

Destroyer diverted to South China Sea

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. Navy has sent a guided missile destroyer to protect a U.S. surveillance ship operating in the South China Sea, a Pentagon official says.

The USS Chung-Hoon was diverted to an escort mission after five Chinese vessels came within 25 feet of the unarmed USNS Impeccable, The Washington Post reported Friday.

"Chung-Hoon is there, in the area, keeping an eye on Impeccable, which continues lawful operations," the official told the Post. He spoke on condition of anonymity.

On Sunday the five Chinese ships surrounded the Impeccable and blocked its path with pieces of wood.

Chinese experts say the Impeccable was there to monitor submarine activity south of Hainan Island.

The arrival of the destroyer to protect Impeccable underscores the Pentagon's determination to continue with the surveillance mission despite China's claim that it represents illegal military activity, the newspaper says.

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