vietnam's oil fields**

The 12,000-ton China Coast Guard (CCG) 5901, widely referred to as "The Monster", has mostly been running "dark"--not broadcasting its automatic information system (AIS)--since departing Sanya port at Hainan Island on November 14th. (This frequent practice violates the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, of which China is a signatory.)

There have been three exceptions to the ship's dark operations over this period. It turned on its AIS last December 9th and 29th, and now most recently on January 7th.

These patrols specifically target Vietnam's oil and gas operations in Blocks 06-01, 05-03, 12-11 and 12W according to a March 2023 analysis by Reuters and the South China Sea Chronicle Initiative. Vietnam shadows these patrols with its much smaller fisheries surveillance fleet.

<https://www.sealight.live/posts/china-s-monster-sends-another-message-to-vietnam-1>

#### **4 January: China slams ‘provocative’ US moves in South China Sea as both sides conduct drills**

China on Jan 4 slammed what it called “provocative” moves by the United States and its ally, the Philippines, in the South China Sea, as both sides held drills in the disputed territorial waters.

Warships from China and the US conducted rival exercises in the sea this week amid heightened tensions involving the Philippines.

Beijing’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theatre Command on Jan 3 said a two-day deployment of its navy and air force, scheduled to end on Jan 4, was carrying out “routine patrols” in the sea.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/china-conducts-patrols-in-south-china-sea-amid-ongoing-run-ins>

#### ***Follows-up: 5 January: Philippines remains open to diplomacy with China***

The Philippines remains open to diplomatic discussions with China and believes the two nations can achieve a resolution to disputes over the South China Sea through peaceful dialogue, its national security adviser said in a statement on Jan 5.

“Our joint patrols with the United States and potential future activities with other allied countries show our mutual commitment to a rules-based international order and for promoting peace and stability of the region,” he said.

The Chinese embassy in Manila repeated the foreign ministry spokesperson’s comments when asked to respond to Mr Ano’s remarks.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-remains-open-to-diplomacy-with-china-national-security-adviser>

#### **4 January: CNOOC announces phase two of crucial oilfield project**

China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) said on Wednesday that phase two of its Lufeng oilfields project commenced production, which is expected to achieve a peak production of approximately 22,600 barrels of crude oil per day in 2025.

The project is located in the South China Sea, with an average water depth of approximately 136 meters. It consists of Lufeng 8-1 oilfield, Lufeng 9-2 oilfield and Lufeng 14-8 oilfield, said the company.

One new drilling platform was built, and 14 development wells are planned to be put into production, including 13 production wells and 1 water-injection well, it said.

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202401/03/WS6594c5cba3105f21a507a4d6.html>

### **3 January: China conducts patrols in South China Sea amid ongoing run-ins**

China's military will conduct routine patrols with its naval and air forces in the South China Sea from Wednesday to Thursday, the military's Southern Theater Command said, as ongoing tensions simmer in the region over disputed territories.

It said troops in the area will be on high alert at all times, and will defend national sovereignty, security and maritime rights.

The patrols also aim to deter activities that disrupt the South China Sea and create "hot spots," the military said on its Southern Theater Command's Wechat account.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-conducts-patrols-south-china-sea-amid-ongoing-run-ins-2024-01-03/>

## **OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA**

### **29 January: U.S. and Philippines eye 2-plus-2 talks in Manila for first time**

The U.S. and Philippines are in talks to hold a meeting between top diplomatic and defense officials in Manila in the spring, people familiar with the planning said, as the countries align to take a stand against Beijing's aggressive maneuvers in the South China Sea.

The so-called two-plus-two meeting would be the first held in the Philippines since the format began in 2012. Washington and Manila resumed the dialogue last year following a seven-year hiatus.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin are expected to meet with counterparts Enrique Manalo and Gilbert Teodoro in March.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/U.S.-and-Philippines-eye-2-plus-2-talks-in-Manila-for-first-time>

### **28 January: ASEAN ministers to express concern over actions in disputed South China Sea**

Association of Southeast Asian Nations foreign ministers will express concern over actions in the South China Sea that endanger the safety of people and renew their call for self-restraint to avoid escalating tensions in the disputed waters when they meet starting on Sunday in Laos.

A draft of their statement to be issued after their two-day meetings in the famous Luang Prabang region said the South China Sea disputes are among the urgent issues high in their agenda along with the Myanmar crisis, the Korean Peninsula, the war in Ukraine and the unfolding violence involving Israel and Hamas.

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/895621/asean-ministers-to-express-concern-over-actions-in-disputed-south-china-sea/story/>

### **14 January: US, South Korea, Japan Seek to Expand Cooperation to Counter China**

The United States, South Korea and Japan have expanded their security cooperation beyond North Korea with their Indo-Pacific Dialogue, which one expert called a “significant” development aimed at deterring Beijing from escalating threats in the region.

The three countries held their first Indo-Pacific Dialogue last week in Washington, where they called out China by name and discussed its “dangerous and escalatory behavior” in the South China Sea.

They also opposed “any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion” in the Indo-Pacific and reaffirmed “the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait” in a statement issued after their meeting on January 5.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/us-south-korea-japan-seek-to-expand-cooperation-to-counter-china-/7438392.html>

### **11 January: Germany ready to help reduce tensions in disputed South China Sea**

Speaking during a visit to the Philippines, the German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, says the nation will support Asian coastal nations against China’s controversial actions.

Germany’s top diplomat has said that China’s actions in the South China Sea violate the rights of Asian coastal states like the Philippines and threaten freedom of navigation.

She did, however, add that territorial disputes have to be resolved peacefully because “the world doesn’t need another crisis.”

She added that it was crucial to set up “mechanisms” to resolve the disputes peacefully and foster dialogue.

“There are truly rough winds blowing across the South China Sea and this is happening in the middle of one of the most dynamic economic regions of the world,” she told a news conference in Manila.

“It is now important to set up mechanisms to solve tensions together in a peaceful way,” she said without elaborating. “I think we all agree that the world doesn’t need another crisis.

There are too many crises at once.”

<https://www.euronews.com/2024/01/11/germany-ready-to-help-reduce-tensions-in-disputed-south-china-sea>

### ***Follows-up:* 13 January: Beijing hits out at German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock’s ‘unwarranted’ attack on its actions in South China Sea dispute with Philippines**

Beijing on Saturday accused German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock of “making unwarranted accusations” about China’s actions during recent confrontations with Philippine ships in the South China Sea.

“The recent maritime incidents between China and the Philippines were not caused by China and China has taken necessary measures to safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests,” the Chinese embassy in Manila said in a statement on its Facebook page.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3248326/beijing-hits-out-german-foreign-minister-annalena-baerbocks-unwarranted-attack-its-actions-south>

### **10 January: China emphasizes Taiwan question, South China Sea issue in resumed defense policy coordination talks with US**

China and the US resumed the previously suspended defense policy coordination talks with a meeting this week, in which the Chinese side stressed its positions on the Taiwan question and the South China Sea issue, as well as maritime and air security issues.

The 17th China-US Defense Policy Coordination Talks was held in Washington from Monday to Tuesday, China's Ministry of National Defense (MOD) said in a press release on Wednesday.

It marks the first meeting of the Defense Policy Coordination Talks since the annual talks were suspended after then-US house speaker Nancy Pelosi provocatively visited the island of Taiwan in August 2022, observers said.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202401/1305128.shtml>

### **9 January: Indonesia ready to work with countries to finalise South China Sea code**

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said on Tuesday her country is ready to work with other Southeast Asian nations to finalise a long-delayed code of conduct for the South China Sea, where many of its neighbours have overlapping claims with China.

"On South China Sea, Indonesia is ready to work together with all ASEAN member states including the Philippines to finalise the Code of Conduct as soon as possible," Retno said at a joint press conference with Filipino counterpart Enrique Manalo in Manila, ahead of a visit by Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesia-ready-work-with-countries-finalise-south-china-sea-code-2024-01-09/>

### **7 January: S. Korea, U.S., Japan note China's 'unlawful' South China Sea claims**

The three countries released the statement after the meeting took place in Washington on Friday, in line with an agreement on its launch that President Yoon Suk Yeol, U.S. President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reached during their landmark Camp David summit in August last year.

The three recalled their positions regarding the "recent dangerous and escalatory behavior supporting unlawful maritime claims" by China in the South China Sea, it said.

"They strongly reiterated their firm commitment to international law, including the freedom of navigation and overflight, as reflected in the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, and they opposed any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion anywhere in the waters of the Indo-Pacific," the statement said.

<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20240107000200315>

### **3 January: Philippine military says second joint patrol with US underway in South China Sea**

The Philippines and the United States began a two-day joint patrol in the west of Palawan in South China Sea on Wednesday (Jan 3), the Philippine military said in a statement, a move that would likely irk China.

Security engagements between the treaty allies soared last year amid growing tensions in the South China Sea, where the Philippines and China have traded blame over a spate of run-ins. The Philippines and the US first launched joint patrols in November, holding military drills for three days in waters near Taiwan and in the West Philippine Sea, Manila's term for South China Sea waters within its exclusive economic zone.

The Philippine military said their second joint patrol this week involved four vessels from the Philippine navy and four ships from the US Indo-Pacific command that include an aircraft carrier, a cruiser and two destroyers.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippine-military-says-second-joint-patrol-us-underway-south-china-sea-4022746>

### ***Follows-up:* 3 January: China Protests as U.S. Carrier Goes on Patrol With Philippine Navy**

China does not approve of the joint drills, and would prefer to negotiate with Manila directly, without any support from Manila's allies. The opinion-oriented Chinese outlet Global Times (owned by state media) said Wednesday that the PLA has launched a routine two-day naval drill to coincide with the Philippine-American drill in the South China Sea.

"The PLA patrol is pointed toward infringement and provocative actions by the Philippines and the US, and displays China's determination and firm will in safeguarding territorial sovereignty and maritime rights,"

"Everyone knows who is creating trouble in the South China Sea, and who is instigating the Philippines to provoke China constantly," Chinese military analyst Song Zhongping told Global Times. "When it comes to sovereignty, we will never back off even a bit. We will use our strength to safeguard our core interests."

<https://maritime-executive.com/article/china-protests-as-u-s-carrier-joins-philippine-navy-in-s-china-sea>