

From: Santicola, Jan CAPT USN INDOPACOM PCJO (USA)
To: Santicola, Jan CAPT USN INDOPACOM PCJO (USA)
Subject: INDOPACOM Legal Vigilance Update #23 (15 Mar 2025)
Date: Saturday, March 15, 2025 9:45:34 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)
[image005.png](#)
[image004.png](#)
[image006.png](#)

Teammates,

Below please find the 23rd edition of INDOPACOM's Legal Vigilance Update.

- **14 March 2025:** G7 Foreign Ministers reaffirm “*steadfast commitment to contribute towards a free, open, and secure maritime domain based on the rule of law that strengthens international security, fosters economic prosperity, and ensures the sustainable use of marine resources.*”
 - **Bottom-line:** the G7 Foreign Ministers “express[ed] deep concern over the growing risks to maritime security, including strategic contestation, threats to freedom of navigation and overflight, and illicit shipping activities,” emphasizing that irresponsible State behavior “has increased the risk of conflict and environmental damage, and imperils all nations’ prosperity and living standards, especially for the world’s poorest.”
 - **References:**
 - [G7 Foreign Ministers Declaration on Maritime Security and Prosperity \(Mar. 14, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - The G7 Foreign Ministers (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, and the High Representative of the European Union):
 - highlighted the “emerging threat on safe seas and freedom of navigation and overflight;”
 - “underscore[ed] the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight and other internationally lawful uses of the high seas and the exclusive economic zones as well as to the related rights and freedoms in other maritime zones, including the rights of innocent passage, transit passage and archipelagic sea lanes passage, as provided for under international law;”
 - stated that they “share a growing concern at recent, unjustifiable efforts to restrict such freedom and to expand jurisdiction through use of force and other forms of coercion, including across the Taiwan Strait, and in the South China Sea, the Red Sea, and the Black Sea;”
 - “condemn[ed] China’s illicit, provocative, coercive and dangerous actions that seek unilaterally to alter the status quo in such a way as to risk undermining the stability of regions, including through land reclamations, and building of outposts, as well as their use for military purpose;”
 - condemned “dangerous vessel maneuvers, the indiscriminate attacks against commercial vessels and other maritime actions that undermine maritime order based on the rule of law and international law” and “reiterate[d] that the award rendered by the Arbitral Tribunal on 12 July 2016 is a significant milestone, which is legally binding upon the parties to those proceedings and a useful basis for peacefully resolving disputes between the parties;”
 - “reaffirm[ed] that our basic policies on Taiwan remain unchanged and emphasize the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as indispensable to international security and prosperity;” and
 - reiterated opposition to “unilateral attempts to change the status quo, in particular by force or coercion including in the East and South China Seas.”
- **14 March 2025:** U.S. announces new visa restrictions on current and former officials from the Government of Thailand responsible for, or complicit in, the forced return of 40 Uyghurs from Thailand on February 27.
 - **Bottom-line:** the U.S. Department of State’s action reaffirmed the *U.S. commitment to combating China’s efforts to pressure governments to forcibly return Uyghurs and other groups to China, where they are subject to torture and enforced disappearances.*
 - **References:**
 - [U.S. Department of State Press Statement, Announcement of a Visa Restriction Policy to Address the Forced Return of Uyghurs and Members of Other Ethnic or Religious Groups with Protection Concerns to China \(Mar. 14, 2025\)](#)
 - [Sui-Lee Wee and David Pierson, Ignoring Pleas, Thailand Deports Dozens of Uyghurs to China \(New York Times, Feb. 27, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - On February 27, 2025, Thailand deported 40 Uyghurs to China, raising significant concerns regarding Thailand’s adherence to the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits sending individuals to a country where they are likely to face persecution, torture, or other serious harm.
 - Immediately following the deportation, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights criticized the move for breaching Thailand’s international obligations, and U.S. 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.
 - The new visa restrictions announced on March 14 will apply to current or former foreign government officials responsible for, or complicit in, the forced return of Uyghurs or members of other ethnic or religious groups with protection concerns to China.
 - *In light of China’s longstanding acts of genocide and crimes against humanity committed against Uyghurs, the U.S. calls on governments around the world not to forcibly return Uyghurs and other groups to China.*
- **12 March 2025:** Taiwan introduces new national security measures amid China’s rising espionage threats.
 - **Bottom-line:** Taiwan’s government is advancing new legal measures, including reinstatement of a military court system, to combat growing CCP influence and infiltration efforts targeting Taiwan’s military and broader society.
 - **References:**
 - [Yimou Lee, Taiwan president warns of China’s ‘infiltration’ effort, vows counter measures, \(Reuters, Mar. 12, 2025\)](#)

- [Koh Ewe, Taiwan calls China 'foreign hostile force' and vows tough measures, \(BBC, Mar. 13, 2025\)](#)
- [Jonathan China and Hollie Younger, Chinese influencer's residency revoked, \(Taipei Times, Mar. 13, 2025\)](#)
- **Key Points:**
 - President Lai Ching-te outlined a total of seventeen countermeasures aimed at countering CCP espionage and influence campaigns, describing China as a “foreign hostile force” and indicating that Beijing has used Taiwan’s democracy to “absorb” various members of society, such as organized crime groups, media personalities, and defense officials.
 - President Lai stated that Taipei charged 64 individuals with espionage for China in 2024, a threefold increase from 2021.
 - Taiwan’s legal reforms underscore the **increasing urgency of countering CCP espionage and influence operations as China intensifies its legal and political warfare efforts.**
- **12 March 2025:** China expands seabed mapping, raising security concerns.
 - **Bottom-line:** China is rapidly expanding the scope and frequency of its seabed mapping operations, raising security concerns from India, Japan, and other Indo-Pacific nations over the military applications of China’s deep-sea data collection.
 - **References:**
 - [Austin Ramzy, China is Mapping the Seabed to Unlock New Edge in Warfare, \(Wall Street Journal, Mar. 12, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - The Wall St. Journal reports: “In a study of 64 research and survey vessels operated by Chinese agencies, law enforcement, universities and state-owned enterprises, CSIS found more than 80% had links or showed behavior—such as visiting military ports—that suggested they were involved in “advancing Beijing’s geopolitical agenda.”
 - The United States and many other countries have active marine data collection programs for a broad range of peaceful purposes, including the study of climate change and marine life.
 - The PRC’s purposes may be similarly peaceful in some cases, but the vast scale of the PRC’s marine data collection, “dual-use” behaviors, lack of transparency, and propensity to flout international law is fomenting a “gray zone” in which coastal states are obfuscated from identifying legal transgressions and taking enforcement action.
 - There is concern that the PRC’s actions are infringing on coastal state security interests and sovereign rights.
 - **The PRC’s approach appears to blur lines between the different types of marine data collection, complicating the ability of coastal states to uphold their rights under international law.**
- **11 March 2025:** new article details China’s legal warfare.
 - **Bottom-line:** in a detailed new piece, two experts (and military lawyers) detail how China is systematically constructing a legal framework to legitimize potential military action against Taiwan, and propose “key steps for Taiwan’s international supporters to strengthen deterrence, including dismantling China’s legal pretext for aggression and implementing coordinated counter-lawfare strategies to challenge Beijing’s lawfare campaign.”
 - **References:**
 - [Cheng Deng Feng and Tim Boyle, Exposing China's Legal Preparations for a Taiwan Invasion \(War on the Rocks, Mar. 11, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - The article thoroughly documents China’s legal warfare, and opines that **“countering China’s legal preparations for war is...essential to preserving peace and security in the Western Pacific and ensuring that international law remains a bulwark against aggression, rather than a weapon used to facilitate it.”**
 - The authors highlight U.S. Indo-Pacific Command’s counter-lawfare initiative as an “approach that others can replicate,” noting that “counter-lawfare can bolster broader deterrence efforts.”
- **9 March 2025:** Wall St. Journal reports that “years of ship-tracking data, flight paths and satellite images show a clear intensification of Beijing’s tactics across a swath of Asia.”
 - **Bottom-line:** through detailed graphics and statistics, the Wall St. Journal provided a compelling argument that “China is waging a ‘gray zone’ campaign to cement power” in the South China Sea, Taiwan, and the Himalayas.
 - **References:**
 - [Niharika Mandhana and Camille Bressange, China Is Waging a ‘Gray Zone’ Campaign to Cement Power. Here’s How It Looks. \(Wall St. Journal, Mar. 9, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - The Wall St. Journal reports: **“Whether it is probes by war planes, maneuvers by coast guard ships or the creeping construction of new civilian settlements, China is constantly pushing boundaries in what security strategists call the ‘gray zone.’”**
 - In detailing China’s destabilizing behavior in the South China Sea, Taiwan, and the Himalayas, the Wall St. Journal says that China “tests the limits of what its opponents consider tolerable behavior, escalating a bit with every new action.”

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

CAPT Ian Santicola, JAGC, USN
U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
Chief, National Security Law
Director, Counter-Lawfare Center
NIPR: ian.santicola.mil@us.navy.mil





The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's Office of the Staff Judge Advocate delivers full-spectrum legal support to integrated deterrence, legal force readiness, and counter-lawfare in support of COMUSINDOPACOM's Theater Campaign Plan. For more information, including USINDOPACOM's counter-lawfare TACAIDS, please visit <https://www.pacom.mil/Contact/Directory/Jo/Jo6-Staff-Judge-Advocate/>.

