



Situation Room

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

Period under review: from **08 March 2022** to **21 March 2022**.

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

Situation analysis recap:

- The European Union has accused China of fabricating a quote from Joseph Borell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and vice-president of the European Commission. The EU foreign policy chief was “quoted” by China as having described that country as a peace-loving superpower. Officials in Brussels insist that he never said that.
- Some sources reported that a close encounter between a Chinese J-20 military fighter jet and a US F-35 stealth fighter jet took place over the South China Sea. US Air Force General Kenneth Wilsbach, the Commander of the Pacific Air Forces did not reveal when (or if) the F-35/J-20 encounter took place.
- Taiwan’s intelligence service confirmed that a Chinese military aircraft had crashed in the South China Sea earlier this month. The area was sealed off for a search and rescue mission. The crash allegedly involved a Chinese Y-8 maritime patrol aircraft and occurred off the coast of Sanya city, which is located on China’s Hainan Island and lies parallel to northern Vietnam.
- US private equity firm Cerberus will acquire, for \$300 million, a debt-laden shipyard in the Philippines at a former US Navy base close to the South China Sea. The strategically located Subic Bay shipyard has been a national security concern for the US because of fears it could be taken over by state-run firms from China.
- Vietnam asked China on 8 March not to violate its exclusive economic zone with military drills. The military exercises took place between the Chinese Hainan province and northern Vietnam from 4 March to 15 March. Taiwan’s intelligence agency said that the exercise was held due to a search and rescue mission of the Chinese Y-8 maritime patrol aircraft earlier this month.
- On 12 March, Vietnam has banned Sony's action movie *Uncharted* from domestic distribution over a scene featuring a map that shows a disputed line declared by China to stake its claim to large parts of the South China Sea.
- Taiwan's air force scrambled again on 14 March to warn away 13 Chinese military aircrafts that entered into Taiwanese air defence zone. The Taiwanese Defence Ministry said the latest intrusion involved seven Chinese J-10 and five J-16 fighters as well as one Y-8 electronic warfare aircraft, which flew over an area to the northeast of the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands.
- The Philippine’s Department of Foreign Affairs stated on 14 March that a Chinese military research ship had sailed into the Sulu Sea on 29 January and stayed there for four days. Manila said that this had been an illegal incursion, because the Chinese electronic reconnaissance ship *No. 792* had entered into Philippine waters without permission. Furthermore, it stayed in the Sulu Sea even after a Philippine military vessel ordered it to leave.
- On 15 March, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said that the military research vessel, which had entered into Sulu Sea on 29 January, had the right of innocent passage according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The spokesman claimed that the passage was safe, standard, and consistent with international law and international practice.
- The US guided-missile destroyer *USS Momsen*, the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force and the Royal Australian Navy conducted trilateral naval training on 15 March in the South China Sea.

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- Taiwan held live-fire drills on two of its islands not far from mainland China. Exercises were held in order to boost combat readiness of Taiwanese forces. Drills took place on Dongyin Island and Penghu Island on 16 March.
- Taiwan's Defence Ministry reported that on 18 March, the Chinese aircraft carrier *Shandong* had sailed through the Taiwan Strait. The incident had occurred hours before the virtual meeting of Chinese and US presidents. The *USS Ralph Johnson*, a guided-missile destroyer, partly followed the carrier on its route. The *Shandong* did not have aircraft on its deck. Taiwan also sent its warships to observe the passage.
- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida discussed the security challenges in the South China Sea on 19 March. They reaffirmed their determination to continue prioritizing the role of international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and facilitate collaboration, including in maritime security, in order to meet challenges against the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas.
- The US Indo-Pacific commander Admiral John C Aquilino said on 20 March that China has militarized at least three of several islands which it has artificially built in the South China Sea, arming them with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, lasers and jamming equipment, and fighter jets.

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