

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 25, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C.

Dear President Biden,

We write to express our grave concern regarding the People's Republic of China's (PRC) hostile and unlawful actions in the South China Sea, particularly against the Philippines, and to request your administration move quickly to support the Philippines in countering China's aggressive behavior.

On October 22, the Philippines attempted to resupply the *BRP Sierra Madre*, a Philippine vessel grounded on a reef in the Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea. The PRC's Coast Guard and maritime militia—once again—obstructed this mission by intentionally interfering with the Philippine vessels' exercise of high seas freedom of navigation. This flagrant conduct jeopardized the lives of Filipino crew members and impeded critically needed supplies from reaching service members stationed at the *BRP Sierra Madre*.

China is on the verge of willfully triggering a humanitarian crisis by blocking the resupply of the *BRP Sierra Madre*. Its actions will eventually starve Filipino sailors on the vessel. China's main purpose, of course, is to force the Philippines to abandon Second Thomas Shoal and take *de facto* control of this territorial feature. Doing so would expand further its unlawful maritime claims – just as Beijing did with Scarborough Shoal over a decade ago. Each new claim of maritime sovereignty gives China another platform to hold allied territory (and U.S. military assets) at greater risk.

Your administration has repeatedly stated that an attack on Philippine public vessels, aircraft, and armed forces – including those of its Coast Guard in the South China Sea – would invoke the U.S. mutual defense commitments under Article IV of the 1951 U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty. China's actions are testing the credibility and value of these commitments, and we must respond with strength. We request your administration provide us with a full list of plans, branches, and sequels or other diplomatic or non-defense options developed by the Departments of State and Defense to support the Philippines and ensure the resupply of the *BRP Sierra Madre*.

We look forward to your response and working with your administration to ensure that the Philippines can successfully resupply its sailors and fend off PRC encroachment into its sovereign territory.

Sincerely,



ROGER F. WICKER
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee
on Armed Services



JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee
on Foreign Relations



MARCO RUBIO
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Select Committee
on Intelligence