**A few Philippine Coast Guard swimmers stealthily cut the 1,000-foot-long buoy barrier ring strung up by four Chinese Navy ships to block the entrance to an atoll near Scarborough Reef which deny local fishing rights to Filipino fishermen.**

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. directed his Coast Guard to remove the barrier. Several brave Philippine Coast Guard members used a small wooden boat, and exploiting the dark of night, slipped pass the large Chinese ships and quietly cut the rope held the buoys together. They also removed the anchors that held the ring of buoys in place.

The presence of the large Chinese ships still prevented local fishermen from fishing in the area, but the act of defiance emboldened the Philippine government which has recently signed a partnership agreement with the United States that invited the US military back to the Philippines.

Along with partnerships with Vietnam, Japan, South Korea and Australia, these strategic alliances serve as barrier to Chinese expansion in Asia.

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**SOURCE:**

**How a Tiny Boat Buoyed Resistance to Chinese Barriers**

**BY NIHARIKA MANDHANA*, The Wall Street Journal* | Page A018, 29 September 2023**

The tiny crew had a risky mission: Sail to a contested coral atoll in the South China Sea, cut a barrier blocking Filipino fishermen and get out before Chinese ships catch on.

Last week, Chinese forces floated a nearly 1,000-foot-long string of buoys near Scarborough Shoal, a reef located about 120 nautical miles from the Philippines that has been at the center of maritime tensions between the countries for years. Manila had objected, saying the “floating barrier” obstructed the country’s fishermen.

Then, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. made a decision: The barrier needed to go. Security officials devised a simple but bold plan. They would try to slip past the four Chinese coast-guard ships in the area without attracting attention and cut it, said Commodore Jay Tarriela, spokesman for the Philippine coast guard.

So, days after the barrier went up, a small coast-guard crew climbed into a wooden fishing boat and set off. They didn’t wear their uniforms in an effort to pass themselves off as fishermen.

They managed to approach the barrier in the dark and approached the reef unnoticed. A diver plunged in and swam just below the surface of the water to the line anchored at one end of the buoys. A video released by the Philippine coast guard on Monday shows him severing the rope after briefly sawing it with a knife. The crew heaved aboard the anchor securing the barrier—and left. The buoys had been set adrift, no longer blocking the entrance to the atoll, Tarriela said.

It was a small, audacious act that, in some ways, had no real practical effect for Filipino fishermen. They couldn’t enter the atoll, which is guarded at all times by Chinese ships.

But it was an act of defiance against a powerful rival, showing a new effort by the Philippines to push back against China’s claims in the South China Sea.

The goal was “to show the Filipino people, to show the world, that we’re now going to stand up against the bully,” said Tarriela. “This is the main message of what we did.”

On Wednesday, the Chinese coast guard denied the Philippines had cut the barrier, saying the Chinese side had removed it. It was put up, the coast guard said, after a Philippine fisheries-department vessel barged into the lagoon at the center of Scarborough Shoal, which the Philippines denies.

China claims much of the South China Sea, including areas a long way from its coast that fall within the exclusive economic zones of others in the region, putting it at odds with those nations. To enforce its claims, Beijing has, over the past decade, built artificial islands in the waterway and turned them into military bases with missiles, runways and radars.

Its coast guard and fishing militia fleets—the largest such forces in the world—patrol widely, shadowing vessels of opposing nations and swarming hotly contested sites. Countries like the Philippines are severely outmatched.

Marcos has tightened his country’s security alliance with the U.S. In February, the two sides unveiled a major expansion of a defense-cooperation agreement.