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Subject: INDOPACOM Legal Vigilance Update #21 (28 Feb 2025)
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Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Teammates,

Below please find the 21st edition of INDOPACOM's Legal Vigilance Update.

- 27 February 2025: Thailand departs dozens of Uyghurs to China despite torture fears.
 - **Bottom-line:** Thailand deported a group 40 Uyghur men to China following their decade-long detention in Thailand, drawing widespread international condemnation.
 - **References:**
 - [Sui-Lee Wee and David Pierson, *Ignoring Pleas, Thailand Departs Dozens of Uyghurs to China* \(New York Times, Feb. 27, 2025\).](#)
 - [Dake Kang and Huizhong Wu, *Thailand departs 40 Uyghur men back to China after more than a decade in detention* \(Associated Press, Feb. 27, 2025\).](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - Thailand deported 40 Uyghurs to China. The Uyghurs had been part of a group of 300 Uyghurs who fled China for Thailand to seek asylum in 2014.
 - Uyghurs are a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority native to China's Xinjiang region, where the Chinese government has been accused of committing crimes against humanity.
 - Thai officials indicated that they carried out the deportations at Beijing's request, demonstrating the growing influence of China in the region. The deportation follows a meeting between Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and Chinese leader Xi Jinping to discuss investment.
 - The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights criticized the move for breaching Thailand's international obligations.
 - The deportation raises significant concerns regarding Thailand's adherence to the principle of non-refoulment, which prohibits sending individuals to a country where they are likely to face persecution, torture, or other serious harm.
 - ***Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued a statement condemning Thailand's actions "in the strongest possible terms," noting that the country could be violating its international obligations under the U.N. Convention Against Torture and the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from***

Enforced Disappearance.

- 24 February 2025: new report exposes DPRK forced labor on China's Indian Ocean tuna fleet.
 - **Bottom-line:** the report finds that the DPRK regime routinely exports labor in order to generate revenue, which is suspected in part to fund its illicit missile and nuclear programs.
 - References:
 - [Trapped at Sea: Exposing North Korean Forced Labour on China's Indian Ocean Tuna Fleet \(EJF, Feb. 22, 2025\)](#)
 - [Choe Sang-Hun and Muktita Suhartono, On Chinese Tuna Boats, North Koreans Trawl for Cash for Kim Jong-un \(NY Times, Feb. 24, 2025\)](#)
 - Key points:
 - The new report by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) states that the DPRK "is accused of 'systematically requir[ing] forced, uncompensated labour from much of its population to sustain its economy.'"
 - The United Nations bans member states from hiring DPRK workers because the Security Council says the DPRK regime uses the workers to raise funds for its illicit nuclear weapons program. Nevertheless, Kim Jong-un sends tens of thousands of his people abroad to earn cash and other benefits for his regime.
 - ***The EJF report "finds that a fleet of Chinese tuna fishing vessels operating in the Indian Ocean reportedly used North Koreans as crew between 2019 and 2024, likely violating UN sanctions," with many "apparently subjected to abuses, including being trapped at sea for up to a decade, on vessels involved in illegal fishing and the killing of dolphins."***
- 25 February 2025: Taiwan detains Chinese national-crewed, Togolese-flagged vessel suspected of severing undersea cable near Penghu Islands.
 - **Bottom-line:** Taiwan authorities are investigating a Chinese national-crewed ship suspected of severing an undersea communications cable.
 - References:
 - [Chris Buckley, Agnes Chang, and Amy Chang Chien, Taiwan Detains a Chinese-Crewed Ship After Undersea Cable Severed \(New York Times, Feb. 25, 2025\)](#)
 - [Taiwan is investigating a Chinese-crewed ship believed to have severed an undersea cable \(AP News, Feb. 25, 2025\)](#)
 - Key points:
 - Taiwan authorities detained a Togolese-flagged, Chinese-

national crewed commercial vessel suspected of severing an undersea communication cable critical to maintaining connectivity between Taiwan and its outlying islands. The incident took place near the Penghu Islands, off of Taiwan's coast.

- Taiwan authorities are working to determine whether the cable was cut by accident or a deliberate act as a part of China's broader gray zone campaign against Taiwan.
- The NY Times reports: ***“Recent incidents off Taiwan and in the Baltic Sea have raised suspicions among some officials and experts that China and Russia may sometimes deploy commercial cargo ships or oil tankers to deliberately cut cables by dragging their anchors.”***
- This comes as the [NY Times reports](#) that China is increasingly engaging in destabilizing military activities and exercises in the Indo-Pacific region.
- 25 February 2025: Philippines and Japan pledge to enhance defense cooperation amid South China Sea tensions.
 - **Bottom-line:** the Philippines and Japan have agreed to increase collaboration in joint training exercises, logistical support, equipment transfers, and intelligence sharing to bolster regional security.
 - References:
 - [Aaron-Matthew Lariosa, Philippines, Japan Pledge Further Defense Cooperation Amid South China Sea Spats \(USNI News, Feb. 25, 2025\)](#)
 - [Takanori Nakada and Shumpei Takeuchi, Japan, Philippines Agree to High-Level Dialogue over Defense Equipment Exports; Foreign Ministers Agree to Strengthen Ties to Counter China \(The Japan News, Feb. 2025\)](#)
 - Key points:
 - Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro and Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani met in Manila to discuss strengthening security and military between their nations.
 - They agreed to establish a high-level strategic framework for the export of Japanese defense equipment to the Philippines, marking a significant step in deepening military cooperation.
 - ***The enhanced Philippines and Japan partnership aims to address shared concerns over China's increasingly assertive maritime actions in the East and South China Seas, which both countries view as attempts to unilaterally alter the regional status quo.***
 - Both nations emphasized the importance of adhering to

international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to resolve disputes and maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

- The collaboration underscores the strategic importance of the South China Sea, a vital maritime corridor for global trade, and the necessity of safeguarding against coercive action that could disrupt regional and international stability.

Thank you for your continued participation in our counter-lawfare community of interest.

V/r Ian

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