

**SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 125**  
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**ACTS OF CLAIMANTS**

**3 March: China's embassy condemns Philippine envoy's remarks on South China Sea**  
China's embassy in the Philippines said on Sunday (Mar 3) that it "strongly" condemns the Philippine ambassador to Washington's recent China-related remarks, saying they "disregarded basic facts".

The remarks "wantonly hyped up the South China Sea issue and made speculations and malicious smears against China", the embassy said in a statement.

Jose Manuel Romualdez said on Wednesday that while the United States sees both the South China Sea issue and a potential Taiwan conflict as "serious concerns", he believed the "real flashpoint is the West Philippine Sea" given "all of these skirmishes happening there".

The Chinese embassy said: "Inviting wolves into the house and engaging in small circles will not only not help resolve the differences in the South China Sea, but on the contrary will complicate the regional situation, and undermine regional peace and stability."

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/china-embassy-condemns-philippines-envoy-remarks-south-sea-4166886>

**3 March: 195 Chinese vessels linger daily in South China Sea**

About 195 Chinese militia ships were present on any given day last year around key features in the South China Sea, according to a Washington-based think tank.

This is a "35-per cent increase" compared with the 12-month period of 2021-2022, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) said in a Feb 28 report, citing satellite imagery last year of 10 features across the South China Sea "known to be frequented by Chinese militia ships."

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2024/03/03/us-think-tank-195-chinese-vessels-linger-daily-in-south-china-sea>

**28 February: Chinese navy's presence in South China Sea is 'worrisome', says Philippine president**

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Wednesday said the Chinese navy's presence in the South China Sea is "worrisome" but will not deter his country from defending its maritime territory and protecting its fishermen.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) spotted the presence of Chinese navy vessels during a patrol mission by a vessel of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) at the hotly contested Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea last week.

The BFAR vessel, which the PCG said was shadowed and blocked by Chinese coast guard ships, also distributed fuel to Filipino fishermen in the area.

**26 February: Satellite images reveal floating barrier at mouth of disputed atoll in South China Sea**

Satellite images of the hotly disputed Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea show a new floating barrier across its entrance, near where Philippine ships and China coast guard vessels have had frequent run-ins.

One of the images taken by Maxar Technologies on Feb 22 and viewed by Reuters showed the barrier blocking the mouth of the shoal, where the Chinese coast guard last week claimed to have driven off a Philippine vessel "illegally intruding" into Beijing's waters.

The Philippines, which last week deployed a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessel to patrol the shoal and transport fuel to Filipino fishermen in the area, said that China's claims were "inaccurate" and that Manila's activities there were lawful.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/satellite-images-reveal-floating-barrier-mouth-disputed-atoll-south-china-sea-4149546>

### **25 February: Philippines accuses China of attempting to block another vessel**

The Philippines on Sunday (Feb 25) accused the Chinese coast guard of attempting to block a Filipino government vessel delivering supplies to fishermen, the second such alleged incident near a disputed reef in two weeks.

The BRP Datu Sanday was supplying fuel to fishermen near the Scarborough Shoal when it was harassed by a China Coast Guard vessel and three other Chinese ships on Feb 22, the Philippine Coast Guard said.

Three of the four Chinese vessels came within 100m of Datu Sanday's bow, it said in an incident report that also listed shadowing, vessel transponder jamming and other "dangerous manoeuvres".

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-china-coast-guard-scarborough-shoal-south-china-sea-4148086>

### **20 February: Philippines joint air patrol with US to 'protect territory'**

A joint air patrol by the Philippines with the United States was aimed at protecting territory and national interests in the South China Sea, a Philippine military official said on Tuesday (Feb 20), after Beijing accused Manila of stirring up trouble.

Philippine fighter jets and a US bomber plane flew together over the South China Sea on Monday, more than a week after their navies held joint maritime exercises in the face of simmering tensions over territorial claims in the area.

"This is to enhance both armed forces' interoperability and enhance the capabilities of our air force (in) performing its mandate of protecting our territory, sovereign rights and national interests," armed forces public affairs chief Xerxes Trinidad said.

### ***Follows-up:* 20 February: PLA sends forces to monitor US-Philippines air patrols over disputed waters**

The People's Liberation Army said it sent forces to the South China Sea to monitor the latest US-Philippines joint air patrol on Monday as the two allies launched their second drill in the disputed waters this month.

The air forces of the two countries conducted a patrol over the western Philippines as part of what they have called a "maritime cooperative activity".

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3252572/south-china-sea-pla-sends-forces-monitor-us-philippines-air-patrols-over-disputed-waters>

### **19 February: Chinese fishing vessels are going scorched earth and pumping cyanide into contested waters, Philippine fishing authority says**

The Philippines' fishing bureau has accused Chinese fishing vessels of using cyanide to destroy Scarborough Shoal, a fish-rich atoll in the South China Sea contested by both Manila and Beijing.

"These Chinese fishermen use cyanide," Nazario Brigueira, a spokesperson for the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, said on Saturday, per a translation from Filipino by The Philippine Star.

Brigueira accused the Chinese fishermen of using cyanide to also "intentionally destroy Bajo de Masinloc to prevent Filipino fishing boats to fish in the area," The Philippine Star noted. Bajo de Masinloc is the Spanish name for Scarborough Shoal.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/scarborough-shoal-chinese-fishing-vessels-pumping-cyanide-contested-waters-philippines-2024-2>

***Follows-up: 20 February: China refutes Philippine allegation of Chinese fishermen using cyanide in Huangyan Dao***

China on Monday refuted an allegation by the Philippines that Chinese fishermen use cyanide in Huangyan Dao in the South China Sea, saying it is "totally baseless and sheer fabrication." The remarks were made by a spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines. "Such continuous disinformation has led up to nothing, but exacerbation of the maritime tensions and destabilization of bilateral relations," said the spokesperson of the Chinese embassy, adding that the inconsistent statements of spokespersons of relevant Philippine agencies can only place their professionalism and credibility in doubt.

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2024-02-20/China-refutes-alleged-use-of-cyanide-in-Huangyan-Dao-1rlfDnumCk0/p.html>

**18 February: China re-installs floating barriers in Scarborough Shoal**

The China Coast Guard (CCG) installed again a floating barrier in the vicinity of Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal) in the West Philippine Sea which is part of the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Aside from the newly installed floating barrier, two CCG vessels (3063 and 3064) were positioned at the entrance to the lagoon, Commodore Jay Tarriela, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) spokesman for the West Philippine Sea, reported on Saturday.

The floating barriers were supposedly installed on February 15.

[https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/02/18/news/china-re-installs-floatingbarriers-in-scarborough-shoal/1933017#:~:text=MANILA%2C%20Philippines%3A%20The%20China%20Coast,exclusive%20economic%20zone%20\(EEZ\).](https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/02/18/news/china-re-installs-floatingbarriers-in-scarborough-shoal/1933017#:~:text=MANILA%2C%20Philippines%3A%20The%20China%20Coast,exclusive%20economic%20zone%20(EEZ).)

**14 February: Philippines to maintain ‘assertive transparency’ over South China Sea row against Beijing’s ‘bullying behaviour’**

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has not been told to tone down its “assertive transparency strategy” to counter Beijing’s grey-zone tactics in the South China Sea, a senior PCG official said, a month after both countries agreed to resolve any incident in the area through diplomacy.

“We will continue [with the strategy],” PCG Commodore Jay Tarriela said at a forum in Manila on Tuesday.

The assertive transparency strategy involves embedding foreign and local media during PCG’s missions to Scarborough Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal, where Chinese fishermen, coastguard and navy ships had blocked and hosed down Philippine vessels in several incidents in the past year. PCG also releases information about the incidents online.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3251956/philippines-maintain-assertive-transparency-over-south-china-sea-row-against-beijings-bullying>

**13 February: Assessing Indonesia’s potential presidents’ South China Sea strategies**

The South China Sea strategy of Indonesia's presidential candidates became a focal topic in a recent debate, with the three participants proposing different approaches to this major security issue involving China. Ganjar Pranowo suggested Indonesia should take provisional measures based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to maintain peace and security, Anies Baswedan argued for a unified ASEAN approach, while Prabowo Subianto emphasised the need to build a strong maritime defence capacity in the North Natuna Sea.

<https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/02/13/assessing-indonesias-potential-presidents-south-china-sea-strategies/>

### **11 February: Philippine coast guard accuses Chinese vessels of ‘dangerous’ manoeuvres**

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Feb 11 accused Chinese vessels of “dangerous” manoeuvres during a nine-day patrol near a reef off the South-east Asian country’s coast. The Philippine vessel BRP Teresa Magbanua was deployed in early February to patrol the waters around Scarborough Shoal – a rich fishing ground in the South China Sea – and ensure the safety of Filipino fishermen in the area.

During the patrol, Chinese coast guard vessels “performed dangerous and blocking manoeuvres at sea against BRP Teresa Magbanua four times, with the Chinese coast guard vessels crossing the bow of the Philippine Coast Guard vessel twice”, the PCG said in a statement.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippine-coast-guard-accuses-chinese-vessels-of-dangerous-manoevures>

### **7 February: Philippines to put military base near Taiwan in high gear to tackle tensions with Beijing**

The Philippines aims to boost military presence and infrastructure in the country’s northernmost province near Taiwan, according to its defence chief, amid tensions with Beijing over the South China Sea.

“Starting 2024, the operational tempo for the AFP will be higher,” Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr was quoted as saying on Tuesday, according to a statement from the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3251228/south-china-sea-philippines-put-military-base-near-taiwan-high-gear-tackle-tensions-beijing>

### **6 February: Filipino bishops urge Manila to ‘defend what is ours’ amid Beijing’s ‘aggression’**

Six Filipino Catholic bishops took the rare step on Tuesday of condemning Beijing’s “aggression” in the disputed South China Sea, pressing President Ferdinand Marcos Jr’s administration to team up with allies to “defend what is ours”, as maritime tensions between the two countries remained elevated.

In a joint pastoral exhortation, the bishops, who serve in regions surrounded by the resource-rich waterway, said the discord was not only about marine resources but the livelihood and future of the Philippines’ fishermen.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3251114/south-china-sea-filipino-bishops-urge-manila-defend-what-ours-amid-beijings-aggression>

### **3 February: China says Philippine vessel "illegally" landed on disputed atoll**

China said on Saturday a small civilian vessel from the Philippines had "illegally placed itself on the beach" of an atoll in the South China Sea that both countries claim.

The vessel, which landed on the Spratly Islands atoll on Friday, was there for supply purposes, the China Coast Guard posted on the Weixin platform.

The Philippines’ coast guard, national security council, and foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment on Saturday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-says-philippine-vessel-illegally-landed-disputed-atoll-2024-02-03/>

### **1 February: Philippines plans to buy submarines to defend sovereignty in South China Sea - senior official**

Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has approved the third phase of the military's modernisation, which includes the purchase of the country's first submarine, in order to defend its maritime sovereignty in the disputed South China Sea.

Navy spokesperson for the West Philippine Sea, Roy Trinidad, said on Thursday the third phase of modernisation reflected a shift in strategy away from internal to external defence.

The third phase of the modernisation plan, which underwent revisions to make it more attuned to the country's needs, is estimated to cost 2 trillion pesos (\$35.62 billion) and will be implemented over a period of several years, said Trinidad.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-plans-buy-submarines-defend-sovereignty-south-china-sea-senior-2024-02-01/>

### **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.

The agreement in Hanoi, details of which were not disclosed, could risk angering Beijing, especially if they pave the way for future compromises on disputed claims.

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

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

### **28 February: US, Philippines Bolster Economic Ties to Fend Off China Risk**

The US and the Philippines are moving to forge closer trade and investment ties amid the risk of China using its economic influence for “coercion,” according to Manila’s envoy to Washington.

The Philippines’ agricultural exports to China could be “in peril” of being cut down as tensions between the two nations in the South China Sea linger, Philippine ambassador to the US Jose Manuel Romualdez said at a diplomatic event on Wednesday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-28/us-philippines-to-bolster-economic-ties-to-fend-off-china-risk?embedded-checkout=true>

### **13 February: Japan to help improve maritime capabilities of 4 Asean states amid South China Sea row**

Japan is drawing up a new 10-year plan to improve the maritime capabilities of four nations in Southeast Asia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam that are struggling to resist growing encroachment into their territorial waters by China.

Tokyo has previously delivered maritime equipment to a number of countries in the region under one-off arrangements, but the new initiative is designed to provide sustained and evolving assistance over a period of a decade, according to an official of the National Institute of Defence Studies (NIDS), a think tank affiliated with Japan’s Ministry of Defence.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3251845/japan-help-improve-maritime-capabilities-4-asean-states-amid-south-china-sea-row>

### **9 February: U.S. Joins Japan, Australia for Trilateral South China Sea Naval Exercise**

The U.S Navy conducted two drills in the South China Sea this week, including a joint trilateral drill with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Royal Australian Navy and the third iteration of the Maritime Cooperative Activity with the Philippines. From Wednesday to Thursday, destroyer USS John Finn (DDG-113) and Littoral Combat Ship USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS-10) drilled with JMSDF destroyer JS Sazanami (DD-113) and RAN frigate HMAS Warramunga (FFH152), according to a release from U.S. 7th Fleet. <https://news.usni.org/2024/02/09/u-s-joins-japan-australia-for-trilateral-south-china-sea-naval-exercise>

### **5 February: Chinese ships near Diaoyu Islands stoke Japan’s fears of Beijing vs Manila South China Sea-style clash**

Japan is increasingly alarmed by the constant presence of Chinese vessels near the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea amid concerns that the row over the area could escalate and mirror recent maritime altercations between Beijing and Manila in the South China Sea. Chinese warships have been spotted in the area and near the boundaries of Japan’s Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), the Japanese defence ministry said on Wednesday without specifying a period of their presence, according to a report by the Yomiuri newspaper.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3250789/chinese-ships-near-diaoyu-islands-stoke-japans-fears-beijing-vs-manila-south-china-sea-style-clash>

### **02 February 2024: EU-ASEAN Joint Ministerial Meeting**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) convened the 24th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting on 2 February 2024 in Brussels, Belgium. In its Joint Declaration, the two sides stated:

30. We reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea, in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. We reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of all activities and avoid actions that could increase tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings, and miscalculation, as well as to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

31. We recognised the benefits of having the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability, and prosperity. We underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety. We encourage all countries to avoid any unilateral actions that endanger peace, security and stability in the region. We emphasised the need to maintain and promote an environment conducive to the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) negotiations. We welcomed further progress towards the early conclusion of an effective, and substantive COC that is consistent with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/FINAL-Joint-Ministerial-Statement-24th-ASEAN-EU-Ministerial-Meeting.pdf>