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ACTS OF CLAIMANT

Feb 27: Philippines, Japan, US hold joint military drills in South China Sea

The navies of the Philippines, the US and Japan trained alongside each other in the South China Sea this week to ramp up cooperation among the military allies, the Philippines' armed forces said on Friday (Feb 27).

Since 2023, the Philippines has worked with a number of countries to assert its rights and maritime entitlements in the South China Sea.

China claims most of the resource-rich waterway, rejecting a 2016 arbitral award that has voided its historical claims to the area.

In a statement, the Philippine military said the joint activity "underscores the sustained commitment of partner forces to enhance interoperability, reinforce maritime security, and improve Maritime Domain Awareness in the region".

The Philippines deployed its Antonio Luna frigate, helicopters and fighter jets to the joint drills. Japan deployed a P-3 Orion aircraft while the US sent guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey and a Poseidon plane.

Exercises included replenishment at sea, joint air patrols, fly-bys and communications check exercises.

The Philippines also held similar exercises with Australia and the US on Feb 15 and 16.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-japan-us-south-china-sea-joint-military-drills-5957206>

Feb 26: How China is masking drone flights in potential Taiwan rehearsal

A large Chinese military drone has conducted regular flights over the South China Sea in recent months while transmitting false transponder signals that made it appear to be other aircraft, including a sanctioned Belarusian cargo plane and a British Typhoon fighter jet.

Military attaches and security analysts scrutinising the operations say the flights represent a step change in China's grey-zone tactics in the contested South China Sea, and appear to be testing possible decoy capabilities in the event of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

Since August, at least 23 flights have been logged under the call sign YILO4200, a known long-endurance Chinese military drone, but the aircraft transmitted registration numbers of other aircraft, according to Reuters analysis of data from flight-tracking website Flightradar24. The flight paths often head east from the Chinese province of Hainan towards the Philippines, near the disputed Paracel Islands, and down Vietnam's coast, the flight analysis showed.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/how-china-is-masking-drone-flights-in-potential-taiwan-rehearsal>

Feb 25: Can China and Philippines replace 'disputes with cooperation' after years of tension?

China and the Philippines may soon start joint coastguard patrols in the [South China Sea](#) after years of tensions over the disputed waters, according to a Philippine senator.

Erwin Tulfo, chairman of the Senate's foreign relations committee, met Chinese ambassador Jing Quan on Monday, and said afterwards that the two countries' coastguards were expected to sign a memorandum of agreement by the end of March.

He added that rather than “[having disputes there](#) ... there will be cooperation”, such as joint patrols, search and rescue operations or environmental clean-ups. “That was what Ambassador Jing mentioned,” he said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3344626/can-china-and-philippines-replace-disputes-cooperation-after-years-tension>

Feb 24: China's Maritime Militia Was More Active Than Ever in 2025

China's militia of military-trained fishing crews spent more time deployed in the South China Sea than ever before last year, according to CSIS' Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. In a new report based on satellite imaging, AMTI detailed the movements of identifiable maritime militia vessels near 12 reefs, and found that the sustained Chinese presence in sensitive areas of the region numbers in the hundreds of vessels - every day.

Nearly half of the activity occurred at Chinese-claimed Mischief Reef and Whitsun Reef. Mischief is occupied by China and has been built up into a massive military installation, used for staging operations throughout the Spratly Islands. Satellite images of the lagoon at Mischief Reef from September 2025 show a remarkably large presence at the anchorage, including flotillas of dozens of vessels rafted together. Four times in 2025, the accumulation of Chinese fishing vessels at this shoal alone exceeded 200 trawlers. In parallel to the buildup at this location, the number of fishing vessels at Fiery Cross Reef - another Chinese mega-base - has virtually vanished.

Whitsun Reef, just 50 nautical miles to the west of this Chinese base, is undeveloped and claimed by the Philippines; it has been the site of repeated mass gatherings of Chinese maritime militia trawlers over the years.

The deployment patterns in the western Spratlys complemented the movements of the China Coast Guard at other, more hotly-contested features. The CCG showed record activity near Scarborough Shoal in 2025, but was not accompanied by many maritime militia vessels at that location; instead, the fishing fleet focused its efforts elsewhere.

<https://maritime-executive.com/article/china-s-maritime-militia-was-more-active-than-ever-in-2025>

Feb 20: Philippines says communication channels still open with Beijing on South China Sea

The Philippine foreign ministry said on Friday (Feb 20) that it is maintaining open communication with China even as it strengthens cooperation with "like-minded" countries that support its stance in the South China Sea.

"Even as the DFA (foreign ministry) deepens alliances and partnerships with like-minded countries, it also maintains open lines of communication with the Chinese side in pursuit of candid, constructive dialogue and practical cooperation," foreign ministry spokesperson Rogelio Villanueva said in a briefing.

The Philippines recently held separate bilateral talks with the United States and Canada on maritime issues.

Philippines and the United States have recently committed to ramp up the deployment of "US cutting-edge missile and unmanned systems" in the Southeast Asian nation.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/philippines-south-china-sea-communication-channels-open-5942296>

Feb 16: Beijing organizes patrol as US, Australia and Philippines drill in South China Sea

A two-day series of maritime drills by the U.S., Australian and Philippine navies this week in the South China Sea drew a response by China's navy with a demonstration of its own.

Aircraft and warships from the U.S. and its two allies converged inside the Philippines' exclusive economic zone for a "maritime cooperative activity" meant to reinforce cooperation and protect freedom of navigation, according to separate news releases from the three militaries.

The exercise Sunday through Monday focused on visual information drills and a replenishment-at-sea, the U.S. 7th Fleet said in its release Tuesday. The U.S. regularly conducts similar drills alongside the Philippines and other allies. China, which claims large swaths of the South China Sea, frequently objects that the exercises undermine peace in the region.

Beijing on Tuesday said it deployed air and naval forces on "combat readiness patrols" Sunday and Monday in response, according to the state-run China Military Online website.

"The Philippines' efforts to rally external countries to organize so-called 'joint patrols' are disrupting the South China Sea and undermining regional peace and stability," Senior Col. Zhai Shicen said Tuesday, according to the website.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey and a U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft from Patrol Squadron 4 represented the U.S. during the exercise, while Australia provided the HMAS Toowoomba and another P-8A Poseidon.

The Philippines sent an undisclosed number of FA-50 fighter jets, the patrol vessel BRP Teresa Magbanua, the guided-missile frigate BRP Diego Silang and other aircraft including an A-29 Super Tucano attack aircraft and several helicopters, according to the 7th Fleet.

https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia_pacific/2026-02-17/south-china-sea-us-navy-philippines-australia-20770871.html

Feb 13: 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>

Feb 12: Philippines to expand civilian population in disputed Spratly Islands amid diplomatic row

Filipino leaders from Kalayaan and Chinese embassy officials in Manila have clashed over entry bans for personnel on either side.

Local authorities in Kalayaan, which falls under the jurisdiction of Palawan province, were working on plans to grow the population beyond its current outpost on Thitu Island, known locally as Pagasa, and to the six other land masses under its administration, Vice-Mayor Maurice Phillip Albayda told This Week in Asia.

Over 400 people live on Pagasa, the municipality's lone village, while soldiers are stationed on the rest of the islands, making up the sparse number of inhabitants in the highly contested waters of the [South China Sea](#) amid a long-standing Manila-Beijing maritime row.

"Our trajectory under the leadership of our municipal mayor is to populate the other islands as well," Albayda said. The move, aimed at boosting the local economy, was "on track".

The council has been developing a comprehensive road map to pitch to the country's Senate and House of Representatives, according to Albayda.

https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3343273/philippines-expand-civilian-population-disputed-spratly-islands-amid-diplomatic-row?module=top_story&pgtype=homepage

Feb 7: China conducts naval, air patrols around disputed South China Sea

China conducted naval and air patrols in the South China Sea from Monday to Friday, the China Southern Theater Command said in a statement on Saturday.

"In an attempt to stir up troubles in the South China Sea, the Philippine side roped in countries outside the region and conducted so-called 'bilateral air patrol', undermining peace and stability in the region," the statement said.

Forces of the Southern Theater Command will remain on high alert and resolutely safeguard China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, according to the statement.

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

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/china-conducts-naval-air-patrols-around-disputed-south-china-sea>

Feb 4: [Philippines] says defending China in [South China Sea] claims is considered treason

Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) spokesperson for the [South China Sea] Commodore Jay Tarriela on Wednesday accused lawmakers and officials who defend China's maritime claims of committing acts he described as treasonous.

In a phone interview with reporters, Tarriela said those who undermine the Philippines' position in the [South China Sea] are betraying the nation.

"If you are defending the position of the People's Republic of China, if you are advancing their interests, and at some point questioning our own position, I don't think this is a patriotic service to the Filipino people," he said. "This is actually treasonous. You are considered a traitor already."

<https://www.inquirer.net/466819/tarriela-says-defending-china-in-wps-claims-is-considered-treason/>

Feb 3: AFP, US set large-scale drills in West Philippine Sea for 2 months

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) will conduct a series of large-scale military activities with the United States in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) for two months, it was confirmed on Tuesday, Feb. 3.

Rear Adm. Roy Vincent Trinidad, AFP spokesperson for WPS, said the exercises will take place inside areas “well within our EEZ [exclusive economic zone], where we have sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction.”

The activities are covered by a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) that runs from Jan. 21 to March 31, and Trinidad said the notice authorizes the AFP and its treaty ally to conduct multiple activities during the period.

<https://mb.com.ph/2026/02/03/afp-us-set-large-scale-drills-in-west-philippine-sea-for-2-months>

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

13 Feb: Japan hands over 5 coastal radar systems to Philippines

The Japanese government on Wednesday officially turned over five coastal radar systems to the Philippines as part of efforts to bolster Manila’s maritime domain awareness amid China’s continuing aggressive actions in the region.

The radars were part of Japan’s official security assistance for fiscal year 2023, the year the grant aid framework for like-minded countries was established.

“The South China Sea is a vital sea lane for many countries through which a large portion of our trade and energy supplies pass. Safety, openness, and stability of these waters are therefore of direct importance to our own security and prosperity,” Japanese ambassador Kazuya Endo said in his speech during the handover ceremony. *“Enhancing the Philippines’ maritime domain capability is not only an investment in the Philippines’ security, but also a meaningful contribution to regional and global stability,”* he added, without mentioning China, which claims these waters almost entirely. Beijing’s coast guard and military vessels have repeatedly engaged in aggressive encounters with Philippine ships near disputed shoals and atolls within Manila’s exclusive economic zone.

The Philippine Navy will be the end user of the coastal radars, amounting to JPY 600 million (P228 million). The package includes radar units, surveillance and monitoring equipment, communications systems, and other support components.

“Once operational by the Philippine Navy, they are expected to significantly enhance the country’s maritime domain awareness by improving the ability to monitor activities in the surrounding waters,” Endo said.

The Philippines is the only country that has been a recipient of the OSA for three consecutive years. For the second fiscal year, the Philippines is expected to receive JPY 900 million worth of rigid-hulled inflatable boats. For the current fiscal year, Japan will fund the construction of facilities for these boats, the first infrastructure project under the OSA.

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2026/02/japan-hands-over-5-coastal-radar-systems-to-philippines/>