



Situation Room

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

Period under review: from 6 May 2021 to 12 May 2021.

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

Situation analysis recap:

- The Chinese People's Liberation Army conducted island amphibious landing drills, apparently aimed at frightening Taiwan. Video footage released by the PLA Navy showed marines in a landing exercise involving an amphibious transport ship *Yimengshan*, along with landing craft, and armoured vehicles. The navy said the drills were aimed at training marines in rapid response in enemy territory.
- China's defence ministry said that the aircraft carrier *Shandong* completed its first military drill in the South China Sea.
- China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) started producing gas from the Liuhua 29-2 field in the eastern part of the South China Sea. It is expected to reach peak production of about 41 million cubic feet of natural gas per day in 2021.
- Foreign ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) countries rebuked China on issues concerning Hong Kong, human rights violations in Xinjiang, and its military build-up in the South China Sea. As a response, China condemned the G7 statement.
- Australian frigate *HMAS Anzac* and auxiliary oiler *HMAS Sirius* conducted a series of exercises alongside with the French Navy's "*Jeanne d'Arc*" Task Group, comprised of the amphibious assault ship *Tonnerre* and the frigate *Surcouf*, while under way in the South China Sea.
- The Royal Australian Navy publicised that three of the navy's Anzac class frigates, *HMAS Anzac*, *HMAS Ballarat* and *HMAS Parramatta*, along with the replenishment vessel *HMAS Sirius* sailed through the southern reaches of the South China Sea. China threatened to launch ballistic missiles at Australia and its military bases if it gets involved in China's relations with Taiwan.
- Faced with climate challenges, Vietnamese rice farmers are switching to shrimp harvesting in the South China Sea, putting further strain on an already overfished ecosystem.
- Vietnam's Civil Aviation Authority proposed the construction of an airport in the disputed Spratly Islands. The aviation agency seeks to include the airport in the transport ministry's 2021-2030 strategic plan.
- Around 200 ships are still moored at reefs in the West Philippine Sea. The Philippine Coast Guard continues to deploy its ships and air assets over the area after it turned away seven Chinese vessels in Sabina Shoal. The Philippines announced plans to convert one of the islands in the South China Sea into a military hub.
- ASEAN and the U.S. announced further collaboration for the maintenance of regional peace, security, and stability in the South China Sea.
- The Biden administration is looking to improve its communication channels with China to reduce the risk of accidental escalation when the planes, ships, and troops of both sides come into contact on an increasingly crowded map in the Asia-Pacific. The idea is to create multiple avenues to communicate with Beijing to manage the growing strategic competition between the two powers, and prevent the onset of a potential conflict, especially as the Chinese navy expands its reach further into the Indo-Pacific.

Sources/Further Reading:

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