



Situation Room

**** SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE ****

Period under review: from **01 April 2021** to **07 April 2021**.

[This report is based on publicly available sources to describe a changing situation. Information subject to change.]

Situation analysis recap:

- The Philippine military said it has documented illegal manmade structures on Union Banks atoll (Spratly Islands, South China Sea). This is near the area where hundreds of Chinese fishing vessels have been anchored at since last month. The structures were discovered during a maritime flight patrol.
- Manila says that China continues to install new facilities and structures on Woody Island, located in the Paracel Island group (north from the Spratly Islands). It is said that it serves as China's blueprint for future military developments in other Chinese-occupied South China Sea islands, including the Spratlys. China, Taiwan, and Vietnam all have competing territorial claims on Woody Island.
- Philippines Defence Secretary has accused Beijing of planning to occupy more islands in the South China Sea. The Philippine Foreign Affairs Department warned China it would issue daily diplomatic protests as long as the maritime militia remains in place. Beijing responded with the accusation of Philippines exaggerating over the Chinese fishing fleet at Whitsun Reef. The Philippines threatens to expel a Chinese diplomatic spokesman in Manila.
- The Taiwan Coast Guard Administration reported it would strengthen defences around the disputed South China Sea islands after Chinese drones were spotted near the Pratas Islands (named Dongsha by Taiwan).
- A Chinese military anti-submarine aircraft entered Taiwan's southwest air defence identification zone on Saturday, 3 April. Taiwan's Defence Ministry reported a new incursion on Monday, 5 April by the Chinese Air Force, made up of eight fighter jets and two other aircraft, one of which flew through the Bashi Channel (located south of Taiwan).
- The Chinese military started a series of exercises in the South China Sea, west of the Leizhou Peninsula which are scheduled to last until the end of April. Simultaneously, China has prohibited foreign vessels from entering the area of the exercise.
- German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer reiterated that a German frigate is scheduled to sail across the South China Sea in August this year. The US has sent the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group to the region for a second time this year (first was in January) in order to conduct routine operations on Sunday, 4 April. The group entered South China Sea two days later. The strike group will conduct flight operations with fixed and rotary-wing aircraft and maritime strike exercises.
- France, US, Japan, India and Australia began two days of joint naval exercises in the South China Sea on Monday, 5 April. Led by France, the objective of the exercises was to enhance interoperability between the participating navies in freedom of navigation operations. The Chinese aircraft carrier held naval drills near Taiwan on the same day. The Chinese Navy also said that such drills would continue to be held in the future.

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