

**SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 139**  
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*Compiled by CIL Ocean Law and Policy Team*

**ACTS OF CLAIMANT**

**03 May 2025: Vietnam opposes China, Philippines' moves on South China Sea reef**

Vietnam has sent diplomatic notes to China and the Philippines to protest against their activities in contested South China Sea waters, and urging them to respect its territorial claims, it said on Saturday (May 3).

The statement follows activities by China and the Philippines in Sandy Cay, which Vietnam considers part of its territory, Vietnam's foreign ministry spokesperson Pham Thu Hang said. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/east-asia/vietnam-opposes-china-philippines-moves-south-china-sea-reef-5106606>

**25 April: Chinese coastguard claims 'sovereign jurisdiction' of Sandy Cay in South China Sea**

The China Coast Guard (CCG) landed on a disputed reef in the South China Sea earlier this month to assert sovereignty over the island that the Philippines also claims, Chinese media reported on Thursday.

According to the state-run Global Times, photographs show CCG officers unfurling a Chinese flag on an uninhabited sand bank, identified as Sandy Cay, also known as Tiexian Jiao in China and Pagasa Cay 2 in the Philippines.

“In mid-April this year, the China Coast Guard exercised sovereign jurisdiction by exercising maritime control at Sandy Cay in the South China Sea,” it reported, without specifying the date of the landing.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3307831/china-coastguard-claims-sovereign-jurisdiction-sandy-cay-south-china-sea>

**Follows-up: 28 April: China, Philippines trade barbs over disputed South China Sea reef**

China and the Philippines on April 28 defended their claims to a disputed reef in the South China Sea after Manila accused Beijing of seeking to “intimidate and harass” using a state media report that suggested the area had been seized.

The Philippines said there was no truth to news reports that Beijing had seized control of a disputed reef in the South China Sea, saying its personnel landed on the unoccupied sandbars and found no Chinese presence there.

On April 28, the Philippine Coast Guard released its own photo showing Filipino sailors holding the country’s flag over the same disputed reef during an early morning mission the day before.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-says-china-has-not-seized-disputed-south-china-sea-reef>

**24 April: China unveils drone-mounted quantum device for submarine detection in South China Sea**

As US-China tensions simmer over submarine operations in the South China Sea, Chinese space scientists have unveiled a breakthrough in magnetic detection technology that could tip the balance in underwater warfare.

A drone-mounted quantum sensor system, tested successfully in offshore trials, achieved picotesla precision to track magnetic anomaly and map seabed resources while overcoming

some severe practical limitations of existing devices, researchers disclosed in a peer-reviewed paper.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3307444/china-unveils-drone-mounted-quantum-device-submarine-detection-south-china-sea>

### **21 April: China, Philippines in Scarborough Shoal naval encounter ahead of US joint drills**

The Chinese navy said it expelled a Philippine warship that “illegally intruded” into the waters of a disputed shoal in the South China Sea on Sunday, hours before the start of Washington and Manila’s annual joint military drills.

The People’s Liberation Army Southern Theatre Command said on Sunday night that the BRP Apolinario Mabini, a Jacinto-class patrol vessel in the Philippine Navy, was challenged near Scarborough Shoal, which is claimed by Beijing and Manila, earlier that day.

Command spokesman Senior Colonel Zhao Zhiwei said the Philippine frigate “illegally entered China’s territorial waters of Huangyan Island” without the approval of the Chinese government.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3307296/china-philippines-scarborough-shoal-naval-encounter-ahead-us-joint-drills>

### **17 April: China and Malaysia say important to maintain peace and stability in South China Sea**

China and Malaysia said they would seek to peacefully resolve disputes in the South China Sea and pledged support for the United Nations in a joint statement issued on Thursday at the end of a state visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

There have been several encounters with Chinese vessels at Malaysian state energy firm Petronas’ oil and gas projects in recent years. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has said Petronas will continue its exploration activities in Malaysia’s exclusive economic zone, despite objections from China.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/china-malaysia-important-maintain-peace-025448393.html>

### **15 April: Vietnam and China issue joint statement on President Xi’s visit to Viet Nam**

The joint statement acknowledges Vietnam and China agreed to manage and resolve sea-related differences through friendly dialogue, aiming to maintain peace and stability in the East Sea. Both sides committed to abiding by previous high-level agreements and international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. They pledged not to escalate disputes, to advance negotiations on maritime delimitation and cooperation, and to strengthen collaboration in non-sensitive maritime areas. Additionally, they reaffirmed their commitment to fully implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the East Sea (DOC) and to work toward an effective Code of Conduct (COC) through consensus.

<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/politics/vietnam-china-issue-joint-statement-4874469.html>

### **14 April: Philippines says it voiced South China Sea concerns during Asean-China negotiations**

The Philippines voiced concerns about the South China Sea, including incidents that endangered its vessels and personnel, during negotiations between Asean and China for a code of conduct in those waters, its Foreign Ministry said on April 14.

The Philippines, which hosted the latest round of talks last week, also reiterated its commitment to resolving disputes peacefully and pursuing constructive diplomatic approaches in managing differences at sea, the ministry said in a statement.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-says-voiced-south-china-sea-concerns-during-asean-china-negotiations>

### **9 April: China says Philippines sent supplies to warship at disputed atoll**

China's coast guard said it had allowed a Philippine civilian vessel to deliver provisions to a warship "illegally grounded" at the Second Thomas Shoal, a disputed atoll in the South China Sea.

The coast guard questioned and monitored the Philippine vessel throughout its supply mission, it said in a statement, urging the Philippines to work with China to manage the maritime situation.

The Philippine embassy in Beijing did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/east-asia/china-philippines-warship-disputed-atoll-south-china-sea-5054781>

### **5 April: China Is Constructing World's 1st "Deep Sea Station" in SCS to Extract 80 Billion Tons Worth of Energy**

China is constructing the world's first permanent undersea research station to study gas hydrates, a potential energy source that could exceed the Persian Gulf's oil reserves.

The deep-sea habitat will be built in methane-rich "cold seep" zones, where six researchers will live for month-long missions to analyze these crystalline formations of methane trapped in ice. Beijing officially confirmed the project on March 1, 2025.

With an estimated 80 billion tonnes of oil-equivalent energy—significantly exceeding the Gulf's 50 billion-tonne proven oil reserves—these massive hydrate deposits have the potential to reshape global energy dynamics.

<https://www.eurasiantimes.com/china-is-building-worlds-first-undersea-research-station/>

## **OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA**

### **29 April: Japan, Philippines Launch Defense Pact Talks to Counter China's Aggression**

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said Tuesday that Japan and the Philippines would begin talks on two proposed defense agreements to strengthen their security alliance and counter growing aggression in contested Asian waters, an implicit rebuke of China.

"We oppose any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo through force or coercion in the East and South China Seas," Ishiba said, pointedly referring to China without naming it. "I hope that our two countries will continue to work closely together to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific based on the rule of law."

<https://jakartaglobe.id/news/japan-philippines-launch-defense-pact-talks-to-counter-chinas-aggression>

### **21 April: Indonesia and China pledge maritime cooperation amid South China Sea tensions**

Indonesia and China have reaffirmed their commitment to maritime cooperation, vowing to strengthen joint efforts on security and safety in the contentious South China Sea, even as Indonesian unease lingers over Chinese activity near the Natuna Islands.

The pledge followed the inaugural joint meeting of foreign and defence ministers from both nations in Beijing, underscoring their intention to promote infrastructure development, mineral extraction and maritime security, the latter viewed as particularly significant amid Jakarta's concerns about Beijing's maritime assertiveness.

<https://www.euronews.com/2025/04/21/indonesia-and-china-pledge-maritime-cooperation-amid-south-china-sea-tensions>

### **21 April: US and Philippine forces to conduct ‘full battle test’ in South China Sea**

US and Philippine forces are to conduct their first “full battle test” for fighting together in flashpoints such as Taiwan or the South China Sea, in a reflection of Washington’s rapidly deepening military engagement with its oldest Asian ally.

This year’s Balikatan exercises, the two countries’ main bilateral annual drill starting on Monday, will combine elements practised over the past two years — such as targeting enemy ships with missiles from shore or protecting islands from attack — into a war scenario under realistic conditions.

“We will demonstrate not just our will to uphold our mutual defence treaty in existence since 1951 but our matchless capability to do so,” US exercise director Lieutenant General James Glynn said at the opening ceremony in Manila on Monday.

<https://www.ft.com/content/c680b509-1f3a-4725-a883-52e4e23b8fa7>

### **8 April: Australia gifts drones to Philippine Coast Guard amid maritime tensions with China**

Australia gave 20 aerial drones to the Philippine Coast Guard on Tuesday as tensions continued to rise in the South China Sea.

The Australian Embassy in Manila said Ambassador HK Yu handed over the drones to boost the Coast Guard's maritime domain capabilities.

"Another great example of how we are implementing our Strategic Partnership," the embassy said in a Facebook post, adding that the delivery followed a request from the Philippine Coast Guard.

Australian drone experts also visited Manila to provide four days of training to 30 members of the Coast Guard's Aviation Command Unmanned Aerial Vehicles Squadron.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/australia-gifts-drones-to-philippine-coast-guard-amid-maritime-tensions-with-china/3531466>

### **4 April: USS Carl Vinson Sails Through Malacca Strait, Chinese Carrier Operating in the South China Sea After Taiwan Intimidation Drills**

The Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group sailed through the Malacca Strait on Friday as it makes its way to U.S. Central Command.

Meanwhile, Japan’s Joint Staff Office reported the People’s Liberation Army Navy Shandong CSG sailed back into the South China Sea on Thursday after participating in PLA drills against Taiwan on Tuesday and Wednesday.

AIS data, along with photos from ship spotters, showed the Carl Vinson CSG, comprising aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70) with embarked Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 2, cruiser USS Princeton (CG-59) and destroyer USS Sterett (DDG-104) transiting the Singapore Strait on Friday morning Singapore time. Subsequent data showed the CSG sailing north up the Malacca Strait later that day. Destroyer USS William P. Lawrence (DDG-110) deployed with the CSG when it departed the West Coast in mid-November and operated with the CSG until late March, but appears not to be following the CSG to the Middle East.

<https://news.usni.org/2025/04/04/uss-carl-vinson-sails-through-malacca-strait-chinese-carrier-operating-in-the-south-china-sea-after-taiwan-intimidation-drills>

### **2 April: US approves sale of 20 US F-16 fighter jets to Philippines**

The United States has approved the potential sale of 20 F-16 fighter jets to Manila, giving the key US ally in the Indo-Pacific a major upgrade to its air force just days after US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth vowed to counter “China’s aggression.”

The US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced the proposed sale of the F-16s and related equipment, worth an estimated \$5.58 billion, in a statement on Tuesday. “This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a strategic partner that continues to be an important force for political stability, peace, and economic progress in Southeast Asia,” DSCA said. <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/04/02/asia/us-philippines-f16-fighter-jet-sale-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>