



By: TA | AP Brief

India and the Philippines stage joint naval drill in the disputed South China Sea



India and the Philippines staged joint sail and naval exercises in the disputed South China Sea for the first time, a high-profile military deployment that will likely antagonize China.

Beijing has separate territorial disputes with the two Asian democracies and a long-running regional **rivalry** with New Delhi.

Armed Forces of the Philippines chief of staff Gen. Romeo Brawner said Monday that the two-day joint naval sail and exercises which began Sunday have been successful so far and expressed hopes that Filipino forces could engage India's military in more joint maneuvers in the future.

Asked if Chinese forces carried out any action in response, Brawner said without elaborating that "we did not experience any untoward incident but we were still shadowed. We expected that already."

In past joint patrols with other foreign navies, Chinese navy and coast guard ships have kept **watch** from a distance, according to the Philippine military.

China has a longstanding land border **dispute** with India in the Himalayas, which sparked a monthlong war in 1962 and a number of deadly firefights after.

Separately, Beijing's expansive claims to virtually the **entire** South China Sea, a key global trade route, has led to tense **confrontations** with other claimant states, particularly the Philippines and Vietnam. Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also lay **claims** to parts of the contested waters.

The Philippines has staged naval patrols in the disputed waters with its treaty ally, the United States, and other strategic partners including Japan, Australia, New Zealand and France to promote freedom of navigation and overflight and strengthen deterrence against China.

It has allowed journalists to join territorial sea and aerial patrols to witness China's increasingly aggressive actions, provoking angry Chinese reactions.

China's Ministry called the Philippines a "troublemaker"

In response to a question last week about Manila's plans to build up military cooperation, China's Ministry of National Defense called the Philippines a "troublemaker" that has aligned itself with foreign forces to stir up trouble in what China deems its own territorial waters.

"China never wavers in its resolve and will to safeguard national territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests and will take resolute countermeasures against any provocations by the Philippine side," Defense Ministry spokesperson Col. Zhang Xiaogang said in a news conference.

Brawner said the Philippines has to boost deterrence to prevent war. "The way to do that is number one, the Armed Forces of the Philippines has to be strengthened through modernization and secondly, we need to partner with like-minded nations and that's what we're doing with India," he said last week.

Philippine President Marcos left Monday for a five-day state visit to India for talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi

During a reception on board an Indian navy tanker, the INS Shakti, on Thursday, Brawner said the vessel's port call in Manila was more than ceremonial. It "sends a powerful signal of solidarity, strength in partnership and the energy of cooperation between two vibrant democracies in the Indo-Pacific," he said.

Brawner welcomed the deepening of relations between the two Asian countries and "reaffirmed the shared commitment to maritime security, regional stability and a rules-based international order in one of the world's most geopolitically sensitive regions."

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos left Monday for a five-day state visit to India for talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other top officials to boost defense, trade and

investment, agriculture, tourism and pharmaceutical industry engagements.