

**SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 147**  
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*Compiled by CIL Ocean Law and Policy Team*

**ACTS OF CLAIMANT**

**27 Dec: Philippine navy challenges Chinese warship intruding into South China Sea**

The Philippine Navy moved quickly after spotting a Chinese warship lingering off the coast of Zambales earlier this month, a presence that once again put the country's maritime rights to the test. According to the Navy, reports came in on Dec 17 about a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessel sailing within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The ship was later identified as a Jiangkai II (Type 054A)-class frigate with bow number 569.

<https://theindependent.sg/philippine-navy-challenges-chinese-warship-intruding-into-manilas-west-philippine-sea/>

**26 Dec: China opens shopping centre on Woody Island in disputed Paracels in South China Sea**

6,000 square metre complex is latest Chinese civilian facility on South China Sea island after first hardware store and hotpot restaurant.

China has opened a new shopping centre on Woody Island in the disputed Parcel Islands, bolstering its civilian presence on the strategically vital South China Sea outpost.

The Sansha City Commercial Centre opened to business on Thursday, according to the local government. The over 6,000 square metre (64,600 sq ft) complex is the latest addition to China's civilian infrastructure on what it calls Yongxing Island, following its first hardware store last year and a hotpot restaurant in 2023.

Woody Island lies within the Paracel Islands – an archipelago known as the Xisha Islands in Chinese that is at the centre of overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3337811/china-opens-shopping-centre-woody-island-disputed-paracels-south-china-sea>

**26 Dec: Chinese Navy warship rescues Philippine fisherman in South China Sea, provides humanitarian assistance**

A warship of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy on Thursday rendered humanitarian assistance to a Philippine fisherman in distress in the South China Sea, providing food and water and notifying a nearby Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) vessel for follow-up assistance, according to videos and photos obtained by the Global Times from relevant authorities.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202512/1351572.shtml>

**22 Dec: China's CNOOC commences new offshore oil project in the South China Sea**

Chinese oil major CNOOC Ltd ([600938.SS](https://www.cnooc.com.cn/)), said on Monday that an offshore oil project in the South China Sea had commenced production.

Xijiang Oilfields 24 Block Development Project, located in the shallow water of the Pearl River Mouth Basin, is expected to achieve a plateau production of about 18,000 barrels of light crude oil equivalent per day in 2026, CNOOC said in a statement.

The development of the project mainly leverages the adjacent existing facilities of the Huixi Oilfields, with the addition of a new unmanned wellhead platform. The project is expected to commission 10 development wells, according to the statement.

CNOOC holds 100% interest in this project and is the operator, it added.

<https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/chinas-cnooc-commences-new-offshore-oil-project-south-china-sea-2025-12-22/>

#### **14 Dec: Chinese 10,000-ton-class destroyer formation holds live-fire exercises in South China Sea**

According to the footage released by CCTV on Sunday, various types of vessels of the PLA Navy form a formation to hold live-fire exercises in South China Sea, including a 10,000-ton-class destroyer. According to the footage, the vessels proceed to designated training zone to hold live-fire training of naval guns.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202512/1350517.shtml>

#### **14 Dec: China warns of VLCC adrift in the South China Sea**

A VLCC has been reported as “not under command” in the South China Sea. The Djibouti-flagged 319,000-dwt tanker Njord (built 2003) was identified as the vessel involved. China’s Sansha Maritime Safety Administration (MSA) issued a navigational warning to passing vessels on 14 December at 11:14 am Beijing time (03:14 GMT).

According to the Sansha MSA, the tanker was drifting near 16°40.24’N 113°41.14’E on Sunday morning. Sansha MSA advised ships to keep a sharp lookout and navigate with caution. No reasons were given as to why the ship is adrift. S&P Global data shows the tanker has been managed by Pakistan-based Maritime Synergy Management since March 2025.

<https://www.tradewindsnews.com/tankers/china-warns-of-vlcc-adrift-in-the-south-china-sea/2-1-1916404>

#### **13 Dec: China Coast Guard Blasts Fishermen With Water Cannon Near Sabina Shoal, Philippines Dispatches Patrol Boats**

Manila rushed two patrol boats to protect fishermen in the South China Sea after a water cannon attack from Chinese cutters that left three injured in one of the most severe incidents at Sabina Shoal this year. According to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), the incident occurred on Friday near Sabina Shoal when several China Coast Guard (CCG) and China Maritime Militia vessels surrounded 20 Filipino fishing boats operating near the maritime feature located 75 nautical miles from the Philippine island of Palawan. CCG cutters 21559 and 21562 also deployed rigid-hulled inflated boats to cut the anchor lines of the Philippine fishermen, sending them adrift in what the PCG described as an “endangering” action. Three Philippine citizens sustained injuries, including bruising and open wounds, according to the Philippine Coast Guard. Two fishing vessels were also damaged from the Chinese high-pressure water cannon blasts.

<https://news.usni.org/2025/12/13/video-china-coast-guard-blasts-fishermen-with-water-cannon-near-sabina-shoal-philippines-dispatches-patrol-boats>

### **12 Dec: Beijing says it expelled Philippine aircraft, vessels near disputed South China Sea atolls**

China said on Dec 12 it had driven away a Philippine aircraft and multiple vessels near disputed atolls in the South China Sea, in the latest in a series of confrontations in the strategic waterway in recent years.

The Chinese military said it issued strong warnings and “expelled” a Philippine aircraft that “invaded” airspace above the Scarborough Shoal, without giving a date for the incident.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea, overlapping the exclusive economic zones of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Unresolved disputes have festered for years over ownership of various islands and features.

In a separate statement, the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) said multiple Philippine vessels entered waters near Sabina Shoal to “cause trouble and provoke incidents”.

The CCG said it took control measures against the vessels, including verbal warnings and forced expulsion.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/china-says-it-expelled-philippine-aircraft-vessels-near-disputed-atolls?ref=search-results>

### **11 Dec: Vietnam steps up South Reef expansion, careful not to provoke China**

Vietnam has quietly accelerated land reclamation at South Reef, a once-remote coral feature in the contested Spratly Islands, signaling a new strategic turn as pressure from China intensifies across the South China Sea. New satellite imagery reviewed by analysts shows significant dredging, reinforced embankments and the early formation of what appears to be a sheltered harbor and logistics zone.

South Reef - known in Vietnamese as Đá Nam, has long been one of Hanoi's lesser-developed outposts. But the latest construction suggests Vietnam is moving to harden a chain of positions that could strengthen surveillance, resupply and defensive coordination across the southern Spratlys. "Vietnam has been quietly expanding multiple features for years," said Gregory Poling, director of the [Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative](#) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

[https://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2025/12/11/south-china-sea-vietnam/8521765461611/](https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2025/12/11/south-china-sea-vietnam/8521765461611/)

### **11 Dec: China Coast Guard Enhances Capabilities in South China Sea**

The China Coast Guard (CCG) helicopters recently conducted night deck-landing training in a certain area of the South China Sea. The training enhanced their maritime protection and law enforcement capabilities in all weather and at all times.

<http://eng.mod.gov.cn/2025xb/D/V/16426571.html>

### **9 Dec: Chinese envoy to UN refutes erroneous remarks by certain countries, reiterates China's position on South China Sea**

A Chinese envoy to the UN said at a United Nations session on Monday local time that the General Assembly is not the proper forum for addressing the South China Sea issue, but said it must firmly counter “erroneous remarks” by certain countries. At the UN General Assembly's 80th session on Monday local time, during a plenary discussion on "Oceans and the Law of the Sea," Ambassador Sun reiterated that China has indisputable sovereignty over the [Spratly Islands] and their adjacent waters, as well as sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant maritime areas. China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South

China Sea are supported by solid historical and legal grounds, according to a release from China's Permanent Mission to the UN.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202512/1350088.shtml>

### **6 Dec: Chinese Naval Flotilla Conducts Training in South China Sea**

A Chinese naval flotilla consisting of Type 075 amphibious assault ship Hubei (Hull 34), Type 071 amphibious dock landing ships Jinggangshan (Hull 999) and Wuzhishan (Hull 987), conducted a live-fire training exercise recently on such subjects as formation maneuver and fire strike in the South China Sea.

[http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/2025xb/M\\_251449/V\\_251467/16425574.html](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/2025xb/M_251449/V_251467/16425574.html)

### **6 Dec: Philippines says China fired flares toward its patrol plane in the disputed South China Sea**

The Philippine coast guard reported on Saturday that a Chinese-held outpost in the disputed South China Sea fired three flares toward a Philippine surveillance aircraft during a routine patrol. Despite the incident, officials said the plane continued its mission without interruption. The flares were launched from Subi Reef, one of the features occupied and fortified by China, though Philippine authorities said the exact distance between the flares and the aircraft—a Cessna Grand Caravan operated by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources—could not immediately be determined.

Beijing did not offer a comment on the episode. China claims almost the entire South China Sea and regularly warns foreign aircraft it believes are encroaching on what it asserts is its airspace. Its forces have in the past used flares from both island outposts and military aircraft to signal that other planes should leave the area.

According to the Philippine Coast Guard, which joined the fisheries bureau for the monitoring flight, onboard cameras captured the moment the flares were fired. The agencies said the plane was conducting a lawful overflight at the time.

“These flights aim to monitor the marine environment, assess the status of fisheries resources and ensure the safety and welfare of Filipino fishermen in the [South China Sea],” the coast guard said, using the Philippine name for the stretch of the South China Sea that Manila claims. The Philippine patrol plane spotted a Chinese hospital ship, two Chinese coast guard ships and 29 suspected militia ships anchored in the waters off Subi, the Philippine coast guard said.

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/philippines-says-chinese-flares-fired-at-patrol-plane-over-disputed-south-china-sea-13957287.html>

### **6 Dec: China sends seasoned ‘America hand’ to serve as top envoy to Philippines**

Jing Quan, formerly the second-in-command at the Chinese embassy in Washington, arrived in Manila on Saturday to assume his post as Beijing’s top envoy to the Philippines, pledging to both defend national interests and stabilise bilateral ties.

“As the ambassador, I will firmly safeguard China’s national interests and dignity, while also serving as a bridge to ensure China-Philippines relations stabilise rather than deteriorate, and that our peoples draw closer instead of drifting apart,” Jing was quoted as saying upon arrival, according to an embassy social media account.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3335460/china-sends-seasoned-american-hand-serve-top-envoy-philippines>

### **Dec 5: Taiwan says China deploys warships in 'military operations'**

Taiwan said on Friday (Dec 5) that China had deployed warships for "military operations" stretching hundreds of kilometres from the Yellow Sea to the South China Sea, posing a "threat" to the region. Beijing, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory, neither confirmed nor denied the manoeuvres.

Taiwan's defence ministry and other security agencies were monitoring China's activities and had a "complete grasp of the situation", presidential office spokeswoman Karen Kuo told reporters. She did not say how many Chinese ships were involved in the deployment, but a security source told AFP the number was "significant". The source spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

The operations were not limited to the Taiwan Strait, but extended from the southern Yellow Sea to the East China Sea near the disputed Diaoyu Islands and on into the South China Sea and even the Western Pacific, Kuo said.

"This indeed poses a threat and impact on the Indo-Pacific and the entire region," she said. Taiwan urged China to "exercise restraint", Kuo said, adding: "We are also confident that we can handle this matter well."

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/east-asia/taiwan-china-warships-military-operations-south-china-sea-5563881>

### **Dec 4: China massing military ships across region in show of maritime force, sources say**

China is deploying a large number of naval and coast guard vessels across East Asian waters, at one point more than 100, in the largest maritime show of force to date, according to four sources and intelligence reports reviewed by Reuters.

China is in the middle of what is traditionally a busy season for military exercises, though the People's Liberation Army has not made any announcements of large-scale officially named drills.

The Chinese ships have massed in waters stretching from the southern part of the Yellow Sea through the East China Sea and down into the contested South China Sea, as well as into the Pacific, according to four security officials in the region.

Their accounts were corroborated by intelligence reports from a country in the region, which detailed the deployment. Reuters reviewed the reports on condition it did not name the country. As of Thursday morning, there are more than 90 Chinese ships operating in the region, coming down from more than 100 at one point earlier this week, the documents showed.

The operations exceed China's [mass naval deployment](#) in December last year that prompted Taiwan to raise its alert level, the sources said.

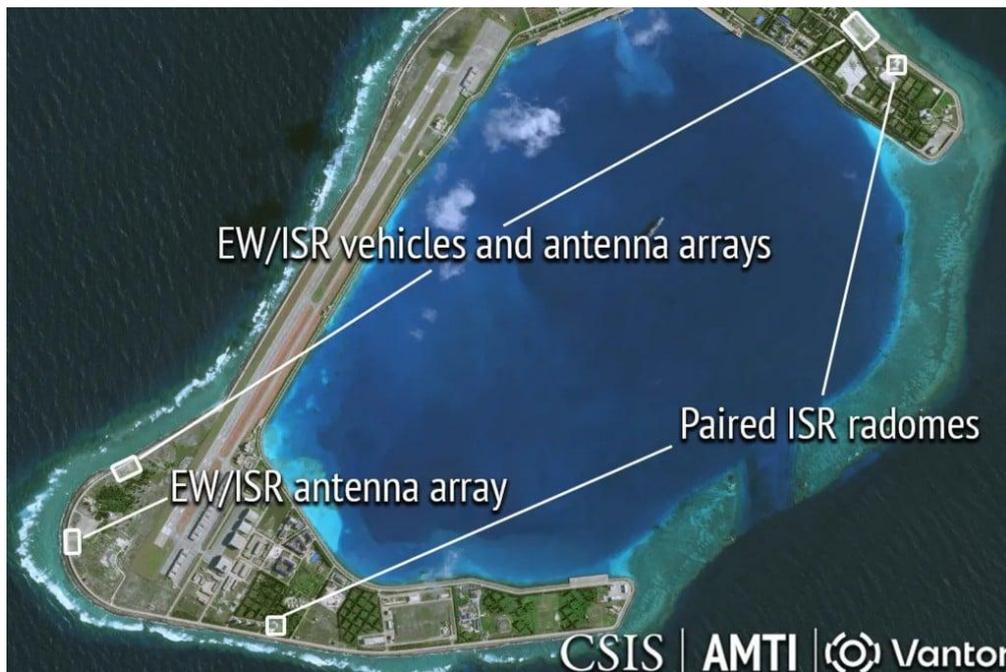
<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-massing-military-ships-across-region-show-maritime-force-sources-say-2025-12-04/>

### **3 Dec: CNOOC starts production at Weizhou 11-4 project in South China Sea**

China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) has begun production at the Weizhou 11-4 oilfield adjustment and satellite fields project in the Beibu Gulf Basin, South China Sea. Located in an average water depth of around 43m, the Weizhou 11-4 project leverages adjacent existing facilities. It also features a newly built unmanned wellhead platform and a central processing platform, connected to an existing platform by a trestle bridge.

<https://www.offshore-technology.com/news/cnooc-starts-production-weizhou-project/?cf-view>

### 3 Dec: China ramps up surveillance equipment at Spratly Islands bases: US think tank



China has carried out extensive upgrades to its surveillance and electronic warfare systems across its [Spratly Islands](#) outposts to improve its intelligence gathering in the [South China Sea](#), according to an American think tank.

The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative under the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) said in a report on Tuesday that satellite images revealed new and upgraded radar sites, antenna fields and other reinforced electronic warfare installations at Mischief, Subi and Fiery Cross reefs.



“These upgrades underscore the fact that a major function of China’s bases is to provide unparalleled [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] coverage of the South China Sea, supporting the operations of China’s coastguard and navy in peacetime,” the report said.

It could also allow “Beijing to contest the use of the electromagnetic spectrum by others in the event of a conflict”. According to the think tank, new paved antenna arrays and coordinated vehicle units carrying jamming and sensing equipment had been deployed, with other fixed monopole networks, direction-finding layouts and mobile electronic warfare platforms.

“Beijing is also investing in support facilities for equipment with more kinetic potential,” the report said. Reinforced artillery positions at Mischief Reef, many of which remain empty, could be used to host mobile rocket launchers or other strike systems, it said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3335054/china-ramps-surveillance-equipment-spratly-islands-bases-us-think-tank>

### **3 Dec: Philippine Coast Guard’s spots more Chinese ships near Bajo de Masinloc**

Just 50 nautical miles from Zambales, a warship of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy with bow number 553 issued a radio challenge to the Philippine Coast Guard’s (PCG) Cessna Caravan.

ABS-CBN News was among those who joined the maritime domain awareness (MDA) flight where the incident occurred on Wednesday, December 3. Throughout the PCG aircraft’s approach to [Scarborough Shoal], the Chinese warship repeatedly issued radio challenges. PCG pilots responded by reminding the vessel to comply with Philippine domestic laws and international maritime rules.

<https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/nation/2025/12/3/pcg-spots-more-chinese-ships-near-bajo-de-masinloc-1823>

### **29 Nov: China Coast Guard conducts law enforcement patrols in waters around Scarborough Shoal**

The China Coast Guard (CCG) conducted law enforcement patrols in the territorial waters of [Scarborough Shoal] and surrounding areas on Saturday. The CCG has continuously intensified law enforcement patrols in the territorial waters of Scarborough Shoal and its surrounding areas since the beginning of November.

The patrols involve legal monitoring, issuing warnings, and intercepting and driving away illegal intruding vessels and aircraft in accordance with the law, thus further strengthening control over the relevant maritime areas and resolutely safeguarding China’s national territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2025-11-29/CCG-conducts-law-enforcement-patrols-in-waters-around-Huangyan-Dao-1IHaYJeyUc8/p.html>

### **28 Nov: Philippines holds drills with India, France in bid to hike Indo-Pacific influence**

The country’s military has conducted maritime cooperative activities (MCA) with India and France this week as both nations, which are widely-considered as regional powers, sought to bolster its influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

India’s guided-missile frigate INS Sahyadri joined the MCA in the South China Sea on Wednesday, according to the Armed Forces of the Philippines. INS Sahyadri, which was also equipped with an onboard helicopter, joined AFP’s lineup of naval and air assets, including the BRP Jose Rizal, a number of FA-50 fighter jets, and a W-3A Sokol search and rescue helicopter.

“The successful conduct of the 2nd MCA reflects the growing synergy between the AFP and the Indian Navy as both countries continue to expand defense cooperation,” the AFP said in a statement.

On Thursday, the Philippine Navy conducted its MCA with the French Navy from south of Balut Island, Sarangani to the waters off Davao Oriental. Navy's BRP Artemio Ricarte and its aircraft with tail number NV392 conducted a series of drills with a "French frigate.

<https://www.inquirer.net/461706/india-france-hold-drills-with-ph-in-bid-to-hike-indo-pacific-influence/>

### **Nov 27: Philippine Coast Guard for new vessels, stronger [South China Sea] patrols**

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is set to acquire additional vessels and equipment to strengthen its presence in the South China Sea after the Senate augmented the agency's 2026 budget by PHP8.6 billion, transportation officials said during budget deliberations on Thursday.

Senator JV Ejercito, sponsor of the Department of Transportation (DOTr) budget, said the augmentation would allow the PCG to procure new vessels, including a 97-meter multi-role response vessel (MRV) from Japan and three 87-meter vessels to expand the country's maritime patrol capability.

The PCG will also receive around 40 aluminum boats for search-and-rescue operations, especially during typhoons and other calamities.

"Actually... they concentrated more on the multi-role vessels... And then three more 87 meters... Ang target nila (their target) is about five of these in the coming years," Ejercito said.

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1264140>

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

### **12 Dec: US and Japan hold joint flight drills as China ups military activity near Japan**

U.S. strategic bombers joined a fleet of Japanese fighter jets in a joint military exercise meant to demonstrate their military cooperation around Japan's airspace, defense officials said Thursday, as tensions with China escalate.

The exercise showcasing joint Japanese-U.S. air power came a day after Chinese and Russian bombers flew together around western Japan, prompting Tokyo to scramble fighter jets, though there was no airspace violation. It also follows [China's military aircraft locking radar](#) on Japanese jets Saturday, another incident that has caused Tokyo-Beijing relations to further deteriorate.

Early Friday, Japanese Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and his U.S. counterpart, Pete Hegseth, held telephone talks on "increasingly severe security situation in the Indo-Pacific region, including the radar incident," the Japanese defense ministry said in a statement. It did not mention the flight drills.

It said the ministers expressed serious concern over any actions to increase regional tensions, as "China's actions are not conducive to regional peace and stability." Koizumi reiterated that Japan will firmly and steadily continue surveillance and monitoring activities in the airspace and waters surrounding the country.

<https://apnews.com/article/japan-us-military-drills-china-russia-87e9785311d7254fc8e14188bd05f54c>

### **10 Dec: Russian bombers join Chinese air patrol near Japan as Tokyo-Beijing tie strains**

Japan has scrambled jets to monitor Russian and Chinese air forces conducting joint patrols around the country, the Japanese Defence Ministry said late on Dec 9, amid rising [tensions between Tokyo and Beijing](#).

Two Russian Tu-95 nuclear-capable strategic bombers flew from the Sea of Japan toward the East China Sea to rendezvous with two Chinese H-6 bombers, and performed a "long-distance joint flight" in the Pacific, the ministry said.

Four Chinese J-16 fighter jets joined the bombers as they made a round-trip flight between Japan's Okinawa and Miyako islands, it added. The Miyako Strait between the two islands is classified as international waters.

Japan also detected simultaneous Russian air force activity in the Sea of Japan, consisting of one early-warning aircraft A-50 and two Su-30 fighters, the ministry said.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/russian-bombers-join-chinese-air-patrol-near-japan-as-tokyo-beijing-tie-strains?ref=search-results>

### **8 Dec: U.S. Navy recovers F/A-18F, MH-60R aircraft lost from USS Nimitz**

The U.S. Navy successfully recovered on Dec. 5, 2025 the F/A-18F Super Hornet and MH-60R Seahawk aircraft lost during two separate incidents off USS Nimitz (CVN 68).

The recovery effort was conducted by Commander, Task Force 73 (CTF 73); Task Force 75; the Naval Sea Systems Command's Supervisor of Salvage and Diving (SUPSALV); and CTG 73.6's Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit. Both aircraft, lost on Oct. 26, 2025, were located and retrieved from a depth of approximately 400 feet. The Navy employed a contracted Vessel of Opportunity, equipped with a government-owned, contractor-operated unmanned system, to lift and recover the aircraft.

All recovered aircraft components are being transported to a designated U.S. military installation in the Indo-Pacific region for detailed analysis. The incidents remain under investigation.

<https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/4354728/us-navy-recovers-fa-18f-mh-60r-aircraft-lost-from-uss-nimitz/>

### **7 Dec: Chinese jets point radar at Japanese aircraft, Japan says**

Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, meeting with his Australian counterpart Richard Marles in Tokyo, said Japan would respond "resolutely and calmly" to China's conduct in order to maintain regional peace and stability.

But a Chinese navy spokesperson, Colonel Wang Xuemeng, said Japanese aircraft had repeatedly approached and disrupted the Chinese navy as it was conducting previously announced carrier-based flight training east of the Miyako Strait.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinese-fighter-jets-directed-radar-japanese-aircraft-japan-says-2025-12-06/>

### **6 Dec: Trump unveils strategy to prevent China conflict over Taiwan**

US President Donald Trump aims to prevent conflict with China over Taiwan and the South China Sea by building up US and allies' military power, according to a new US strategy memo.

The Trump administration laid out its approach to one of the world's most sensitive diplomatic issues in an official, 29-page National Security Strategy document, dated November but only recently published online.

"Deterring a conflict over Taiwan, ideally by preserving military overmatch, is a priority," according to the document.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/trump-unveils-strategy-to-prevent-china-conflict-over-taiwan>