

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 131
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ACTS OF CLAIMANTS

30 August: Philippines, Vietnam boost military ties amid South China Sea tensions

Vietnam and the Philippines agreed on Friday (Aug 30) to advance defence and military relations and deepen collaboration on maritime security, in a significant step by two countries long at odds with Beijing over its actions in the South China Sea.

Vietnamese Defence Minister Phan Van Giang was in Manila for talks with his Philippine counterpart Gilberto Teodoro, his first visit as defence chief, and paid a courtesy call earlier in the day on Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

"The ministers expressed their unwavering commitment to deepen defence and military cooperation through continued interaction and engagements at all levels," the Philippine defence department said in a statement.

The two nations aimed to sign a defence cooperation deal before the end of the year, Teodoro said after he and Giang inked "letters of intent" to enhance engagements on disaster response and military medicine.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-vietnam-military-ties-south-china-sea-tensions-4577791>

27 August: U.S. could escort Philippine resupply missions in South China Sea, admiral says

U.S. ships could escort Philippine vessels on resupply missions in the South China Sea, a top admiral said on Tuesday, describing what he called an "an entirely reasonable option" that required consultation between the treaty allies, however.

The remarks, which are likely to annoy China, were made by Samuel Paparo, commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, after a series of maritime and air confrontations between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea in the past week.

Beijing has pressed its claim to the disputed conduit for more than \$3 trillion of annual ship-borne commerce, while Manila has kept up supply missions, particularly those to a beached naval ship on the hotly contested Second Thomas Shoal.

"Escort of one vessel to the other is an entirely reasonable option within our Mutual Defense Treaty," Paparo told reporters on the sidelines of a military forum organised by the Indo-Pacific Command.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-says-china-is-biggest-disruptor-peace-region-2024-08-27/>

25 August: China, Philippines clash in South China Sea despite efforts to rebuild trust

The Philippines and China clashed in Sabina Shoal on Sunday (Aug 25) over what Manila said was a resupply mission for fishermen, the latest in a series of sea and air confrontations in the strategic waterway.

The incident overshadows efforts by both nations to rebuild trust and better manage disputes after months of confrontations, including a violent clash in June where a Filipino sailor lost a finger.

The Philippines accused China of "aggressive and dangerous manoeuvres" to block the resupply mission, while China's coast guard said it had taken "control measures" against a vessel that had "illegally" entered the waters and repeatedly approached Chinese ships in a dangerous manner.

20 August: China's Xi holds talks with Vietnam's new leader in Beijing over SCS

China's President Xi Jinping has held talks with Vietnam's President To Lam in Beijing on his first state visit since becoming his country's top leader, according to Chinese official media Xinhua.

The meeting between Xi and Lam on Monday signals the close ties between the two communist-run neighbours, which have well-developed economic and trade relations despite occasional strains over their competing claims in the South China Sea.

President Xi Jinping for "better management" of differences between China and Vietnam over their maritime disputes.

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/xi-meets-vietnams-to-lam-in-beijing-calls-for-better-management-of-differences-over-south-china-sea-13806203.html>

Follows-up: 21 August: Viet Nam and China issued joint statement

"The two sides deeply exchanged sincere and frank opinions on maritime issues, emphasizing the need to better control and actively resolve disagreements at sea, maintain peace and stability in the East Sea and the region.

The two sides agreed that it is necessary to adhere to the common perception of the senior leaders of the two Parties and countries, jointly maintain peace and stability in the East Sea, persevere through friendly consultations, and actively seek fundamental solutions. basic and long-term agreement that both sides accept in accordance with the "Agreement on basic principles guiding the settlement of maritime issues between Vietnam and China", international law, including the United Nations Convention on the 1982 Law of the Sea, taking no action to complicate the situation or expand the dispute. Promote discussions on cooperation for mutual development at sea and discussions on delimitation of waters outside the mouth of the Gulf of Tonkin to soon achieve substantive progress, and actively promote cooperation in less sensitive areas at sea. Continue to comprehensively and effectively implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the East Sea (DOC), on the basis of consultation and consensus to soon achieve a substantive and effective Code of Conduct in the East Sea (COC), in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea."

<https://vtv.vn/chinh-tri/tuyen-bo-chung-viet-nam-trung-quoc-20240820191401693.htm>

20 August: China says Philippine vessel 'deliberately collided' with Chinese vessel in the South China Sea

China's Coast Guard said a Philippine vessel that had ignored its repeated warnings "deliberately collided" with a Chinese vessel in an "unprofessional and dangerous" manner in the disputed South China Sea, according to statements on Monday.

A short video of the incident posted on China Coast Guard's social media showed the collision happened around 3:24 a.m. on Monday (1924 GMT on Sunday) and labelled the Chinese vessel as a coast guard vessel.

In one of the statements, China's maritime security said the same Philippine vessel then entered waters near Second Thomas Shoal after being prevented from entering Sabina Shoal waters.

Manila's National Task Force on the West Philippine Sea, meanwhile, said two of its coast guard ships were damaged in collisions with Chinese vessels that were conducting "unlawful and aggressive manoeuvres" near the Sabina Shoal.

The confrontation "resulted in collisions causing structural damage to both Philippine Coast Guard vessels", Manila said.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/china-says-philippine-vessel-deliberately-collided-with-chinese-vessel-in-the-south-china-sea>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/19/china-philippine-ships-crash-sabina-shoal-south-china-sea>

19 August: Philippines Deploys Gunboats, Maritime Security Unit to SCS

The Philippines has deployed patrol gunboats and a new Marine unit focused on littoral operations to Western Palawan amid recent tensions with Beijing over disputed features in the South China Sea (SCS).

Four Navy patrol boats and a Marine Corps Maritime Security Battalion have been sent to the country's westernmost province following one of the most severe incidents between Manila and Beijing on June 17th, which saw the seizure of Philippine troops and equipment by the China Coast Guard during an Armed Forces of the Philippines-led resupply mission to BRP Sierra Madre (LT-57) at Second Thomas Shoal. These deployments have been composed of Manila's newest assets and formations under its military modernization efforts to reorient Philippine forces from internal security to external defense operations.

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2024/08/philippines-deploys-gunboats-maritime-security-unit-to-scs/>

9 August: Vietnam accelerates island building to challenge China's maritime claims

Vietnam has dramatically accelerated its effort to expand islands and reclaim land in the contested South China Sea since the start of the year to challenge rising Chinese assertiveness, according to satellite imagery and interviews with Vietnamese officials, security analysts and diplomats.

While Vietnam has been enlarging its presence across a remote collection of rocks, reefs and islets called the Spratlys since 2021, the country is on pace this year to create more than 1,000 acres of new land there, more than in any year prior.

In rare interviews in the capital, Hanoi, five former and current Vietnamese officials said the government has been "consolidating" outposts for the purpose of self-defense, part of a broader strategy to counter security threats "early and from afar."

"We will resort to every means possible to make sure we can defend and safeguard our legitimate interests in the East Sea," said Le Dinh Tinh, director general of policy planning in Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, using Vietnam's name for the South China Sea. Vietnam's activities in the Spratlys are "completely within its legitimate rights," he added.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2024/vietnam-south-china-sea-islands-growth/>

7 August: China launches air and sea patrols near flashpoint Scarborough Shoal in South China Sea

China on Aug 7 carried out a combat patrol to test "strike capabilities" near Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, a flashpoint area also claimed by the Philippines.

On Aug 7, the Chinese military's Southern Theatre Command said it had "organised a joint combat patrol in the sea and air space" near the area.

The manoeuvres tested "the reconnaissance and early warning, rapid mobility, and joint strike capabilities of theatre troops", Beijing said.

The Chinese coast guard also conducted a separate patrol on Aug 7 to "uphold its rights" around another group of contested islands in the East China Sea that are administered by Japan, Beijing's state media said.

"It's meant to intimidate," Mr Jay Batongbacal, director of the Manila-based Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea, said.

"It's definitely meant to send a message, a show of force," he added.

Mr Duan Dang, a Vietnam-based maritime security analyst, said the fact China had specifically mentioned the shoal showed its “mounting dissatisfaction with Manila’s recent collaborative efforts with its allies and partners”.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/china-launches-air-sea-patrols-near-flashpoint-scarborough-shoal>

Follows-up: 10 August: Philippine military condemns China air force for 'dangerous' acts in South China Sea

The Philippine military said on Saturday it strongly condemns "dangerous and provocative actions" by China's air force at a contested shoal in the South China Sea.

Two People's Liberation Army Air Force aircraft executed a dangerous manoeuvre and dropped flares in the path of a Philippine air force aircraft conducting a routine maritime patrol over the Scarborough shoal on Thursday morning, the military said in a statement. It "endangered the lives of our personnel undertaking maritime security operations recently within Philippine maritime zones", said Philippines armed forces chief Romeo Brawner, adding that the Chinese aircraft interfered with lawful flight operations and violated international law on aviation safety.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippine-military-condemns-China-air-force-for-dangerous-acts-in-South-China-Sea>

6 August: Philippines, Vietnam to hold first joint maritime drills amid tensions in South China Sea

The Philippines and Vietnam are set to hold their first joint maritime exercises on Aug 9, a historic move seen as a way to deepen trust between the two South-east Asian nations that have resisted Beijing’s increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Though the two countries have competing claims in the disputed waterway, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) welcomed its Vietnamese counterparts as they docked at the Port of Manila on Aug 5.

Vietnam has been speeding up its artificial island-building pace in the South China Sea over the past months, while tensions have been increasing between China and the Philippines over the latter’s resupply missions to a remote military outpost on Second Thomas Shoal.

Beijing’s rising aggression in the region, however, has pushed Manila and Hanoi to beef up their defence and cooperation.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-vietnam-to-hold-first-joint-naval-drills-amid-tensions-in-south-china-sea>

Follows-up: 13 August: Philippines-Vietnam drills show ASEAN a solution to China

The Philippine and Vietnamese coast guards have completed joint training exercises near the West Philippine Sea, a not-so-subtle message to a mutual rival vying for control of the South China Sea.

The exercises were held on Friday as part of a maritime cooperation deal brokered by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. when he flew to Vietnam for a state visit in January.

On top of rolling waves and under moody skies, personnel from the Philippine Coast Guard and Vietnam Coast Guard simulated firefighting scenarios by employing water cannons to extinguish fires in times of emergency. The use of water cannons was a high point for these exercises, as it represented a reversal of sorts from China's repeated bombardment of Manila's resupply missions in waters of its exclusive economic zone.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippines-Vietnam-drills-show-ASEAN-a-solution-to-China>

5 August: Chinese coastguard ‘monitoring’ Philippine vessels near Sabina Shoal

China says it is “monitoring” and “effectively controlling” Philippine ships gathering around the disputed Sabina Shoal in the South China Sea, while vowing to “resolutely defend” its territorial sovereignty.

Patrol boats from the Philippines’ Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and a number of fishing vessels from the country have gathered in the waters near the Philippine coastguard ship BRP Teresa Magbanua since Saturday, according to a statement from the China Coast Guard.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3273217/south-china-sea-chinese-coastguard-monitoring-philippine-vessels-near-sabina-shoal>

3 August: South China Sea: Beijing opens hardware store on disputed Woody Island

China has opened a hardware store on a disputed South China Sea island, according to the local government, as Beijing ramps up efforts to expand civilian facilities and cement claims in the strategically important waterway.

Covering an area of about 100 square metres (1,076 square feet), the Xinyi Hardware Store is located on Woody Island in the Paracel Islands, a contested archipelago known in Chinese as the Xisha Islands and in Vietnamese as the Hoang Sa Islands.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3273082/south-china-sea-beijing-opens-hardware-store-disputed-woody-island>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

1 September: U.S. decries China's 'escalatory' acts against Philippines in South China Sea

The United States on Saturday condemned "dangerous and escalatory" actions by China against what it called lawful Philippine maritime operations in the South China Sea, the State Department said in a statement.

"A China Coast Guard vessel deliberately collided three times with a Philippine Coast Guard vessel exercising its freedom of navigation in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ), causing damage to the vessel and jeopardizing the safety of the crew onboard," spokesman Matthew Miller said.

The statement said it was the latest in a series of dangerous and escalatory actions by China in the area throughout August.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/U.S.-decries-China-s-escalatory-acts-against-Philippines-in-South-China-Sea>

26 August: Super Garuda Shield: Indonesia hosts 10-country military exercise amid South China Sea tensions

Thousands of military personnel from Indonesia, the US, and eight other countries began two weeks of exercises Monday, focused on joint capabilities in the Asia-Pacific.

The region, particularly in the South China Sea, has seen tensions rise this year with flashpoints between littoral states claiming sovereignty over disputed islands and waterways.

The annual exercises – known as Super Garuda Shield – started in Sidoarjo, East Java, with Indonesia deploying more than 4,400 troops to the drills.

The Indonesian military said around 1,800 US troops and several hundred from other countries will also take part.

The programme includes expert academic exchanges, professional development workshops, a command-and-control exercise, and field training that culminates with a live-fire event.

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/super-garuda-shield-indonesia-hosts-10-country-military-exercise-amid-south-china-sea-tensions-13808279.html>

19 August: Canada's 'absurd' South China Sea play: challenging Beijing or undermining ASEAN?

Canada is wading into the contested waters of the South China Sea, joining forces with Australia to ramp up military and defence industry cooperation. The two countries, expressing alarm at China's assertive claims in the vital waterway, are looking to counter Beijing's growing influence in the region.

Speaking after talks with his Australian counterpart in Vancouver on August 8, Canadian Defence Minister Bill Blair accused China of trying to reshape the international system to advance its own interests, and said security in the Indo-Pacific was being challenged "in a number of significant and difficult ways". Blair vowed that his nation would work more closely with Australia to maintain order in the region.

Greater involvement of outside powers in the South China Sea could serve as a counterweight against China's assertiveness. But some observers caution that Canada's interest may be "merely symbolic", pointing to its lack of significant regional defence resources. Analysts say such moves could also prevent Southeast Asian nations from speaking with "one voice" – making it easier for Beijing to deal with a divided response.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3274790/canadas-absurd-south-china-sea-play-challenging-beijing-or-undermining-asean>

13 August: China, Indonesia hold first 2+2 senior officials' meeting amid South China Sea tensions

China and Indonesia are holding their first Senior Officials' Meeting of the Joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Dialogue, a meeting that analysts say will potentially cover multiple topics including the South China Sea issue.

Experts believe that Indonesia will play a constructive role in the ongoing tensions between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, as cooperation between Beijing and Jakarta will set an example for ASEAN member states while contributing to stabilizing the situation in the South China Sea.

The China-Indonesia Joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Dialogue, launched in 2023, is the first 2+2 ministerial dialogue established between China and another country. During the Senior Officials' Meeting, the two sides will exchange views on China-Indonesia relations and international and regional issues of mutual interest, the spokesperson said.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202408/1317907.shtml>

07 August: Philippines, US, Australia, Canada to hold first joint exercises in South China Sea

The Philippines, Canada, United States and Australia kicked off their first joint military exercise on Wednesday (Aug 7) in the South China Sea to enhance inter-operability among their forces, the four countries' military said.

The two-day exercise, which will involve naval and air force units, is the first among the four countries, and follows the first Philippines-Japan joint exercise in the disputed South China Sea last week.

The United States, a treaty ally of the Philippines, has held similar exercises with other countries in the disputed waterway, having carried out drills with Manila and Japan in June.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-us-australia-canada-hold-first-joint-exercises-south-china-sea-4531776>

2 August: Japan eyes meeting with Australia, India by early September to strengthen security ties

The Japanese government has begun coordinating with India and Australia to hold a two-plus-two meeting of their foreign and defence ministers by early September, according to government sources.

Ahead of the summit meeting of the Quad countries — Japan, Australia, India and the United States — to be held in late September, the Japanese government aims to strengthen security ties with each country, sources said.

Japan and India plan to hold a two-plus-two meeting in India on Aug. 20, the first since September 2022 in Tokyo. A meeting between Japan and Australia will be held in Australia in early September for the first time since December 2022 in Tokyo. Both meetings are expected to focus on promoting joint military training.

<https://asianews.network/japan-eyes-meeting-with-australia-india-by-early-september-to-strengthen-security-ties/>