# US reiterates commitment to defend Philippines amid South China Sea clash



The United States reiterated its commitment to defend the Philippines following a confrontation on June 17, 2024, between Filipino and Chinese vessels in the disputed Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea. The clash, which resulted in injuries to Filipino navy personnel and damage to their supply boats, is one of the most serious incidents in the ongoing territorial standoff between the two nations.

US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell affirmed the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty during a phone call with Philippine counterpart Maria Theresa Lazaro. This treaty obligates the US to assist in defending the Philippines against armed attacks in the South China Sea.

The incident occurred as Filipino navy personnel attempted to deliver supplies to their contingent stationed on the BRP Sierra Madre, a grounded warship at the shoal. Both countries accused each other of instigating the confrontation. The Philippine task force overseeing the area condemned China's "dangerous maneuvers," while the Chinese coast guard alleged that Filipino vessels approached their ship "dangerously and unprofessionally."

The Second Thomas Shoal, also known as Ayungin Shoal in the Philippines, is located approximately 200 kilometers from the Philippine island of Palawan. This area is part of the larger Spratly Islands, a region with overlapping claims from multiple nations, including China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan.

The latest clash comes amidst rising tensions, with China's increased assertiveness over its claims in the South China Sea. A new Chinese law authorizing its coast guard to seize foreign ships and detain crews without trial for up to 60 days has further complicated the situation.

Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. condemned China's actions and vowed to protect the Philippines' territorial integrity, while Filipino President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. previously stated that any harm to Filipino citizens in these waters could be considered an act of war.