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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

30 April: Philippines accuses China of damaging its vessel in disputed South China Sea shoal

The Philippines on Tuesday (Apr 30) accused China's coast guard of harassment and damaging one of its boats in a disputed area of the South China Sea, and rejected Beijing's position that it had expelled two vessels from the hotly contested shoal.

The Philippine coast guard said its two vessels stood their ground at the Scarborough Shoal, a key battleground in the South China Sea, but one sustained damage from use of water cannon by two Chinese coast guard ships.

"This damage serves as evidence of the forceful water pressure used by the China coast guard in their harassment of the Philippine vessels," Philippine coast guard spokesperson Jay Tarriela said in a statement.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-accuses-china-damaging-its-vessel-disputed-south-china-sea-shoal-4302206>

25 April: Vietnam opposes China's East Sea fishing ban

Vietnam on Thursday said a fishing ban issued by China on the East Sea, also known as the South China Sea, violates Vietnam's sovereignty over the Paracel Islands.

Spokeswoman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pham Thu Hang said at a press meet the ban is also a violation of the sovereign rights and jurisdiction of Vietnam over its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), as established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

"Vietnam asks that China respect Vietnam's sovereignty for the Paracel Islands and Vietnam's sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction over Vietnamese waters, to refrain from over-complicating the situation and to contribute to the maintenance of peace, stability and order in the East Sea," she said.

<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-opposes-china-s-east-sea-fishing-ban-4738965.html>

22 April: US, Philippines kick off annual joint military drills as tensions mount in South China Sea

The US and the Philippines launched the largest and most expensive iteration of their annual joint military exercises today. More than 16,000 Filipino and American soldiers are taking part in the drills dubbed Balikatan, or "shoulder to shoulder". This comes a little more than a week after the historic trilateral summit between the US, Philippines and Japan. China has accused the Philippines of stoking tensions through Balikatan exercises, but officials have insisted that the exercises are inclusive. Buena Bernal reports.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/watch/us-philippines-kick-annual-joint-military-drills-tensions-mount-south-china-sea-4283441>

22 April: China and Cambodia vow to move quickly to conclude code of conduct amid tension in disputed waterway

China and Cambodia pledged on Monday to speed up finalising the long-awaited South China Sea code of conduct when Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Beijing's loyal partner.

During a meeting with Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sun Chanthol, Wang said both Beijing and Phnom Penh had agreed to protect "hard-earned regional peace" under multiple frameworks, such as the China-Asean (Association of Southeast Asian nations) and Lancang-Mekong cooperations.

Plans for a code of conduct in the region can be traced back to the early 2000s but only reached the third reading late last year.

On Sunday, Wang told Cambodian Foreign Minister Chenda Sophea Sok the two countries should extend cooperation in various fields and create "a favourable external environment" for that cooperation, according to the Chinese foreign ministry's readout.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3259931/south-china-sea-china-and-cambodia-vow-move-quickly-conclude-code-conduct-amid-tension-disputed>

21 April: China hosts foreign naval officials amid South China Sea tensions

The Chinese Navy on Sunday kicked off a biennial meeting of top foreign naval officials in the port city of Qingdao, in a show of military diplomacy that will be closely watched for signs of more engagement between China and the United States.

The four-day event with delegations from 30 countries comes during heightened tensions in the South China Sea, as U.S. treaty ally Manila is in an increasingly fraught standoff with Beijing over the strategic waterway, which could be a potential flashpoint for U.S-China relations.

Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Stephen Koehler will attend the Western Pacific Naval Symposium on behalf of the United States, according to a source familiar with the matter. Other country delegations include Australia, France, India, South Korea, Russia and Britain, state media reported.

Participants will hold closed-door talks on Monday, with seminars on topics such as addressing maritime security challenges. They will also discuss the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea, a set of guidelines formulated a decade ago, meant to de-escalate tensions between militaries at sea. It has not since been updated to cover drone warfare.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-hosts-foreign-naval-officials-amid-south-china-sea-tensions-2024-04-21/>

17 April: China urges Philippines not to flex muscles in South China Sea

The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Wednesday urged the Philippines to refrain from flexing its muscles with countries outside the region in provocations that could worsen tensions and undermine the stability of the South China Sea.

Lin Jian, a ministry spokesperson, made the comment in response to questions about a scheduled joint military drill between the Philippines and the United States next week at a regular press briefing in Beijing.

"The Philippine side should be clearly aware that wooing a country outside the region to flex the muscles and provoke confrontation in the South China Sea will only escalate tensions and undermine regional stability," Lin said.

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2024-04-17/China-urges-Philippines-not-to-flex-muscles-in-South-China-Sea-1sSiInaMDK0/p.html>

13 April: China Readies World's 1st AI-Enabled Water Canon That It Claims Can Revolutionize Non-Lethal Combat

In a significant development with potential ramifications for the volatile South China Sea (SCS) region, Chinese researchers claimed to have developed the world's first "smart" water cannon, leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) technology.

Now, with the development of the AI-powered water cannon, Beijing appears poised to further bolster its maritime claims.

Equipped with a photoelectric camera and motion sensors, the smart water cannon can automatically identify targets and adjust their power and trajectory in real-time. This feature allows the weapon to maintain precision even in rough seas, where conventional cannons often struggle to hit their mark.

<https://www.eurasiantimes.com/china-readies-worlds-1st-ai-enabled-water-canon/>

10 April: Philippines' Marcos 'horrified' by Xi-Duterte 'gentleman's agreement' for status quo in disputed waters

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said he's "horrified" to learn of an agreement between his predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, and China that bars Manila from shipping construction materials to a military outpost in a disputed shoal in the South China Sea.

"If that agreement says we need to seek permission from another country to be able to do something within our own territory, it would probably be difficult to honour that agreement," Marcos told reporters on Wednesday.

"I am horrified by the idea that we have compromised through a secret agreement the territory, the sovereignty and the sovereign rights of the Philippines," he added.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3258506/south-china-sea-philippines-marcos-horrified-xi-duterte-gentlemans-agreement-status-quo-disputed>

***Follows-up:* 17 April: Marcos ready to rescind 'gentleman agreement' with China on South China Sea**

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said he was rescinding any supposed "gentleman's agreement" that his predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, made with China involving the conflicting territorial claims in the West Philippine Sea.

Despite this, leaders of the House of Representatives said they would "consider calls" to start an inquiry into that verbal pact between Duterte and Chinese President Xi Jinping once Congress resumes its regular sessions on April 29.

"I've said that before, when this first came up a few months ago... It turns out the Chinese are insisting that there is a secret agreement, and perhaps there is, and I said, I don't know anything about the secret agreement. Should there be such a secret agreement, I am now rescinding it," he said.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2024/04/17/marcos-ready-rescind-039gentleman-agreement039-with-china-on-south-china-sea>

***Follows-up:* 19 April: China claims South China Sea deal with Philippines' Duterte**

China and the Philippines entered a "gentleman's agreement" to avoid conflict in the South China Sea under former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, the Chinese Embassy in the Philippines said Thursday, in a revelation that could be aimed at rattling the current administration in Manila.

Under the agreement, which isn't recognized by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Manila apparently promised not to repair or build structures at Second Thomas Shoal in the disputed Spratly Islands, which the Philippines effectively controls.

In return, Beijing agreed not to interfere with deliveries of food and other supplies to a Philippine warship there.

In a statement on Thursday, the Chinese Embassy acknowledged that the deal was made during the Duterte administration. Referring to the pact as a "gentlemen's agreement," the

embassy said it was "no secret" and was aimed at "managing the situation on the ground, maintaining peace and preventing conflicts."

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/China-claims-South-China-Sea-deal-with-Philippines-Duterte>

Follows-up: 27 April: Philippines denies deal with China over disputed South China Sea shoal

The Philippines on Saturday (Apr 27) denied a Chinese claim that the two countries had reached an agreement over an escalating maritime dispute in the South China Sea, calling the claim propaganda.

A spokesperson at China's embassy in Manila said on Apr 18 that the two had agreed early this year to a "new model" in managing tensions at the Second Thomas Shoal, without elaborating.

Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro said on Saturday that his department was "not aware of, nor is it a party to, any internal agreement with China" since President Ferdinand Marcos Jr took office in 2022.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-denies-deal-beijing-south-china-sea-shoal-4296881>

7 April: Philippines beefs up northernmost defences amid China tensions

The military detachment on the Philippines's northernmost island faces northwest, towards the setting sun – and the country's biggest potential adversary.

The island of Mavulis was uninhabited until 2016, when the Philippine military planted a flagpole at its highest point and started building a fisherman's shelter.

Now, about 15 soldiers are deployed in rotation on the rocky outpost, amid increasing tension with Beijing over the disputed South China Sea and Beijing's growing assertiveness towards Taiwan - which lies just 142km (88 miles) away and whose lights flicker in the distance during the night.

https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/4/7/philippines-beefs-up-defences-on-its-northernmost-edge-amid-china-tensions?traffic_source=rss

2 April: Philippines says China's 'coercive, aggressive' actions discussed with top US security adviser

The Philippines on April 2 said its national security adviser and his US counterpart discussed "coercive, aggressive and deceptive actions" by Beijing in the South China Sea, as a diplomatic row intensifies between the two Asian neighbours.

Philippine National Security Adviser Eduardo Ano "expressed his appreciation for the United States' continued assurances and reaffirmation of its ironclad commitment" to their alliance, the Philippine National Security Council said in a statement.

The phone call on April 1 was on the heels of a series of maritime run-ins and heated verbal exchanges between China and the Philippines that has triggered concern about an escalation at sea.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/philippines-us-top-security-officials-discuss-chinas-coercive-aggressive-actions-manila-says>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

27 April: China, France agree to deepen military cooperation as South China Sea tensions rise

Agreement on inter-theatre cooperation and dialogue mechanism with PLA comes as France joins US-Philippine drills in contested South China Sea

The French Navy has joined the annual war games between the Philippines and the US for the first time in 2024, in a move that analysts say demonstrates the solidarity among Washington and its allies in backing Manila's claims over the disputed South China Sea. France's Floreal-class frigate FS Vendemiaire began its 10-day multilateral maritime exercise alongside the Philippines' offshore patrol vessel BRP Ramon Alcaraz and landing dock BRP Davao del Sur, as well as the US' landing ship dock USS Harpers Ferry on April 25.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3260645/china-france-agree-deepen-military-cooperation-south-china-sea-tensions-rise>

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/french-navy-debuts-in-annual-us-philippines-war-games-amid-south-china-sea-tensions>

25 April: Joint Statement on the Philippines – United States Bilateral Strategic Dialogue

Senior Philippine and U.S. officials gathered in Washington for the 11th Philippines-United States Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD) on April 22 and 23. First held in 2011, the BSD serves as the main annual platform for our two countries to: discuss the full range of political, security, and economic cooperation; exchange views on current challenges and strategic priorities; and identify new collaborative initiatives.

Promoting An International Law-Based Maritime Order. In reiterating their shared commitment to a maritime order based on international law, the two sides called upon the PRC to comport its maritime claims in the South China Sea with the international law of the sea as reflected in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the "Convention"), to respect the Philippines' sovereign rights and jurisdiction, to comply with the final and binding July 12, 2016 judgment in the Philippines v. China arbitration, and to cease its aggressive and dangerous actions that are inconsistent with its obligations under the Convention, including its unlawful interference with the Philippines' freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

<https://ph.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-on-the-philippines-united-states-bilateral-strategic-dialogue/#>

21 April: The Group of Seven (G7) has called out China's activities in the South China Sea

The Group of Seven (G7) has called out China's continued "militarization, coercive and intimidation activities" in the South China Sea, saying Beijing's expansive maritime claims to the strategic waterway have no legal basis.

In a joint statement on Friday, the world's leading industrialized nations, excluding China and Russia, said they were "seriously concerned" about the situation in the South China Sea and expressed their "strong opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion."

"We continue to oppose China's dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia in the South China Sea and its repeated obstruction of countries' high seas freedom of navigation, and we express serious concern about the increasing use of dangerous maneuvers and water cannons against Philippine vessels in this regard," it said.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/232643/g7-slams-china-ph-govt-warns-vs-beijing-puppets>

18 April: Philippines, New Zealand eye forces deal, share concern over South China Sea

Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon agreed on Thursday to deepen defence cooperation and expressed serious concern over the South China Sea, where the Philippines and China have had maritime run-ins. Marcos and Luxon also "recognised the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait", according to a joint statement.

The Philippines and New Zealand will elevate their relations to a "comprehensive partnership" in 2026, Luxon told a joint press conference. The countries also committed to concluding a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement, allowing joint military exercises and humanitarian missions

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/philippines-new-zealand-eye-forces-deal-share-concern-over-south-china-sea>

13 April: US, Japan, Philippines trilateral deal to change dynamic in South China Sea

A cooperation agreement by the Philippines, the United States and Japan will change the dynamic in the South China Sea and the region, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said on Friday, while seeking to assure China it was not a target.

"I think the trilateral agreement is extremely important," Marcos told a press conference in Washington a day after meeting President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in the nations' first trilateral summit.

"It is going to change the dynamic, the dynamic that we see in the region, in ASEAN in Asia, around the South China Sea," Marcos said, referring to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-japan-philippines-trilateral-deal-change-dynamic-south-china-sea-marcos-says-2024-04-13/>

12 April: Biden pledges to defend Philippines from any attack in South China Sea

Joe Biden has pledged to defend the Philippines from any attack in the South China Sea, as he hosted the first joint summit with Manila and Tokyo amid growing tensions with Beijing. "The United States' defence commitments to Japan and to the Philippines are ironclad," the US president said on Thursday as he met the Philippines president Ferdinand Marcos and Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida.

The summit at the White House comes after repeated confrontations between Chinese and Philippine vessels in the disputed waterway that have raised fears of a wider conflict.

"Any attack on Philippine aircraft, vessels or armed forces in the South China Sea would invoke our mutual defense treaty," said Biden.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/12/joe-biden-philippines-attack-defence-meeting-japan-south-china-sea>

4 April: Tokyo in talks with Manila over sending troops to the Philippines

Tokyo and Manila have discussed deploying Japanese forces in the Philippines as the countries near agreement on several security pacts aimed at boosting regional deterrence against China, according to one of the south-east Asian nation's senior diplomats.

Jose Manuel Romualdez, Philippine ambassador to the US, said Manila and Tokyo were close to signing a "reciprocal access agreement" (RAA) that would also let their militaries train and conduct exercises in each other's countries.

Romualdez said the two nations had discussed deployment of the troops on a rotational basis — an arrangement similar to that under which the US maintains military forces in the Philippines despite the country's constitutional prohibition of permanent deployments

<https://www.ft.com/content/2bf4cb90-bc86-4db2-a0d5-21973f7b2765>

2 April: Japan, U.S., Australia, Philippines to hold drill in South China Sea

Japan, the United States, Australia and the Philippines are set to hold a joint naval exercise on Sunday off the Southeast Asian country's Palawan Island in the South China Sea, multiple government sources said Tuesday, amid China's continuing aggressive actions.

It would be the first full-scale exercise involving the four countries aimed at enhancing interoperability among their forces, the sources said. The exercise will include anti-submarine warfare training, communication drills and sailing ships in formation.

<https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2024/04/2ec17913513e-japan-us-australia-philippines-to-hold-drill-in-south-china-sea.html>

***Follows-up:* 7 April: Philippines, U.S., Australia and Japan hold joint military drills in disputed South China Sea**

Japan joined the United States, Australia and the Philippines for joint naval and air drills in the disputed South China Sea on Sunday, as China announced its own exercises in the strategic waterway.

"The Armed Forces of the Philippines, United States Indo-Pacific Command, Australian Defence Force and Japan Self-Defense Forces successfully conducted the first Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity in the West Philippine Sea on Sunday," the Philippine military said in a statement, using Manila's official designation for sections of the South China Sea.

The statement said that the joint exercise involved naval vessels and aircraft and had taken place in an area within the Philippine's exclusive economic zone in the strategic waterway. The drills — which included the Maritime Self-Defense Force's Akebono destroyer — included a communication exercise, division tactics and a photo exercise.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/04/07/japan/politics/japan-australia-philippines-us-south-china-sea-exercise/>

***Follows-up:* 7 April: PLA patrols South China Sea as US, Philippines, Japan and Australia hold joint military drills**

China will conduct military "combat patrols" on April 7 in the disputed South China Sea, a statement from the army said, the same day as joint drills by the Philippines, the United States, Japan and Australia take place.

"On April 7, the Southern Theatre Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army organises joint naval and air combat patrols in the South China Sea," said the statement.

"All military activities that mess up the situation in the South China Sea and create hotspots are under control," it added, in an apparent swipe at the other drills being held in the waters.

The announcement comes one day after defence chiefs from four countries including the Philippines — which has been engaged in several contentious maritime disputes with Beijing recently — said they would conduct joint drills in the area on April 7.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/china-to-conduct-drills-in-the-south-china-sea-on-april-7>

1 April: First U.S.-Japan-Philippines trilateral to address China's 'gray zone' tactics

U.S. President Joe Biden will add to his collection of "minilateral" gatherings of allies and partners when he hosts Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in Washington on April 11 for their first trilateral summit.

Unlike the Quad grouping of the U.S., Japan, India and Australia -- and unlike the AUKUS security partnership of the Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. -- the new trilateral does not have an announced name or acronym.

But Japan and the Philippines sit in arguably the most critical locations for the U.S. when it comes to defending Taiwan against a potential Chinese invasion. This means that the new

trilateral grouping could grow into something even more substantial than the Quad, which has hesitated to discuss security matters, and AUKUS, which faces shipbuilding bottlenecks that make it challenging to deliver nuclear-powered submarines to Australia.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/First-U.S.-Japan-Philippines-trilateral-to-address-China-s-gray-zone-tactics>