



China: 'Business as Usual' as COVID-19 Diverts the World's Attention?

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying three article excerpts suggest that the ongoing COVID-19 crisis has not distracted China from its international exploits and military plans. On the contrary, they suggest that the pandemic has created an opportunity for China to advance its agenda in contested areas like the South China Sea, while the rest of the world is distracted. Despite China's global aid and diplomacy efforts, the articles demonstrate a continued distrust in the country's intentions and a perception that it is "business as usual for China and its military," given what it is doing in the public eye as well as behind the scenes.

In the first article, published in the *Taipei Times*, Chang Yan-tin, an adjunct professor at Taiwan's National Defense University, points out that J-11 fighters, H-6 bombers, and KJ-500 airborne early warning and control aircraft flown by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force had "intruded into Taiwan's outer airspace... during their first long-distance nighttime exercise." Chang points out that this was the first time Chinese warplanes operated over the Taiwan Strait during nighttime exercises. The fact that the maneuvers took place while the world was busy fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Chang, "implies that there are political motives behind the action." The author explains that China is using a "compound strategy – with military activity, public opinion, and psychological propaganda warfare – to gradually change the Strait's status quo."

The next two articles, published in Philippine media outlets *Philstar.com* and *Inquirer*, are reporting the Chinese Academy of Sciences' establishment of two research stations on the heavily contested Subi and Fiery Cross Reefs. This is taking place as Beijing makes a big show of donating 100,000 COVID-19 test kits to Manila. According to *Philstar.com*, "the 'research' constitutes further incursion in waters within the Philippines' 200-mile exclusive economic zone plus 150-mile extended continental shelf. The article also points out that recently, Beijing had also delivered a million respirators and 250,000 test kits to the Czech Republic, with huge quantities of other supplies to follow. The donation came despite the fact that, in December 2018, the "Czech cyber-security agency became the first in Europe to ban Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE for spyware in 5G technologies."

As the *Inquirer* notes, it is "still business as usual" for China and its military, even as "the world is turning topsy turvy over the novel coronavirus 2019 pandemic that started in China." The article goes on to quote maritime security expert Collin Koh as saying, "the launching of two new research centers by China at this time is a significant development. Some may think that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic would have distracted Beijing from these maritime flashpoints. Truth is, this is far from the case. The PLA is touted to remain ready despite the coronavirus." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Some may think that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic would have distracted Beijing from these maritime flashpoints... Truth is, this is far from the case. The PLA is touted to remain combat ready despite the coronavirus.”

Source: Chang Yan-ting, "Prepare for War to Keep Peace with Rowdy PLA," *Taipei Times Online*, 30 March 2020, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2020/03/30/2003733631>

Prepare for War to Keep Peace with Rowdy PLA

In the past, Chinese warplanes only operated over the Taiwan Strait during the daytime. That the first nighttime exercise took place as the world is busy fighting the COVID-19 pandemic implies that there are political motives behind the action.

The PLA Air Force is being transformed from a purely defensive force to a regional expeditionary one. The reason for these frequent operations in the Strait airspace in recent years is that China wants to use a compound strategy — with military activity, public opinion and propaganda warfare — to gradually change the Strait's "status quo." It has also launched a psychological warfare campaign that is increasing tension in the region.

Today's around-the-clock surveillance and reconnaissance is advanced, and it is no longer possible for the CCP to wage a quick attack to force a speedy result...

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues and the China-US trade dispute is turning into global economic warfare, the Chinese economy has apparently deteriorated due to its huge deficits. Due to Beijing's overarching disease prevention framework with closed control and lockdowns, the serious economic crisis could turn into a major political event.



Continued: China: 'Business as Usual' as COVID-19 Diverts the World's Attention?

Source: Jarius Bondoc, "Beijing Surveys Philippines Reefs While Donating Virus Tests," *PhilStar*, 27 March 2020. <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2020/03/27/2003675/beijing-surveys-philippines-reefs-while-donating-virus-tests>

Beijing Surveys Philippines Reefs While Donating Virus Tests

One simply can't trust China's communist rulers. As Beijing gave Manila Covid-19 test kits it bolstered control of two of seven Philippine reefs it illegally is occupying. Civilian ruses were used, no different from deploying fisheries militia to Philippine maritime jurisdictions.

China's Academy of Science "established two research stations" on Subi and Fiery Cross Reefs, the official Xinhua News Agency announced last weekend. "Scientists [will] live and conduct field research on ecology, geology, and environment."

The "research" constitutes further incursion in waters within the Philippines' 200-mile exclusive economic zone plus 150-mile extended continental shelf.

Twenty and 55 miles respectively from Philippine Pagasa island municipality, Subi and Fiery Cross are in fisheries-rich Spratlys. The archipelago is said to also contain oil, gas, and other minerals...

Last Saturday in Manila the Chinese embassy made a big show of donating 100,000 Covid-19 test kits to the Dept. of Foreign Affairs. It was the second dole; 2,000 kits came five days ahead. The Philippines direly needs testing and other medical supplies to contain the pandemic that sprang from Wuhan in Dec...

Also last weekend in the Czech Republic, Beijing delivered a million respirators for potential severe Covid-19 patients. Earlier Prague received 250,000 test kits. Three more planeloads were expected Sunday with more respirators, two million face masks, personal protection equipment, and other medical supplies. In Dec. 2018 the Czech cyber-security agency became the first in Europe to ban Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE for spyware in 5G technologies. Last Dec. 2019 the prime minister suddenly sacked the three-year-long agency chief allegedly for inexperience. Before heading cyber-security the latter was for ten years with the Czech national security department.

Source: Frances Mangosing, "China Launches New Facilities in West PH Sea Just as World's Eyes Fixed on COVID-19," *Inquirer*, 30 March 2020. <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/186253/china-launches-new-facilities-in-west-ph-sea-just-as-worlds-eyes-fixed-on-covid-19>

China Launches New Facilities in West PH Sea Just as World's Eyes Fixed on COVID-19

While the world is turning topsy turvy over the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that started in China, it's still business as usual for the Asian giant in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea).

Maritime security expert Collin Koh said the launching of two new research centers by China at this time is a significant development.

"Some may think that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic would have distracted Beijing from these maritime flashpoints," Koh told INQUIRER.net.

"Truth is, this is far from the case. The PLA (People's Liberation Army) is touted to remain combat ready despite the coronavirus," he said.