

EAST SEA (SOUTH CHINA SEA) STUDIES



E S N A P S H O T

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ACTIVITIES OF THE CLAIMANTS

China

Honorary Kuomintang chairman to visit China

22nd February | China Daily

On February 24th to February 27th, Honorary Kuomintang chairman Lien Chan visited the Chinese mainland, a move analysts said is expected to boost cross-Straits ties. [On February 25th](#), Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China held a meeting with Lien Chan at Beijing. Xi stressed that ""It is the duty of the new CPC leadership to continue promoting the peaceful development of cross-strait ties and the peaceful reunification of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait,". "We will maintain consistency in policies toward Taiwan by unswervingly upholding the one-China principle and continuing to promote cross-strait exchanges and cooperation," he added.

[Link](#)

China's Hainan Province plans to funding for marine economy

23rd February | Xinhua

South China's Hainan Province is planning to boost financial support to develop its marine economy, according to guidelines issued by the provincial government. The guidelines, released by the State Oceanic Administration on February 22nd, said the province will step up funding for fishery, infrastructure building, marine technology and ecological protection. According to the guidelines, inhabitants in the so-called "Sansha", will be able to use Automatic Teller Machines (ATM) and POS (Point of sale) equipment. Also, bank notes will be used to ensure smooth seafood trading in "Sansha".

[Full report](#)

China's new frigate delivered to PLA Navy

26th February | Xinhua

China's first Type 056 stealth frigate was delivered to the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy) in Shanghai on February 25th afternoon. The new frigate requires only one-third of the crew needed by its predecessor, the Type 053, and it is expected to be deployed primarily for escort missions and anti-submarine operations, said the report.



[Full report](#)

China plans military drills to boost combat readiness

26th February | Xinhua

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) will conduct 40 military exercises in 2013 in order to improve its combat abilities, according to the Military Training Department of the PLA General Staff Headquarters. A statement released on February 26th by the department said the PLA will put China's core security-

related interests in a more prominent position and will strengthen live-ammunition and confrontation exercises.

[Full report](#)

China dispatches fleet to patrol South China Sea

28th February | Xinhua

A fleet of Chinese marine surveillance ships departed from Sanya Port in south China's Hainan Province on February 28th morning to carry out regular patrol missions in the South China Sea. The fleet consists of the Haixun 21, Haixun 31 and Haixun 166, the Hainan Maritime Safety Administration said. The missions will strengthen China's maritime law enforcement capacity and test the patrol team's rapid response abilities in the South China Sea.

[Full report](#)

Taiwan to stage live-fire drill in Spratly islands

1st March | GMA Network

Taiwan's coastguard said on March 1st it would stage a live-fire exercise on Ba Binh Island between April 9th and 11th in the Spratly islands. Among other weaponry, the drill will involve 40mm artillery and 120mm mortars, both shipped to the island last year.



[Full report](#)

The Philippines



Philippines slams patrols for Chinese fishers

27th February | Inquirer

On February 26th, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) called on China to “act responsibly” amid simmering tensions in the region over the contested waters, the subject of a Philippine arbitration bid in the United Nations. “We again call on China to respect our territorial sovereignty and exclusive economic zone. The Philippines strongly objects to the Chinese

patrols in the Philippines’ maritime domain in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea)” said DFA spokesperson Assistant Secretary Raul Hernandez.

[Full report](#)

The U.S

Asia rebalance remains U.S. priority amid fiscal woes

27th February | Reuters

The Obama administration policy of shifting its security focus to the Asia-Pacific region will remain on track despite drastic U.S. budget cuts looming this week, the top Pentagon official for Asia said. "The rebalance is a priority and we'll work to see that continue," said Mark Lippert, assistant secretary of defense for Asia and Pacific affairs. Lippert also said this policy, based on shoring up alliances and partnerships and strengthening forward deployments and power projection in Asia, "will continue on in the current form" in the second administration of Barack Obama.

[Full report](#)



REGIONAL SNAPSHOTS

China pledges to strengthen ties with Brunei

27th February | Xinhua

On February 27th, Jia Qinglin, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, met with Brunei's Foreign and Trade Minister Prince Mohamed Bolkiah in Beijing. At the meeting, Jin said that China is willing to work with Brunei, which holds the ASEAN's rotating presidency in 2013, to adhere to the theme of development and cooperation and further promote China-ASEAN relations.

[Full report](#)

China, Indonesia to boost cooperation

28th February | Antara News

On February 28th, at a meeting with Assistant Chief of Staff of Indonesian Navy for Operations Didit Herdiawan, Chinese Deputy Naval Chief of Staff Vice Admiral Xu Hongmeng said that Indonesia and China play an important role particularly in securing sea lanes in the Asia-Pacific region. "The Indonesian and Chinese Navies can enhance and expand the existing cooperation, ranging from mutual visits by the two countries` military officers, exchange of military officers to more strategic operational order," he said.

[Full report](#)

Japan Coast Guard visits Vietnam's southern cities

28th February | Vietnamplus

A delegation from the Japan Coast Guard, led by Vice Commandant Kiyoshi Saishoji visited the Vietnam's southern city of Vung Tau and Ho Chi Minh City, from February 27th. The visit, which will end on March 1st, offers both Japanese and Vietnamese marine police forces to exchange experiences, contributing to strengthening cooperation among law enforcement forces in the region and the world.

[Full report](#)



COMMENTARIES & ANALYSES

Brunei takes on the challenges of chairing ASEAN in 2013

By Murray Hiebert, Jeremiah O. Magpile



Brunei Darussalam, the smallest country in Southeast Asia with a population of only 400,000, faces some daunting challenges this year as it chairs the 10-country ASEAN grouping. For starters, Brunei must help manage tensions regarding the strategic South China Sea following last year's acrimony after then-chair Cambodia, a major recipient of assistance from Beijing, twice sought to limit discussion of China's assertive actions in the disputed sea. This prompted protests from several Southeast Asian countries. Second, with the group's goal of achieving an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by the end of 2015, Brunei will need to press its neighbors to get cracking on implementing the agreed-upon economic road map. A third task will involve keeping China and the United States engaged in the East Asia Summit (EAS). Many Southeast Asians wonder what impact the departure of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Kurt Campbell will have on the U.S. rebalance to Asia and U.S. relations with ASEAN. How well Brunei performs will depend at least in part on the diplomatic skills of its Foreign Ministry. Foreign Minister Prince Mohamed Bolkiah advocates what he calls "defense diplomacy," a doctrine that promotes regular and frequent dialogue and personal relations among the parties. It is these skills that the foreign minister will try to use to tamp down the dispute.

[Full article](#)

Look East Policy compulsions

By P K Ghosh

The strategic indicators that India may be dragged to become deeply involved in the South China Sea imbroglio and a likely conflict tinderbox waiting to explode were clear and ominous for anyone trying to decipher them. The comments of the Indian naval chief in which he has reiterated that the Indian Navy will be ready to send warships to protect Indian interests in the South China Sea evolved into a major controversy. The other indicator was provided by the Indo-ASEAN summit that was hosted by Delhi. The event sought to re-affirm India's emerging role in the region with a renewed focus on its 'Look East policy' but equally it was to offset partially the overwhelming shadow of the 'elephant in the room - China'. Hence while trade enhancement was an important issue at the summit it was 'freedom of navigation' and maritime security that struck an important chord with the ASEAN seeking greater involvement of India in the volatile South China Sea. Indian interests in the region are not only because

nearly 50 per cent of its trade to the east passes through this turbulent area but also since it has made considerable investments in exploration of energy resource. Thus there is a necessity to ensure freedom of navigation through this region as well as to ensure that its legitimate national assets are protected and its national and strategic interests are safeguarded. India as an external power is keen to play the role of a credible stabilising factor in the region and cannot afford to be ambivalent. Walking the thin line between the desires of the ASEAN to play a more prominent role and safeguarding its own strategic interests, the advantages of taking a stand are many. Given the Chinese foray into India's strategic backyard - the Indian Ocean - such a venture in the South China Sea will give India strategic leverage. Hence joining the fray is not an option but an imperative to safeguard Indian strategic interests and aspirations.

[Full article](#)

The United States heads to the South China Sea

By *Michael T. Klare*

From the perspective of the region's major actors, the United States can hardly be viewed as a neutral, disinterested party. In China's eyes, it is partisan in the island disputes and an obstacle to achieving China's legitimate objectives. Indeed, many in China believe that Washington is actively spurring Japan and the Philippines to assume a more assertive stance on the disputed territories as a way of constraining China's rise. This, in turn, is feeding distrust and resentment of the United States, and increasing the likelihood that future incidents at sea -- however they are provoked -- could spark a clash between Chinese and U.S. vessels.



For the other actors, the United States is a source of moral succor, military aid, and, if things ever get totally out of control, direct combat support. In other words, regardless of whether it was Obama's intention when he pivoted to the Pacific, he has surely increased the chances that rash and potentially incendiary behavior by any one of the countries hashing it out in the South and East China seas could lead to war.

[Full analysis](#)

Background Briefing: South China Sea: China Rejects UNCLOS Arbitral Tribunal

By *Carlyle A. Thayer*

China said Tuesday it rejected the Philippines' attempt to seek international arbitration over conflicting claims to territory in the South China Sea. Mr Thayer provided of your assessment of the following issues. Q1: Given the status quo, can the tribunal be convened and proceed in the absence of China? It is up to the chairman of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea to nominate five persons to form the Arbitral Tribunal upon a formal request by the Philippines. The Arbitral Tribunal must undertake two duties before it can proceed. First, it must decide whether or not the Philippines' Claim and Notification is an abuse of international law. Second, the Arbitral Tribunal must decide if it has jurisdiction in this case. Q2: If the tribunal rules in favour of the Philippines, would the verdict be binding? How would it be enforced? UNCLOS states that the decision of the Arbitral Tribunal is binding on all members. But UNCLOS contains no provision for enforcement or compliance. The Arbitral Tribunal has been asked to rule on several points of international law. Some of its decisions may favour the Philippines but other decisions may not. Q3: What if China refuses to observe the verdict? The

Arbitral Tribunal has been asked to rule on several points of international law. Some of its decisions may favour the Philippines but other decisions may not. If China decides to brazen it out and continue to occupy features illegally there is not much a regional state realistically could do. If a state attempted to use force it would be an unequal confrontation that China would win. China would undermine its credibility and prestige, however. *Q4*: Should the fact that China rejects such mediation serve as a discouraging factor for other claimants like Vietnam to file a similar lawsuit in the future? Yes, if China refused to comply with the finding of the Arbitral Tribunal, other states would still face the situation where China asserts sovereign jurisdiction over the South China Sea. It should be noted that the Philippines has been clever not to challenge those areas where China has exempted itself from binding arbitration. The various arbitration provisions of UNCLOS are concerned with adjudicating disputes over maritime jurisdiction but not sovereignty. Vietnam cannot resort to UNCLOS to establish its claims to sovereignty over the Paracel Islands, for example. That can only be decided between China and Vietnam bilaterally or by a mutually agreed third party.

[Full article](#)