
China warns US against 'minor' incidents that could 'spark war'

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On Tuesday, the Aegis destroyer USS Lassen entered within 12 nautical miles of Subi Reef, an undersea cliff in the South China Sea, which Beijing turned into an artificial island. The destroyer was reportedly traveling with a Navy surveillance airplane near the contested Spratly Islands. China views the man-made creation as part of its territory and claims territorial sovereignty over the waters surrounding it.

Addressing the issue of US intrusion on Thursday in a video teleconference, Admiral Wu Shengli warned the chief of US naval operations Admiral John Richardson to refrain from further "provocative acts".

"If the United States continues with these kinds of dangerous, provocative acts, there could well be a seriously pressing situation between frontline forces from both sides on the sea and in the air, or even a minor incident that sparks war," Wu said, according to a Chinese naval statement.

"(I) hope the US side cherishes the good situation between the Chinese and US navies that has not come easily and avoids these kinds of incidents from happening again," Wu added.

Commenting on the bilateral exchange during the teleconference, an American official told Reuters that both sides agreed to avoid clashes. The US and Chinese navies also decided to maintain dialogue and follow protocols stipulated under the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES).

“They agreed that it’s very important that both sides continue to use the protocols under the CUES agreement when they’re operating close to keep the chances for misunderstanding and any kind of provocation from occurring,” said the official.

China’s Navy commander Wu Shengli to talk to US Navy’s CNO today on US warship in **#SouthChinaSea**: Defense Ministry



The US Navy stressed that it is entitled to *“protect the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea and airspace guaranteed to all nations under international law.”*

Following the incident Beijing had summoned the American ambassador to protest the *“provocative”* maneuver that according to China’s foreign ministry placed personnel and infrastructure on the island in jeopardy. Close to 200 Chinese troops are believed to be stationed at Subi reef. The reef is also claimed by Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Subi Reef lies 500 nautical miles away from Hainan Island, the nearest Chinese shoreline, but only 230 nautical miles from the island of Palawan in the Philippines which disputes Beijing’s territorial claim.

On Thursday, the court in the Hague ruled that it has jurisdiction to hear territorial claims that were filed by the Philippines over the disputed areas in the South China Sea. The UN-based body will hold further hearings to settle the issue but they will not focus on sovereignty but rather economic entitlements.

“This arbitration concerns the role of ‘historic rights’ and the source of maritime entitlements in the South China Sea, the status of certain maritime features in the South China Sea and the maritime entitlements they are capable of generating, and the lawfulness of certain actions by China in the South China Sea that are alleged by the Philippines to violate the Convention,” a

press release issued by the Permanent Court of Arbitration read.
