

South Korean warship runs afoul of China in the South China Sea as the US and its allies up the pressure on Beijing

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- **The South Korean destroyer Munmu the Great recently sailed close to Chinese-occupied territories in the South China Sea to steer clear of a typhoon.**
- **Beijing lodged complaints with Seoul over the incident, accusing South Korea of violating Chinese law, which requires ships to request permission when entering China's "territorial seas." This practice is inconsistent with international law.**
- **The incident follows a series of standoffs and shows of force in the contested region.**

A South Korean warship seeking refuge from a storm upset Beijing by sailing close to disputed Chinese territory in the South China Sea in mid-September.

Dodging a typhoon, the South Korean navy destroyer Munmu the Great sailed within 12 nautical miles of the Paracels, contested territories occupied by the Chinese military but claimed by Vietnam. Beijing accused South Korea of breaking Chinese

law by entering waters considered by Chinese authorities as Chinese territorial seas without seeking permission, The Wall Street Journal [reported](#) Wednesday.

South Korea asserts that it was not conducting a freedom-of-navigation operation or challenging China's claims; rather, the warship was steering clear of Typhoon Mangkhut. International law permits "innocent passage" through territorial waters. China, however, demands permission from foreign vessels.

"We have taken this up with the South Korean side," Chinese Ministry of National Defense spokesman Senior Col. Ren Guoqiang said. "From a humanitarian point of view, we can accept their explanation," he further explained, adding that the South Korean ship broke the law by "entering the territorial sea without the permission of the Chinese government."

The incident with South Korea comes as Beijing faces increased pressure from the US and its allies in the South China Sea, as well as the East China Sea.

US Air Force B-52H Stratofortress heavy, long-range bombers [flew through the South China Sea](#) twice within the past week. US bombers [did the same](#) thing in August. The US has also [sent heavy bombers](#) through the disputed East China Sea multiple times, most recently alongside Japanese fighter jets.

Earlier this month, a British warship challenged China's territorial claims in the Paracels, [triggering](#) a showdown with the Chinese military, which sent a frigate and two Chinese helicopters to confront the UK Royal Navy amphibious assault ship HMS Albion.

The US Navy's Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group [conducted](#) joint drills with the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force's Escort Flotilla 4 Battle Group led by the Kaga helicopter destroyer in late August. Toward the middle of September, Japan [sent an attack submarine](#), the Kuroshio, to drill alongside the Kaga in the South China Sea for the first time.

China has warned these countries to avoid engaging in provocative behavior, pointing to these actions as examples of militarization in the South China Sea and justification for bolstering Chinese defenses in the region. The US and its allies and international partners assert that Chinese behavior, such as the deployment of military systems such as anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missiles, jamming technology, and even heavy bombers justify their military presences in the South China Sea and beyond.

Rising tension in the South China Sea comes at a time of increased hostility between Washington and Beijing, as the two sides fail to find solutions to longstanding issues ranging from trade to military ties. Experts suspect it will be quite some time before relations recover.