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NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY
FORT GEORGE G MEADE, MARYLAND 20755-6000

October 10, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR: Members of the United States Congress

FROM: Nathan Bronson
Director

SUBJECT: **Developing Weather Situation and International Relations in the South China Sea**

Typhoon Arbesque (RBS) has been forming in the South China Sea over the past several days. Typhoon RBS is developing into what meteorologists have described as a loud and sometimes angry storm. Typhoon RBS's path has been erratic and the storm is gaining speed and strength at an abnormally fast pace. Ships have been warned to stay clear of the area. A number of vessels in the South China Sea have been caught off guard by the magnitude of the storm and its unpredictable path. This has required some smaller vessels to travel closer to the disputed international waters of the South China Sea near the Paracel Islands where the People's Republic of China claims sovereignty.

By way of background, the United States Navy recently has increased its freedom of navigation operations (FNOP) into the disputed territorial waters in the South China Sea, including the waters around the Paracel Islands. The People's Liberation Army have continued to dispute these operations and have deemed them to be hostile and aggressive. In response, the PLA has repositioned additional Chinese naval assets at those islands. China has also appeared to have built a submarine dock at the nearby Hainan Island. This enhanced military presence has given the PRC a vast array of resources to monitor and intercept any perceived threats. The PRC's stated goal has been to have the sufficient military assets in this theater of operation to challenge the US Navy.

The US Navy has canceled several FNOPs which were planned for the coming days as a result of Typhoon RBS, but have remained in the general vicinity. The US Navy has publicly announced that it is monitoring weather developments and stand ready to assist any vessels that may need assistance. The vessels that may be in trouble appear to be from various countries, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Malaysia.