



Situation Room

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

Period under review: from 29 April 2021 to 5 May 2021.

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

Situation analysis recap:

- The Philippines accused China of blocking its ships around the contested South China Sea reefs.
- Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has said he will not withdraw the navy and coastguard vessels patrolling the disputed South China Sea.
- The Philippines conducted maritime exercises near Thitu Island, Scarborough Shoal, and the Batanes islands. The country's defence minister vowed on Sunday, 2 May that the Philippines would continue maritime exercises inside its exclusive economic zone.
- US President Joe Biden said in a conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping that the US will maintain a strong military presence in the Indo-Pacific, not to start a conflict, but to prevent one. China responded that the US must restrain its frontline forces in nearby seas.
- China renewed its unilateral yearly fishing ban on Thursday, 29 April. The ban prohibits all countries from fishing in the South China Sea between May and September. China has enforced this ban since 1995, officially for conservation efforts of the fish population. The Vietnamese government responded by rejecting the Chinese ban and encouraged Vietnamese fishing boats to continue their activities as normal.
- Kathleen Hicks, the US Deputy Defence Secretary said, in a virtual address at the Aspen Security Forum, that conflict with China is not inevitable.
- China's *Shandong* aircraft carrier task group conducted an exercise in the South China Sea that was seen as a response to rising tensions with Taiwan.
- Japan has begun providing the Philippine military with sea rescue equipment. The supply of equipment, which can also be employed in civilian use, is intended to strengthen defence ties with the Philippines.

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