



AS IT IS

Tensions Rise Between China, Philippines over Disputed Area

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Tensions have again risen between China and the Philippines over a disputed area of the South China Sea.

In 1999, the Philippines ran aground an old warship from World War II on a small piece of land called the Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea.

The move was to reinforce its claims of **sovereignty**, or control, of the area within the country's **exclusive** economic zone. However, China claims the Philippines is illegally holding the land.

Since then, a number of soldiers have lived on the ship. Boats from the Philippines come often to exchange soldiers and bring supplies.

On August 5, the Philippines military said China interfered with its supply ships. They said a Chinese boat **sprayed** them with a water cannon. No one was hurt, but only one Philippines boat completed its resupply mission. The Philippines called the action "excessive and offensive."

China said the incident was a "warning" and that it has exercised "**rational** restraint." It also accused the Philippines of using the incident as a way to get support from the United States and other allies.

On Tuesday, China again asked the Philippines to remove the old warship. Its embassy in Manila also released a statement criticizing other nations for getting involved in the dispute between the countries. It said other nations are "making **mischief**" and "sowing **discord**" in the South China Sea.

Security experts who follow the issue say China wants the ship, called the Sierra Madre, to move so it can claim the area for itself.

Rommel Ong is a security expert and retired vice commander of the Philippine Navy. He said his country needs to “re-establish control” of the shoal to keep supplying the Sierra Madre. The last time China aimed a water cannon at a ship from the Philippines was in November 2021.

Collin Koh is a security expert at Singapore’s Rajaratnam School of International Studies. He said China would not want to use more force to occupy the shoal. Such an action could launch a defense treaty signed by the Philippines in 1951 requiring the United States to offer military support.

Koh said: “There’s probably no question about whether China has the means” to do something more than shoot water. But he believes China is worried about “political risks.”

Jonathan Malaya of the Philippines National Security Council urged China “not to **escalate** matters and put lives at risk.”

And Japan and France, through their embassies in Manila, have expressed concern over China's recent actions. The two also repeated their support for a 2016 ruling against China’s claim over all of the South China Sea.

I’m Dan Friedell.

Dan Friedell adapted this story for Learning English based on a report by Reuters.

Words in This Story

sovereignty *-n.* a country’s independence and right to govern itself

exclusive *-adj.* having the right to do something alone, something no one else can claim

spray *-v.* to shoot a stream of liquid

rational -*adj.* thoughtful and measured

mischievous -*n.* activities meant to provoke a response

discord -*n.* a situation where many people or groups are upset with each other

escalate -*v.* to push something to a more serious or dangerous level

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