



## Situation Room

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

**Period under review:** from **23 May 2024** to **19 June 2024**.

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

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

- **(23 May)** China began a two-day large-scale military exercise in the waters and airspace around Taiwan as a response to the inauguration of the new Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te, whom China regards as a supporter of Taiwan's independence. China also warned against any separatist acts of and provocations by external actors. The Eastern Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) conducted military exercises in the Taiwan Strait, the north, south and east of Taiwan as well as in areas near Kinmen and Matsu Islands. They included army, navy, air force and rocket force and were focused on joint sea-air combat readiness patrol, joint seizure of comprehensive battlefield control, and joint precision strikes on key targets.
- **(24 May)** Taiwan's Defence Ministry stated that it tracked 49 Chinese warplanes, 19 navy vessels and many coast guard ships on, near, and around Taiwan on the second day of a large-scale Chinese military exercise. Along with the statement, a video emerged which showed animated Chinese forces encircling the island from all sides, enclosing it in a circular target area and simulated missiles that destroyed Taiwan's key population and military targets.
- **(26 May)** Japanese and South Korean leaders met with China's premier in a trilateral meeting in South Korean capital of Seoul where they discussed sensitive topics like tensions in the South China Sea, recent Chinese large-scale military exercises near and around Taiwan, clampdowns on pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong, human rights abuses against minorities in Chinese northwestern Xinjiang region, and North Korea, along with recommendations on how to boost their countries' cooperation.
- **(27 May)** Philippines foreign ministry released a protest statement against Chinese imposition of a unilateral four-month long fishing ban in the South China Sea and called on Beijing to cease all illegal actions that violate Philippines' sovereignty. The unilateral, yearly Chinese fishing ban is set to last until September.
- **(28 May)** China and Cambodia conducted a 15-day annual land and naval military exercise called "Golden Dragon" which included more than 2000 military personnel from both countries. In the wake of the annual drills, Cambodian army Commander-in-Chief, General Vong Pisen, publicly thanked China for its

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significant help with upgrading Cambodian military facilities, including the Ream Naval Base, and for providing new military equipment.

- **(30 May)** About 600 delegates from approximately 50 countries will attend the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia's top security meeting, which attracts senior military officers, top defence officials, diplomats, weapons makers, and security analysts. The event is useful for the bilateral and multilateral military-to-military meetings besides regular plenary sessions and defence ministers' speeches. This year's topics will revolve around growing South China Sea tensions and wars in Ukraine and Gaza.
- **(31 May)** US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin met with his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore for the first time in 18 months. He announced that the US and the People's Republic of China will resume military-to-military communications in the following months, which could ease growing tension between two great powers.
- **(2 June)** During his speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue security forum, Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun stated that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is ready to forcefully prevent Taiwan's independence, if necessary, and claimed that both Taiwan's new president Lai Ching-te and the governing Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) are pursuing Taiwanese separatism and erasure of the Chinese identity.
- **(5 June)** Commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, General Romeo Brawner, reported that two rigid hull inflatable boats and two rubber boats belonging either to Chinese Coast Guard or People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) intercepted and recovered one of four airdropped packages loaded with food supplies that were meant to resupply a small contingent of Philippine marines stationed aboard the *BRP Sierra Madre*, an old warship purposefully grounded and turned into a military outpost on the Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands.
- **(7 June)** Swedish Defence Minister Pål Jonson expressed concern about Chinese repeated dangerous manoeuvres against Philippine ships in the South China Sea during his diplomatic reception in Manila. He remarked that such actions are endangering both regional stability and global security.
- **(8 June)** Philippines National Security Adviser, Secretary Eduardo Ano, stated that the country will continue to maintain and supply its outposts on the Second Thomas Shoal and in wider area of the South China Sea without seeking permission from any other country. He stressed that the national security council is committed to uphold Philippines' sovereign rights and jurisdiction within its own territorial waters and exclusive economic zone.
- **(10 June)** Taiwanese Coast Guard arrested a lone Chinese man who sailed a speedboat into the harbour at the mouth of Tamsui River, which leads into downtown Taipei, Taiwan's capital city, and collided with other vessels at a ferry terminal. The perpetrator was later charged with illegal entry.

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- **(12 June)** Senior officials from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) said that the organisation will speed up negotiations on a code of conduct to lower the risk of conflicts in the disputed South China Sea which should conclude in 2026. The negotiations have been intermittently on-going since 2002.
- **(14 June)** Philippines increased the number of maritime patrols in the disputed South China Sea ahead of the rollout of a new Chinese maritime regulation that enables the Chinese Coast Guard to detain foreigners accused of trespassing for up to 60 days without trial.
- **(15 June)** Chinese Premier Li Qiang visited New Zealand, Australia, and Malaysia during his tour in the Indo-Pacific where he discussed Chinese and New Zealand's cooperation in areas such as green development, creation of first-class business environment and support of foreign enterprises' development in China, Chinese global dominance in the critical minerals sector, and lifting of the Chinese trade ban on Australian live lobster exports.
- **(17 June)** The Chinese Coast Guard and Philippine armed forces blamed each other for a recent incident in the South China Sea after a Philippine supply vessel and a Chinese ship collided near the Second Thomas Shoal in the disputed Spratly Islands. Both countries stressed that they acted in accordance with the international law and accused the other of reckless and dangerous manoeuvres.
- **(18 June)** Chinese official overseeing Taiwan affairs, Wang Huning, stated that 'separatists' in Taiwan are seeking the island's independence, undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and harming the interests and well-being of the Taiwanese people. China also initiated a new wave of influence campaigns against Taiwan meant to diminish the island's resolve and ability to seek independence while promising to welcome more Taiwanese people to participate in cross-strait exchanges.
- **(19 June)** The US administration approved a new \$360 million weapons sale to Taiwan that includes 291 Altius-600M unmanned aerial vehicle systems with warheads, 720 Switchblade extended-range loitering munitions, missile equipment, and related support material. US officials stated that this sale will help improve Taiwan's security and assist in maintaining political stability, military balance and economic progress in the South China Sea.

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