

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 136
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ACTS OF CLAIMANT

30 Jan: Philippines arrests 5 Chinese nationals for suspected espionage

Filipino authorities announced the arrests of five more Chinese nationals suspected of spying on coast guard and navy installations, after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. offered to make a deal with China over U.S. missiles deployed in his country.

The arrests brought to six the number of Chinese citizens taken into custody in the Philippines in recent days on suspicion of espionage amid heightened bilateral tensions in the South China Sea.

The Philippine government paraded the five new suspects before the media's cameras on Thursday – the same day that Marcos said he would have an American mid-range missile system removed from the Southeast Asian nation if Beijing agreed to stop intimidating Filipinos in contested waters.

<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/philippines-china-alleged-spies-01302025133022.html>

25 Jan: Philippines suspends South China Sea survey after China's 'harassment'

The Philippines said on Saturday it has suspended a scientific survey in the South China Sea after two of its fisheries vessels faced "harassment" and aggressive behaviour from China's coast guard and navy.

Two Philippine fisheries vessels, on their way on Friday to collect sand samples from Sandy Cay near Philippine-occupied Thitu island, encountered "aggressive manoeuvres" from three China Coast Guard ships, the Philippine Coast Guard said in a statement on Saturday.

China Coast Guard said the Philippine vessels had entered waters near Tiexian Reef without permission and attempted to "illegally" land on the reef to collect sand samples.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-accuses-china-harassing-its-fisheries-boats-south-china-sea-2025-01-25/>

23 Jan: Philippines to pick venue soon for second South China Sea case against Beijing

The Philippines will soon decide on an international platform to sue China for alleged damage to the marine environment, its justice minister said, as it pursues a second high-profile legal challenge against Beijing over the South China Sea.

The Philippines won a landmark case at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 that found China's sweeping claim of sovereignty in the South China Sea had no basis under international law. It now wants to hold Beijing accountable for what it says is its harvesting of giant clams and substantial environmental damage to coral reefs in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

"We're in discussion and the decision has to come very soon," Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla said, referring to which legal forum to file the case.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-pick-venue-soon-second-south-china-sea-case-against-beijing-2025-01-23/>

22 Jan: Malaysia's Anwar says don't single out China in sea tensions

There will always be border disputes in Asia, and China should not be singled out because of tensions in the South China Sea, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said on Wednesday (Jan 22).

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Anwar said that Malaysia had border issues with Singapore and its other neighbours in Southeast Asia but they still managed to cultivate good relations.

While Malaysia also has maritime issues with China, it will push ahead with improving ties because it is an important country, he said.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/malaysia-pm-anwar-ibrahim-single-out-south-china-sea-tensions-asia-4889536>

20 Jan: Philippines, China uphold South China Sea deal on resupply missions

In a rare moment of accord amid their simmering feud over the South China Sea, Beijing and Manila have agreed to maintain a provisional deal allowing the Philippines to resupply a remote outpost at the Second Thomas Shoal - a move hailed as a "win" for Manila, albeit one fraught with uncertainty.

The agreement, reached during the 10th bilateral consultation mechanism (BCM) meeting in Xiamen on Thursday, comes as the Philippines continues to push back against what it calls a rising tide of Chinese incursions in the South China Sea.

<https://www.msn.com/en-xl/news/other/it-s-a-win-philippines-china-uphold-south-china-sea-deal-on-resupply-missions/ar-AA1xyHcE>

19 Jan: PLA carries out first South China Sea patrol of year as Philippine tensions continue

The Chinese military has carried out two-day joint combat readiness patrols in the contested South China Sea amid ongoing tensions with the Philippines over the strategically important waters.

The People's Liberation Army Southern Theatre Command said its naval and air forces patrolled the waters on Friday and Saturday.

"The patrols were meant to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea region, and any military activities that disrupt the South China Sea are fully under control," the statement said, without providing further details.

It was the first patrol of the year and coincided with a joint air and sea exercise involving the Philippine and United States militaries.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3295368/pla-carries-out-first-south-china-sea-patrol-year-philippine-tensions-continue>

13 Jan: Manila deploys coast guard ship to counter China patrols

The Philippines said on Sunday (Jan 12) that it had deployed a coast guard ship to challenge Chinese patrol boats attempting to "alter the existing status quo" of the disputed South China Sea.

Beijing claims most of the strategic waterway despite a 2016 international tribunal ruling that went against it, and there have been frequent clashes or tense standoffs between Philippine and Chinese vessels.

Commodore Jay Tarriela, a Philippine Coast Guard spokesman, said Chinese patrol ships had this year come as close as 60 nautical miles (111km) west off the main Philippine island of Luzon.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/south-china-sea-philippines-coast-guard-chinese-patrol-vessels-4852681>

12 Jan: China Begins Patrolling Boundary of its "Nine-Dash Line" Claim

For the first time, China's coast guard has begun patrolling a section of the country's "nine-dash line" - the loosely-defined boundary of Beijing's unilateral claim to the South China Sea, including international waters and other states' exclusive economic zones.

Since the beginning of the new year, a group of large China Coast Guard cutters have been rotating through patrol duty in an area just off Zambales, Luzon. At closest approach, the patrols have come within about 55 nautical miles of Philippine shores.

One of the deployed vessels is CCG 5901, the largest armed law enforcement vessel in the world at 12,000 tonnes displacement. Over VHF, its crew has informed the Philippine Coast Guard that the CCG is enforcing Chinese law in Chinese waters, even when 100 nautical miles inside the Philippine exclusive economic zone.

<https://maritime-executive.com/article/china-begins-patrolling-boundary-of-its-nine-dash-line-claim>

11 Jan: Philippines starts Spratly Islands upgrades after months of tension with China

The Philippine government allocated over 1 billion pesos for the development of sheltered port facilities on Thitu Island and Nanshan Island in the South China Sea.

The funding will be used to extend Thitu Island's airstrip to 1.5km, allowing it to accommodate F-16 fighter jets and light combat planes, enhancing the Philippines coastguard's capabilities in the disputed waters.

The upgrades on Thitu Island could lead to heightened tensions with China, as Beijing may view the presence of US military aircraft or coastguard vessels on the island as interference in the territorial dispute between China and the Philippines.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/philippines-starts-spratly-islands-upgrades-093000647.html>

6 Jan: Philippines deploys air and sea assets to track Chinese 'monster'

The Philippines has deployed air and sea assets of its military and coast guard in its exclusive economic zone to monitor China's largest coast guard vessel, calling the ship's presence an act of Chinese "intimidation, coercion and aggression."

According to the Philippine coast guard, the 165 m (541 ft) long vessel 5901, referred to by the Philippines as "the monster," was 65 to 70 nautical miles off the coast of the province of Zambales on Sunday.

"We have all our assets pointed at this monster ship. The moment it (carries out) any provocative action, it will be met with appropriate response," Jonathan Malaya, spokesperson for the National Security Council told state television on Monday.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-China-Sea/Philippines-deploys-air-and-sea-assets-to-track-Chinese-monster>

2 Jan: Philippines recovers suspected Chinese submarine drone from sea

The Philippine National Police Regional Office 5 (Bicol PNP) confirmed that three fishermen recovered a submarine drone with Chinese markings in the waters off San Pascual town in Masbate on Wednesday, January 1.

Police Brigadier General Andre Dizon, Bicol PNP Director, said that their initial investigation revealed the device has Chinese markings, identified as an HY-119 model. He added that the submarine drone features various operations, including communication, underwater surveillance, oceanographic research, and naval missions.

Authorities also identified the device's frequency-hopping capabilities, which enable it to evade detection during underwater operations.

<https://www.brigadanews.ph/eyes-below-masbate-fishermen-recover-suspected-chinese-submarine-drone/>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

27 Jan: India, Indonesia on South China Sea conflicts

India and Indonesia Sunday called for the resolution of maritime disputes and the conclusion of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), in what appeared to be a message directed towards China.

Both leaders reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region, and other lawful uses of the seas,” a joint statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs said.

<https://theprint.in/diplomacy/india-indonesia-call-for-resolution-of-maritime-disputes-in-south-china-sea-in-message-aimed-at-china/2464108/>

23 Jan: Quad Foreign Ministers signal firm stand against China’s aggression at sea

In a veiled message to China on its attempts to coerce its way through maritime territorial disputes, the Foreign Ministers of the Quad countries ‘strongly opposed’ attempts to change any status quo and said the four countries — India, the US, Japan and Australia — would maintain conviction for upholding international law.

A joint statement outlined the Quad’s plans for progress, emphasising the shared commitment of the four nations. “We remain convinced that international law, economic opportunity and peace, stability and security across all domains, including the maritime domain, are essential to the development and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific’s people,” it said.

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/quad-foreign-ministers-signal-firm-stand-against-chinas-aggression-at-sea/>

22 Jan: Marco Rubio affirms ‘ironclad’ US commitment to Philippines

In a call with his Philippine counterpart Enrique Manalo, Mr Rubio “underscored the United States’ ironclad commitments to the Philippines under our Mutual Defence Treaty,” State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said.

Mr Rubio, a long-time hawk on China, discussed the “dangerous and destabilising actions in the South China Sea” by Beijing, formally known as the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

“Secretary Rubio conveyed that the PRC’s behaviour undermines regional peace and stability and is inconsistent with international law,” Ms Bruce said.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/marco-rubio-affirms-ironclad-us-commitment-to-philippines>

***Follows-up:* 23 Jan: China responds to Rubio's remarks on S.China Sea after his phone call with Philippine FM**

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said on Thursday that the US is not a party to the South China Sea issue and has no right to interfere in the maritime issues between China and the Philippines.

Mao said "the military cooperation between the US and the Philippines should not undermine China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea, still less should such cooperation support or advance the Philippines' illegal claims."

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202501/1327469.shtml>

19 Jan: Malaysia takes on Asean mantle but tempers expectations on Myanmar, South China Sea

Malaysia takes its turn as rotating chair of the 10-member Association of South-east Asian Nations as the bloc contends with Beijing’s assertiveness in the South China Sea and a

faltering Asean peace process for Myanmar, where the ruling military plans to hold an election this year.

Malaysia is committed to addressing regional issues, but expectations on Myanmar and the advancing of talks on an Asean-China code of conduct for the South China Sea should be measured, a top official said.

“To say that we will have a solution immediately is going to be very ambitious,” Malaysian foreign ministry secretary general Amran Mohamed Zin told a media briefing ahead of the retreat on Langkawi island.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-takes-on-asean-mantle-but-tempers-expectations-on-myanmar-south-china-sea>

19 Jan: Philippines, US hold joint maritime exercises in South China Sea

The Philippines and the United States carried out joint maritime exercises for a fifth time in the South China Sea, Manila's armed forces said on Sunday, in a move that would likely irk China.

The Philippine military said in a statement it held a "maritime cooperative activity" with the US on Friday and Saturday, its first for the year and fifth overall since launching the joint activities in 2023.

The joint maritime activity included the United States' Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group, two guided missile destroyers, two helicopters and two F-18 Hornet aircraft.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-us-maritime-exercise-south-china-sea-4876836>

17 Jan: Chinese Coast Guard Vessel ‘Shadows’ Indian Ship As It Traverses Volatile Waters

Generally, the Southeast Asian countries are at the receiving end of the Chinese Coast Guard's aggressive tactics. But an Indian Coast Guard Ship returning from a goodwill visit from Japan was shadowed by a Chinese Coast Guard vessel as it passed west of the disputed Scarborough Shoal.

The Indian ship is passing through the waters that lie within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone, a claim that China refutes. Two additional Chinese coast guard ships, CCG 3103 and CCG 3502, were present as the Indian vessel navigated the region.

<https://www.eurasiantimes.com/chinese-coast-guard-ship-shadow-indian-coast/>

13 Jan: Japan, Philippines, US vow to deepen cooperation in face of China's behaviour

Japan, the Philippines and the United States vowed to further deepen cooperation under a trilateral arrangement in the face of rising tensions in Asia's waters, the three countries said following a call among their leaders.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and outgoing US President Joe Biden met virtually on the morning of Jan 13, Asian time.

Mr Marcos' communications office said the leaders “agreed to enhance and deepen economic, maritime and technology cooperation”.

The call followed a first-of-its-kind summit meeting between Mr Marcos, Mr Biden and then Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Washington in April 2024 to uphold international law and regional stability.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/japan-philippines-us-vow-to-deepen-cooperation-manila-says>

10 Jan: Indonesia to keep pushing for South China Sea code of conduct, expand defence ties

Indonesia will expand its existing defence partnerships and step up its handling of strategic issues impacting its sovereignty, including maritime security and the safety of sea passage and fisheries, its foreign minister said on Friday.

Sugiono, who uses only one name, said Indonesia would continue to advocate for the completion of a code of conduct between the Southeast Asian bloc ASEAN and China on the South China Sea and prioritise ASEAN's centrality.

Indonesia considers itself not a party in disputes over the sea, a waterway crucial to global trade, but has recently been tested by forays by China's coastguard into its exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3294211/indonesia-keep-pushing-south-china-sea-code-conduct-expand-defence-ties>

6 Jan: South China Sea conflict risks to rise in Trump's second term, academic forecasts

The risk of a China-US conflict in the South China Sea is set to rise in 2025, fuelled by incoming president Donald Trump's expected assertive and confrontational approach, a prominent Chinese scholar has warned.

Wu Shicun, founder of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies and a former policy adviser to Beijing, said the new Trump administration "will be more impulsive and aggressive" than its predecessor on issues relating to the disputed waterway.

In an article published on Saturday by the Chinese foreign ministry's World Affairs Press journal, Wu also predicted that China's stand-offs with the Philippines and Vietnam would continue, as well as the challenges facing the long-delayed code of conduct.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/south-china-sea-conflict-risks-093000362.html?guccounter=1>

2 Jan: Japan Proposes New Frigate Deal to Indonesia to Counter South China Sea Tensions.

Defense Minister Gen Nakatani is set to visit Indonesia from January 5 to 8, where he will present the proposal to his Indonesian counterpart, Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin. Japan's proposal includes the joint development of frigates tailored to MSDF specifications. This initiative aligns with Indonesia's strategic interests, as the country has previously shown interest in advanced maritime defense capabilities, including submarines. However, earlier talks under former President Joko Widodo's administration stalled due to financial constraints linked to Indonesia's ambitious capital relocation project.

<https://armyrecognition.com/news/navy-news/2025/japan-proposes-new-frigate-deal-to-indonesia-to-counter-south-china-sea-tensions>

***Follows-up:* 11 Jan: Japan pledges patrol boats to Indonesia amid rising South China Sea tensions**

Japan will give Indonesia two high-speed patrol boats, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said Saturday, as Tokyo seeks to boost regional maritime security cooperation in the face of growing assertiveness by China.

Ishiba made the pledge during a visit to Jakarta, where he held talks with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto on a range of bilateral issues.

"We agreed on establishing working-level defence consultations on our maritime security, including on defence equipment technical cooperation," Ishiba was quoted as saying in a joint statement.

"We also agreed to... provide high-speed patrol boats through Official Security Assistance, which would be our first with Indonesia."

<https://www.malaymail.com/news/world/2025/01/11/japan-pledges-patrol-boats-to-indonesia-amid-rising-south-china-sea-tensions/162845>

