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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

30 May: Vietnam protests Chinese hospital ship deployed in South China Sea

Vietnam protested what is said was China's violation of its sovereignty after Beijing dispatched a navy hospital ship to the Paracels, a group of small coral islands and reefs in the South China Sea currently occupied by China but claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan.

The Youai hospital ship is under the command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Southern Theater Command. According to a report in the Global Times, citing China Central Television, the ship sailed around the Paracels, covering around 1,000 kilometers, and stopped at some islands to provide health service and treatment to Chinese soldiers.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/vietnam-protests-chinese-hospital-ship-deployed-in-south-china-sea/7637107.html>

30 May: ASEAN chief says South China Sea code to be concluded by 2025

A code of conduct meant to minimize the risk of conflict in the South China Sea, where many countries have overlapping maritime claims, will be concluded between ASEAN and China by next year, ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn told Nikkei Asia.

"ASEAN have been working with China ... [on] the current negotiation on [a] code of conduct, which we expect to conclude by next year," Kim Hourn said in an interview on the sidelines of the Future of Asia forum in Tokyo last week.

Kim Hourn's confidence was recently echoed by one ASEAN member state. Indonesian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Roi Sumirat said Wednesday that the negotiations had reached a "new stage" with the recent round of talks held in March.

"This new stage of negotiation is expected to be the finalization for the draft of code of conduct," Roi said, adding that the talks had gone through 35 rounds in the last four years.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/ASEAN-chief-says-South-China-Sea-code-to-be-concluded-by-2025>

27 May: Philippines protests China's unilateral South China Sea fishing ban

The Philippines rejected China's unilateral fishing ban in the South China Sea, as tensions continued to roil in the disputed waterway.

In a statement on Monday, the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs said China unilaterally informed the Philippines of its imposition of a fishing ban that would last till Sept. 16, and that Manila has lodged a protest.

"Through a diplomatic note," the statement says, "the Philippines protested the ban insofar as it includes the Philippines maritime zones over which the Philippines has sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction."

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippines-protests-China-s-unilateral-South-China-Sea-fishing-ban>

25 May: China reports crash of survey drone in vital South China Sea waters

A Chinese environmental survey drone crashed in waters between Taiwan and the Philippines, Beijing warned on Wednesday as the People's Liberation Army prepared to launch two days of drills around the island.

In a brief notice, the China Maritime Safety Administration said the 4-metre (13 feet) ocean survey drone crashed into the sea earlier this month.

It did not specify a date and warned ships to be on alert.

According to coordinates given by the administration, the crash site was about 145km (90 miles) from Taiwan and about 100km from the Bashi Channel, an important navigation zone between Taiwan and the Philippines.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3264107/china-reports-crash-survey-drone-vital-south-china-sea-waters>

24 May: Mahathir says Beijing 'can claim' South China Sea, no need for war

Malaysia's former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Friday downplayed China's claims to much of the South China Sea, arguing it is more important to avoid clashing with the country led by "ambitious" President Xi Jinping.

"You can claim" the South China Sea, he said in a fireside-style chat at the annual Future of Asia conference in Tokyo. "We don't have to go to war against you because of your claim." He added, "We just want to live in peace among ourselves and with our trading partners." Mahathir argued that as long as China's position does not cause physical harm or otherwise infringe on Malaysia's own claims, there is no issue. He said China has not inspected ships or banned sailing through the South China Sea. "We have oil production in the South China Sea. So far they haven't done anything," he added. "Maybe one day, they will realize that the claim means nothing."

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/The-Future-of-Asia/The-Future-of-Asia-2024/Mahathir-says-Beijing-can-claim-South-China-Sea-no-need-for-war>

22 May: Philippine admiral at centre of 'new deal' saga breaks silence on alleged pact with Beijing

A top Philippine navy official has broken his silence about an alleged phone call he had with a Chinese embassy official but denied accusations he had compromised national security by making a secret deal regarding conduct in the South China Sea.

Following weeks of allegations about whether the phone call took place, Vice-Admiral Alberto Carlos testified before the senate's defence committee on Wednesday and admitted he did talk to a Chinese military attaché about rising tensions over the Manila's resupply missions to its outpost on the Second Thomas Shoal, a disputed maritime feature in the South China Sea.

Carlos denies giving consent for the conversation to be recorded and insists 'I have not compromised the country's territorial integrity'

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3263692/south-china-sea-philippine-admiral-centre-new-deal-saga-breaks-silence-alleged-pact-beijing>

20 May: Philippines calls on China to open Scarborough Shoal to scrutiny

The Philippines has demanded that China open Scarborough Shoal to international scrutiny, accusing Beijing of destroying a lagoon's ecosystem.

The call came on Monday from the National Security Council after the Philippine Coast Guard revealed reports of marine destruction within a lagoon inside the Scarborough Shoal.

"So, that is our challenge to China," Jonathan Malaya, NSC spokesperson, told reporters. "If it considers itself as protector of the environment, they should open up Bajo de Masinloc to international observers," using the Spanish name for Scarborough Shoal.

China effectively controls part of the shoal after putting up a 380-meter floating barrier in September to prevent Filipino fishermen from entering the lagoon.

"We can ask third-party groups, environmental groups and any group to do a fact-finding mission to determine the environmental situation in Bajo de Masinloc because we're alarmed and worried," Malaya added.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippines-calls-on-China-to-open-Scarborough-Shoal-to-scrutiny>

15 May: 100-Boat Convoy of Filipino Fishers, Activists Sets Sail to Disputed Shoal in South China Sea

A flotilla of about 100 mostly small fishing boats led by Filipino activists sailed Wednesday to a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, where Beijing's coast guard and suspected militia ships have used powerful water cannons to ward off what they regard as intruders. The Philippine coast guard and navy deployed one patrol ship each to keep watch from a distance on the activists and fishermen, who set off on wooden boats with bamboo outriggers to assert Manila's sovereignty over the Scarborough Shoal. Dozens of journalists joined the three-day voyage.

"Our mission is peaceful based on international law and aimed at asserting our sovereign rights," said Rafaela David, a lead organizer. "We will sail with determination, not provocation, to civilianize the region and safeguard our territorial integrity."

<https://time.com/6978216/philippines-boats-fishermen-activists-south-china-sea/>

***Follows-up:* 15 May: China Deploys Dozens of Ships to Block Philippine Protest Flotilla; Coastguards can detain trespassers without trial, says Beijing**

China deployed a formidable contingent of much bigger government-run ships to the area, an intimidating escalation of its frequent assertions of control over vast expanses of sea far from its mainland.

"What we're seeing this time, I would say, is definitely of another order," said Ray Powell, the director of SeaLight, a group that monitors the South China Sea. "I think that the China Coast Guard is concerned that they're going to try to sort of get too close, and so they're sending an overwhelming force."

Beijing has fleshed out the Chinese coastguard's powers to detain foreigners suspected of illegally crossing borders, rolling out regulations on Wednesday that stipulate suspects can be held for up to 60 days without trial, amid rising tensions in the South China Sea.

While existing laws and regulations give coastguards the power to detain suspects, this is the first time a specific regulation has clarified the coastguard force's law enforcement procedure for administrative detentions.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3262911/beijing-clarifies-coastguards-detention-powers-activists-converge-scarborough-shoal-south-china-sea>

***Follows-up:* 16 May: Philippine boat convoy won't proceed to China-held reef**

A convoy of boats carrying Philippine civilians bearing supplies for Filipino fishers has abandoned plans to sail closer to a China-held reef off the Southeast Asian country, organisers said on Thursday (May 16), after one of their boats was "constantly shadowed" by a Chinese vessel.

"Atin Ito will now proceed to conduct the final leg of supply distribution in the current area, as there are no more Filipino fishers in BdM," he said, using the acronym for the shoal also known to Filipinos as Bajo de Masinloc.

The convoy learned from fishermen on boats in the area via radio "that they had been chased away by the Chinese", Hizon told AFP.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-south-china-sea-territorial-dispute-tensions-convoy-aid-distribution-4340036>

11 May: Philippines sends ships to disputed atoll where Beijing building 'artificial island'

There has been 'small-scale reclamation' of the Sabina Shoal and China is 'the most probable actor', says a spokesman for the Philippine coastguard

Presence of Chinese vessels at the atoll coincided with the Philippine coastguard's discovery of piles of dead and crushed coral, the spokesman adds

The Philippine Coast Guard said on Saturday it had deployed a ship to Sabina Shoal on the Spratly archipelago, where it accused China of building an artificial island, having documented what it said were piles of dead and crushed coral on the sandbars.

Jonathan Malaya, spokesperson of the National Security Council (NSC), said NSC chief Eduardo Ano had ordered a tighter guard at locations within Manila's 200-nautical mile economic zone, as a long-standing diplomatic row with Beijing intensifies.

"No one will guard (these locations) except us. It is our responsibility under international law to guard (them) and ensure that the environment there would not be damaged and that there won't be reclamation activities," Malaya told a regular television program.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3262328/south-china-sea-philippines-sends-ships-disputed-atoll-where-beijing-building-artificial-island>

Follows-up: 13 May: China denies Philippine report of "artificial island" in disputed waters

The Philippines said on Monday that it would keep a closer guard on reefs, shoals and islets in its exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea, as China denied accusations of trying to build an artificial island in the disputed waters.

China's foreign ministry on Monday dismissed Manila's latest accusation as "groundless and pure rumor."

"Recently, the Philippine side has repeatedly spread rumors, deliberately smeared China and attempted to mislead the international community, which is futile," spokesperson Wang Wenbin told a regular briefing.

He urged Manila to "return to the right track of properly settling maritime disputes through negotiation and consultation."

<https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15265785>

10 May: Philippines calls for expelling Chinese diplomats as South China Sea row escalates

The Philippines' national security adviser called on Friday for Chinese diplomats to be expelled over an alleged leak of a phone conversation with a Filipino admiral in a significant escalation of a bitter row over the South China Sea.

China's embassy in Manila had orchestrated "repeated acts of engaging and dissemination of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation", with the objective of sowing discord, division and disunity, Eduardo Ano said in a statement.

Those actions "should not be allowed to pass unsanctioned without serious penalty", he said. Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian called the comments provocative and said Chinese diplomats in the Philippines had to be allowed to do their job.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippine-calls-chinese-diplomats-be-expelled-disinformation-2024-05-10/>

9 May: Philippine officials outraged, accuse Beijing of anti-wiretapping law violation over 'new model' phone call

Philippine officials have accused Beijing of violating an anti-wiretapping law over a controversial phone conversation that the Chinese claimed was recorded between their diplomat and a Filipino navy officer.

Observers say the transcript and audio clip released by China's embassy to a selected group of reporters in Manila could be an act of "deception", with an analyst suggesting the material could even be fabricated.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3261941/south-china-sea-philippine-officials-outraged-accuse-beijing-anti-wiretapping-law-violation-over-new>

6 May: Philippines says won't raise South China Sea tensions, won't use water cannons

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said on Monday the Philippines would not use water cannons or any offensive weapons in the South China Sea, and the last thing it wanted was to raise tensions in the strategic waterway.

"We will not follow the Chinese coast guard and Chinese vessels down that road," Marcos told reporters, adding the mission of the Philippine navy and coast guard was to lower tensions, and there no plans to install water cannons on vessels.

China's embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-says-wont-raise-south-china-sea-tensions-wont-use-water-cannons-2024-05-06/>

3 May: China publicizes for the first time what it claims is a 2016 agreement with Philippines

The China-Philippines war of words over whether an unwritten agreement was made for Manila to resupply its grounded warship in the disputed South China Sea has intensified, after Beijing offered details of the purported deal for the first time.

In a statement published on Saturday, the Chinese embassy in Manila gave some details of what it called "a new model for management" of the Second Thomas Shoal, a submerged reef that is part of the Spratly Islands chain also claimed by China as the Nansha Islands.

<https://apnews.com/article/china-south-china-sea-philippines-alleged-agreement-0006abb98502727972872bcecf49a51>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

27 May: US Navy's 100,000-Ton Aircraft Carrier Transits South China Sea Amid Boiling China-Taiwan Tensions

On May 26, 2024, the US military's Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (DVIDS) announced the carrier's transit through the South China Sea. The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, flagship of Carrier Strike Group Nine, is engaged in routine operations within the US 7th Fleet area of operations.

The Navy said that the US 7th Fleet, the largest forward-deployed numbered fleet of the US Navy, plays a critical role in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region through regular interactions and operations with allies and partners.

Accompanying the announcement, the military released images showcasing the USS Theodore Roosevelt conducting flight operations, featuring the E-2D Hawkeye and F/A-18F Super Hornet aircraft.

<https://www.eurasiantimes.com/power-with-aircraft-carrier-theodore-roosevelt/>

20 May: India sends warships as 'subtle reminder' to Beijing

India has dispatched warships to the South China Sea this month, in a move engineered to send Beijing "subtle reminders" about the importance of upholding international law, analysts say.

Though there is a danger that the ships could provoke an "aggressive response" from China, New Delhi-based observers told This Week in Asia that the region welcomed India's presence "with open arms".

https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3263326/south-china-sea-india-sends-warships-subtle-reminder-beijing?utm_source=rss_feed

10 May: China's military confronts US ship in Paracel islands, South China Sea

China's military said it issued a warning to a US Navy destroyer in the disputed South China Sea on Friday.

The USS Halsey was sailing near the Paracel Islands at the time of the encounter.

A spokesperson for China's military said it "organized naval and air forces to tail and monitor the ship in accordance with laws and regulations and issued a warning to drive it away."

"The actions by the United States seriously violate China's sovereignty and security," it added.

The People's Liberation Army accused Washington of being the "creator of security risks" and said the incident was "yet another iron proof of its navigation hegemony and militarization of the South China Sea."

<https://www.dw.com/en/chinas-military-confronts-us-ship-in-south-china-sea/a-69044225>

9 May: New 'Squad' bloc could allow Philippines to 'borrow strength' of Australia, Japan, US to counter China

An emerging regional bloc linking Australia, Japan, the Philippines and the United States is expected to evolve into a more permanent or institutionalised grouping.

But for now, analysts say the informal alliance will allow Manila to "borrow the strength" of the other three nations in countering challenges from China, and in elevating the Philippines' status beyond that of a "junior partner".

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3261905/new-squad-bloc-could-allow-philippines-borrow-strength-australia-japan-us-counter-china>

8 May: Indian Navy's warships in Singapore before deployment in South China Sea

Indian Naval ships Delhi, Shakti and Kiltan have reached Singapore as part of the long-leg operational deployment, led by Rear Admiral Rajesh Dhankhar, Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet.

The visiting ships were given a warm welcome by personnel of Republic of Singapore Navy and the High Commissioner of India. "The visit is part of the Operational Deployment of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet to the South China sea," the Indian Navy said in a statement.

"This visit is poised to strengthen the longstanding friendship and cooperation between the two maritime nations through a series of engagements," it said.

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/May/08/indian-navys-warships-in-singapore-before-deployment-in-south-china-sea>

5 May: Australia boosts Philippine military ties as South China Sea tensions rise

Australia has agreed to strengthen its security cooperation with the United States, Japan and the Philippines. Analysts say the move is a response to China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea.

China's ambitions in the South China Sea continue to alarm Australia, its Indo-Pacific allies and the United States.

In response, Australia, the United States, and Japan have agreed to step up military drills with the Philippines. Defense officials from the four countries met in Hawaii on Friday, declaring their commitment to protecting freedom of navigation in the region.

Earlier this week, the Philippines accused China of "dangerous maneuvers" and "harassment" after its use of water cannons against two Philippine vessels during a patrol in the South China Sea.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/australia-boosts-philippine-military-ties-as-south-china-sea-tensions-rise-/7598589.html>

3 May: Damage, injury to Philippines in South China Sea is 'irresponsible behaviour'

Damage to Philippine vessels and injuries to their crew in the South China Sea is "irresponsible behaviour" in disregard of international law, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Thursday, weighing in on the latest flare-up involving China.

Manila and Beijing have traded barbs almost daily since Tuesday's confrontation at the disputed Scarborough shoal, opens new tab, where China's coast guard used water cannon against two vessels from the Philippines, prompting outrage from its government.

"We've been very clear to everyone, to include Beijing, that the kind of behaviour that we've seen, where Filipino crews are put in danger... sailors have been injured and property damaged, that is irresponsible behaviour," Austin told a joint press conference in Hawaii.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/damage-injury-philippines-south-china-sea-is-irresponsible-behaviour-says-us-2024-05-03/>