



Situation Room

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

Period under review: from 24 March 2021 to 31 March 2021.

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

Situation analysis recap:

- U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said in a speech at NATO headquarters on Wednesday, 24 March, that China threatens freedom of navigation and militarizes the South China Sea. Hua Chunying, a spokesperson for the Chinese foreign ministry, denied accusations made by U.S. Secretary of State Blinken the following day, commenting that the label of militarization in the South China Sea cannot be attributed to China. Taiwan and the U.S. signed an agreement to set up a joint Coast Guard Work Group in order to coordinate policy, since China passed a law that allows their coast guards to shoot on foreign ships.
- The Philippines and Vietnam have expressed concern over the 220 Chinese fishing ships still anchored in the Whitsun Reef, which lies in the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone. Vietnam defines the presence as a violation of state sovereignty, and the Philippines claims the ships are controlled by the Chinese naval militia. China argues, that on 7 March, fishing boats were merely seeking refuge from bad weather and that it owns the coastal territory. The Philippines' claim was rejected. The Philippine Coast Guard has tightened control.
- Twenty Chinese military planes entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone on 26 March. The event is considered to be the largest intrusion to date, further escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait. China has also announced that maritime traffic between the Chinese province of Hainan and the Paracel Islands will be closed on Monday and Tuesday due to military exercises.
- On Sunday, 28 March, the defence ministers of Japan and Indonesia informed the international community that both countries will strongly oppose any Chinese action that could escalate tensions in regional waters.
- On Monday, 29 March, the Taiwanese military increased their force training and further strengthened its defence infrastructure on Itu Abo Island (named Taiping by Taiwan), which is considered as the largest natural island in the South China Sea. The Philippines sent military planes to fly over still anchored Chinese fishing boats.
- The Foreign and Defence Ministers of Japan and Indonesia met on Tuesday, 30 March. They signed an agreement that will allow Indonesia to procure defence equipment from Japan in order to facilitate the upgrade to its naval defences.
- The two French Navy ships, which sailed on their deployment towards the South China Sea in February, stopped in the Indian city of Kochi on Tuesday, 30 March. Their mission is to emphasise the importance of freedom of navigation in international waters.

Si želite izvedeti več? Vas zanima področje mednarodne varnosti? Pridružite se nam.

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