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Calendar No. 512

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4600

To require a South China Sea diplomatic engagement strategy, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 20, 2026

Ms. DUCKWORTH (for herself and Mr. CURTIS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

JULY 27, 2026

Reported by Mr. RISCH, with an amendment

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in italic]

A BILL

To require a South China Sea diplomatic engagement strategy, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

~~SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.~~

~~This Act may be cited as the "South China Sea Strategy Act of 2026".~~

~~SEC. 2. UNITED STATES POLICY.~~

~~It is the policy of the United States—~~

(1) to support the importance of the freedom of navigation, overflight, and unfettered commerce in the South China Sea, in a manner consistent with international law to preserve United States economic interests in the region;

(2) to commit to a rules-based approach to resolving maritime disputes;

(3) to counter efforts by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to unilaterally change the status quo and treat the South China Sea as its unilateral dominion, undermining regional stability and contravening the PRC's prior commitments to resolve disputes peacefully and through appropriate legal venues; and

(4) to engage with allies and partners in a concerted, coordinated manner to support a strategic, consistent approach to diplomatic engagement on issues and crises that arise that affect United States interests in the South China Sea, including to ensure the safety of United States citizens in the region.

SEC. 3. SOUTH CHINA SEA DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State

shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, submit to the appropriate congressional committees a Strategy for Diplomatic Engagement on the South China Sea to ensure that the United States Government is operating in a smart, strategic direction in line with United States interests to maximize our efficient engagement on South China Sea matters.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The Strategy listed in subsection (a) shall—

(1) describe the overarching goals of United States engagement with littoral states, allies, and partners on security, diplomatic, legal, and economic matters in the South China Sea;

(2) designate an office tasked with lead responsibility for coordinating execution of each goal described in paragraph (1);

(3) analyze the successes of the Department of State's existing mechanisms, programs, and forums for advancing United States goals in the South China Sea through bilateral, multilateral, subnational, civil society, and private sector avenues with littoral states, allies, and partners, and identifies gaps in engagement;

(4) detail plans to deepen bilateral engagement with each littoral state around pressures, threats

and opportunities in the South China Sea identified as priorities in previous bilateral engagements;

(5) detail plans to convene and increase the frequency of collective engagements with littoral states, including additional allies and partners as appropriate, around themes of shared importance, including—

(A) bolstering defense capabilities;

(B) reinforcing maritime law enforcement capacity and governance;

(C) responding to grey-zone tactics, including coordinated illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing;

(D) managing maritime territorial disputes to reducing the likelihood of security crises and conflicts;

(E) preparing crisis management and response mechanisms to avoid potential actions that could unnecessarily provoke or exacerbate a volatile or tense situation;

(F) building resilience to foreign malign influence and interference;

(G) supporting economic development and resilience to economic coercion; and

(H) addressing additional factors assessed by the Secretary to be causing a direct risk to the United States national interests in the South China Sea; and

(6) detail plans for coordination with the interagency and foreign governments to address crisis management for scenarios short of war that would require heightened interagency and international engagement.

(c) CLASSIFICATION.—The strategy submitted under subsection (a) shall be submitted in unclassified form but may include a classified annex.

SEC. 4. STRATEGY EXECUTION.

(a) IDENTIFICATION OF NECESSARY PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES.—Not later than 360 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State shall identify and submit to the appropriate congressional committees any necessary program, policy, or budgetary resources required to support implementation of the Strategy for Diplomatic Engagement on the South China Sea for fiscal years 2027, 2028, and 2029.

(b) BRIEFING.—Not later than 30 days after the submission of the assessment described in subsection (a), the Secretary of State shall brief the appropriate congres-

~~sional committees on the implementation of the Strategy for Diplomatic Engagement on the South China Sea.~~

~~**SEC. 5. DEFINITIONS.**~~

~~In this Act:~~

~~(1) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—The term "appropriate congressional committees" means—~~

~~(A) the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate; and~~

~~(B) the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives.~~

~~(2) LITTORAL STATES.—The term "littoral states" means—~~

~~(A) Brunei;~~

~~(B) Indonesia;~~

~~(C) Malaysia;~~

~~(D) the Philippines; and~~

~~(E) Vietnam.~~

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South China Sea, in a manner consistent with international law to preserve United States economic interests in the region;

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(3) to counter efforts by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to unilaterally change the status quo and treat the South China Sea as its unilateral dominion, undermining regional stability and contravening the PRC's prior commitments to resolve disputes peacefully and through appropriate legal venues; and

(4) to engage with allies and partners in a concerted, coordinated manner to support a strategic, consistent approach to diplomatic engagement on issues and crises that affect United States interests in the South China Sea, including to ensure the safety of United States citizens in the region.

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that the United States Government is operating strategically to maximize our efficient engagement on South China Sea matters.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The Strategy listed in subsection (a) shall—

(1) describe the overarching goals of United States engagement with allies and partners, including with littoral states, on security, diplomatic, legal, and economic matters in the South China Sea;

(2) designate an office at the Department of State tasked with the lead responsibility for coordinating the execution of each goal described in paragraph (1);

(3) analyze the successes of the Department of State's existing mechanisms, programs, and forums for advancing United States goals in the South China Sea through bilateral, multilateral, subnational, civil society, and private sector avenues with allies and partners, including littoral states, and identify gaps in engagement;

(4) detail plans to deepen bilateral engagement with each littoral state around pressures, threats, and opportunities in the South China Sea identified as priorities in previous bilateral engagements;

(5) detail plans to convene and increase the frequency of collective engagements with littoral states, including Taiwan and additional allies and partners as appropriate, around themes of shared importance, including—

(A) bolstering defense capabilities;

(B) reinforcing maritime law enforcement capacity and governance;

(C) responding to grey-zone tactics, including coordinated illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing;

(D) managing maritime territorial disputes to reduce the likelihood of security crises and conflicts;

(E) preparing crisis management and response mechanisms to avoid unnecessary escalation;

(F) building resilience to foreign malign influence and interference in the South China Sea;

(G) supporting economic development and resilience to economic coercion from foreign adversaries; and

(H) addressing additional factors assessed by the Secretary of State to be causing a direct

risk to United States interests in the South China Sea; and

(6) detail plans for coordination with the interagency and foreign governments to address crisis management for scenarios below the threshold of armed conflict that would require heightened interagency and international engagement.

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(A) Brunei;

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(D) the Philippines; and

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SEC. 6. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.

(a) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION REGARDING CONTINUED UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD TAIWAN AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PRC.—Nothing in this Act may be construed as a change to the One China Policy of the United States, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act (22 U.S.C. 3301 et seq.), the three United States-People's Republic of China Joint Communiqués, and the Six Assurances.

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