

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 129
June 2024

ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

26 June: China intercepts submarine probe dropped from U.S. aircraft in South China Sea, state media says

China recently intercepted a submarine probe dropped by a United States military aircraft into the South China Sea, said Yuyuan Tiantian, a social media account affiliated with Chinese state broadcaster CCTV, on Wednesday.

The U.S. military aircraft were found hovering over the waters of the South China Sea and continuously dropped "unidentified items" downwards, Yuyuan Tiantian added.

China's coastguard salvaged and checked an item, a video released on the account showed. It said the interception took place recently.

"The probe can be used to detect Chinese submarine signals and to counter signals from submarines underwater," text on the video said, quoting an expert.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-intercepts-submarine-probe-dropped-us-aircraft-south-china-sea-state-media-2024-06-26/>

25 June: Philippines wants to talk with China on South China Sea, foreign minister says

The Philippines is working hard to bring China back to the table for talks to resolve differences in the South China Sea, Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo said on Tuesday (Jun 25).

The two countries held a working group meeting last week in preparation for a potential Bilateral Consultation Mechanism meeting in July, Manalo told a senate inquiry on Tuesday.

"Whatever confidence-building measures we achieve, they will be not at the expense of promotion of our sovereignty, sovereign rights, as well as our rights and jurisdiction on the West Philippine Sea," Manalo said.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-china-south-china-sea-wants-talk-4434331>

19 June: Philippines accuses Chinese coastguards of piracy after violent confrontation

The Philippines has accused China's coastguard of piracy in the disputed South China Sea after a violent confrontation in which it says its boats were rammed, punctured with knives and boarded by Chinese personnel.

One Filipino sailor lost a thumb in the incident, according to the Philippines military, which said Chinese personnel also destroyed communication equipment, seized personal mobile phones and took away unopened cases containing guns.

China has blamed the Philippines for the collision, which happened on Monday, and has said "no direct measures" were taken against Filipino personnel, adding that its coastguards "were professional and restrained".

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/19/philippines-china-clash-south-sea-navy-injuries-coast-guard-second-thomas-shoal-severe-thumb>

Follows-up: 21 June: Philippines says did not consider invoking US pact over recent clash with Chinese coast guard

"We are not yet ready to consider this as an armed attack," President Ferdinand Marcos' executive secretary Lucas Bersamin told reporters when asked if Manila would ask Washington to honour the 1951 treaty.

The US-Philippines mutual defence pact requires both parties to come to the other's defence in case of an "armed attack" against vessels, aircraft, military and coast guard anywhere in the Pacific theatre, which Washington says includes the South China Sea.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/south-china-sea-philippines-coast-guard-clash-united-states-defence-pact-4426996>

15 June: Philippines files UN claim to extended continental shelf in South China Sea

The Philippines filed a claim with the U.N. on Saturday to an extended continental shelf (ECS) in the South China Sea, a waterway where it has had increasingly confrontational maritime disputes with China.

"Today we secure our future by making a manifestation of our exclusive right to explore and exploit natural resources in our ECS entitlement," Marshall Louis Alferez, foreign ministry assistant secretary for maritime and ocean affairs, said in a statement.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, including parts claimed by the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam. Portions of the strategic waterway, where \$3 trillion worth of trade passes annually, are believed to be rich in oil and natural gas deposits, as well as fish stocks.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-files-un-claim-extended-continental-shelf-south-china-sea-2024-06-15/>

Follows-up: 18 June: China rejects bid by Philippines to extend its continental shelf in South China Sea

China has rejected a move by the Philippines to seek UN approval to extend its continental shelf in the South China Sea and secure "exclusive" rights to exploit undersea resources, state media reported Monday.

"The Philippines unilaterally submitted a case regarding the delimitation of the outer continental shelf in the South China Sea, infringing upon China's sovereign rights and jurisdiction," China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said, according to the Global Times.

"This action violates international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and contravenes relevant provisions of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea," he added.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/china-rejects-bid-by-philippines-to-extend-its-continental-shelf-in-south-china-sea/3252345>

Follows-up: 21 June: Vietnam says it's ready to hold talks with Philippines on overlapping continental shelf claims

Vietnam is ready to hold talks with the Philippines to settle their overlapping claims to the undersea continental shelf in the South China Sea, official Vietnamese media said Friday, in a diplomatic approach that contrasts with China's increasingly assertive actions to fortify its claims in the contested waters.

The Philippine government said over the weekend that it has asked a United Nations body to formally recognize its right to the undersea continental seabed extending from its western coast outward to the South China Sea, a region that covers the hotly contested Spratly group of islands, islets and reefs. If granted, that would give Manila the exclusive right to exploit undersea resources there.

[https://apnews.com/article/vietnam-philippines-south-china-sea-continental-shelf-6656b8bcd3fbc336ccdde98c0f6d70fb#:~:text=HANOI%2C%20Vietnam%20\(AP\)%20%E2%80%94,fortify%20its%20claims%20in%20the](https://apnews.com/article/vietnam-philippines-south-china-sea-continental-shelf-6656b8bcd3fbc336ccdde98c0f6d70fb#:~:text=HANOI%2C%20Vietnam%20(AP)%20%E2%80%94,fortify%20its%20claims%20in%20the)

15 June: China's new rules allow detention of foreigners in South China Sea

New China Coast Guard rules which allow Beijing to detain foreigners for trespassing in the disputed South China Sea are taking effect on June 15.

China deploys coast guard and other boats to patrol the waters and has turned several reefs into militarised artificial islands.

From June 15, the China Coast Guard can detain foreigners “suspected of violating management of border entry and exit”, according to the new regulations published online.

Up to 60 days of detention is allowed in “complicated cases”, the regulations say.

“Foreign ships that have illegally entered China’s territorial waters and the adjacent waters may be detained.”

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-s-new-rules-allow-detention-of-foreigners-in-south-china-sea>

14 June: Philippines Builds First BrahMos Anti-Ship Missile Base Facing South China Sea

According to recently released satellite imagery, the Philippines’ first BrahMos anti-ship missile base is taking shape at a naval installation facing the South China Sea.

Manila’s order of the Indian supersonic cruise missiles in 2022 marked a significant milestone in its defense modernization program that aimed to modernize the country’s outdated military amid regional disputes with China.

Procured under the Philippine Navy’s Shore-Based Anti-Ship Missile Acquisition Project, the \$375 million sale earmarked three batteries of BrahMos missiles and technical support for the system to the Philippine Marine Corps Coastal Defense Regiment. The purchase also marked the first international sale of New Delhi’s missile system, reportedly sparking more international interest in the system by countries in the region such as Vietnam and Indonesia.

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2024/06/philippines-builds-first-brahmos-anti-ship-missile-base-facing-south-china-sea/>

9 June: Vietnam expanding landfill work in South China Sea, report says

Vietnam has rapidly expanded its dredging and landfill operations in the South China Sea over the past six months, according to a new report.

The country is “on pace for a record year of island building in 2024”, according to the Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

It said it had added 692 acres (2.8 sq km) across 10 features in the Spratly Islands since November, roughly matching its efforts in the previous two years.

The think tank said Vietnam had reclaimed around 2,360 acres of land, around half the amount China has claimed, but that is an almost tenfold increase compared with the total Hanoi held three years ago.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3265972/vietnam-expanding-landfill-work-south-china-sea-report-says>

6 June: South China Sea code of conduct unlikely to be concluded on time due to lack of ASEAN unity

A lack of unity among ASEAN nations is regarded as the core stumbling block to immediately concluding the long-awaited code of conduct (COC) in the South China Sea, which had been expected to establish a guiding framework for preventing an open conflict in the troubled waters.

ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn revealed recently that the negotiations between the association and China would be completed by next year, but many remain doubtful.

Dafri Agussalim, the executive director of the ASEAN Studies Center at Gadjah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta, told The Jakarta Post that each ASEAN member seemed to have its own vested interests in China's economic influence, putting shared interests behind. "I'm not too confident about the deadline. You can see that each ASEAN member has its individual interests that it puts ahead of the association's, which eventually affects all internal negotiations. This is clear in, say, the Myanmar case as well," Dafri said.

<https://asianews.network/south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-unlikely-to-be-concluded-on-time-due-to-lack-of-asean-unity/>

4 June: Philippines says Chinese boats seized supplies airdropped to Filipino outpost

The Philippine military said on Tuesday (Jun 4) that Chinese boats illegally "seized" food and medicine airdropped to a Filipino outpost in the South China Sea.

The alleged incident happened on May 19 at Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands, where Filipino troops are garrisoned on a grounded navy vessel to assert Manila's claims to the waters.

The Philippine military accused China of "aggressive and unprovoked interference" when two Chinese rigid-hulled inflatable boats allegedly came within 10 metres of the Sierra Madre vessel and seized an airdropped package meant for Filipino troops.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-says-chinese-boats-seized-supplies-airdropped-filipino-outpost-4385406>

3 June: China says Philippine personnel pointed guns at its coast guard in disputed waters

Chinese state media said on June 2 that personnel on a Philippine ship pointed guns at the country's Coast Guard in disputed waters of the South China Sea in May.

At least two people on the Philippine vessel near the Second Thomas Shoal were carrying guns on deck, pointing them in the direction of the Coast Guard, China Central Television (CCTV) said.

An accompanying 29-second video appears to show a masked man momentarily holding up a blurred black object that resembles a rifle.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/china-says-philippine-personnel-pointed-guns-at-chinese-coast-guard-in-disputed-waters>

***Follows-up:* 4 June: Philippine military denies pointing guns at China Coast Guard**

The Philippine military on Tuesday denied a Chinese allegation that personnel had pointed guns at the China Coast Guard on May 19 as China seized supplies for the Philippines' military outpost at Second Thomas Shoal.

In a press statement on Tuesday, the Armed Forces of the Philippines said Filipino personnel had acted with the "highest level of professionalism, restraint, and discipline."

"Foreign vessels that venture dangerously close to our military vessel and in violation of safe distance protocols necessitate heightened vigilance and alertness from our personnel," the statement said, adding, "Hence, our troops were seen on guard because of the [China Coast Guard] provocative presence near BRP Sierra Madre."

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippine-military-denies-pointing-guns-at-China-Coast-Guard>

1 June: Marcos sets 'red line' with Beijing over South China Sea

Any Filipino serviceman or citizen killed by a wilful act in the South China Sea comes very close to what the Philippines defines as "an act of war" – to which his country will respond accordingly, said Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr on May 31.

“We had already suffered injury, but thank God, we have not yet gotten to the point where any of our participants, civilian or otherwise, have been killed,” said Mr Marcos, using the most strongly worded language to date in reference to an escalating maritime row with China in the South China Sea.

“But once we get to that point, certainly we would have crossed the Rubicon. Is that a red line? Almost certainly it’s going to be a red line,” he added, in response to a question from the floor after his keynote speech at the 21st Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/any-wilful-act-in-maritime-spat-that-causes-a-filipino-death-is-close-to-act-of-war-ferdinand-marcos>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

25 June: U.S. & Canadian Naval Forces “Flex Muscles” In South China Sea Amid Growing Threats To The Philippines

The United States Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy conducted bilateral operations in the South China Sea from June 18 to June 20, showcasing a strong commitment to regional security and cooperation amid ongoing tensions between China and the Philippines.

The bilateral operations featured the US Navy’s Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson (DDG 114) and the Royal Canadian Navy’s Halifax-class frigate HMCS Montreal (FFH 336).

The US Navy disclosed that the activities included personnel transfers, flight operations, and replenishment at sea, supported by the Lewis-and-Clark class dry cargo ship USNS Wally Schirra (T-AKE 8).

<https://www.eurasiantimes.com/n-u-s-canadian-naval-forces-hold-bilateral/>

22 June: US East Asia envoy says South China Sea situation deeply concerning

US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink on Saturday (Jan 22) said the situation in the South China Sea is deeply concerning, adding that China's recent actions in the disputed waterway were "deeply destabilising".

Kritenbrink made the comments during a visit to Hanoi, amid rising tension between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, where Vietnam is also a claimant.

"We think that China's actions, particularly its recent actions, around the Second Thomas Shoal, vis-à-vis the Philippines have been irresponsible, aggressive, dangerous, deeply destabilising," Kritenbrink said at a briefing for selected media in Hanoi, a recording of which was reviewed by Reuters.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/us-east-asia-envoy-says-south-china-sea-situation-deeply-concerning-4429076>

21 June: China says Japan has 'no right to intervene' in sea dispute with Philippines

China on Friday said Japan has "no right to intervene" in its maritime dispute with the Philippines, after Tokyo expressed serious concern over repeated confrontations in the South China Sea including a particularly tense one on Monday.

On Tuesday, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement saying the South China Sea issue is "directly related to the peace and stability of the region and is a legitimate concern of the international community." It also condemned Beijing for engaging in maritime activities that "obstruct freedom of navigation and increase regional tensions."

A spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Japan told reporters on Friday that China was lodging a "solemn protest" over the Japanese government once again making remarks on the South China Sea, "making mischief and turning black and white upside down," and "accusing China unreasonably in spite of truth."

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/China-says-Japan-has-no-right-to-intervene-in-sea-dispute-with-Philippines>

20 June: Blinken discusses China's actions in South China Sea with Philippine counterpart

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday held a call with Philippine Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo to discuss China's actions in the South China Sea, which Manila and Washington have called escalatory.

Blinken and Manalo's discussion "followed (China's) dangerous and irresponsible actions to deny the Philippines from executing a lawful maritime operation in the South China Sea on June 17," the State Department said in a statement after the call.

Blinken emphasized that China's actions "undermine regional peace and stability and underscored the United States' ironclad commitments to the Philippines under our Mutual Defense Treaty," the State Department said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/blinken-discusses-chinas-actions-south-china-sea-with-philippine-counterpart-2024-06-19/>

16 June: US submarine may have made detectable wakes before South China Sea mishap, study suggests

On October 2, 2021, a US submarine hit a seamount while cruising at high speed in the northern part of the South China Sea.

The USS Connecticut (SSN-22) was travelling at 24 knots when it was involved in the serious accident. A subsequent US military investigation assigned blame to the negligence of the officers and crew on board as well as their unfamiliarity with the terrain.

But when travelling in excess of 20 knots, and in such a complex and intensely monitored waterway as the South China Sea, a large submarine such as the SSN-22 can produce detectable ripples on the surface, thus giving away its position, according to a new study by Chinese scientists.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2024/06/16/us-submarine-may-have-made-detectable-wakes-before-south-china-sea-mishap-study-suggests>

8 June: Malaysia's military drills with West, Singapore spotlight its South China Sea concerns

Asia's oldest defence pact is getting ready to roll out the big guns for its annual military exercises later this year, in a display of firepower analysts say is aimed at demonstrating Western powers' commitment to Southeast Asia's security – while also helping Malaysia send a signal to Beijing on the South China Sea.

Advanced drones, fifth-generation fighter jets and high-altitude surveillance aircraft are all set to take to the skies at this year's Five Power Defence Arrangements' Bersama Lima drills, which are traditionally held in October.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3265773/malaysias-military-drills-west-singapore-spotlight-its-south-china-sea-concerns>

1 June: 'United States can be secure only if Asia is': Defence chief Austin

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stressed on Saturday (Jun 1) that the Indo-Pacific region remained a "priority" for Washington, saying the United States was secure "only if Asia is".

Lloyd made the remarks at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, a day after he met with his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun.

"The United States can be secure only if Asia is and that's why the United States has long maintained its presence in this region," Austin said at the major security summit.

"Despite these historic clashes in Europe and the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific has remained our priority theatre of operations," Austin said.

The United States is seeking to strengthen alliances and partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly with the Philippines, as it seeks to counter China's growing military might and influence.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/us-commitment-indo-pacific-defence-chief-lloyd-austin-shangrila-dialogue-south-china-sea-4378881>