
SOUTH CHINA SEA: TENSIONS ERUPT AS BEIJING VESSELS SPOTTED IN PHILIPPINES TERRITORY

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As reported by The Diplomat, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Commander Armand Balilo confirmed the sighting on Monday. The vessel was joined by two ships from the China Coast Guard and two ships with the wartime militia, usually fishing vessels carrying irregular forces. The shoal is covered by both Philippine and Chinese claims on the South China Sea, with the Taiwanese claims also encompassing it.

Since 2012, Beijing and Manila have been at a standoff with Chinese forces regularly sending vessels to patrol the water.

The former refers to the shoal as Huangyan Dao while the latter refers to it as Panatag Shoal (Filipino) or Bajo de Masinloc (Spanish).

The sighting comes in the backdrop of increasing Chinese activity near Pag-asa Island, the largest Philippine outpost in the region in recent months.

The Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte demanded China lay off Pag-asa shortly after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pledged the US would protect the island nation from any armed attack that took place in the South China Sea.

In 2013, the government of Benigno Aquino III actually took China to The Hague over the pressing of excessive maritime claims by China in the Shoal and over The Spratly Islands, also partially claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam.

The tribunal which came down in favour of Manila concluded Beijing had through the operation of its official vessels at Scarborough Shoal from May 2012 onwards, unlawfully prevented Filipino fishermen from engaging in traditional fishing at Scarborough Shoal.

China did not take formally part in the legal proceedings.

Though the decision made no finding on sovereignty, the Duterte administration has not pressed forward with enforcing the ruling, opting not to jeopardise economic and diplomatic ties.

In April, Duterte signed various agreements with China securing investment worth 12 billion dollars (£9.46 billion) that was expected to generate 21,000 jobs.

The PDP-Laban Party Chairperson also warned Philippine forces would be annihilated in a conflict with Chinese forces.

However, former solicitor general Florin Hilbay, who led the legal team in the tribunal accused him of fear mongering over suggestions war could break out.

The waters see one-third of international shipping pass through it, carrying over 3trillion dollars (£2.36trillion) in trade per year.

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1138871/World-War-3-South-China-Sea-latest-news-Philippines-beijing-scarborough-shoal-jingping>

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