

Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

March 5, 2024

Secretary Austin,

I write to express my serious concerns about the increasing volume and intensity of confrontations by the Chinese Communist Party in the South China Sea, particularly against the Philippines. I request the Department of Defense to move quickly to support the Philippines in countering China's aggressive behavior.

On March 5, the Philippines conducted another resupply mission to its personnel on board the *BRP Sierra Madre* in the Second Thomas Shoal—which lies within the waters of the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, as determined by settled international law.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese Coast Guard obstructed this mission by using water cannons and other dangerous maneuvers in an attempt to blockade the entrance to the Second Thomas Shoal. This time, it appears the China Coast Guard vessel even collided with the Philippine Coast Guard vessel, the *BRP Sindangan*.<sup>2</sup> This confrontation follows a string of aggressive efforts by the Chinese Communist Party to assert its unlawful territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The Biden Administration has upheld the Trump Administration's position that an attack on Philippine public vessels, aircraft, and armed forces would invoke U.S. mutual defense commitments under Article IV of the 1951 U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty. I request the Department of Defense to provide Congress with a comprehensive plan for how the United States can help the Philippines counter such unlawful actions by the Chinese Communist Party in the South China Sea.

I look forward to your response and working with the Department of Defense to ensure that the Philippines can successfully resupply its sailors and fend off PRC encroachment into its sovereign territory.

Sincerely,



Eric S. Schmitt  
United States Senator

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<sup>1</sup> Rita, Joviland. "PCG: China Actions Led to Collision during Latest Ayungin Resupply Mission." *GMA News Online*, *GMA News Online*, 5 Mar. 2024, [www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/899475/pcg-china-actions-led-to-collision-during-latest-ayungin-resupply-mission/story/](http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/899475/pcg-china-actions-led-to-collision-during-latest-ayungin-resupply-mission/story/).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.