



Situation Room

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

Period under review: from 08 July 2021 to 14 July 2021.

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

Situation analysis recap:

- Monday, 12 July, marked the fifth anniversary of the 2016 UN Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling that rejected China's territorial claims over the contested area. China responded with a comment that international ruling regarding the resource-rich waterways were a waste of paper and contained numerous errors, claiming its sovereignty claims will not be affected.
- China warned Canada against further damage to its relationship and to regional peace and stability after Ottawa urged Beijing to abide by the five-year-old ruling rejecting most of its South China Sea claims.
- Hundreds of Filipinos marched in front of the Chinese Consulate on Monday to mark the five-year anniversary of the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration's decision upholding the Philippines territorial rights on the South China Sea.
- On Thursday, 8 July, Vietnam protested China's plan to send a research vessel to the Paracel archipelago. Vietnam's foreign ministry spokesperson said that all survey and scientific research activities on the Paracel Islands without Vietnam's permission are a violation of Vietnam's sovereignty and relevant rights.
- On Sunday, 11 July, the Biden administration rejected nearly all of China's significant maritime claims in the South China Sea. The administration also warned China that any attack on the Philippines in the disputed region would draw a U.S. response under a mutual defence treaty.
- On Monday, China warned the guided missile destroyer *USS Benfold* to leave the vicinity of the disputed Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, further signalling China's aggressive position.
- Satellite imagery showed a huge number of Chinese fishing vessels, which are anchored in the disputed areas in the South China Sea, are damaging coral reefs and other sensitive marine ecosystems by releasing tons of sewage into the sea. Sewage sources on the Spratly Islands also include ship waste as well as human sewage from the island inhabitants. Significant damage to the coral reefs will further damage the fish stocks throughout the South China Sea. Satellite imagery shows that the damage caused by sewage, generated over the past five years in some parts of the Spratly Islands in the Western Philippine Sea is extensive. In addition to sewage, the sea is being destroyed by Chinese construction of artificial islands and over-hunting of giant mussels.
- China denounced Japan for interfering in Chinese internal affairs after Tokyo raised the importance of the Taiwan Strait in its annual defence white paper. According to the paper, Japan said it was facing heightened security risks because of China's military advancement and the rivalry between China and the US.
- Beijing declassified a report on the development of drone submarines (unmanned underwater vehicles – UUV). China is developing underwater drones capable of identifying, tracking, and attacking an enemy submarine without human interference.

Additional background information:

- China's most important tool in the various territorial disputes in the South China sea is the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM). This armed fishing fleet is used to assert Beijing's claims and harass foreign civilian and military ships. This approach is part of Chinese so-called grey zone

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tactics, which are acts beyond normal deterrence or assurances that attempt to achieve one's security objectives while falling below the threshold that would elicit armed responses.

- Beyond the Spratlys dispute, there are four other major disputed areas in the region which only include two states: 1) The Paracel Island Group, involving China and Vietnam; 2) Scarborough Shoal, involving China and the Philippines; 3) The Pratas Island, involving China and Taiwan; 4) the Natuna Islands, involving China and Indonesia. In the case of the Pratas island, China regards it as an internal issue, but Taiwan asserts that it is an international issue.

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Analysis by: **Matjaž J. Leben**

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