

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 137
February 2025

ACTS OF CLAIMANT

2 March: China primary cause of marine habitat damage in South China Sea, report says

China's artificial-island building accounts for about two-thirds of the damage to marine habitats in the South China Sea stemming from dredge-and-fill construction, researchers say. China has buried more than 4,600 acres (about 19 square kilometers) of coral reef since 2013, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) reported in January 2025. The group, part of the United States-based think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), analyzed satellite imagery and determined China was responsible for 65% of the 8,000 acres of damaged reef.

The artificial island-building activities "cause irreparable and long-term changes to the overall structure and health of the reef," the report said.

<https://ipdefenseforum.com/2025/03/china-primary-cause-of-marine-habitat-damage-in-south-china-sea-report-says/>

2 March: Beijing says Philippines is polluting South China Sea by burning waste

China has accused the Philippines of polluting the environment after it released footage it said showed troops burning rubbish at a disputed reef in the South China Sea.

The video, published on social media by state broadcaster CGTN on Saturday, showed smoke pouring from the BRP Sierra Madre, an old warship that was deliberately grounded on Second Thomas Shoal in 1999.

CGTN said marines stationed on the ship had been burning refuse and were posing "a serious threat to the ecological environment of the surrounding waters".

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/beijing-says-philippines-polluting-south-093000231.html?guccounter=1>

27 Feb: China says Taiwan drills 'routine', as Taipei details surge in military activity

China's defence ministry said on Thursday that drills which had alarmed Taiwan off its coast were "routine" and the island should stop complaining, as Taipei reported a surge in Chinese military activity, although no live-fire exercises.

Democratically governed Taiwan, which China views as its own territory, said on Wednesday the Chinese military had set up a zone for "shooting" drills in the southwestern part of the Taiwan Strait, off the key areas of Kaohsiung and Pingtung.

In its daily morning update of Chinese military activities in the prior 24 hours, Taiwan's defence ministry said it had detected 45 Chinese military aircraft and 14 navy ships operating around the island. They included seven ships in the Chinese-declared drill zone, 40 nautical miles off Taiwan.

Taiwan condemned the move as dangerous, provocative and a threat to commercial flights and shipping, adding that it was given no prior notice.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-details-surge-chinese-military-activity-2025-02-27/>

21 Feb: Vietnam government publishes map of its Gulf of Tonkin baseline

Vietnam's foreign ministry published a map defining its baseline claim in the Gulf of Tonkin, where it shares a maritime border with China, which it said on Friday was to help protect and

enforce its sovereign rights. Baselines are used to determine limits to territorial waters and exclusive economic zones, and are a sensitive subject in the South China Sea, where China, Vietnam and other countries in the region have some conflicting claims.

The ministry marked the line on a map with 14 points running from offshore Quang Ninh province to Quang Tri province.



<https://hanoitimes.vn/vietnams-gulf-of-tonkin-baseline-helps-protect-sovereignty-rights-329279.html>

19 Feb: Beijing resources ministry gauges depth of new Vietnamese port on reef

Vietnam has dramatically expanded its presence on Barque Canada Reef through a three-year land-reclamation project enabling large warships to sail into the harbour, according to a study by China's Ministry of Natural Resources.

The research combines laser measurements from Nasa's ICESat-2 satellite with optical data from the European Union's Sentinel-2 to map underwater changes with unprecedented precision. The team's peer-reviewed paper was published in the Chinese-language Journal of Tropical Oceanography on February 13.

https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3299167/south-china-sea-beijing-resources-ministry-gauges-depth-new-vietnamese-port-reef?utm_source=rss_feed

18 Feb: Philippines and China trade accusations over alleged airspace intrusion, dangerous flight manoeuvres in South China Sea

The Philippine coast guard accused the Chinese navy of performing dangerous flight manoeuvres today when it flew close to a government aircraft patrolling a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, an account Beijing disputed.

“This reckless action posed a serious risk to the safety of the pilots and passengers,” the coast guard said in a statement.

The coast guard said the government fisheries aircraft was conducting what it called a maritime domain awareness flight today over the Scarborough Shoal, a rocky atoll and prime fishing patch inside the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

<https://www.malaymail.com/news/world/2025/02/18/philippines-and-china-trade-accusations-over-alleged-airspace-intrusion-dangerous-flight-maneuvres-over-scarborough-shoal-in-south-china-sea/167137>

17 Feb: China, Philippines quarrel over South China Sea row in Munich conference

Representatives from the Philippines and China quarreled Sunday over the South China Sea during a roundtable discussion at the 61st Munich Security Conference.

Speaking at the “Making Waves: Maritime Tensions in the Indo-Pacific” roundtable, Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo asserted the Philippines remains steadfast in defending the

rules-based international order and the rule of law, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

However, former Chinese vice-foreign minister Fu Ying said China cannot agree for the Philippines to occupy Second Thomas (Ayungin) Shoal and Sabina (Escoda) Shoal "because that is a violation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea."

<https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2025/2/17/china-philippines-quarrel-over-south-china-sea-row-in-munich-conference-1018>

14 Feb: Beijing approves construction of first South China Sea deepwater 'space station'

After years of debate and technical reviews, China has given the green light to a deep-sea research facility that could redefine marine exploration, while amplifying Beijing's geopolitical leverage in one of the world's most resource-rich areas.

The "cold seep" ecosystem research facility will be anchored 2,000 metres (6,560 feet) below the surface of the strategically significant South China Sea, which is also subject to a number of competing territorial claims.

The facility – one of the deepest and most technologically complex underwater installations ever attempted – is scheduled to be operational by around 2030, with room for six scientists on missions that will last as long as a month.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/tech/tech-news/2025/02/13/beijing-approves-construction-of-first-south-china-sea-deepwater-space-station>

12 Feb: CSIS says China and Vietnam cause most damage to South China Sea's corals

Over 7,000 acres (28.3 sq km) of coral reefs equivalent to almost 4,000 football fields have been destroyed by five South China Sea claimants based on an analysis of satellite images, according to a report published by a US think tank.

The report by the Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) released last month, listed China and Vietnam among the worst offenders whose dredging and landfill activities had caused "irreparable and long-term changes to the overall structure and health of the reef". Of the claimants, China was responsible for about 65 per cent of the reef damage followed by Vietnam at 33 per cent, according to the CSIS.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/east-asia/china-vietnam-south-china-sea-coral-damage-report-4932921>

5 Feb: PLA conducts patrol in South China Sea, criticizes Philippine actions

The People's Liberation Army's Southern Theater Command conducted a routine patrol in the South China Sea on Wednesday, a spokesperson said.

Tian Junli, spokesperson for the command, announced the operation in a statement Wednesday evening, criticizing the Philippines for working with outside countries on "so-called joint patrols," which he said created instability in the region.

<https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/603797>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

23 Feb: French carrier visits Philippines, flexes nuclear-powered muscle in disputed South China Sea

France's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and accompanying warships were in the Philippines on Sunday after holding combat drills with Filipino forces in the disputed South China Sea in a show of firepower that would likely antagonise China.

The Charles de Gaulle docked on Friday at Subic Bay, a former US Naval base northwest of Manila, for a break after more than two months of deployment in the Indo-Pacific. France's recent and ongoing military deployments to the Philippines underscore its "commitment to regional security and the shared goal of strengthening maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesperson Colonel Xerxes Trinidad said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3299786/french-carrier-visits-philippines-flexes-nuclear-powered-muscle-disputed-south-china-sea>

22 Feb: Japan aims to help Philippines monitor South China Sea

Japan plans to boost support for the Philippines' surveillance activities in the South China Sea and lay the groundwork for an intelligence-sharing agreement to better keep an eye on China's military activities.

Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani told reporters Friday that he plans to visit the Philippines from Saturday to Tuesday. He is set to meet with his counterpart on Monday. "I hope to confirm that we will press ahead with cooperation on defense equipment and technologies," he said.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/Japan-aims-to-help-Philippines-monitor-South-China-Sea>

19 Feb: US condemns 'dangerous' manoeuvres by Chinese navy in South China Sea

The United States condemned the "dangerous" manoeuvres of a Chinese navy helicopter that endangered the safety of a Philippine government aircraft patrolling a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, its ambassador to Manila said on Wednesday.

In a post on X, Ambassador MaryKay Carlson also called on China "to refrain from coercive actions and settle its disputes peacefully in accordance with international law."

The Philippines said late on Tuesday it was "deeply disturbed" by the Chinese navy's "unprofessional and reckless" flight actions and that it will make a diplomatic protest.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/us-condemns-dangerous-manoeuvres-by-chinese-navy-in-south-china-sea>

18 Feb: Malaysian leader urges code of conduct for South China Sea

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim visits Brunei along with former Thai Premier Thaksin; holds talks with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim called for a "conclusion" of the code of conduct "as soon as possible" to address and solve disputes in the South China Sea.

"With regard to the disputes in the South China Sea, we agree that there needs to be broader diplomatic progress multilaterally," Anwar said, hoping that "negotiations on the Code of Conduct can be concluded as soon as possible."

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/malaysian-leader-urges-code-of-conduct-for-south-china-sea/3485607>

13 Feb: Australia and China trade blame over fighter jet incident in South China Sea

A Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft was conducting a routine surveillance patrol in international waters in the South China Sea on Tuesday when a Chinese PLA J-16 fighter jet released flares within 30 metres (100 feet) of the RAAF aircraft, Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles said.

"That is an action that we've declared as being unsafe. We have made representations about our concerns to the Chinese government both yesterday and today here in Canberra, but also in Beijing," Marles said in a television interview with Sky News Australia.

The Chinese foreign ministry, in turn, accused the Australian aircraft of "deliberately intruding" into its airspace and "jeopardising" its national security.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-criticises-unsafe-chinese-fighter-jet-interaction-south-china-sea-2025-02-13/>

10 Feb: US-Japan South China Sea statement attacks and smears China

US President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said on Friday they opposed China's "unlawful maritime claims, militarisation of reclaimed features, and threatening and provocative activities in the South China Sea" after they met in Washington. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun hit back saying: "The China-related content of the US-Japan joint statement blatantly interferes in China's internal affairs, attacks and smears China and exaggerates regional tensions".

China had "lodged solemn representations" with both countries, he added at a regular press briefing.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/east-asia/us-japan-south-china-sea-statement-attacks-smears-china-4928276>

6 Feb: US defence chief discusses South China Sea 'deterrence' with Philippines

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth reaffirmed Washington's "ironclad" commitment to a mutual defence treaty with the Philippines during a call with his counterpart in Manila in the face of geopolitical tensions in South China Sea.

Hegseth "reaffirmed the ironclad US commitment to the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty and its importance for maintaining a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific," the Pentagon said. The call follows a joint maritime drill involving the US, Philippines, Australia and Japan in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea on Wednesday.

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2955521/us-defence-chief-discusses-south-china-sea-deterrence-with-philippines>

4 Feb: Philippines, US joint air patrol exercises underway over South China Sea

The air forces of the Philippines and the United States were holding joint patrols over the South China Sea on Tuesday (Feb 4), a spokesperson for the Philippine Air Force said, as Manila said it was monitoring three Chinese vessels in its maritime zones.

The one-day exercise was being carried out in the West Philippine Sea, Philippine Air Force spokesperson Maria Consuelo Castillo said, using Manila's term for waters in the South China Sea that fall within its exclusive economic zone.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-us-joint-air-patrol-exercises-south-china-sea-4914931>