

SOUTH CHINA SEA NEWS No. 153

June 2026

Compiled by CIL Ocean Law and Policy Team

ACTS OF CLAIMANT

30 June: China conducts patrols around Scarborough Shoal in disputed South China Sea
China's military and coast guard said on Tuesday they had carried out patrols in the waters around Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, as part of safeguarding Beijing's territorial claims to the area.

The Southern Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army said its naval and air forces conducted combat-readiness patrols in the territorial waters and airspace around the shoal. Scarborough Shoal, which Beijing calls "Huangyan Dao", is claimed by both China and the Philippines and is one of Asia's most disputed maritime sites.

In a separate statement, the China Coast Guard (CCG) later said it conducted law-enforcement patrols on Tuesday in the waters and surrounding areas of the shoal too, saying it has enhanced patrols this month and regulated ships engaged in "illegal rights-violation activities", without elaborating.

Tuesday's patrols came after joint U.S.-Philippine drills in waters near Scarborough Shoal over the weekend that Washington said underscored a shared commitment to strengthening regional and international cooperation in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

In response, China's military on Monday said it had carried out a routine patrol in the South China Sea over the weekend and accused the Philippines of bringing in countries outside the region for patrols, which it said undermine regional peace and stability.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-conducts-patrols-around-scarborough-shoal-disputed-south-china-sea-2026-06-30/>

22 June: China says Liaoning aircraft carrier completes over 40 days of drills

China's Liaoning aircraft carrier and accompanying vessels on Monday returned to a Chinese port after more than 40 days of drills in the South China Sea and the western Pacific Ocean, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported.

- The training focused on combat readiness, including air defence, anti-ship strikes, support missions, long-range rescue and live-fire exercises, according to CCTV.
- The group carried out multiple rounds of ship-air offensive and defensive drills, it said.
- Joint exercises with an amphibious assault ship group were also conducted in the western Pacific Ocean to enhance coordination in far-sea operations.
- CCTV also said that during the training, the Liaoning carrier group "professionally and prudently" handled what the broadcaster called "repeated close-range tracking, harassment and provocation" by Japanese ships and aircraft.
- In early June, Japan's defence ministry said it had [monitored](#) the Liaoning aircraft carrier and accompanying vessels operating east of the Philippines' Luzon island in late May.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-liaoning-aircraft-carrier-completes-over-40-days-drills-2026-06-22/>

19 June: Philippine, U.S. forces conduct Maritime Cooperative Activity

The Armed Forces of the Philippines and the United States Armed Forces conducted a Maritime Cooperative Activity (MCA) within the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone June 14-19 2026. This activity demonstrated a collective commitment to strengthening regional and international cooperation in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

As the seventh MCA of 2026, this iteration included U.S. Navy, Army, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps participation and focused on littoral maneuver and amphibious assault subject matter expert exchange and training, in addition to visit, board, search, and seizure; maritime interdiction operations; search and rescue; and maritime law enforcement training. These regular at-sea events expand the interoperability of our respective military doctrines, tactics, techniques, and procedures between the armed forces of the U.S. and Philippines.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/568246/philippine-us-forces-conduct-maritime-cooperative-activity>

18 June: New Chinese research ship spotted near [Scarborough Shoal] after platform removal

Philippine authorities have spotted a new Chinese research vessel operating near [Scarborough Shoal], a day after confirming the removal of a controversial floating platform that had drawn public attention in the key feature.

The vessel, identified as the Chinese research ship Tong Ji, was documented during a maritime domain awareness flight conducted by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) over [Scarborough Shoal] on Thursday.

“What is worth noting is that there are now Chinese Coast Guard vessels once again back in [Scarborough Shoal]. There are also three Chinese maritime militia vessels and, most importantly, there’s another Chinese research vessel that we are now seeing,” PCG spokesperson for the West Philippine Sea Rear Adm. Jay Tarriela told reporters in Manila.

<https://www.inquirer.net/478045/wps-new-chinese-research-vessel-spotted-near-panatag-after-platform-removal/>

17 June: Philippines says China has removed structure in disputed South China Sea shoal

A floating structure in a contested shoal in the South China Sea has been removed, the Philippines said, after Manila lodged a diplomatic protest over what it called an “illegal” move by Beijing.

Patrols conducted by the Philippine authorities on the morning of June 17 confirmed the removal of the [floating platform previously monitored](#) within the lagoon of Scarborough Shoal, a Manila task force said in a statement.

“The Philippines has indivisible, incontrovertible and longstanding sovereignty over Bajo de Masinloc,” it said, referring to Scarborough Shoal. “Only the Philippines has the right to place or construct structures and conduct activities, including marine scientific research, in Bajo de Masinloc and its territorial sea.”

China’s foreign ministry has reiterated Beijing’s “indisputable sovereignty” over the shoal, which it calls Huangyan Island, as well as its adjacent waters.

Lin Jian, China’s foreign ministry spokesperson, said at a press briefing on June 17 that the presence of a floating structure at Scarborough was part of a programme of “comprehensive research” in the South China Sea.

China had previously said the structure was a temporary scientific research facility established by its South China Sea Institute of Oceanology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Lin added that such activities fall within China’s sovereign rights and that other countries “have no rights to interfere in them.”

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-says-china-has-removed-structure-in-disputed-south-china-sea-shoal>

16 June: 26 Chinese vessels spotted in West Philippine Sea from June 9-15, 2026 —PH Navy

A total of 26 Chinese vessels were monitored in the [South China Sea] (SCS) from June 9 to 15, 2026, the Philippine Navy said Tuesday.

This number is fewer than the 41 Chinese vessels monitored in SCS from June 2 to 8.

The Philippine Navy said the 26 Chinese vessels spotted June 9 to 15 were in the following areas:

- [Second Thomas] Shoal - 3 China Coast Guard (CCG) vessels
- [Scarborough Shoal] - 3 CCG vessels, 4 People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessels
- [Sabina] Shoal - 3 CCG vessels, 2 PLAN vessels
- Thitu Islands - 3 CCG vessels, 1 PLAN vessel

These resulted in a total of 19 CCG vessels and 7 PLAN vessels, and the overall total is 26 Chinese vessels monitored in SCS for the said period.

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/991599/26-chinese-vessels-spotted-in-west-philippine-sea-from-june-9-15-2026-ph-navy/story/>

16 June: KAMANDAG 10 strengthens combined readiness and Alliance integration across the Philippines

More than 2,000 service members from the Philippines, the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea commenced Exercise Kaagapay ng mga Mandirigma ng Dagat (KAMANDAG) 10 on June 15, demonstrating combined readiness, interoperability and the enduring strength of the U.S.-Philippine alliance through training conducted across the Philippine archipelago.

<https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Articles/Article/4519412/kamandag-10-strengthens-combined-readiness-and-alliance-integration-across-the/>

12 June: Indonesia chooses PIRIOU to build two research vessels

The “Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional” (BRIN), Indonesia national agency for research and innovation, has commissioned the French shipbuilder PIRIOU to design and build two research vessels intended to strengthen Indonesia’s oceanographic capabilities: a multi-mission offshore hydro-oceanographic vessel (ORV–Ocean Going Research Vessel) and a coastal research vessel (CRV–Coastal Research Vessel).

The order was officially signed on 11 June 2026 during a ceremony held in Indonesia, attended by representatives of BRIN, Stéphane BURGAUD, PIRIOU’s Commercial Director, and the project’s institutional partners.

Both vessels will be built by PIRIOU VIETNAM, the Group’s industrial subsidiary in Southeast Asia, and will benefit from PIRIOU’s recognized expertise in the construction of highly sophisticated scientific and hydrographic vessels.

The project forms part of KRisNa (Kapal Riset Nasional – National Research Vessel), a strategic programme designed to strengthen Indonesia’s oceanographic research capabilities in response to major challenges related to climate change, marine biodiversity and the sustainable management of ocean resources. Indonesia is also set to host the Ocean Impact Summit 2026 in Bali later this year.

The project is financed with the support of the French Development Agency (AFD), illustrating the scientific, maritime and industrial cooperation between France and Indonesia, a strategic partnership recently reinforced through bilateral exchanges between the two countries.

The future ORV will enable BRIN to conduct offshore scientific campaigns throughout Indonesian waters and the Natuna Sea (South China Sea). Designed for multidisciplinary missions, the vessel will enhance Indonesia's capabilities in hydrography, physical and chemical oceanography, marine geology and geophysics, sediment sampling, physicochemical water characterization, scientific analysis, and the observation of marine ecosystems and climate change impacts.

The CRV will complement this scientific capability by supporting coastal operations and regional research missions, particularly in Indonesian waters and across Southeast Asia. Both vessels will be equipped with state-of-the-art scientific systems, including multibeam bathymetric survey equipment and, for the ORV, a high-resolution sub-bottom profiler for sediment layer characterization. An Ultra-Short Baseline (USBL) acoustic positioning system will also be installed on both vessels, enabling the deployment and positioning of remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) as well as unmanned systems such as USVs and AUVs. These capabilities will support oceanographic sampling, environmental monitoring and observation missions, contributing to a better understanding of local biodiversity.

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2026/06/indonesia-chooses-pirou-to-build-two-research-vessels/>

12 June: China concludes maritime traffic enforcement operation in waters east of its Taiwan Island

China's Ministry of Transport has concluded a maritime traffic enforcement and hydrographic survey operation in waters east of Taiwan Island, the ministry said on Wednesday.

From June 6 to 10, the ministry organized maritime authorities in Fujian and Guangdong provinces to carry out patrol and law-enforcement missions, as well as hydrographic surveys in waters east of Taiwan Island.

The operation was aimed at fully exercising China's maritime administrative jurisdiction, strengthening long-range offshore patrol and enforcement capabilities, improving traffic management, ensuring maritime safety, and safeguarding national rights and interests.

The action was a necessary response to Japan and the Philippines' announcement of plans to launch negotiations on maritime delimitation in waters east of China's Taiwan Island, a move that would seriously infringe upon China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

The operation covered 1,030 nautical miles, inspected 198 passing vessels and rectified violations involving three ships, reinforcing enforcement and traffic-control capabilities in the area and further improving maritime safety.

http://english.scio.gov.cn/pressroom/2026-06/12/content_118545603.html

11 June: [China's] Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Announces Sanctions Against Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. and His Relatives

Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. repeatedly made irresponsible remarks on China, which undermines China's legitimate interests and sabotages China-Philippines relations. To uphold China's sovereignty, security and development interests, China has decided to prohibit Gilberto Teodoro Jr. and his spouse and child from entering the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Macao, and not allow organizations and individuals in China to engage in any transaction, cooperation or other activities with him and his spouse and child.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/fyrbt/202606/t20260611_11942742.html

11 June: Chinese government vessels enter prohibited waters of Taiwan's Taiping Island for first time

Taiwan Coast Guard condemns Chinese vessels for endangering Taiwanese ships.

Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration on Thursday condemned the first incursion by Chinese government vessels into Taiping Island's prohibited waters, calling it a serious challenge to Taiwan's sovereignty.

The Coast Guard said in a press release that the vessels remained in the prohibited waters for 15 minutes and twice made deliberate course changes, endangering Taiwanese vessels and personnel at sea. It described the incident as another escalation of China's gray-zone tactics following recent operations east of Taiwan.

The CGA's Dongsha-Nansha Branch detected the Chinese vessels Sansha Zhi Fa 301 and San Sha 2 Hao approaching Taiping Island at 7:25 a.m. Coast Guard vessels issued radio warnings and shadowed the ships at a distance of just 0.1 nautical mile (185 meters).

At 8:28 a.m., the vessels entered restricted waters north of Taiping Island and crossed into prohibited waters three minutes later. The vessels twice made sharp course changes during the incursion before being driven away by Coast Guard vessels and departing Taiwan's restricted waters at 8:43 a.m.

The Coast Guard stressed that Taiwan and China are not subordinate to one another and that any attempt to assert jurisdiction in Taiwan's waters would be met with immediate expulsion. The agency said it has strengthened intelligence and surveillance efforts and stands ready to defend Taiwan's sovereignty and maritime security.

<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/news/6381153>

10 June: Philippines urges China to remove shoal structure, warns against island-building

The Philippines said on Wednesday that it is urging Beijing to remove a floating structure placed at the disputed [Scarborough Shoal](#) in the South China Sea, adding that it will not allow the atoll to be turned into a man-made island.

Manila on Tuesday lodged a [diplomatic protest](#) with China over the presence of what it described as a "movable platform," which the Philippine Coast Guard said was likely deployed by Chinese research vessels.

"From the lens of defense and security, we are doing what we can to perform our mandate, and that includes preventing [Scarborough Shoal] from being developed into another man-made island," Philippine Navy spokesperson Roy Trinidad told a press briefing, using the shoal's local name.

Philippine security officials shared photos of the floating structure during a press briefing on Wednesday, showing a square platform with several people on board and an antenna positioned at its centre.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/philippines-urges-china-remove-new-structure-disputed-shoal-south-china-sea-2026-06-10/>

10 June: China completes maritime traffic law enforcement, survey operation in waters east of Taiwan island after Japan-Philippines delimitation talks plan

From June 6 to 10, China's Ministry of Transport organized multiple departments, including the Fujian Maritime Safety Administration (MSA), the Guangdong MSA, the Eastern Navigation Service Center of China's Maritime Safety Administration and the East China Sea

Rescue Bureau, to jointly carry out a special maritime traffic law enforcement and hydrographic survey operation in waters east of Taiwan island, conducting maritime patrols, law enforcement activities and surveys in key waters, Xinhua reported.

The operation was a necessary move taken in response to Japan and the Philippines' unilateral announcement that they would launch "maritime delimitation talks" over waters east of China's Taiwan island, which seriously infringes on China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, per Xinhua.

According to a readout of an earlier press conference released on May 29 from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, on May 28, during the Philippine President's visit to Japan, the two countries issued a joint statement announcing the start of talks on the delimitation of exclusive economic zone and continental shelf between Japan and the Philippines.

In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that the area the two countries announced they will delimit is east of China's Taiwan island. According to China's domestic law and international law including UNCLOS, China has exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in this area.

Mao said that Japan and the Philippines' so-called maritime delimitation talks constitute a severe violation of China's maritime rights and interests, UNCLOS and other international law and basic norms governing international relations. China strongly deplores and firmly opposes that and has lodged serious protests with both countries.

The so-called delimitation talks are completely illegal, null and void, and will have no effect on China's claims to rights in the area east of the Taiwan island or exercise of China's lawful rights. China urges Japan and the Philippines to immediately stop any violation of China's maritime rights and interests and take concrete actions to uphold regional peace and stability, Mao said, according to the readout.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterated the above position on June 2 and June 9. The Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council also reaffirmed the position at its Wednesday press conference.

The special maritime traffic law enforcement and hydrographic survey operation carried out in waters east of Taiwan island involves China's 10,000-ton-class maritime patrol vessel Haixun 09, the large patrol and rescue vessel Haixun 06 operating in the Taiwan Straits, the specialized hydrographic survey vessel Haixun 08 and the specialized rescue vessel Donghai Jiu 113 jointly carried out the operation. They checked passing vessels, reminded vessels to comply with navigation rules, investigated and dealt with various maritime violations, and maintained navigation order, Xinhua reported.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202606/1363243.shtml>

9 June: Philippines commissions new OPV BRP Rajah Lakandula

The Philippine Navy on June 9, 2026, welcomed the offshore patrol vessel (OPV) BRP *Rajah Lakandula* (PS-21) into active service. It is the second Sulayman-class OPV built by HD HHI in South Korea.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. led the commissioning ceremony as part of the Navy's 128th anniversary celebration. The event also marked the first time that one of the Navy's biggest warships was able to berth at the headquarters in Manila following dredging work completed earlier this year.

After the commissioning, Marcos briefly toured the ship with senior defense and military officials and met with members of its crew.

The BRP *Rajah Lakandula*, named after a prominent 16th-century ruler of Tondo in present-day Manila, is the second of six 2,400-ton offshore patrol vessels being acquired under a ₱30

billion (\$573 million) contract signed with South Korean shipbuilder HD Hyundai in 2022. The remaining ships are scheduled to be delivered in batches through 2028.

The vessels are equipped with a Leonardo Super Rapid 76mm main gun, an Aselsan SMASH 30mm secondary gun, Terma C-Guard decoy launching systems, a Leonardo SPS-732 search radar, and a Safran Paseo XLR electro-optical/infrared system. As previously reported by *Naval News*, this class of OPV is also equipped with a [non-lethal effector](#) while the Philippine Navy also plans to acquire [modular towed-array sonar systems](#) for three of the six ships.

<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2026/06/philippines-commissions-new-opv-brp-rajah-lakandula/>

9 June: Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian's Regular Press Conference on June 9, 2026

Bloomberg: Can you tell us more about the floating structure flagged by the Philippines in the South China Sea and any diplomatic actions that are underway?

Lin Jian: Huangyan Dao/Scarborough Shoal has always been China's territory. China has indisputable sovereignty over it and its adjacent waters. It is fully within China's sovereign rights to carry out activities including scientific research at Huangyan Dao/Scarborough Shoal. China urges the Philippines to stop all infringement activities, provocations and false accusations at sea.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202606/t20260609_11940743.html

3 June: Statement of the National Task Force for the [South China] Sea

The National Task Force for the [South China] Sea is aware of reports regarding the alleged presence of a new structure at Bajo de Masinloc.

Relevant government agencies are currently undertaking verification and validation measures to establish the accuracy, nature, and circumstances surrounding these reports, utilizing available monitoring, surveillance, and operational assessment mechanisms.

The Philippine Government takes seriously any development that may affect the country's sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction in the [South China] Sea. The NTF-WPS is closely coordinating with concerned agencies to ensure a comprehensive and fact-based assessment of the situation.

<https://pia.gov.ph/press-release/statement-of-the-national-task-force-for-the-west-philippine-sea-3/>

1 June: Philippines, Vietnam upgrade ties, say South China Sea peace 'non-negotiable'

The Philippines and Vietnam are elevating their ties to an enhanced strategic partnership, reaffirming that shared commitment to peace and stability in the South China Sea is "non-negotiable," President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said on Monday during a state visit by Vietnam's top leader To Lam to Manila.

Marcos said there is no doubt the Philippines and Vietnam share a common interest in maintaining peace, stability and a rules-based order in their region, adding that the partnership has become more important as the region navigates an evolving and uncertain global environment.

- Marcos said the deeper ties would be "defined by wider pathways for cooperation, stronger political and defence cooperation, and closer linkages between the Filipino and Vietnamese people."
- Vietnam is the Philippines' lone strategic partner in the ASEAN region, after they [upgraded ties 10 years ago](#) in a show of unity against China.

- Marcos said Manila and Hanoi reaffirmed that maintaining peace, stability, and the freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea "remains non-negotiable."
- He added that both countries "remain resolute in their commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes," grounded on international law, particularly the 1982 UNCLOS treaty and the 2016 South China Sea arbitral award.
- To Lam said the Philippines is an "important regional partner of Vietnam", citing a similar vision and strategic interests, and strong commitments for peace and stability. "We always want to bring the strategic partnership with the Philippines to a new high."
- To Lam said he and Marcos agreed to have closer coordination to "effectively respond" to regional and global challenges.
- The Philippines and Vietnam signed deals on defense cooperation, information and technology, tourism and education.
- Speaking after the meeting with Marcos, To Lam said Vietnam and the Philippines agreed to enhance security and defence cooperation.
- He said they will also seek to boost economic ties and will work together to ensure food security.
- Vietnam is the largest supplier of rice to the Philippines.
- The Philippine and Vietnamese coast guards held their [first joint exercises](#) in 2024, despite overlapping claims to some South China Sea features.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-vietnam-elevate-ties-enhanced-strategic-partnership-2026-06-01/>

1 June: China Coast Guard conducts routine law-enforcement patrols in the waters east of China's Taiwan island

The China Coast Guard (CCG) task group led by CCGS Daishan conducted routine law-enforcement patrols in accordance with the law in the waters east of China's Taiwan island, Jiang Lue, spokesperson for the CCG, said on Monday.

This is a necessary operation in response to the announcement by Japan and the Philippines on their own, to begin negotiations on maritime delimitation in the waters east of China's Taiwan island, which seriously infringed upon China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, Jiang said.

"We urge Japan and the Philippines to immediately cease all illegal acts that undermine China's sovereign rights and interests," the spokesperson said. The CCG will continue to strengthen control and management over relevant waters and take real actions to resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, Jiang added.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202606/1362447.shtml>

1 June: Chinese naval hospital ship sets sail for mission in South China Sea

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy hospital ship, Silk Road Ark, departed from a military port in Zhanjiang, South China's Guangdong province, on Sunday for a medical service mission to islands in the South China Sea and along South China's coasts.

The ship will offer medical consultations, physical examinations, traditional Chinese medicine physiotherapy, surgery, and health education to officers, soldiers, and their families stationed on the islands.

The Silk Road Ark will also conduct casualty treatment drills and medical equipment maintenance during the mission.

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202606/01/WS6a1cdf81a310d6866eb4bb83.html>

31 May: The PLA Southern Theater Command has Conducted Combat Readiness Patrols in the Territorial Sea and Airspace of China's Huangyan Dao/Scarborough Shoal and Its Surrounding Areas

On May 31, naval and air units of the PLA Southern Theater Command (STC) conducted readiness patrols in the territorial sea and airspace of China's Huangyan Dao/Scarborough Shoal and its surrounding areas.

http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/2025xb/H_251454/L_251456/16464648.html

OTHER STATES AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

25 June: US military maintaining high-intensity South China Sea operations raises risks; provocations by Japan, Philippines warrant attention: think tank

The US military has maintained a high-intensity military presence in the South China Sea and its periphery in 2025, with close-in reconnaissance, drills and exercises, and joint operations with its allies continuing to expand, according to a report released Thursday by the South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative (SCSPI).

While the report found that some key US strategic platforms showed signs of slowing operational growth because of resource constraints, a Chinese expert warned that increasingly aggressive frontline operations, greater use of unmanned platforms and rising provocations by US allies, particularly Japan and the Philippines, could become more destabilizing factors in the region.

The report, titled "An Incomplete Report on US Military Activities in the South China Sea in 2025", found that the US military continued to strengthen its military deterrence against China.

According to the report, large reconnaissance aircraft conducted about 1,200 missions over the South China Sea in 2025, while ocean surveillance and oceanographic survey vessels accumulated 197 ship-days of activity.

US carrier strike groups (CSGs) have entered the South China Sea nine times, up slightly from eight deployments in 2024, while at least 11 nuclear-powered submarines operated in the region over the course of the year.

Furthermore, US bombers also conducted 13 sorties across seven deployments into the South China Sea and its surrounding areas, frequently rehearsing "north-south converging maneuvers" and "distributed operations".

Overall, the report said it sees sluggish growth of strategic platform activities from the US military. Although US CSG deployments increased modestly, the report noted that the actual intensity of carrier operations in the South China Sea declined compared with previous years. It attributed the slowdown largely to extended deployments in the Middle East, maintenance challenges and operational accidents involving CSGs such as the USS George Washington, USS Carl Vinson and USS Nimitz.

Reconnaissance activities, however, continued to expand. The report said US reconnaissance aircraft conducted approximately 1,200 sorties in the South China Sea in 2025, representing a moderate increase from 2024. The growth was driven primarily by unmanned aerial systems and expanded access to air bases in the Philippines.

"We have seen closer and more dangerous military approaches by US forces, reflecting what can be described as an 'autopilot' mode among frontline US military units in the region," said Hu Bo, director of SCSPI.

The report warned that despite constraints on major strategic assets, the broader Asia-Pacific, particularly the South China Sea, will remain the US military's most important strategic theater.

Facing growing resource constraints, the US military has increasingly relied on allied cooperation to sustain its regional presence. According to the report, the US military conducted 122 large-scale exercises in the South China Sea and surrounding areas in 2025.

Japan participated in 71 exercises, the highest number among US allies and partners, followed by the Philippines with 32.

Hu said that although the US has adopted a more assertive tactical posture, its overall military activities have moderated somewhat as resources are diverted to other hotspots. "The biggest security risk in the South China Sea today is no longer the US itself, but the increasingly provocative actions of Japan and the Philippines," he said.

Unlike the US, the two countries are less willing to acknowledge China's growing strength and are therefore more prone to miscalculation. "Many of the recent provocations highlighted in the report were initiated by Japan and the Philippines, making their actions an increasingly important source of regional instability," Hu said.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202606/1364480.shtml>

19 June: Taiwan coast guard seizes Chinese fishing boat near Penghu, detains 6 crew

The [Taiwan] Coast Guard Administration (CGA) has detained six crew members from an unnamed Chinese fishing vessel caught operating in restricted waters off a Penghu Islands islet, an official said Friday, adding that the group is being held while an investigation is ongoing.

<https://focustaiwan.tw/society/202606190016>