



Situation Room

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

Period under review: from **22 March 2022** to **11 April 2022**.

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

Situation analysis recap:

- US admiral John Aquilino (US Indo-Pacific Command) has said that China has fully militarised at least three islands in the South China Sea. China has deployed anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, laser and jamming equipment, and fighter jets.
- After the US admiral's comment about Chinese militarization of islands, Beijing has responded that China has the right to develop South China Sea islands. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin has said that China's deployment of national defence facilities on its own territory is a right entitled to every sovereign country and is in line with international law.
- Vietnam has asked China on 7 April to end Chinese militarisation in the South China Sea. Furthermore, it has stated that the strengthening of militarisation of a number of entities in part of the Spratly Islands not only violates Vietnam's sovereignty claim over this island, but also causes serious concerns for countries in the region and the international community.
- On 27 March, the Philippine Coast Guard reported an incident, which happened on 2 March during Philippine maritime patrol operations around the Scarborough Shoal. The incident involved a Chinese Coast Guard vessel that conducted close distance manoeuvring over an area of approximately 19.2 meters in the direction of Philippine ship.
- 3,800 Armed Forces of the Philippines personnel and 5,100 U.S military personnel on 28 March began large-scale military drills called *Balikatan 2022* across the Philippine main island of Luzon. Exercises were held until 8 April. US aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* and the US expeditionary support base *USS Miguel Keith* were involved in drills. US destroyers conducted firing exercises in the Philippine Sea on 31 March.
- China has accused the US of spying activities in the disputed Sea. The US Navy has deployed three of its ocean surveillance vessels in the region. *USNS Bowditch* was seen in the Vietnam's exclusive economic zone, *USNS Effective* in waters northwest of the Philippines and *USNS Loyal* in the sea east of Taiwan. All three ships have been in the area since March 17.
- Taiwan's Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-Cheng has said Taiwan has no intention of militarising Taiping Island. Taiwan is closely monitoring the militarisation of Chinese artificial islands in the South China Sea.
- A draft security agreement between the Solomon Islands and China was leaked on 24 March. It has been confirmed as authentic by the island nation. The key points of the leaked draft agreement include permitting Chinese PLA Navy ships to dock and stopover in the country and carry out logistical operations. It also allows unfettered access to Chinese military police.
- The Chinese-Solomon Island draft security agreement has sparked a diplomatic protest from Australia and New Zealand. Because of a regional diplomatic backlash, the Solomon Islands has said that despite of its plan to sign a security pact with Beijing, it would not allow a Chinese military base in a country.
- Dr. Kurt Campbell, the US deputy assistant to the President and coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs at the National Security Council is going to travel to the Solomon Islands in a high-level visit over the Pacific nation's security pact with China. The US has been increasingly worried about the Solomon Islands since it switched diplomatic allegiance from Taipei to Beijing in 2019.

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- Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong met with US President Joe Biden at the White House on 29 March. Both leaders renewed the two nations' constructive and long-standing partnership against the backdrop of European turmoil and increasing strategic competition in Asia.
- The US has approved the sale of \$95 million worth of weapons and equipment to Taiwan. The sale would help Taiwan maintain its US-made missile defence system. The purchase involves equipment, training, and other items that would support the Patriot Missile Air Defence System. The US Defence Security Cooperation Agency confirmed the sale on 5 April.
- US defence analysts say China has developed a capability to use space for military purposes. The analysts believe that due to the Chinese sea doctrine, which states China needs to control the near seas, the Chinese military would most likely use military technology in space to seek control in the disputed East and South China seas and fend off challenges on the Western Pacific.
- Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Chinese President Xi Jinping held a telephone meeting on 8 April. Both leaders have agreed to broaden the space for positive engagements in dealing with disputes over the South China Sea.

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