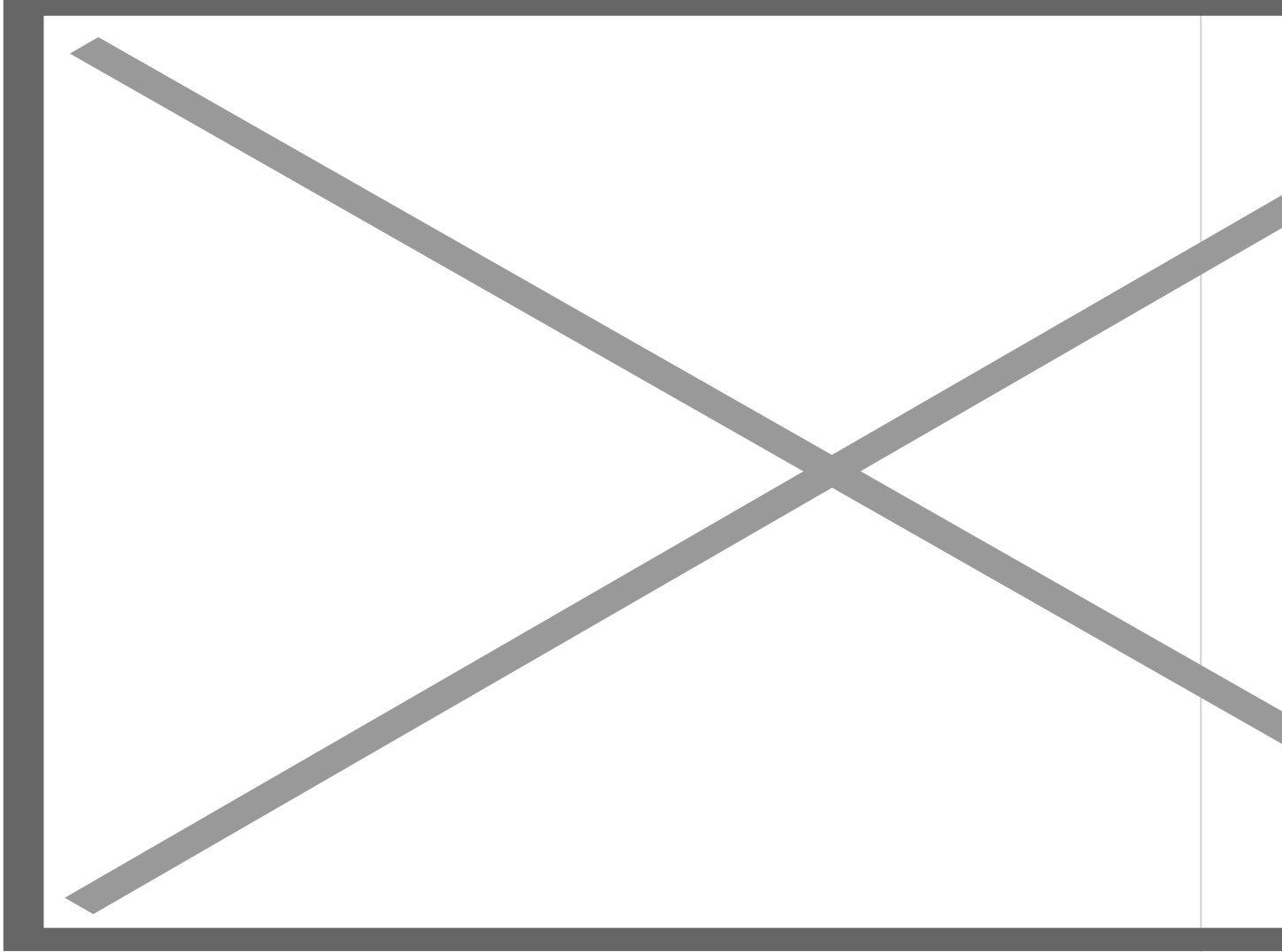


Chinese envoy says U.S. biggest threat to security in South China Sea

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Chinese vessels are moored at Whitsun Reef, South China Sea. (Via AP)

United Nations, August 11 (RHC)-- A UN Security Council meeting on maritime security has turned into a scene of a heated exchange between Chinese and U.S. officials, with the Chinese envoy taking the Americans to task for threatening peace in the South China Sea, after the U.S. secretary of state accused Beijing of using bullying tactics.

Addressing the UN virtual session, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said a conflict in the South China Sea "would have serious global consequences for security, and for commerce," adding that his country was concerned by alleged actions that "intimidate and bully other states from lawfully accessing their maritime resources."

China claims the South China Sea in its entirety. Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei have overlapping claims to parts of the sea. The United States, which sides with Beijing's rival claimants in the maritime dispute, regularly dispatches warships and warplanes to the waters as part of what it describes as "freedom of navigation" patrols.

Blinken's remarks sparked condemnation from Beijing, with China's deputy UN ambassador Dai Bing saying Washington is "not qualified to make irresponsible remarks on the issue of South China Sea."

Dai described the situation in the South China Sea as "generally stable," adding: "All countries enjoy freedom of navigation and overflight in accordance with international law."

The Chinese envoy also noted that the United States has been "stirring up trouble out of nothing, arbitrarily sending advanced military vessels and aircraft into the South China Sea as provocations and publicly trying to drive a wedge between regional countries."

In a strongly-worded condemnation of Washington's moves, Dai termed the US as "the biggest threat to peace and stability in the South China Sea."

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