



Situation Room

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

Period under review: from 17 April 2025 to 17 May 2025

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

Situation analysis recap:

- **(17 April)** Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Malaysia to celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations between both countries. Key agreements with the Malaysian government included enhanced Belt and Road Initiative collaboration, industrial and digital integration, educational and scientific exchanges, and strengthened people-to-people ties. Both countries reaffirmed mutual respect for sovereignty and multilateral cooperation, with shared commitments to regional peace, especially in the South China Sea.
- **(17 April)** Taiwanese minister of defence, Wellington Koo, stated that at least 62 members of the Taiwanese military hold Chinese residence permits that allow people to live in China. All 62 personnel will be barred from working with confidential and intelligence data.
- **(19 April)** Two Japanese warships docked at Cambodia's renovated Ream Naval Base, located on the country's southern coast as a sign of mutual trust and cooperation. Ream Naval Base was earlier renovated with Chinese help and sparked concerns in the US that the base will be used by Chinese military as a key strategic node in the Gulf of Thailand near the disputed South China Sea.
- **(21 April)** The militaries of the Philippines and the US began the annual three-weeks long Balikatan joint military exercises that will simulate a 'full-scale battle scenario' amid tensions in the South China Sea. Joint military drills will include 17.000 US and Filipino soldiers that will simulate an integrated air and missile defence simulation for the first time along other battle scenarios. US will deploy mobile NMESIS anti-ship missile system near crucial sea chokepoint between Northern Philippines and Taiwan during the exercises.
- **(21 April)** China and Indonesia stated that they will cooperate in the field of infrastructure building, minerals extraction and joint security. Both countries are committed to maritime cooperation and promotion of safety and security in the South China Sea, while some tensions around the disputed Natuna island group between them still remains.
- **(21 April)** Philippines will receive a second battery of the Indian BrahMos supersonic anti-ship missiles from to improve its coastal defences. A defence source from India stated that the missiles are in preparation of being shipped to Philippines.
- **(23 April)** Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) nations, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the UK conducted Exercise Bersama Shield 25, a joint military drill involving land, air, and

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naval forces in the South China Sea. This 50 years old partnership focuses on ensuring regional security through regular exercises like Bersama Shield and Bersama Lima. During the exercise, UK's warship HMS Spey operated alongside ships from allied navies, including HMAS Sydney, RSS Vigilance, KD Terenganu, and KD Sri Indera Sakti.

- **(24 April)** Philippines' Senate Majority Leader Francis Tolentino accused China of conducting disinformation campaign to influence public opinion with pro-Chinese narratives about South China Sea dispute and Philippines' midterm elections candidates that are critical of Beijing's activities in the region.
- **(25 April)** Chinese media reported that earlier this month personnel of Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) landed on disputed Sandy Cay reef in the South China Sea and displayed a Chinese flag to assert sovereignty and maritime control over the island.
- **(27 April)** Chinese Coast Guard accused six members of the Philippines Coast Guard (PCG) of illegally landing on Sandy Cay reef and displaying the flag of the Philippines, probably as a response to Chinese assertion of sovereignty over the disputed reef.
- **(28 April)** Philippines denied the reports that Chinese Coast Guard seized control over the mentioned Sandy Cay reef in the South China Sea after its naval forces visited the disputed territory.
- **(29 April)** Southern Theatre Command of China's People Liberation Army (PLA) stated that its air and naval forces conducted routine patrols in the South China Sea as a response to joint US-Philippines patrol in the disputed region that involved three FA-50 fighter jets from the Philippines Air Force, two US B-1B bombers, two F-16s and an F-18 fighter jet.
- **(3 May)** Vietnamese officials sent diplomatic notes to both China and the Philippines regarding their activities at the Sandy Cay reef in the South China Sea and urged both countries to respect Vietnam's sovereignty. Vietnam considers Sandy Cay reef a part of its territory.
- **(5 May)** US and Philippines militaries cancelled a ship-sinking combat exercise after the WW2-era Philippines ship, *BRP Miguel Malvar* (PS-19), accidentally sank just hours before the start of the live-fire exercise. The ship was supposed to be a target during the drill and was decommissioned in the South China Sea by Philippines Navy in 2021.
- **(8 May)** The Philippines Navy accused two Chinese Navy ships of conducting dangerous and aggressive manoeuvres against its patrol near disputed Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea. Meanwhile, Chinese PLA Southern Theatre Command accused Philippines Navy of attempting to invade waters around the disputed territory and confirmed that it mobilised air and naval assets to track and deter the Philippines' patrol.

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- **(9 May)** Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs accused Australia of exacerbating tensions in the South China Sea after Royal Australian Navy's destroyer *HMAS Sydney* linked up with the Philippines' guided missile frigate and both US and Filipino aircraft to conduct joint military exercise.
- **(10 May)** Chinese President Xi Jinping met with chief of Myanmar's military government for the first time since their seizure of power in 2021. President Xi said that China will aid with recovery after the earthquake which hit Myanmar in March and that it will help to end the country's civil war.
- **(12 May)** US Army's 1st Multi-Domain Task Force's 5th Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment fired six rockets into South China Sea from the western coast of Palawan Island. Firing drills were conducted with High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) during recently concluded Balikatan joint military exercises. These firing drills proved that HIMARS, which is usually used for high-precision strikes on ground targets, can also be effective against maritime targets.
- **(14 May)** Vietnamese Navy and Coast Guard contacted European providers of underwater surveillance technology to acquire equipment that should help Vietnam map and secure their territorial waters in the South China Sea and improve their activities in the disputed region.
- **(15 May)** Australia will donate 20 surveillance drones to the Philippines Coast Guard for support of search and rescue, maritime safety and security, and marine environmental protection missions in the South China Sea as a part of joint civil-maritime cooperation agreement.
- **(16 May)** Senior officials from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Republic of Korea (ROK) announced that they will continue to strengthen the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership at the 29th ASEAN-ROK Dialogue in Bangkok. They also discussed current regional and international issues, including those in South China Sea, on the Korean Peninsula, in Myanmar, Ukraine, and the Middle East.
- **(17 May)** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for advance in the military's war preparation during inspection of 1st Air Division's anti-aircraft combat and airstrike drills.

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