

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 146
November 2025

Compiled by CIL Ocean Law and Policy Team

ACTS OF CLAIMANT

29 Nov: China's military, coast guard conduct patrols around Scarborough Shoal, Xinhua says

China's military and coast guard organised patrols around Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea on Saturday to "resolutely safeguard its sovereignty, maritime rights and interests", the official Xinhua news agency reported. The Philippine embassy in Beijing did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-military-coast-guard-conduct-patrols-around-scarborough-shoal-xinhua-says-2025-11-29/>

Nov 27: Beijing's influence comes under scrutiny as Philippines-China Studies Center debuts in Manila

Red and gold lanterns swayed above the narrow corridors of Diliman College in Quezon City, Metro Manila, where paper dragons snaked across the walls, and a papier-mache woman in traditional Filipino attire stood nearby.

For a moment, the modest community college felt like a mini-Chinatown as Chinese diplomats, Chinese-Filipino businessmen and Filipino scholars made their way through the decorated halls after the launching ceremony of the Philippines-China Studies Center on the college premises on Nov 18.

The opening of the centre raises fresh questions about Beijing's influence networks in the Philippines, just as public trust of China hits record lows, said analysts.

Centre director, Filipino political analyst and international studies expert Rommel Banlaoi, told The Straits Times that it aims to address Filipinos' "trust deficit" with regard to China and to rebuild relations between the two nations engaged in what may be the most volatile period of maritime friction over the South China Sea in years.

The centre hopes "to overcome the extent of Filipino public ignorance" and generate "real empirical knowledge essential to promote mutual understanding", he said.

"There's more to Philippines-China relations than the disputes in the South China Sea, and there are aspects of this relationship that we need to treasure," said Dr Banlaoi, 55, a Chinese-educated security scholar.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/beijings-influence-comes-under-scrutiny-as-philippines-china-studies-center-debuts-in-manila>

25 Nov: 30 Chinese vessels swarm South China Sea

At least 30 Chinese military and coast guard vessels were seen swarming four features in the South China Sea as of yesterday, the Philippine Navy said Tuesday, November 25. Based on the Navy's monitoring as of Monday, November 24, at least four Chinese warships and eight coast guard ships were spotted near Scarborough Shoal (Bajo de Masinloc), while seven vessels were seen near Ayungin Shoal. Six more vessels were seen at Escoda Shoal, while five China Coast Guard ships were spotted near Pag-asa Island. This was shared by Navy spokesperson for the South China Sea Rear Adm. Roy Vincent Trinidad at a press conference Tuesday.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/11/25/2489796/30-chinese-vessels-swarm-west-philippine-sea>

22 Nov: Beijing launches historic preservation campaign to cement South China Sea claims

China has launched a campaign to preserve historical sites on the disputed Woody Island, or Yongxing Island in Chinese, as Beijing looks to cement its territorial claims in the South China Sea. A team of conservation scientists and technicians from the Hainan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology spent six days reinforcing a monument that marked China's takeover of the Paracel Islands, known as the Xisha Islands in China, after World War II, according to the government of the city of Sansha.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2025/11/22/beijing-launches-historic-preservation-campaign-to-cement-south-china-sea-claims>

22 Nov: US, China held maritime security talks in Hawaii, Chinese navy says

The US and Chinese militaries this week held "frank and constructive" maritime security talks, the Chinese navy said on Saturday (Nov 22), as the two superpowers gradually restore military-to-military communications after several months of trade tensions. The working-level meetings took place November 18-20 in Hawaii, according to a posting on the official social media account of the People's Liberation Army Navy.

"The two sides had frank and constructive exchanges ... mainly exchanging views on the current maritime and air security situation between China and the US," China's navy said in its posted statement.

China also criticised US freedom-of-navigation operations in the statement. These are frequently carried out in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea, international waters over which China claims sovereignty.

"China ... resolutely opposes any infringement and provocation," China's navy said in its statement, referring to those maritime and overflight transits by US forces.

Both sides also discussed "typical cases of naval and air encounters between the two militaries ... to help the front-line naval and air forces of China and the US interact more professionally and safely," it said.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/east-asia/china-us-maritime-security-talks-5484161>

21 Nov: Chinese, Vietnamese navies conclude joint patrol in Beibu Gulf

Two fleets from the Chinese and Vietnamese navies conducted their 39th joint patrol in the waters of the Beibu Gulf from Wednesday to Thursday, in accordance with a relevant agreement and annual plans between the two sides.

During the patrol, the fleets, comprising two vessels from each side, monitored maritime and aerial security in the Beibu Gulf, exchanged information on courses, speeds and hydrometeorological conditions, and strengthened coordination in command and operations by taking turns leading.

They also conducted a joint search and rescue drill simulating a scenario where one fishing boat from each country was in distress in the Beibu Gulf. The exercise effectively demonstrated their capabilities in command and emergency response under complex conditions.

<https://www.chinadailyasia.com/hk/article/624064>

20 Nov: Philippines wants to strengthen cooperation with the EU in South China Sea

The European Union and representatives of countries in the Indo-Pacific region are meeting in Brussels for the fourth ministerial forum, which brings together around 70 participants from EU institutions and member states, countries in the Indo-Pacific, and regional organisations from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific island states.

This year's meeting focuses on the themes of resilience, prosperity and security. Each participant arrives with their own agenda and priorities.

For Philippine Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro the meeting is an opportunity to strengthen maritime cooperation in the face of Beijing's claims in the South China Sea. Lazaro welcomes European support through its statements, but also through "a lot of support through the visits of EU member countries, frigates passing through the South China Sea and this gives a lot of impetus to relations."

<https://www.euronews.com/2025/11/20/philippines-wants-to-strengthen-cooperation-with-the-eu-in-south-china-sea>

18 Nov: Chinese Navy conducts real combat drills in South China Sea

A naval detachment, including the supply ship Honghu, the missile frigate Hengyang, and naval aviation units, recently deployed into a sector of the South China Sea. They launched multi-day, overnight, realistic combat training. Over several days, they carried out high-intensity, cross-domain drills to sharpen coordination and warfighting readiness.

<https://english.cctv.com/2025/11/18/VIDEAG58y6XYRk1hKZP43AZI251118.shtml>

17 Nov: Philippines eyes completion of South China Sea code as ASEAN chair next year

The Philippines is hoping a code of conduct for the South China Sea can be completed when it is chair of the ASEAN bloc next year, with a consensus emerging between Southeast Asia and China, its foreign secretary said on Monday.

Theresa Lazaro said the code being negotiated between China and the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations should be legally binding.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/philippines-eyes-completion-south-china-sea-code-asean-chair-next-year-2025-11-17/>

16 Nov: China sends coast guard to Senkaku islands amid row with Japan

Activity around Japanese-held islands, also claimed by China, comes after PM Sanae Takaichi said Japan might respond militarily to an invasion of Taiwan.

China has sent its coast guard through the waters of the Senkaku islands and military drones past outlying Japanese territory as Beijing ramps up tensions over the Japanese prime minister's remarks on Taiwan.

On Sunday the Chinese coastguard said its ships made a "rights enforcement patrol" through the waters of the Senkaku, which are administered by Japan but also claimed by China as the Diaoyu islands.

"China coast guard vessel 1307 formation conducted patrols within the territorial waters of the Diaoyu islands. This was a lawful patrol operation conducted by the China coast guard to uphold its rights and interests," the statement said.

China and Japan have repeatedly faced off around the islands but the latest activity comes amid an intensifying diplomatic spat after the Japanese prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, told parliament that if China attack democratically ruled Taiwan it [could trigger a military response from Tokyo](#).

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/nov/16/china-sends-coast-guard-to-senkaku-islands-amid-row-with-japan>

16 Nov: PLA Southern Theater Command holds bomber formation patrol in South China Sea: spokesperson

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command announced on Sunday that it had conducted a bomber formation patrol in the South China Sea amid the Philippines' so-called "joint patrols" with external forces. An expert said powerful bombers could serve as a warning to provocateurs.

The PLA Southern Theater Command organized a bomber formation to conduct a routine patrol in the South China Sea on Friday, Senior Colonel Tian Junli, a spokesperson for the Southern Theater Command, said in a statement on Sunday. The Philippines has frequently colluded with external forces to carry out so-called "joint patrols," undermining regional peace and stability, Tian said. "We solemnly warn the Philippine side to immediately stop provoking incidents and escalating tensions," he said. Tian's remarks came after Philippine media reported on Sunday that the US and Japan joined the Philippines in a maritime exercise in the South China Sea. Citing a Philippine official, Manila Bulletin reported that the three countries conducted a two-day Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity from Friday to Saturday. The theater command forces maintain a high level of alert at all times, resolutely safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and peace and stability in the South China Sea region. Any attempt to infringe on the sovereignty and stir up trouble will never succeed, said Tian, the PLA Southern Theater Command spokesperson. According to public information, this is the first time the PLA Southern Theater Command has announced organizing a bomber formation in response to the Philippines' so-called "joint patrols" with external forces.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202511/1348286.shtml>

10 Nov: Chinese Military Holds War Drills in Disputed Waters

The Chinese military recently conducted a drill simulating a wartime scenario in which its ships and bases came under attack, amid tensions in the contested South China Sea.

The Southern Theater Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army said last week that one of its naval bases—at an undisclosed location—conducted a realistic logistical support exercise to test its "full-process emergency support capabilities," according to local media.

The exercise simulated a naval fleet and its home port being attacked by the enemy, creating what the command called multiple emergency situations, including damaged ship equipment and dock facilities, low ammunition levels and injured personnel.

While returning, naval ships conducted rapid ammunition replenishment and refueling at the base, while maintenance teams boarded the vessels to repair damaged equipment. Official photos show black smoke rising from the pier, simulating the attack scenario.

<https://www.newsweek.com/chinese-military-war-drills-disputed-waters-11021265>

3 Nov: Philippines boosts deterrence in South China Sea by tripling its patrol area

[The Philippines](#) has tripled its patrol area in the [South China Sea](#) in what analysts describe as a shift in focus from reactive protests to proactive maritime control in response to China's escalating territorial claims.

The expanded missions reflect a move by Manila to close long-standing coordination gaps between military and civilian agencies, particularly after Beijing recently declared a "marine

protected area” at Scarborough Shoal, a flashpoint in the two countries’ maritime dispute, according to analysts.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3331327/philippines-boosts-deterrence-south-china-sea-tripling-its-patrol-area>

1 Nov: China military says it monitored Philippine patrol in South China Sea

China's military said on Saturday (Nov 1) that it monitored and tracked a joint patrol organised by the Philippines in the disputed South China Sea on Oct 30 and Oct 31.

Washington and Manila have beefed up military cooperation, unveiling plans on Friday to form a new joint task force for areas including the South China Sea, a conduit for more than US\$3 trillion of annual ship-borne commerce. Manila has called September’s announcement by China of plans for a reserve at the shoal a “clear pretext for occupation”.

The armed forces of Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines and the United States held a drill in the South China Sea on Oct 30 and Oct 31.

The US 7th Fleet said the exercise aimed to demonstrate "a collective commitment to strengthen regional and international cooperation in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific".

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/east-asia/china-military-philippines-south-china-sea-5439371>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

27 Nov: Supercarrier launches jets in disputed South China Sea

A U.S. Navy carrier strike group has resumed high-tempo flight operations in the disputed South China Sea, with aircraft from USS George Washington conducting launches and recoveries as regional tensions remain acute.

The U.S. Navy released images showing Capt Tim Waits, commanding officer of USS George Washington, landing a VFA-102 F/A-18F Super Hornet on the carrier’s deck while the ship operated in contested waters.

The carrier is the U.S. Navy’s forward-deployed flagship in the Indo-Pacific and one of Washington’s most visible tools for signalling presence in the face of China’s expansive maritime claims.

The U.S. Navy described the George Washington as “a long-standing symbol of the United States’ commitment to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region, while operating alongside allies and partners across the U.S. Navy’s largest numbered fleet.”

<https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/supercarrier-launches-jets-in-disputed-south-china-sea/>

22 Nov: Australia conducts routine transit through South China Sea

Royal Australian Navy Hobart Class destroyer HMAS *Brisbane* has conducted a routine transit through the South China Sea in accordance with international law. HMAS *Brisbane* is currently on a four-month-long Regional Presence Deployment in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia has conducted four Regional Presence Deployments for 2025, demonstrating the Australian Defence Force’s commitment and ability to maintain a near permanent presence in the region to support regional security and stability.

https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2025-11-22/australia-conducts-routine-transit-through-south-china-sea?utm_source=miragenews&utm_medium=miragenews&utm_campaign=news

21 Nov: US Navy trying to pull crashed aircraft from bottom of South China Sea

The US Navy is trying to recover two aircraft from the bottom of the South China Sea that US experts say could yield sensitive information to China if Beijing were to get to them first.

The aircraft – an F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jet and an MH-60 helicopter – crashed within 30 minutes of each other while operating off the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz during routine operations in late October.

No official cause has been given for the crashes, but US President Donald Trump suggested to reporters shortly after the incidents that contaminated fuel may be to blame. All crew members were rescued.

The Navy confirmed to CNN on Friday that a salvage ship was operating in the South China Sea, while not revealing the specific location where the aircraft crashed or where the salvage ship is now.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2025/11/20/asia/us-navy-south-china-sea-aircraft-salvage-intl-hnk-ml>

13 Nov: U.S. Marines Deploy Drone Unit to Philippines to Patrol Over South China Sea

The U.S. Marine Corps temporarily deployed a unit of drones to support Philippine maritime security efforts in the South China Sea where tensions are high between Manila and Beijing, USNI News has learned.

Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron (VMU) 1, an Arizona-based unit formation equipped with MQ-9A Reapers, was sent to the Southeast Asian nation to support “Philippine regional maritime security,” a Marine Corps Forces Pacific spokesperson confirmed to USNI News. The deployment also enhances the U.S.-Philippine alliance’s maritime domain awareness capabilities.

“The temporary stationing of unarmed MQ-9As to the Philippines demonstrates mutual commitment to improving the collective maritime security and supports our common goal for a free and open Indo-Pacific,” the spokesperson said.

<https://news.usni.org/2025/11/13/u-s-marines-deploy-drone-unit-to-philippines-to-patrol-over-south-china-sea>

2 Nov: US and China agree to set up direct military communication channels, says Pentagon chief

Pete Hegseth's remarks came just hours after the US defence chief urged Southeast Asian nations to stand firm and strengthen their maritime forces to counter China’s increasingly “destabilising” actions in the South China Sea.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Sunday (Nov 2) that Washington and Beijing would establish military-to-military communications channels, adding that bilateral ties between the countries have “never been better”.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/east-asia/us-china-direct-military-communication-channels-south-china-sea-5440471>

2 Nov: Canada, Philippines sign defence pact to deter Beijing in South China Sea

The Philippines and Canada have signed a defence pact to expand joint military drills and deepen security cooperation in a move widely seen as a response to China’s growing assertiveness in the region, most notably in the disputed South China Sea.

The agreement provides the legal framework for Canadian troops to take part in military exercises in the Philippines and vice versa. It mirrors similar accords Manila has signed with the United States, Australia, Japan and New Zealand.

Talks are under way by the Philippines for similar defence agreements with France, Singapore, Britain, Germany and India as Manila continues to fortify its defence partnerships amid rising tensions with Beijing.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/2/canada-philippines-sign-defence-pact-to-deter-beijing-in-south-china-sea>

30 Oct: US and Malaysia boost security partnership in South China Sea

The US and Malaysia signed a pact solidifying bilateral defence ties, underscoring a commitment to security in the disputed South China Sea.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth oversaw the signing of the memorandum of understanding with his counterpart on Oct 30 during a visit to the South-east Asian nation for a regional defence summit.

The pact is the latest in a series of deals between the two nations.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/us-and-malaysia-boost-security-partnership-in-south-china-sea>