

**From:** [Santicola, Ian CDR USN INDOPACOM PCJO \(USA\)](#)  
**To:** [Santicola, Ian CDR USN INDOPACOM PCJO \(USA\)](#)  
**Subject:** INDOPACOM Legal Vigilance Update #20 (21 Feb 2025)  
**Date:** Friday, February 21, 2025 6:06:47 PM  
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Teammates,

Below please find the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of INDOPACOM's Legal Vigilance Update.

- **21 February 2025:** U.S., Japan, and Republic of Korea underscore the necessity of enhancing the strength of the Alliances to ensure peace and prosperity, as G7 foreign ministers reaffirm commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.
  - **Bottom-line:** during the Munich Security Conference, the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea reaffirmed their commitment to ***“a free and open Indo-Pacific and ensuring international law prevails,”*** while the G7 foreign ministers ***“reiterated their commitment to a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific region, grounded in respect for the rule of law and sovereignty.”***
    - **References:**
      - [Joint Statement on the Trilateral United States-Japan-Republic of Korea Meeting in Munich \(Department of State Media Note, Feb. 15, 2025\)](#)
      - [G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Margins of the Munich Security Conference \(Department of State Media Note, Feb. 15, 2025\)](#)
    - **Key points:**
      - The U.S. Secretary of State and the Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK):
        - underscored the necessity of enhancing the strength of the Alliances to ensure peace and prosperity, including through robust security cooperation among the three countries;
        - reiterated their strong opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the waters of the Indo-Pacific, including the South China Sea;
        - emphasized their commitment to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific and ensuring international law prevails;
        - expressed strong opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the waters of the Indo-Pacific, including the South China Sea, and emphasized the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.
      - The G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the U.S., and the High Representative of the European Union:
        - reiterated their commitment to a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific region, grounded in respect for the rule of law and sovereignty;
        - stated that they strongly oppose any attempts to change unilaterally the status quo using force and underscored the importance of resolving disputes peacefully, and strongly opposed China's attempts to restrict freedom of navigation through militarization and coercive activities in the South China Sea;
        - expressed serious concern over the DPRK's nuclear and ballistic missile programs and reaffirmed their commitment to the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
  - **14 February 2025:** China escalates cross-Taiwan Strait military activity under Taiwan President William Lai.
    - **Bottom-line:** China has significantly increased military activities around Taiwan since Taiwan President William Lai came to power in May 2024, many of which (e.g. Joint Sword 2024A and 2024B) are not conducive to cross-Strait stability or the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait differences.
      - **References:**
        - [Brian Hart, China Escalates Cross-Strait Military Activity Under Taiwan President William Lai \(CSIS, Feb. 14, 2025\)](#)
      - **Key points:**
        - CSIS reports: “In 2024, ***China's military flew a record-shattering 3,075 flights into Taiwan's self-declared air defense identification Zone (ADIZ)—an 81 percent increase from 2023.***”
        - “This uptick coincided with Lai's inauguration as Taiwan's president in 2024. Following Lai's inauguration speech in May and his National Day speech in October, China staged large-scale military and law enforcement exercises around Taiwan dubbed ‘Joint Sword-2024A’ and ‘Joint Sword-2024B.’”
        - ***China's coercive military pressure activities around Taiwan are fundamentally destabilizing to the region and detrimental to the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait relations.***
        - The U.S. continues to have an abiding interest in peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.
        - The U.S. opposes any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side, and expects cross-Strait differences to be resolved by peaceful means, free from coercion, in a manner acceptable to the people on both sides of the Strait.
  - **18 February 2025:** helicopter of China's People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN) engages in unsafe and irresponsible actions in South China Sea.
    - **Bottom-line:** a PLAN helicopter came within three meters of a Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Resources (BFAR) plane conducting routine overflight in the vicinity of Scarborough Reef, endangering the safety of the aircraft and its crew.
      - **References:**
        - [Chinese helicopter flies within 3m of Philippine government plane in South China Sea \(Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Feb. 17, 2025\).](#)

- **Tammy Bruce, U.S. Support for the Philippines in the South China Sea** (Department of State Press Statement, Feb. 19, 2025)
- **Key points:**
  - This incident follows China's separate unsafe and unprofessional maneuver on February 11 that endangered an Australian aircraft that was conducting a routine maritime patrol in the South China Sea.
  - **Reckless actions by China such as these are a threat to navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, and the U.S. will continue to support our allies and partners to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.**
  - The U.S. calls on China to refrain from coercive actions and settle its disputes peacefully in accordance with international law.
  - The 1951 United States-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty extends to armed attacks on Philippine armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft – including those of its Coast Guard – anywhere in the South China Sea.
- **17 February 2025:** Canadian frigate HMCS Ottawa conducts Taiwan Strait transit amid heightened tensions.
  - **Bottom-line:** Royal Canadian Navy frigate HMCS Ottawa transited the Taiwan Strait on February 16, 2025, preserving freedom of navigation and maneuver, and safeguarding global mobility for the international community.
  - **References:**
    - [Dzirhan Mahadzir, Canadian Frigate HMCS Ottawa Transits Taiwan Strait \(USNI News, Feb 17, 2025\)](#)
    - [USINDOPACOM Tactical Aid: Legal Status of Taiwan Strait](#)
  - **Key points:**
    - On February 16, 2025, the Royal Canadian Navy frigate HMCS Ottawa (FFH 341) conducted a south-to-north transit through the Taiwan Strait.
    - The Taiwan Strait encompasses a corridor of waters and airspace beyond the territorial sea (TTS) and sovereign airspace of any coastal state. In this corridor, all nations enjoy high seas freedoms of navigation, overflight, and other internationally lawful uses of the sea.
    - This event marks the first Canadian warship transit of the strait in 2025 and the sixth since the release of Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy in November 2022, underscoring Canada's commitment to maintaining regional stability, preserving freedom of navigation, and upholding international law.
    - **The United States rejects any assertion by the PRC of sovereignty over the entirety of the Strait or beyond its 12-nm TTS and rejects any assertion of excessive jurisdiction or control, i.e. exceeding the limited CZ and EEZ jurisdiction or rights provided for by international law of the sea as reflected in UNCLOS.**
- **18 February 2025:** Cook Islands' China deal raises concerns in New Zealand over regional influence.
  - **Bottom-line:** the **Cook Islands' recent comprehensive partnership agreement with China has raised concerns in New Zealand over Beijing's expanding influence and the potential erosion of New Zealand's longstanding role as a key partner and security guarantor.**
  - **References:**
    - [Lucy Craymer, What is the Cook Islands deal with China and what has worried NZ? \(Reuters, Feb. 18, 2025\)](#)
    - [Rashneel Kumar, On the ground in the Cook Islands, controversial deal with China stirs debate \(The Guardian, Feb. 21, 2025\)](#)
  - **Key points:**
    - The Cook Islands is a self-governing territory in free association with New Zealand, a status it has held since 1965 – while the Cook Islands manages its own domestic and foreign affairs, New Zealand retains responsibility for its defense and external security.
    - Cook Islanders are New Zealand citizens, and the two nations maintain close political, economic, and cultural ties.
    - The strategic agreement between the Cook Islands and China (which marks the first time the Cook Islands has struck a major deal with a country outside its traditional partners, New Zealand and Australia) **reportedly covers economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and seabed mineral exploitation**, among other issues. The agreement does not include security or defense.
    - New Zealand is wary of the **lack of notice and transparency in the agreement between the Cook Islands and China**, particularly on the issues of seabed mining and strategic influence.
    - New Zealand fears growing engagement with China will increase the Cook Islands' economic dependence on Beijing and undermine New Zealand's historical role as a key partner and security guarantor.
    - The agreement is part of China's broader engagement with Pacific Island nations, raising strategic security concerns from Western allies.
    - **Note:** the Cook Islands' ship registry has experienced significant growth in recent years and has come under scrutiny for its association with vessels suspected of evading sanctions, particularly within Russia's shadow fleet. One such vessel, the *Eagle S*, a Cook Islands-flagged tanker transporting Russian oil, allegedly severed the Estlink-2 power cable between Finland and Estonia in December 2024. [Finnish authorities have detained the Eagle S in connection with this incident.](#)
- **3 February 2025:** **two executives from China-based chemical company convicted in connection with fentanyl precursor importation and money laundering schemes.**
  - **Bottom-line:** Qingzhou Wang and Yiwei Chen, executives at the Hubei Amarvel Biotech company, conspired to import multi-ton shipments of fentanyl precursors from China to the United States in exchange for payment in cryptocurrency.
  - **References:**

[Two Chinese Chemical Company Executives Convicted and Multiple Websites and Cryptocurrency Accounts Seized in Connection With Fentanyl Precursor Importation and Money Laundering Schemes \(Department of Justice Press Release, Feb. 3, 2025\)](#)

■ **Key points:**

- The executives face up to twenty years in prison following convictions relating to fentanyl precursor smuggling and money laundering.
- Hubei Amarvel Biotech company (aka AMARVEL BIOTECH) was a chemical manufacturer based in the city of Wuhan, in Hubei province, China, that exported vast quantities of the precursor chemicals used to manufacture fentanyl and its analogues.
- Fentanyl and its analogues have devastated communities across the U.S. and are fueling the ongoing opioid epidemic, which killed at least 105,263 Americans between February 2022 and January 2023 alone.
- As part of the operation, U.S. authorities shut down multiple illicit websites and seized approximately \$900,000 in cryptocurrency linked to drug sales.
- The case demonstrates the ***U.S. government's commitment to targeting not just traffickers but also the upstream supply chain, including foreign chemical suppliers of fentanyl precursors.*** This approach aligns with broader counter-drug efforts aimed at reducing the flow of synthetic opioids into the U.S. and holding foreign entities accountable for their role in the crisis.

Thank you for your continued participation in our counter-lawfare community of interest.  
V/r Ian

CDR Ian Santicola, JAGC, USN  
U.S. Indo-Pacific Command  
Chief, National Security Law  
Director, Counter-Lawfare Center



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