

Chinese and Philippine Vessels Collide in Disputed South China Sea

written by Ezba Walayat | October 30, 2023



Introduction

Chinese and Philippine vessels collided twice on Sunday, October 23, 2023, in the South China Sea. The first collision involved a Chinese Coast Guard vessel and a Philippines-contracted resupply boat. The second collision involved a Chinese maritime militia boat and a Philippine coast guard ship. The collisions took place near Second Thomas Shoal, which is located within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Philippines was trying to resupply sailors on the Sierra Madre, a ship it grounded there in 1999 to assert its sovereignty over the shoal. There are regular maritime incidents between the two countries involving coast guard, military, and supply vessels, and both sides assert sovereignty over certain areas of the South China Sea.

Importance of South China Sea

The South China Sea is a vital shipping route and is believed to contain rich oil and gas reserves. It is also a strategically important region, located near major air and sea lanes. The recent collisions are the latest in a series of incidents that have raised concerns about China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. China has claimed sovereignty over nearly the entire sea, despite competing claims from other countries, including the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei.

Accusations by China and the Philippines

China and the Philippines each charged one another for escalating tensions. The Philippines has accused China of engaging in "dangerous and provocative actions" and of violating its sovereignty. The defense

minister of the Philippines stated that the country will increase its multilateral efforts, including freedom of navigation patrols in the South China Sea, and expressed the hope that other nations would join the fight. China, on the other hand, accused the Philippine vessel of “deliberately” causing difficulty by reversing in a “premeditated manner” into a Chinese fishing vessel.



(FILES) (Photo by Ted ALJIBE / AFP)

China’s Response to the United States

The U.S. Department of State said “The U.S. stands with Philippine allies in the face of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) Coast Guard and maritime militia’s dangerous and unlawful actions.” Furthermore, the U.S. President Joe Biden said, “Any attack on the Filipino aircraft, vessels, or armed forces will invoke our Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines,” at a joint press conference with the prime minister of Australia.

In response, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement, the U.S. has no business interfering in disputes between China and the Philippines. “The U.S. is not party to the South China Sea issue, it has no right to get involved in a problem between China and the Philippines.” To conclude, it is uncertain how the China-Philippine conflict will develop in light of U.S. involvement. China and the Philippines have become more assertive in the South China Sea, with neither country willing to back down from their claims, fueling competition for resources and maritime influence in the region.