



Situation Room

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

Period under review: from **08 April 2021** to **14 April 2021**.

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

Situation analysis recap:

- The US warned China against its increasingly aggressive moves, reminding Beijing of Washington's obligations to its partners in the region. The US also stated that an armed attack against the Philippines' armed forces, or public vessels and aircraft in the Pacific, including in the South China Sea, would trigger the US-Philippines Mutual Defence Treaty. The Philippine defence department followed up with the statement on Thursday, 8 April, that it was keeping its options open as a diplomatic row with Beijing grows over hundreds of Chinese vessels on the Whitsun Reef. On Tuesday, 13 April, The Philippines sent additional ships for maritime patrol to the disputed area. Hours after the announced deployment, only nine Chinese vessels remained at the Whitsun Reef. The Philippines demanded Beijing's top envoy in Manila facilitates the departure of the remaining Chinese ships from the area.
- Armed Chinese ships chased down a civilian naval craft carrying a Filipino news crew which was sailing within its own exclusive economic zone on Friday, 9 April. The Chinese Navy deployed two missile-carrying vessels to drive away the ship as it travelled across the sea close to the western island province of Palawan. On the following day, it was reported that vessels were fast-attack cruise missile catamarans.
- The destroyer *USS John McCain* sailed through the Taiwan Strait to demonstrate the US commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. China protested the passage and blamed the US for the increased tensions over Taiwan. Taiwan's foreign minister said Taiwan would fight to the end in the event of a Chinese attack.
- The Chinese task group led by the aircraft carrier *Liaoning* was observed entering the South China Sea on Saturday, 10 April, after conducting exercises around the island of Taiwan. On Monday, 12 April, China sent 25 military planes over Taiwan's air defence identification zone. Taiwan's defence ministry launched its own jets to broadcast warnings back to the Chinese aircraft. Chinese planes have breached the island nation's airspace for the 10th day in a row. The latest Chinese intrusion involved 18 fighter jets and four nuclear capable bombers, as well as two anti-submarine aircraft, and an early warning aircraft.
- China's military will begin live-fire drills on Thursday, 15 April, in waters off Taiwan's southwest coast where the six-day exercise will be carried out to the south of the Penghu archipelago in the Taiwan Strait. Other vessels are prohibited to enter the area until next Tuesday. Beijing also warned that it was willing to use force to stop Taiwan moving closer to Washington. This announcement was broadcast after US president Joe Biden announced a visit of former US politicians and officials to Taiwan.
- The US Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group (led by the amphibious assault ship *USS Makin Island*) entered the South China Sea. The group travelled through the Straits of Malacca into the disputed waters where it arrived on the morning of Thursday, 8 April. It joined the *Theodore Roosevelt* Carrier Strike Group, in the area since 4 April, to conduct Expeditionary Strike Force operations. On 11 April, the combined US naval group and the Royal Malaysian Air Force conducted a joint exercise.
- China is upgrading two of its civilian supply ships in the South China Sea with new high-tech surveillance equipment to help the vessels track foreign ships sailing through the disputed area.

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