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Recent News in Global Maritime Affairs

[1] Climate Change and Blue Carbon Economy [1]

[58% of ocean suffered at least one marine heatwave event in 2022](#)

April 22 - *Jara News*
[Global]

According to the recently released *State of the Global Climate 2022* report, in 2022, 58% and 25% of the ocean surface suffered from one or more marine heatwave events or marine cold spells, respectively. Also, an estimated 36% of the rise in sea level in 2022 was specifically credited to ice loss from glaciers in Greenland and Antarctica.

[Cross-sectional research into mangrove blue carbon: A tale from two islands](#)

April 19 - *Forest News*
[Southeast Asia, East Asia]

Lead researchers in a multidisciplinary research study spoke at a conference in Indonesia commenting on the state of mangrove studies in Indonesia. One researcher summarized that the “best course is, indeed, to rehabilitate mangrove areas to their original state with a management model that aligns conservation with economic activities to meet the needs of people.”

[New coral reef discovered in Ecuador's Galapagos Islands](#)

April 18 - *Reuters*
[South America]

Ecuador's environment ministry announced on April 17 that a deepwater scientist found a new coral reef, approximately two kilometers in length and containing a wide variety of marine life, near the Galapagos Islands. It is being regarded as an important, valuable and even surprising discovery because many deepwater systems are already degraded.

[Large seagrass bed discovered in Cornish bay](#)

April 16 - BBC

[Europe]

With the assistance of acoustic surveys, a seagrass bed of nearly 900 acres (360 hectares) was discovered in the St. Austell Bay in Cornwall, England. The discovery and accompanying report, which also notes the 122 different species of plants and animals found in the seabed, was published by Cornwall Wildlife Trust and Natural England.

[First Carbon Credit Methodology for Seagrass Developed in France](#)

April 11 - *Carbon Credits*

[Europe]

Four organizations in Europe—EcoAct, Digital Realty France, Schneider Electric France and the Calanques National Park—have come together to create the first carbon credit accounting methodology in Europe for protecting seagrass beds that is expected to allow French companies to use the credits to offset emissions of up to 24,000 tCO₂e per year.

[The Nature Conservancy And Planet Collaborate To Map Blue Carbon](#)

April 5 - Planet

[Global]

Planet announced the details of how they have been helping accelerate The Nature Conservancy's Blue Carbon Explorer, a Google Maps engine tool that aims to map mangrove and seagrass blue carbon around the world. "These ecosystems really are a great ocean-climate link, and part of our strategy is to unlock this blue carbon potential for climate mitigation," said Lindsey Smart, Climate and Ocean Scientist at The Nature Conservancy.

[Maps of sharks' journeys show marine protected areas alone won't save them](#)

April 5 - *Mongabay*

[South America]

Recent research shows that silky sharks may swim for longer distances and travel to a wider range of waters than previously thought. The finding could mean that current conservation methods—namely, the set-up of discrete marine protected areas—could be insufficient to prevent the species' extinction.

['Scary' new data on the last ice age raises concerns about future sea levels](#)

April 5 - *The Washington Post* [Paywall]

[The Antarctic, Europe, Global]

According to a new study, a giant ice sheet in Antarctica is retreating 2,000 feet a day. This indicates that melting ice could raise global sea levels at an unprecedented fast rate, and would lead to serious, “scary” consequences if the trend of global warming cannot be reversed.

[CO2 in, methane out? Study highlights complexity of coastal carbon sinks](#)

March 29 - *Mongabay*

[Europe]

Researchers in the Baltic Sea found that, while blue carbon coastal ecosystems (mangrove forests, seagrass meadows, salt marshes, etc.) absorb significant amounts of carbon, these ecosystems might also be related to the release of methane, another greenhouse gas. It is yet unclear how methane was released from or near coastal ecosystems and to what extent.

[2] Maritime Economy and Shipping [2]

[UAE container ship docks in Kuwait opening direct maritime trade route](#)

April 17 - *Zawya*

[Middle East]

On April 17, after a container freight ship of the Abu Dhabi Ports Group docked at Al-Shuwaikh Port in Kuwait, the Acting Director General of Kuwait Ports Authority Issa Al-Mulla commented that the docking marked the inauguration of a direct maritime navigational route between Khalifa Port and Al-Shuwaikh Port.

[Germany reexamines Cosco Shipping's investment in Hamburg port](#)

April 16 - *Seatrade Maritime News*

[Europe]

Leaders in Germany are reassessing an investment deal, originally agreed upon in September 2021, that would allow China's COSCO Shipping firm to buy a 35% stake in the German port of Hamburg.

[Schneider Electric takes on feasibility study for UK's first green maritime corridor](#)

April 14 - *Ship Technology*

[Europe]

Schneider Electric, a French-based multinational company, will be a “technical partner” in an eight-month long consultancy project to design and deliver the UK's first green maritime corridor between Dover in the United Kingdom and the ports of Calais and Dunkirk in France. The new project is part of the UK's Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition (CMDC).

[Textron awarded US Navy mine sweep system contract](#)

April 12 - *Sea Technology*

[United States, Global]

Private company Textron Systems secured a 36-month, \$20.8 million contract to create the U.S. Navy's next-generation mine sweep system (MAGNUSS) for the Common Unmanned Surface Vessel platform. Collaborating with General Dynamics-Applied Physical Sciences Corporation and American Superconductor, the system aims to safely and efficiently neutralize mines.

[Maersk divestment to further offshore solutions](#)

April 11 - *Sea Technology*

[Global]

A.P. Moller-Maersk will divest Maersk Supply Service (MSS), a leading offshore marine services provider, to its parent company A.P. Moller Holding. The deal completes Maersk's strategy to separate energy-related activities and focus on integrated logistics. MSS will continue to trade under its current name, servicing the offshore wind industry as a key growth area.

[Exclusive: China plans \\$500 million subsea internet cable to rival US-backed project](#)

April 6 - *Reuters*

[China, Asia, Middle East, Europe]

Three of China's top state-owned telecommunications companies are planning to lay a \$500 million undersea fiber-optic internet cable network to connect Asia, the Middle East and Europe. So far, this project appears very similar to a separate U.S.-backed project and is seen by some as a sign of an "intensifying tech war."

[Congress Seeks Details on Spying Risks From Chinese Cargo Cranes](#)

April 3 - *The Wall Street Journal* [Paywall]

[United States, China]

U.S. lawmakers are concerned about potential security vulnerabilities from Chinese-made cranes at American ports and are working to investigate potential risks to U.S. cybersecurity and critical infrastructure. Currently, about 80% of cranes at U.S. ports use Chinese software from a company with ties to China's military.

[In Croatia, U.S. Campaigned to Stop Chinese Bid on Key Port](#)

April 2 - *The Wall Street Journal* [Paywall]

[Europe, China, United States]

A U.S.-led campaign, with support from the European Union, prevented Chinese state-owned firms from securing a 50-year deal to build and operate a container terminal in Croatia's Rijeka port. Using diplomacy and declassified intelligence, the U.S. backed an alternative offer by Danish company A.P.

Moller-Maersk. Croatia eventually awarded the €2.7 billion concession to Maersk's APM Terminals and Croatian firm ENNA Logic.

[Govt to Identify 100 Districts to Develop as Export Hubs: DGFT](#)

April 1 - *The Economic Times* [Paywall]

[South Asia]

The Indian government plans to designate nearly 100 districts as export hubs, involving young officials for a bottom-up approach, according to Directorate General of Foreign Trade Santosh Kumar Sarangi.

[Philippine fishermen struggle as oil spill keeps them ashore](#)

March 29 - *The Jakarta Post* [Paywall]

[Southeast Asia]

Four weeks after it sank, a tanker originally carrying 210,000 gallons (800,000 liters) of thick oil continues to leak pollutants into renowned marine life habitats off of the Philippines' central island of Mindoro, severely and visually harming the local fishing industry.

[3] Ocean Governance and Maritime Cooperation [3]

[Philippines Opens 'More Lines Of Communication' With China To Resolve Maritime Conflict](#)

April 23 - *qCaptain*

[Southeast Asia, China]

Following his meeting with China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang in Manila, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said the Philippines and China have agreed to establish "more lines of communications" to "talk directly to one another and iron things out" over issues related to the West Philippine Sea. Minister Qin said China is also ready to "truly implement a consensus."

[Việt Nam protests China's unilateral fishing ban in East Sea](#)

April 20 - *Viet Nam News*

[Southeast Asia, China]

Speaking during a regular press conference in Hanoi, the deputy spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeated Vietnam's protest of China's unilateral, annual fishing ban, explaining among other concerns that it "violates our sovereignty towards the Hoàng Sa (Paracel) archipelago." This year, the ban is set to run from May 1 to August 16 across several parts of the South China Sea.

[South Korea repels North Korean patrol boat that crossed sea border](#)

April 16 - PBS News Hour

[East Asia]

While also following a Chinese fishing boat, the South Korean military fired warning shots in an effort to deter a North Korean patrol boat that crossed the disputed western sea boundary. There was no direct firing between the South and North Korean vessels, but the South Korean vessel did collide with the Chinese fishing boat.

[Australia Says No Single Power Should Dominate Indo-Pacific](#)

April 16 - Bloomberg [Paywall]

[Pacific Ocean, Southeast Asia]

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong has come forward to oppose the concept of a single power dominating the Indo-Pacific region, stating that “countries don’t want to live in a closed, hierarchical region where the rules are dictated by a single major power to suit its own interests.”

[Top French court orders closure of fisheries amid mass dolphin deaths](#)

April 14 - Mongabay

[Europe]

In a sign of tightening maritime regulations, France’s Council of State has ordered the closure of areas to fisheries during portions of the year to prevent injuring or killing dolphins during fishing activities.

[Malaysia says it will protect its rights in South China Sea](#)

April 8 - Reuters

[Southeast Asia]

Malaysia's foreign ministry said in a statement that Malaysia is “unequivocally and firmly committed to protecting Malaysia's sovereignty, sovereign rights and interests in its maritime areas in the South China Sea.” The statement came after Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim suggested that he was “ready to negotiate” with China on disputed oil and gas exploration rights.

[China Ready to Speed Up Talks With Asean Over South China Sea](#)

April 1 - Bloomberg [Paywall]

[China, Southeast Asia, South China Sea]

Beijing announced that it is prepared to speed up consultations with Southeast Asian states for a code of conduct to cover the South China Sea. The remarks came from Chinese Premier Li Qiang during a recent visit to Beijing by Malaysian Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim.

[Deep-sea mining meeting closes without resolving whether mining can start in July](#)

March 31 - *Mongabay*

[Global]

During meetings of the International Seabed Authority to last from March 7-31, member states remain divided on whether to approve certain deep-sea mining practices. According to observers, the meeting concluded with inconclusive results and it remains ambiguous whether the deep-sea mining in question is authorized to begin in July 2023.

[4] Maritime Security and Defense [4]

[China sends 12 military aircraft, 4 ships around Taiwan, issues navigation warning in Yellow Sea](#)

April 18 - *Taiwan News*

[East Asia, China]

On the evening of April 17, China's Shandong Maritime Safety Administration warned that its military would be conducting "major military activities" in the Yellow Sea the following morning for four hours and declared a navigation warning. Meanwhile, in the hours before the declared warning was set to begin, 12 Chinese military aircraft and four ships were detected around Taiwan, according to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense.

[Taiwan suspects Chinese ships cut islands' internet cables](#)

April 18 - *AP News*

[East Asia, China]

Taiwan's National Communications Commission said Chinese fishing and cargo ships are suspected of cutting internet cables in Matsu, a Taiwanese island whose residents rely on two submarine internet cables leading to Taiwan's main island.

[US, allies stage drills as N. Korea warns of security crisis](#)

April 17 - *AP News*

[United States, East Asia]

China's PLA was put on "high alert at all times" after the U.S. sent its guided-missile destroyer the USS *Milius* through the Taiwan Strait on April 16 in what the U.S. Navy defines as a "routine" transit in international waters.

[Russia puts Pacific Fleet on high alert in surprise inspection](#)

April 15 - *The Japan Times* [Paywall]

[Russia, Pacific Ocean]

In an interview on state television, Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu explained how Russia put its Pacific naval fleet on high alert as part of a surprise inspection "to increase the ability of the Armed Forces to repel the aggression of a probable enemy from the direction of ocean and sea."

[China says Taiwan encirclement drills a 'serious warning'](#)

April 12 - *AP News*

[China, East Asia]

On April 12, China said that the three days of "large-scale air and sea exercises" that simulated an encirclement of Taiwan were intended as a "serious warning" to pro-independence leaders and supporters. Having ended on April 10, the drills directly followed Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California.

[Carrier USS George H.W. Bush Leaves Mediterranean Sea After 230 Days](#)

April 12 - *USNI News*

[United States, the Mediterranean]

After 230 days in the Mediterranean Sea, the George H.W. Bush (CVN-77) carrier strike group is sailing back to Virginia as of April 19, leaving no U.S. carrier in the Mediterranean region for the first time since December 2021.

[US, Philippines hold largest war drills near disputed waters](#)

April 11 - *AP News*

[United States, Southeast Asia]

On April 11, U.S. and Philippine military forces launched their annual Balikatan combat exercise, which will run up to April 28. This year's is the largest joint exercise between the two in decades, involving more than 17,600 military personnel.

[South China Sea: PLA forces tail US warship near disputed Spratly Islands as live-fire drills around Taiwan enter day 3](#)

April 10 - *South China Morning Post* [Paywall]

[South China Sea, United States, China]

Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS *Milius* sailed within 12 nautical miles of Mischief Reef, a key man-made island in South China Sea controlled by China, as part of a freedom of navigation operation. In response, China said the U.S. Navy "illegally intruded" and reiterated that "China has indisputable sovereignty over islands in the South China Sea and their nearby waters."

[North Korea conducts another underwater nuclear drone test](#)

April 8 - *The Japan Times* [Paywall]
[East Asia]

North Korea completed an underwater nuclear-capable drone test, with North Korea state media claiming that the drone cruised 1,000 kilometers for 71 hours and 6 minutes and successfully hit a simulated target.

[U.S. Sends Attack Submarine to Middle East as Tensions Rise Between Iran and Israel](#)

April 8 - *The New York Times* [Paywall]
[Middle East, United States]

On April 8, the U.S. Navy announced it sent an attack submarine to the Middle East following a warning of increased tensions between Iran and Israel.

[Chinese Naval Surveillance Ship Docks in South African Port](#)

April 5 - *Bloomberg* [Paywall]
[China, Africa]

The *Yuan Wang 5*, a Chinese surveillance ship that can reportedly track rocket and spacecraft launches, docked at South Africa's eastern port of Durban. The docking, which follows an increased level of joint naval activities between South Africa and China as well as another case of Iranian warships docking in Cape Town, has brought concerns from observers.

[Philippines Announce 4 New Locations to Host U.S. Troops](#)

April 3 - *USNI News*
[Southeast Asia, United States]

On March 3, the Philippines announced four more locations that will be hosting U.S. troops under the bilateral Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). Two of these locations will be in the province of Cagayan, and the other two will be in the municipality of Gamu and province of Palawan.

[Six crew members kidnapped after Gulf of Guinea pirate attack](#)

March 31 - *Alarabiya News*
[Africa, Europe]

In mid-March, the Liberian-flagged oil and chemical tanker *Monjasa Reformer* was hijacked by armed pirates while transiting approximately 140 miles off the coast through the Gulf of Guinea, with six of the 16 crew members being kidnapped. The tanker was temporarily unknown, though it was later found by the French navy off the coast of Sao Tome and Principe.

[AUKUS Agreement Will Help Deter China from Taiwan Invasion, Says Former PACOM CO](#)

March 31 - USNI News

[United States, Indo-Pacific]

Speaking at a think tank event in Washington, D.C., former commander of the U.S. Pacific Command Harry Harris said the technology-sharing AUKUS agreement “will serve certainly as a deterrent in the mindset of the Chinese military when they consider things like acting against their neighbors, acting on the global stage in negative and nefarious ways.”

Peer-Reviewed Research on Maritime Issues

- Government Release: Australian Government, Defence - [“National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023”](#) [April 24]
- Government Release: Group of Seven - [“G7 Japan 2023 - Foreign Ministers’ Communiqué”](#) [April 18]
- Government Release: U.S. Department of State - [“Renewal of the Charter for the Shipping Coordinating Committee”](#) [April 7]
- Government Release: U.S. Congressional Research Service - [“Navy LPD-17 Flight II and LHA Amphibious Ship Programs: Background and Issues for Congress”](#) [Updated March 31]
- Government Release: U.S. Congressional Research Service - [“Coast Guard Polar Security Cutter \(Polar Icebreaker\) Program: Background and Issues for Congress”](#) [Updated March 30]
- Press Release: Government of Western Australia - [“Consultation to improve protection of shipwrecks in WA waters”](#) [April 11]
- Press Release: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia - [“Malaysia’s Position on the South China Sea”](#) [April 8]
- Press Release: U.S. Embassy in the Philippines - [“Philippine, U.S. troops to hold largest ever Balikatan Exercise from April 11 to 28”](#) [April 4]
- Press Release: United Kingdom National Oceanography Centre - [“New research set to improve vital hurricane forecasts”](#) [April 3]
- Podcast: *The Economist* [“What does Kinmen island reveal about China’s plans for taking Taiwan?”](#) [April 18]
- Podcast: CIMSEC [“Sea Control 425 - Sweden’s Navy in NATO with Dr. Sebastian Bruns”](#) [April 6]
- Journal Article: [“Assessing the impact of the global subsea telecommunications network on sedimentary organic carbon stocks”](#) [*Nature* - April 12]
- Opinion: [“Shoulder-to-shoulder”](#) [*Manila Standard* - April 24]
- Opinion: [“Op-Ed: Outsiders Needed to Digitalize Ocean Freight Industry”](#) [*The Maritime Executive* - April 20]
- Opinion: [“Safe Harbors: Securing Ports to Protect the Nation’s Critical Maritime Infrastructure”](#) [MITRE - April 19]
- Opinion: [“The US is about to blow up a fake warship in the South China Sea - but naval rivalry with Beijing is very real and growing”](#) [*The Conversation* - April 19]
- Opinion: [“Blue carbon is a natural climate solution with big potential”](#) [*Popular Science* - April 17]

- Opinion: [“New EU maritime security strategy: adjusting the compass?”](#) [International Institute for Strategic Studies - April 11]
- Opinion: [“South China Sea: Asean needs to compromise with China to settle protracted code of conduct dispute”](#) [South China Morning Post - April 11] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“United States Sends Armed Submarine to the Middle East as Tensions with Tehran Escalate”](#) [IR Insider - April 10]
- Opinion: [“The Case for Capping Sea-Level Rise: A More Tangible Way to Measure the Harm From Climate Change”](#) [Foreign Affairs - April 3] [Paywall]
- Opinion: [“California Salmon Stocks Are Crashing. A Fishing Ban Looks Certain.”](#) [The New York Times - April 3] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“Trading Water for Sun: How the Abraham Accords opened the door for a green energy exchange between Israel and Jordan.”](#) [The Wilson Quarterly - Spring 2023]
- Analysis: [“The Challenge of Blue Carbon”](#) [Nautilus - April 21]
- Analysis: [“Charting fuel choices as the shipping industry sails toward net zero”](#) [McKinsey & Company - April 20]
- Analysis: [“The Impact of Conflict on Trade”](#) [CIMSEC - April 20]
- Analysis: [“Ukraine war: The Russian ships accused of North Sea sabotage”](#) [BBC - April 19]
- Analysis: [“The AUKUS Deal and India’s Submarine Dilemma”](#) [The Diplomat - April 14]
- Analysis: [“Is there a ‘lighter side’ to our possible environmental apocalypse? \(commentary\)”](#) [Mongabay - April 12]
- Analysis: [“2022 Russian Maritime Doctrine: Implications for NATO & the Future of Great Power Competition in the Arctic”](#) [The Arctic Institute - April 11]
- Analysis: [“Carriers and precision attacks: The takeaways from China's latest Taiwan drills”](#) [Reuters - April 11]
- Analysis: [“Rivalry between America and China has spread to the Indian Ocean”](#) [The Economist - April 10] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“Analysis: China's intensifying nuclear-armed submarine patrols add complexity for U.S. allies”](#) [Reuters - April 3]
- Analysis: [“In Taiwan’s Waters, a Hunt for Tiny, Wriggling ‘Gold’”](#) [The New York Times - March 31] [Paywall]
- Analysis: [“Perilous prospects: Tensions flare at Malaysian, Vietnamese oil and gas fields”](#) [Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative - March 30]
- Analysis: [“Terrorism as an evolving threat to Southeast Asia’s maritime security”](#) [Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative - March 28]

Events on the Maritime Domain



- On March 27, 2023, CIFOR-ICRAF and several other universities and institutions in Indonesia and South Korea held an international symposium titled [“Beyond Blue Carbon: Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation with Blue Carbon: Cross-sectional Research from Two Islands”](#) in Denpasar, Indonesia.
- From April 3-5, 2023, the Navy League of the United States will be conducting their [Sea-Air-Space 2023](#) convention in Maryland with multiple keynote speakers and other open forums.
- From April 19-22, 2023, the University of Massachusetts’ Department of Earth, Geographic, and Climate Sciences & Climate System Research center will be hosting the in-person [52nd International Arctic Workshop](#); “a friendly, informal, and relaxed conference open to all students and professionals interested in the Arctic.” The abstract submission deadline is March 31, 2023 and registration for attendance is still open.
- On April 19, 2023, the East-West Center held a webinar to discuss [“Social-Ecological Mapping of Fish Value Chains.”](#)
- On April 20, 2023, the Center for Strategic & International Studies China Power Project held a webcast titled [“The Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis Continued?: Assessing China’s April 2023 Military Exercises Against Taiwan.”](#) A full recording is available.
- On April 24, 2023, the Wilson Center held a hybrid conversation with Monica Medina, the Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, on [U.S. Environmental Diplomacy](#). A full recording is available.
- On April 25, 2023, the Wilson Center Asia Program will hold an in-person and online discussion on [“The Road Ahead for U.S.-Japan Economic Security Partnership in the Indo-Pacific.”](#)
- On April 27, 2023, the Wilson Center Polar Institute along with the Fulbright Arctic Initiative and the U.S. Department of State will hold a symposium on [Science Diplomacy in the Arctic](#) to share and highlight the key findings by 19 Fulbright Arctic-based research scholars from eight different Arctic nations.
- On May 4, 2023, the Center for Strategic & International Studies Southeast Asia Program will hold [A Conversation with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. of the Philippines](#). This hybrid event is part of the CSIS ASEAN Leadership Forum.
- From May 11-12, 2023, Spinnaker will be holding its annual [Maritime People & Culture Conference 2023](#) in London, United Kingdom.
- From May 23-25, 2023, the U.S. Naval War College will hold [The 5th Annual Alexander C. Cushing International Law Conference: “International Law and Conflict at Sea.”](#) Registration is still open.
- From May 24-25, 2023, the European Commission will be celebrating its annual [European Maritime Day 2023](#) during which Europe’s maritime community will meet in Brest, France “to network, discuss and outline joint action on maritime affairs and sustainable blue economy.”
- From June 5-8, 2023, the IEEE Oceanic Engineering Society and Marine Technology Society will be hosting the [“OCEANS 2023 Limerick - Blue Ocean Planet Earth”](#) in person in Limerick, Ireland; an event for “global maritime professionals to learn, innovate, and lead in the protection and utilization of the world’s largest natural resource – our Oceans.” Registration is still open.

Handbill Spotlight

Joint Naval Exercise

Issue Background

Joint military exercises is a relatively new strategic concept [credited](#) to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization alliance who has been conducting such exercises since 1951. A ‘joint naval exercise’ can be loosely defined as a structured, planned military exercise conducted between the naval or maritime units of two or more nations, typically with the end goal of strengthening the abilities, knowledge, interoperability and friendly relations of the parties involved. In another description, they [aim](#) “to project capabilities, hone operational skills, imbibe best practices and procedures, and enable mutual doctrinal learning” and are “used as a demonstration of close strategic relation among participating countries and also for political signalling.” Additionally, they [are](#) “often used by nations to display their military might” and typically conducted between friendly nations or neighbors.

While joint naval exercises can occur in one-off instances, they are more often regularly occurring, in which case the exercise is given a unique reference name (i.e., [Joint Warrior](#), [Malabar](#), [Resolute Hunter](#), or [RIMPAC](#)). Furthermore, the length and number of participants of joint naval exercises can vary extensively, depending on the end goal of the exercise and past precedents.

As noted by the term ‘joint’, joint naval exercises are different from—and even more telling than—naval exercises, drills or activities individually conducted by a single nation, such as [China’s recent unilateral naval exercises around Taiwan](#) in April or the U.S. Navy’s frequent freedom of navigation operations ([FONOPs](#)) [around the globe](#). Joint naval exercises also differ from joint naval patrolling, the latter of which [has been described](#) as “a cooperative operational deployment of navies for addressing common maritime threats or challenges” such as piracy, illegal fishing, human trafficking and other maritime crimes.

Recent Events

While they may not make headline news, joint naval exercises are happening around the world on a regular basis. The first part of 2023 has seen an abnormally high number of joint naval exercises—and their subsequent potential political messages—getting global attention.

To start, some of the regular, annual exercises were held in the first quarter of the year, several of which were marked as their largest ever. The 12th iteration of [Exercise Obangame Express](#), the [largest](#) multinational maritime exercise in Western and Central Africa, ran from January 23–February 3 out of Nigeria and involved 32 participating nations. The 8th installment of the near-annual [International Maritime Exercise](#), [involving](#) 50 participating countries and employing “more than 7,000 personnel, 35 ships and more than 30 unmanned AI systems,” was held for 18 days in February in the Middle East. Nearby, the largest ever U.S.-Israeli [Exercise Juniper Oak](#) was held one month earlier. [Exercise Balikatan](#), the most significant annual exercise between the U.S. and the Philippines

and its largest iteration yet, was launched on April 11 and is set to run through April 28. The bilateral U.S.–Republic of Korea [Exercise Ssang Yong](#) ran from March 23–April 3 around the Korean Peninsula. [Exercise Noble Dina](#), a two-week long training between Greece, France, Cyprus, Italy and the U.S. in the Mediterranean, was held in late March. [Exercise Arctic Forge](#), a month-long effort between the U.S., Africa and Europe that focuses on interoperability and training in the Arctic region, was held in February and March.



Capt. Tony Chavez, commanding officer of amphibious assault ship USS Makin Island (LHD 8), left center, and Capt. Andria Slough, executive officer of Makin Island, front right, give a tour of the flight deck for Vice Adm. Myung Soo Kim, commander, Republic of Korea (ROK) Fleet, center, during a key leader engagement aboard Makin Island for Operation Ssang Yong 2023 (SY23), held March 24 in South Korea. SY23 is a U.S./ROK joint landing drill to strengthen the alliance's combat readiness, ensure tailored capabilities for defense, and improve interoperability to protect peace by strength. (Photo By: Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Joshua Martinez, Public Domain)

There are also several first or near-first cases being held that strongly suggest the formation or strengthening of a new or existing partnership. The [European Union and the U.S.](#) held their [first-ever](#) joint maritime security [exercise in the Indo-Pacific](#) from March 23–24, as agreed upon in the latest round of the EU-U.S. High-Level Consultations on the Indo-Pacific on December 2, 2022. Last November, the U.S., the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia held the weeklong [Exercise Nautical Defender](#) in the Arabian Gulf. Ahead of the 42nd case of the multinational, Indo-Pacific based [Exercise Cobra Gold](#) being held in February, the U.S. Navy SEALs and Royal Thai Special Warfare Command held the first iteration of a three-week collaboration now titled [Exercise Flash Torch](#). Egypt and Sudan held the first iteration of [Exercise SUD-EGY-T](#) in Sudan in early April while India and Sri Lanka's bilateral [Exercise SLINEX](#) took place April 6–8.

Somewhat similar to the United States' own level of joint naval activities, China's naval forces have been particularly active in an apparent pursuit of showcasing their partnerships, the extent of their reach, and their growing military capabilities. China, Russia and Iran held [Exercise Security Bond](#), a newly-formalized joint exercise [in the Gulf of Oman](#) with other unnamed countries, in mid-March, further building on an apparent strengthening of naval ties that has been [growing](#) for more than a year. [China, Russia and South Africa](#) held the second iteration of joint naval exercises (the first being in 2019) from February 17–27, taking place in the Indian Ocean. Russia and China have been holding bilateral naval exercises in December 2022 off the [southern coast of China](#) and [in the East China Sea](#), advertised as efforts to “further deepen” their partnership. Apart from Russia, China also held its first joint maritime exercise with Cambodia, code-named [Golden Dragon](#), in March, and just announced joint naval [drills with Singapore](#) to be held from late April to early May.

The last few months have also seen joint naval exercises be specific responses to other diplomatic or military activities; an increasingly regular—and increasingly publicized—practice. In mid-April, the U.S., South Korea and Japan [started](#) holding joint naval missile defense exercises “to improve responses to North Korean threats” as part of [new agreements from talks](#) in Washington on April 14. Several of the above-mentioned cases, such as the U.S. and European Union's new exercise [promoting](#) “high seas freedom of navigation,” could partially or fully be direct responses as well.

Keep In Mind

Again, joint naval exercises are not rare. What is notable is how the last few months have culminated in what appears to not be only increased activities but increased attention by the larger public and diplomatic representatives. Part of this increase could be credited to the reduction in Covid-19 related pauses, new launches of naval vessels, and expanding developments in naval technologies.

Virtually as important as their role in enhancing technical interoperability is the political and social power of joint naval exercises. They are regularly mentioned in high-level speeches as signs of mutual cooperation and in lists of how nations can hope to improve cooperative relations. Regardless of whether these exercises being held these last four months have been their first or their fifteenth, they—and the associated increase in public interest in them—are indicators of a heightened attention to maritime security and, in some cases, unavoidable indicators of where true loyalties lie. Nations understandably limit the amount of information granted to the public regarding a joint naval exercise, but the list of participating nations or parties as well as the length of the exercise is nearly always readily provided. This indicates the importance of the ‘invitation list’ and ‘participation list’ and is typically the largest takeaway from any announcement of a joint naval exercise: Who is involved, and has the participation list changed? The case of [China being ‘disinvited’](#) from participating in the 2018 RIMPAC Exercise, a major, publicly-dealt blow to Beijing received with mixed global responses, is a key example showing the [interplay](#) between joint military exercises and global diplomacy.

Aside from participants, the size, frequency, length and focus of the exercises are important and telling features to note of any exercise. For example, this year’s Balikatan, a word in Tagalog which means ‘shoulder-to-shoulder’, is the [“largest ever”](#) with more than 17,600 sailors, Marines, soldiers and airmen participating and is taking place during a time of significant shift in Philippine policy.

What is dangerous is how these ironically public-yet-secretive events all but invite speculation by observers—and at all levels. For example, there has been a flurry of attention over the numerous trilateral naval exercises between Russia, China and South Africa and what it might mean in the [context of the Ukraine-Russia conflict](#), for [U.S.-China-South Africa relations](#), and for [Indian Ocean](#) and [African geopolitics](#). In the case of U.S.-China relations, which has arguably reached its lowest and most tense point, joint military exercises have become a case study or statistic to point at and use in the ever-popular verbal arguments. Like cases of unilateral military exercises, they have the potential to be unabashedly used as silent diplomatic tools of disapproval and disagreement in reaction to another party’s actions.

That is why, when hearing about a joint naval exercise being held, understanding the active context—both inside and outside of the military realm—is important to most accurately deciphering a nation’s mindset and intent. One of the first questions that should be asked, prior to any speculations being drawn, is regarding the establishment of context. Often shrouded in succinct press releases with minimized public details, joint naval exercises are powerful, public, silent tools that can be used to gauge the strength of two or more nations’ current state of alliance. More important than the number and types of troops and ships used, it is the location, timing, duration and participants that should be more thoroughly examined. Furthermore, it can be dangerous for

non-military experts to be overinterpreting actions, just as it is dangerous for non-legal experts to be independently arguing on behalf of or against a concept with legal implications. When debating over joint naval drills, or any other military-intensive subject for that matter, observers should value the words of military professionals in the field over those of domestic, non-military political leaders.

This issue's Spotlight was written by Jessica Martin, ICAS Research Associate & Chief Editor, ICAS Newsletters.

ICAS Maritime Affairs Program: New and Upcoming

— Past MAP Event —

Roles of Asian Observers in Arctic Governance: Adapting to a Changing Arctic Council

Thursday, April 13, 2023

9:30 AM – 11:00 AM EST



On April 13, 2023, the ICAS Maritime Affairs Program (MAP) and the China Institute at the University of Alberta (CIUA) co-hosted an online roundtable discussion on the “Roles of Asian Observers in Arctic Governance: Adapting to a Changing Arctic Council.” This event brought together scholars from the five Asian observer states of the Arctic Council—China, Japan, South Korea, India and Singapore—to exchange their views on the modern state of Arctic governance. The session was moderated by **Nong HONG, Executive Director, Institute for China-America Studies.**

Jia WANG, Interim Director, China Institute, University of Alberta, opened the discussion by highlighting how climate change is increasing access to potential shipping lanes and resources in the Arctic. However, Arctic governance through the Arctic Council, a forum historically characterized by deep multilateral cooperation, has become mired by unprecedented tensions and concerns resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Throughout the last decade, the growth of international attention on Arctic environmental, economic and security issues has brought distant countries to the discussion table as observer states on the Arctic Council. Wang invited the audience to carefully consider the gathered scholars’ opinions on how to rehabilitate Arctic cooperation, however distant from the poles these countries may be...

- ZHAO Long: Senior Fellow and Deputy Director, Institute for Global Governance Studies, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies
- Sakiko HATAYA: Research Fellow, Ocean Policy Research Institute of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation
- KIM Wonhee: Senior Researcher, Korea Institute of Ocean Science and Technology
- Anurag BISEN: Research Fellow, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses
- Christopher LEN: an independent scholar based in Singapore, previously working as the Senior Research Fellow and Head of Publications at the Energy Studies Institute, National University of Singapore

Read the Full Summary:

<https://chinaus-icas.org/event/roles-of-asian-observers-in-arctic-governance-adapting-to-a-changing-arctic-council/>

Watch the Full Event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvVxCEK65ZQ>

Learn More: <https://www.ualberta.ca/china-institute/events/2023/arctic-council.html>

— MAP Issue Brief —

The Maritime Bedrock of the U.S.-Philippines Alliance: Understanding Manila and Washington's Interests in the South China Sea

By Alec Caruana

April 10, 2023

Key Takeaways

- Manila's recent deepening of military cooperation with the United States is motivated by a perceived need to enhance the Philippines' maritime security and reinforce its position in disputes with other claimant states—primarily China—in the South China Sea.
- Washington takes no official position on sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea, but its overall strategy to promote international maritime law and deter Chinese transgressions in the region substantively aligns its interests with the renewed resolve of Philippine President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr., inaugurated last June.
- The Philippines' disputed claims in the South China Sea operate on two levels: disputed jurisdiction over maritime space, and disputed sovereignty over mid-ocean territorial features. Both of these categories trace their legal origins back to the Philippines' time as a U.S. colony between 1898 and 1946.
- Manila's rights to resources and jurisdiction in maritime zones extending from its coastline are disputed with Beijing's overlapping claims to "historic rights" in the South China Sea and jurisdiction over "relevant waters" around its controlled islands. The Arbitral Tribunal established under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) ruled in 2016 that China was violating Philippine rights in its entitled maritime zones, but disputes over fishing and hydrocarbon exploration between the two states persist.

- The Philippines is also engaged in territorial sovereignty disputes with its neighboring states over several islands, reefs, and underwater features in the South China Sea, namely: the Scarborough Shoal, which it disputes with China, and parts of the Spratly archipelago, which it disputes with China, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Both disputes are mired by complicated histories, precarious legal arguments, and ‘might makes right’ attitudes.
- With the recent expansion of U.S.-Philippine security cooperation, Manila has an opportunity to shrewdly pursue constructive diplomacy with other claimant states alongside targeted maritime capacity-building measures with Washington’s assistance. The Biden administration may facilitate both ‘tracks’ if it wishes to positively contribute to regional stability and mitigate the escalation of tensions.

Read Online:

<https://chinaus-icas.org/research/the-maritime-bedrock-of-the-u-s-philippines-alliance/>

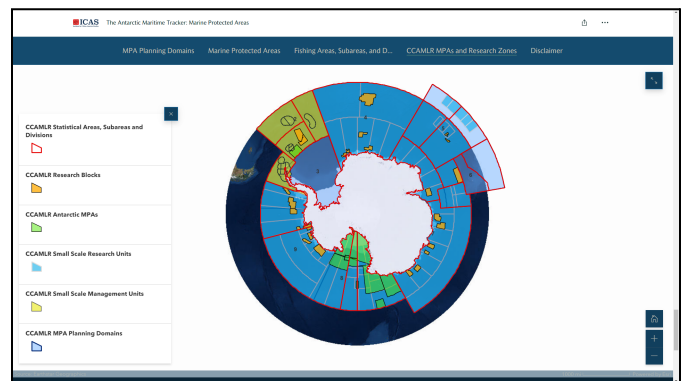
— MAP Commentary —

Why China is hesitant about endorsing marine protected area proposals in the Antarctic

By Nong Hong

April 7, 2023

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR, hereafter referred to as the Commission) convenes meetings on a range of topics each year. This includes gatherings to discuss the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in the Antarctic. In **the 41st Meeting of the Commission**, held October 24–November 4, 2022, three MPA proposals were brought to the meeting for discussion: Domain 1 MPA (Western Antarctic Peninsula and South Scotia Arc) submitted by Argentina and Chile; East Antarctic MPA submitted by Australia, the European Union and India, New Zealand, Norway, Korea, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay; and the Weddell Sea MPA (WSMPA) submitted by the EU, Norway, Uruguay, Australia, the UK, New Zealand, the U.S., Korea, India and Ukraine. The Commission did not reach consensus on any of the three MPA proposals at this meeting.



The three proposals were supported by most members of the Commission. Russia and China expressed concerns, such as the need for baseline data collection and research and monitoring plans (RMPs) prior to the establishment of a MPA. The United States explicitly stated that it neither currently agrees with all the conclusions nor endorses all the recommendations made by China and Russia regarding MPAs and associated RMPs. The U.S. also called for attention being given to a more constructive dialogue on MPAs and RMPs in the future, starting with a Special Meeting in 2023...

Read Online:

<https://chinaus-icas.org/research/why-china-is-hesitant-about-endorsing-marine-protected-area-proposals-in-the-antarctic/>