

119TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

**S.** \_\_\_\_\_

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

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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

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## **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—

8               (1) to support the importance of the freedom of  
9 navigation, overflight, and unfettered commerce in  
10 the South China Sea, in a manner consistent with

1 international law to preserve United States economic  
2 interests in the region;

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

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

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

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, sub-  
24 mit to the appropriate congressional committees a Strat-  
25 egy for Diplomatic Engagement on the South China Sea

1 to ensure that the United States Government is operating  
2 in a smart, strategic direction in line with United States  
3 interests to maximize our efficient engagement on South  
4 China Sea matters.

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

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

11 (2) designate an office tasked with lead respon-  
12 sibility for coordinating execution of each goal de-  
13 scribed in paragraph (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  
17 China Sea through bilateral, multilateral, sub-  
18 national, civil society, and private sector avenues  
19 with littoral states, allies, and partners, and identi-  
20 fies gaps in engagement;

21 (4) detail plans to deepen bilateral engagement  
22 with each littoral state around pressures, threats  
23 and opportunities in the South China Sea identified  
24 as 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 additional allies and partners as appro-  
4           priate, around themes of shared importance, includ-  
5           ing—

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 reducing the likelihood of security crises and  
14          conflicts;

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

19                  (F) building resilience to foreign malign in-  
20          fluence and interference;

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

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

1 the United States national interests in the  
2 South China Sea; and

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

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

11 **SEC. 4. STRATEGY EXECUTION.**

12 (a) IDENTIFICATION OF NECESSARY PROGRAMS AND  
13 RESOURCES.—Not later than 360 days after the date of  
14 the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State shall  
15 identify and submit to the appropriate congressional com-  
16 mittees any necessary program, policy, or budgetary re-  
17 sources required to support implementation of the Strat-  
18 egy for Diplomatic Engagement on the South China Sea  
19 for fiscal years 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 congres-  
23 sional committees on the implementation of the Strategy  
24 for Diplomatic 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 com-  
5 mittees” means—

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

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