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Sea's code-of-conduct criticism rankles Beijing

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Marise Payne is under attack in the Chinese media over her stand on the South China Sea, after an Australian envoy raised concerns that China's proposed code of conduct for the contested waters was "prejudiced".

Australian Defence analysts believe China is trying to insert clauses into the code so that companies from some countries are excluded from energy exploration in the waters and so Beijing can veto military exercises between ASEAN nations and the US and Australian navies.

"The draft negotiating text

includes China's proposal that parties 'not hold joint military exercises with countries from outside the region, unless the parties concerned are notified beforehand and express no objection', Australian Strategic Policy Institute Analyst Huong Le Thu wrote.

"If that clause makes it into the final (draft), it would give Beijing a veto over ASEAN member states' choices about who they conduct exercises with in the South China Sea."

Australian ambassador to The Philippines Amanda Gorely then delivered a speech in The Philippines to an international audience just over a week ago that raised concerns about the proposal.

"Developments in the South China Sea matter to Australia," she told the Stratbase Albert Del Rosario Institute Forum.

She said the code should not be "prejudiced" against countries that do not have territorial claims in the sea, such as the US and Australia.

"The code of conduct should not prejudice the interests of third parties or the rights of all states under international law."

Ms Gorely said the code should strengthen the commitments of countries to stop their militarisation of the South China Sea — indirectly referring to China.

Senator Payne's previous comments against China's militarisation

of the South China Sea were featured in Chinese media articles this week that have had a negative tone.

Meanwhile, amid concern in Canberra about China's aid funding to Papua New Guinea for the November APEC summit, Papua New Guinea media reported that Australia had held a naval exercise with the Pacific nation.

The reports said the PNG Defence Force and the Royal Australian Navy began Exercise Paradise off the coast of Fairfax Harbour midway through last week.

The Australian Defence Department did not post a media release of the event on its website.

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