



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on January 27, 2024

## China Slams U.S. “Provocation” in South China Sea, Pledges Further Drills

China slammed the United States on Jan 25 for causing “trouble and provocation” after the U.S. Navy sailed its first warship through the Taiwan Strait since presidential and parliamentary elections on the self-governed island.

China [claims Taiwan as its own](#) and has never excluded the use of force to bring the island under its control. Taiwan says only the island’s people can decide their future and rebuffs Beijing’s claims.

“US warships and planes have caused trouble and provocation on China’s doorstep, and carried out large-scale, high-frequency activities in waters and airspace around China,” Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian told reporters at a monthly briefing.

The U.S. Navy said the destroyer USS *John Finn* transited a corridor in the Taiwan Strait that was “beyond the territorial sea of any coastal state.”

Colonel Wu said China’s reaction in driving away the ship was “justified, reasonable, professional and restrained.”

He elaborated that China’s military will “continue to organize relevant military operations” around the Taiwan Strait on a regular basis as part of its training, as analysts predict frequent drills in the run-up to Taiwanese President-elect William Lai’s inauguration in May.

When questioned about a potential meeting between newly appointed Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun and his U.S. counterpart, Wu said China “displays an open attitude to bilateral dialogues at all levels,” without confirming any meeting.

The Chinese and U.S. militaries conducted two days of talks in Washington earlier in January after both sides resumed high-level military contact last autumn. Pentagon officials say communication between the two militaries is key to preventing a miscalculation from escalating into conflict.

Separately, regarding the Philippines’ plans to reinforce construction in the contested Spratly Islands, Wu accused Manila of “violating China’s sovereignty and making provocations in the South China Sea” while “in collusion with external powers.”

The Philippines armed forces will ensure the “unimpeded and peaceful” exploration and exploitation of natural resources within the country’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as it shifts its focus to external defense, Manila’s defense secretary said.

“We are evolving into a defense concept that projects our power into areas where we must, by



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constitutional fiat and duty, protect and preserve our resources,” Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro told the Manila Overseas Press Club on the night of January 23.

Manila regards the portion of the South China Sea that is within its EEZ as the West Philippine Sea, where it has had a [series of clashes with China](#), with both sides accusing the other of provoking conflict.

The Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 said China’s claims had no legal basis, a ruling Beijing rejects.

Teodoro added that the Philippines will “increase the tempo” of activities with allies and major partners in the West Philippines Sea and other parts of the country and “exercise these partnerships to the full.”

The territorial dispute has obstructed plans by a Philippine firm to drill for oil and natural gas on the Reed Bank in the South China Sea.

“We are not the ones encroaching on the EEZ of another country’s sea. The encroacher has a vast area of sea,” Teodoro said.

“We do not want a fight, we want peace, but it should be based on international law and sustainability,” he added.

“We will not bend over backward.”

China and the Philippines [agreed last week to improve maritime communication](#) and to properly manage conflicts and differences in the South China Sea via friendly talks.

On January 24, the Chinese foreign ministry said China’s claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea were backed by “history” after Vietnam over the weekend repeated it had ample evidence to claim sovereignty over the islands.

The Paracel and Spratly Islands, known as the Hoang Sa and Trong Sa islands in Vietnam, are in the South China Sea, a busy global maritime waterway almost all of which is claimed by China. Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Brunei are other rival claimants.

Vietnam has “full legal basis and ample historical evidence” to assert its sovereignty over the two island chains, its foreign ministry said on January 20, in response to a query from the media on China’s “invasion” of the Paracel Islands in 1974.

“Viet Nam’s sovereignty over the Hoang Sa Islands has been established since at least the 17th century in accordance with international law, and exercised in a peaceful, continuous and public manner by successive Vietnamese states,” it said.

However, the Chinese foreign ministry said China’s claims were “fully supported by history and jurisprudence.”

“China was the first to discover, name, develop and manage these islands and archipelagos, and continue to exercise sovereign jurisdiction over them,” said Wang Wenbin, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, at a regular news conference.

“China always opposes relevant countries’ illegal claims on China’s territory and will continue to firmly safeguard its sovereignty.”

Vietnam’s re-assertion of its claims coincides with months of claims by the Philippines in other parts of the South China Sea after dramatic maritime skirmishes between Chinese and Philippine vessels near



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contested territory.

In December, Chinese authoritarian leader Xi Jinping visited Vietnam and inked an agreement to move toward the building of a community with a "[shared future](#)" between the two countries.

Regarding the India-China border dispute, Wu said border tensions were "an issue left over from history and not the whole of China-India relations," and said it was "unwise and inappropriate" for New Delhi to associate the issue with bilateral relations.

A senior Indian official said in January that India could loosen its heightened scrutiny of Chinese investments if the border remained peaceful, the first indication that the four-year-old curbs could be lifted.

China also denied that it has supplied any weapons or equipment to the Middle East conflict, after reports that the Israeli military discovered Hamas militants using Chinese-made weaponry in the Gaza Strip.



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