

Calendar No. _____

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

_____ (legislative day, _____), _____

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.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “South China Sea Strat-
5 egy Act of 2026”.

6 **SEC. 2. UNITED STATES POLICY.**

7 It is the policy of the United States—

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

6 (2) to commit to a rules-based approach to re-
7 solving maritime disputes;

8 (3) to counter efforts by the People's Republic
9 of China (PRC) to unilaterally change the status
10 quo and treat the South China Sea as its unilateral
11 dominion, undermining regional stability and contra-
12 vening the PRC's prior commitments to resolve dis-
13 putes peacefully and through appropriate legal
14 venues; and

15 (4) to engage with allies and partners in a con-
16 certed, coordinated manner to support a strategic,
17 consistent approach to diplomatic engagement on
18 issues and crises that arise that affect United States
19 interests in the South China Sea, including to en-
20 sure the safety of United States citizens in the re-
21 gion.

22 **SEC. 3. SOUTH CHINA SEA DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT**
23 **STRATEGY.**

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

1 shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, sub-
2 mit to the appropriate congressional committees a Strat-
3 egy for Diplomatic Engagement on the South China Sea
4 to ensure that the United States Government is operating
5 in a smart, strategic direction in line with United States
6 interests to maximize our efficient engagement on South
7 China Sea matters.

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

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

14 (2) designate an office tasked with lead respon-
15 sibility for coordinating execution of each goal de-
16 scribed in paragraph (1);

17 (3) analyze the successes of the Department of
18 State's existing mechanisms, programs, and forums
19 for advancing United States goals in the South
20 China Sea through bilateral, multilateral, sub-
21 national, civil society, and private sector avenues
22 with littoral states, allies, and partners; and identi-
23 fies gaps in engagement;

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

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

3 ~~(5) detail plans to convene and increase the fre-~~
4 ~~quency of collective engagements with littoral states;~~
5 ~~including additional allies and partners as appro-~~
6 ~~priate; around themes of shared importance, includ-~~
7 ~~ing—~~

8 (A) bolstering defense capabilities;

9 ~~(B) reinforcing maritime law enforcement~~
10 ~~capacity and governance;~~

11 ~~(C) responding to grey-zone tactics, includ-~~
12 ~~ing coordinated illegal, unreported, and unregu-~~
13 ~~lated fishing;~~

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

17 ~~(E) preparing crisis management and re-~~
18 ~~sponse mechanisms to avoid potential actions~~
19 ~~that could unnecessarily provoke or exacerbate~~
20 ~~a volatile or tense situation;~~

21 ~~(F) building resilience to foreign malign in-~~
22 ~~fluence and interference;~~

23 ~~(G) supporting economic development and~~
24 ~~resilience to economic coercion; and~~

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

5 (6) detail plans for coordination with the inter-
6 agency and foreign governments to address crisis
7 management for scenarios short of war that would
8 require heightened interagency and international en-
9 gagement.

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

13 **SEC. 4. STRATEGY EXECUTION.**

14 (a) ~~IDENTIFICATION OF NECESSARY PROGRAMS AND~~
15 ~~RESOURCES.~~—Not later than 360 days after the date of
16 the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State shall
17 identify and submit to the appropriate congressional com-
18 mittees any necessary program, policy, or budgetary re-
19 sources required to support implementation of the Strat-
20 egy for Diplomatic Engagement on the South China Sea
21 for fiscal years 2027, 2028, and 2029.

22 (b) ~~BRIEFING.~~—Not later than 30 days after the sub-
23 mission of the assessment described in subsection (a), the
24 Secretary of State shall brief the appropriate congres-

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

3 **SEC. 5. DEFINITIONS.**

4 In this Act:

5 (1) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-
6 TEES.—The term “appropriate congressional com-
7 mittees” means—

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

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

12 (2) LITTORAL STATES.—The term “littoral
13 states” means—

14 (A) Brunei;

15 (B) Indonesia;

16 (C) Malaysia;

17 (D) the Philippines; and

18 (E) Vietnam.

19 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

20 *This Act may be cited as the “South China Sea Strat-*
21 *egy Act of 2026”.*

22 **SEC. 2. UNITED STATES POLICY.**

23 *It is the policy of the United States—*

24 (1) *to support the importance of the freedom of*
25 *navigation, overflight, and unfettered commerce in the*

1 *South China Sea, in a manner consistent with inter-*
2 *national law to preserve United States economic in-*
3 *terests in the region;*

4 *(2) to commit to a rules-based approach to re-*
5 *solving maritime disputes;*

6 *(3) to counter efforts by the People's Republic of*
7 *China (PRC) to unilaterally change the status quo*
8 *and treat the South China Sea as its unilateral do-*
9 *minion, undermining regional stability and contra-*
10 *vening the PRC's prior commitments to resolve dis-*
11 *putes peacefully and through appropriate legal*
12 *venues; and*

13 *(4) to engage with allies and partners in a con-*
14 *certed, coordinated manner to support a strategic,*
15 *consistent approach to diplomatic engagement on*
16 *issues and crises that affect United States interests in*
17 *the South China Sea, including to ensure the safety*
18 *of United States citizens in the region.*

19 **SEC. 3. SOUTH CHINA SEA DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT**
20 **STRATEGY.**

21 *(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the*
22 *date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State*
23 *shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, submit*
24 *to the appropriate congressional committees a Strategy for*
25 *Diplomatic Engagement on the South China Sea to ensure*

1 *that the United States Government is operating strategi-*
2 *cally to maximize our efficient engagement on South China*
3 *Sea matters.*

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

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

10 *(2) designate an office at the Department of*
11 *State tasked with the lead responsibility for coordi-*
12 *nating the execution of each goal described in para-*
13 *graph (1);*

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

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

1 (5) detail plans to convene and increase the fre-
2 quency of collective engagements with littoral states,
3 including Taiwan and additional allies and partners
4 as appropriate, around themes of shared importance,
5 including—

6 (A) bolstering defense capabilities;

7 (B) reinforcing maritime law enforcement
8 capacity and governance;

9 (C) responding to grey-zone tactics, includ-
10 ing coordinated illegal, unreported, and unregu-
11 lated fishing;

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

15 (E) preparing crisis management and re-
16 sponse mechanisms to avoid unnecessary esca-
17 lation;

18 (F) building resilience to foreign malign in-
19 fluence and interference in the South China Sea;

20 (G) supporting economic development and
21 resilience to economic coercion from foreign ad-
22 versaries; and

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

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

3 *(6) detail plans for coordination with the inter-*
4 *agency and foreign governments to address crisis*
5 *management for scenarios below the threshold of*
6 *armed conflict that would require heightened inter-*
7 *agency and international engagement.*

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

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13 *RESOURCES.—Not later than 360 days after the date of the*
14 *enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State shall identify*
15 *and submit to the appropriate congressional committees*
16 *any necessary program, policy, or budgetary resources re-*
17 *quired to support implementation of the Strategy for Diplo-*
18 *matic Engagement on the South China Sea for fiscal years*
19 *2027, 2028, and 2029.*

20 *(b) BRIEFING.—Not later than 30 days after the sub-*
21 *mission of the assessment described in subsection (a), the*
22 *Secretary of State shall brief the appropriate congressional*
23 *committees on the implementation of the Strategy for Dip-*
24 *lomatic Engagement on the South China Sea.*

1 **SEC. 5. DEFINITIONS.**

2 *In this Act:*

3 (1) *APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-*
4 *TEES.*—*The term “appropriate congressional commit-*
5 *tees” means—*

6 (A) *the Committee on Foreign Relations of*
7 *the Senate; and*

8 (B) *the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the*
9 *House of Representatives.*

10 (2) *LITTORAL STATES.*—*The term “littoral*
11 *states” means—*

12 (A) *Brunei;*

13 (B) *Indonesia;*

14 (C) *Malaysia;*

15 (D) *the Philippines; and*

16 (E) *Vietnam.*

17 **SEC. 6. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**

18 (a) *RULE OF CONSTRUCTION REGARDING CONTINUED*
19 *UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD TAIWAN AND THE GOV-*
20 *ERNMENT OF THE PRC.*—*Nothing in this Act may be con-*
21 *strued as a change to the One China Policy of the United*
22 *States, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act (22*
23 *U.S.C. 3301 et seq.), the three United States-People’s Re-*
24 *public of China Joint Communiqués, and the Six Assur-*
25 *ances.*