



Situation Room

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

Period under review: from 15 July 2021 to 21 July 2021.

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

Situation analysis recap:

- The U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his 10 Southeast Asian counterparts discussed the agenda on the South China Sea disputes, the COVID-19 pandemic, and many other issues in the Special ASEAN-U.S. Foreign Ministerial Meeting. Blinken staked out strong positions on China's expansive claims over the South China Sea.
- U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin will travel to Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines later this week. Secretary Austin's visit wishes to demonstrate the importance the Biden administration places on Southeast Asia and on ASEAN as an essential part of the Indo-Pacific's strategy.
- United States Congressional committee on Foreign Relations passed the Ensuring American Global Leadership and Engagement (EAGLE) Act to address challenges in Indo-Pacific region. The legislation includes key provisions that will strengthen American diplomacy and leadership in the strategically important region.
- The U.S. released its report on U.S.-China competition in the East and South China Seas.
- The United States Air Force is sending 25 F-22 stealth fighters to an exercise in the western Pacific this month. Carl Schuster, a Hawaii-based defence analyst and a former director of operations at the US Pacific Command's Joint Intelligence Centre said that deploying a large number of F-22s for the exercise sends a message to China at a time when relations are tense over Pacific flashpoints like Taiwan and the South China Sea. He added that normal F-22 deployments consist of six to 12 aircraft.
- The U.S. and the Philippines are set to reinforce an agreement allowing U.S. troops to operate from the island nation as tensions with China remain high.
- French President Emmanuel Macron said that France and South Pacific nations would launch a South Pacific coastguard network to counter behaviour such as illegal fishing, as China expands its maritime reach.
- France has assured the Philippines that as a permanent and currently presiding member of the United Nations Security Council, it will perform its role to ensure that international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and sovereignty of its regional partners are upheld.
- China has dismissed a recent research into catastrophic environmental damage caused by hundreds of Chinese fishing boats dumping sewage and wastewater into the South China Sea.
- The PLA held drills this week in all major Chinese sea areas amid consecutive US military exercises. China sees US exercises, such as landing military aircraft on Taiwan, and sailing through Chinese claimed territorial waters in the South China Sea as provocations. The action is aimed to display the PLA's determination and preparedness.
- The United States and its allies accused China on Monday, 19 July of a global cyberespionage campaign. Beijing rejected the accusation.
- Britain said on Tuesday, 20 July that it would permanently deploy two warships in Asian waters.
- Negotiations between Beijing and its neighbours for a code of conduct on activities in the South China Sea are facing more uncertainty as tensions rise over the contested waterway. One observer commented that the process could end in a stalemate.

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