



## Situation Room

### **\*\* SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE \*\***

**Period under review: from 01 January 2022 to 21 February 2022.**

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

#### **Situation analysis recap:**

- The Philippines has finalised a deal to acquire a shore-based anti-ship missile system from India. The new anti-ship system aims to deter foreign vessels from encroaching on the country's 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone.
- On 3 January, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States agreed to work together to stop the further spread of nuclear weapons and to avoid nuclear conflict.
- Taiwan's military conducted drills targeting simulated Chinese warplanes on 5 January.
- Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met virtually on 6 January. The two leaders reaffirmed the fundamental and enduring importance to both countries of the Special Strategic Partnership, which is based on a shared commitment to democracy, human rights, free trade and a rules-based international order, close coordination to contribute to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific and beyond, longstanding trade and investment ties, and the deep affinity between the Australian and Japanese peoples.
- The *USS Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group* and *USS Essex Amphibious Ready Group* completed joint expeditionary strike force training operations in the South China Sea on 16 January.
- The Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi said on 17 January that China would not use its strength to bully smaller neighbour countries.
- China appears to be shifting from the so-called 'nine-dash line' towards a new legal theory to support its claims in the disputed region. ASEAN members were first to spot the changing process. Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah said on 18 January that Beijing now speaks less of the nine-dash line and more often of the 'Four Sha.' Four 'Sha', or Four Sands Archipelagos, referring to the four island groups in the South China Sea that Beijing claims to hold historical rights to. Internationally, they are known as Pratas Islands, Paracel Islands, the Macclesfield Bank area and Spratly Islands.
- China accused the US that on 20 January, the *USS Benfold*, a guided-missile destroyer, illegally entered China's territorial waters without the approval of the Chinese government. The US Navy said its mission was in accordance with international law and in line with its commitment to defend every nation's right to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows.
- Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and US President Joe Biden held the Japan-US Summit video conference on 21 January where they refuted Chinese accusations of changing the status quo in the East and South China Seas and any economic coercion in the region.
- On 23 January, the *USS Carl Vinson* and the *USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Groups* began dual carrier operations in the disputed Sea.
- On 23 January, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence revealed it had spotted 34 Chinese fighter planes, four electronic warfare aircraft and a strategic bomber in the Taiwanese Air Defence Identification Zone. In response, Taiwan activated its military jets, issued radio warnings, and put its missile systems on high alert.
- On 25 January, a US Navy F-35 fighter jet crashed while landing on the *USS Carl Vinson* aircraft carrier. Seven military personnel were injured.
- Foreign ministers of the Quad alliance vowed on 11 February to work on humanitarian relief, terrorism, cyber and maritime security, and global supply chain challenges.

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- The United Kingdom has pledged £25 million to a security pact with Australia as part of a commitment to promote peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific amid continuing concerns about China's power and influence in the region. The funds will be used to strengthen regional resilience in areas including cyberspace, state threats, and maritime security.
- Between 14 - 18 February, Chinese Air Force units from all five theatre commands reportedly performed simultaneously exercises in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Yellow Sea in order to demonstrate battle readiness.
- The Australian Defence Department said in a statement on Saturday 19 February that the Chinese military vessel fired a laser at an Australian surveillance aircraft. The incident allegedly occurred on Thursday, 17 February when an Australian aircraft was flying over the Arafura Sea.
- On Monday 21 February, Australia has demanded China investigate the alleged use of a laser in order to illuminate an Australian jet.

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