



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on October 26, 2023

## U.S. Says It Will Protect Philippines From China as Tensions in Pacific Rise

As tensions between Washington and Beijing mount, the United States is pushing back against Chinese ambitions in the Pacific.

After Chinese vessels blocked and collided with two Filipino ships in the South China Sea on Sunday, the State Department vowed to protect the Philippines against threats, citing a 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty obligating the U.S. to come to the island nation's defense if its armed forces, ships, or aircraft come under an armed attack in the South China Sea.

"The United States stands with our Philippine allies in the face of the People's Republic of China coast guard and maritime militia's dangerous and unlawful actions obstructing an October 22 Philippine resupply mission to Second Thomas Shoal," [said](#) the State Department in a statement.

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The State Department laid the blame for the incident on China, and declared that Beijing likely "violated international law by intentionally interfering with the Philippine vessels' exercise of high seas freedom of navigation."

The U.S. responded to the collisions by deploying forces to the area to patrol the waters and promote free navigation, a move that has elicited the wrath of Chinese officials and prompted them to call on America to stay out of foreign affairs.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. called an emergency meeting with his country's defense secretary and other high-ranking military officials amid the crisis in the disputed waters.

"The Philippine government views the latest aggression by China as a blatant violation of international law," said Philippine Secretary of Defense Gilberto Teodoro. "China has no legal right or authority to conduct law enforcement operations in our territorial waters and in our exclusive economic zone."

He added, "We are taking these incidents seriously at the highest levels of government. The Chinese government is deliberately obfuscating the truth."

The hostilities began Sunday when five Chinese coast guard ships, along with two naval ships and several other vessels, blockaded two Philippine coast guard ships and two boats attempting to make a delivery of food and supplies to Filipino forces stationed aboard a navy ship marooned at Second Thomas Shoal. One of the Philippine naval vessels and one of the supply boats were hit by the Chinese ships.

Yet the Chinese coast guard blamed the Philippines for the incident.



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“China once again urges the Philippines to take seriously China’s grave concerns, honor its promise, stop making provocations at sea, stop making dangerous moves, stop groundlessly attacking and slandering China, and to tow away the illegally ‘grounded’ warship as soon as possible,” deputy chief of mission Zhou Zhiyong said.

Fox News further reported:

In May, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and Philippine Secretary of the Department of National Defense Carlito Galvez established the “Bilateral Defense Guidelines” and reaffirmed that “an armed attack in the Pacific, including anywhere in the South China Sea, on either of their public vessels, aircraft, or armed forces — which includes their Coast Guards — would invoke mutual defense commitments under Articles IV and V of the 1951 U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty,” the State Department said.

As Angeline Tan reported Thursday, Chinese leader Xi Jinping [said](#) that his country was open to collaborating with the United States to tackle global challenges:

Xi’s statements urging for more stable bilateral relations, which he claimed should be premised on the principles of “mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation,” came ahead of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s visit to Washington from October 26 to 28 [and] an anticipated meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and Xi in San Francisco at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November.

It also comes amid escalating tensions further heightened by the two major conflicts on which China and the United States find themselves on opposite sides: In Ukraine, the U.S. has given weapons and money to the Ukrainians while leading Western sanctions against Russia, whereas China is assisting Russia in evading these sanctions.

And in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the United States is giving weapons and money to Israel, while China has ramped up its criticism of Israel and spoken out in favor of Palestine.

Yet Washington reportedly hopes China will use its clout with Iran to prevent the fighting in Israel-Palestine from erupting into a larger conflict involving other players in the Middle East.

There are indications that the United States no longer holds the clear military advantage over China.

[The New American](#) has previously covered the way in which the Biden administration is making budget cuts resulting in the premature retirement of nearly a dozen ships, while also removing missile systems that currently deter Chinese aggression at sea.

Biden’s actions would result in the loss of 600 vertical missile systems and retire at least 11 ships, while ordering the building of only nine new ones.

To compare America and China: The United States has 294 battle force ships, which is lower than the 355 the country is supposed to have by law. Meanwhile, China has a fleet of 340 ships and is expected to have more than 400 by 2025 — part of a plan for fast growth that also includes supplying its military with a fresh stock of surface combat missiles and guided-missile destroyers.

In addition, Biden’s budget tosses aside the Marine Corps’ request for at least 31 more amphibious warships — three of which are being retired — which would play an important role in a potential war



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with China. The Pentagon has reportedly balked at the idea of shifting focus away from the Middle East and toward the Pacific.

Given recent events in the Middle East, it's not unthinkable that the military brass will only double down on their desire to keep the U.S. entrenched in the region.



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