
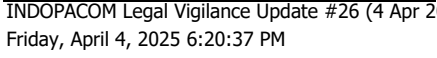


From: 
To: 
Subject: INDOPACOM Legal Vigilance Update #26 (4 Apr 2025)
Date: Friday, April 4, 2025 6:20:37 PM
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Teammates,

Below please find the 26th edition of INDOPACOM's Legal Vigilance Update.

- **1-2 April 2025: *China conducts destabilizing and coercive large-scale joint military exercises encircling Taiwan on April 1 and 2.***
 - **Bottom-line:** China launched a series of large-scale joint military drills (“Strait Thunder 2025A”) simulating a blockade around Taiwan, integrating the PLA Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force
 - **References:**
 - [Christian Shepherd, Vic Chiang, and Lyric Li, *China targets Taiwan’s president with military drills and personal attacks* \(Washington Post, Apr. 1, 2025\)](#)
 - [Chris Buckley, *China Holds Military Exercises Around Taiwan in Fresh Warning* \(New York Times, Apr. 1, 2025\)](#)
 - [Taiwan condemns PRC military drills](#) (Taipei Times, Apr. 2 2025)
 - [Joe Cash, Yimou Lee, and Ben Blanchard, *China concludes two-day war games around Taiwan after live fire drills* \(Reuters, Apr. 2, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - The People’s Liberation Army’s Eastern Theater Command announced that the drills would focus on “joint seizure of sea and air control, **blockade of key areas**, and simulated strikes on land targets.”
 - The Taiwanese National Defense Ministry [reported 135 PLA aircraft sorties across both days of exercises](#)—68 of which crossed the median line—and 13 PLA Navy ships, which encircled Taiwan from all directions.
 - China coupled its military actions with an aggressive propaganda campaign, including derogatory cartoons personally attacking Taiwan President Lai and videos that depicted the PLA destroying major Taiwanese cities.
 - China’s coercive and aggressive Strait Thunder 2025A exercise appears to have been a response to a March 13 speech by Taiwan President Lai in which he outlined measures for resisting China’s malign influence and coercion.
 - This marks China’s third major encirclement exercise around Taiwan since President Lai took office in May 2024. China’s pretext for launching Joint Sword 2024A and 2024B was a reaction to claimed “provocations” by

President Lai in his inauguration speech and national day speech, respectively.

- In response, the [U.S. Department of State stated](#):
*Once again, **China's aggressive military activities and rhetoric toward Taiwan only serve to exacerbate tensions and put the region's security and the world's prosperity at risk.** In the face of China's intimidation tactics and destabilizing behavior, the United States' enduring commitment to our allies and partners, including Taiwan, continues. The United States supports peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and opposes unilateral changes to the status quo, including through force or coercion.*
- 3 April 2025: leaders of the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea reaffirm ironclad defense commitments and shared principles on the rule of law.
 - **Bottom-line:** United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Japanese Foreign Minister Iwama Takeshi, and Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul met on April 3 in Brussels to strengthen trilateral cooperation in advancing the safety, security, and prosperity of the three countries and the broader Indo-Pacific region, while upholding shared principles including the rule of law.
 - References:
 - [Joint Statement on the Trilateral – United States, Japan, Republic of Korea – Meeting in Brussels \(Dep't of State, Apr. 3, 2025\)](#)
 - Key points:
 - The U.S. Secretary of State and Foreign Ministers of Japan and ROK:
 - strongly **opposed unlawful maritime claims or 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 as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, including freedoms of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea, prevails;**
 - emphasized the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity for the international community;
 - expressed concern about provocative actions, particularly the recent military drills around Taiwan, and called for an

- end to further destabilizing actions;
 - encouraged the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues and opposed any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo, including by force or coercion; and
 - expressed support for Taiwan's meaningful participation in appropriate international organizations.
- 3 April 2025: WSJ report details how the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has become "the world's most dangerous cryptocurrency thief."
 - ***Bottom-line: hackers from the DPRK have stolen more than \$6 billion in cryptocurrency over the past decade, with the illicit money helping to fund the Kim regime's nuclear program and prop up the country's sanctions-strapped economy.***
 - References:
 - [Patricia Kowsmann and Timothy W. Martin, *How North Korea Cheated Its Way to Crypto Billions* \(Wall St. Journal, Apr. 3, 2025\)](#)
 - Key points:
 - According to the WSJ, "The regime commands more than 8,000 hackers as though they were in a military unit, with the country's brightest minds. State support means its hackers can wait months or years to exploit a single slip in a company's digital security."
 - The WSJ reported that "U.S. officials and private investigators said North Koreans leave behind digital crumbs making it clear they are the culprits, including familiar malware code and crypto wallets that were reused from prior heists attributed to Pyongyang."
 - The report states: "The reason for North Korea's focus is obvious: It needs roughly \$6 billion a year to fund its various government activities, South Korea's spy agency has said, including hundreds of millions of dollars estimated to be earmarked for its nuclear program. International sanctions have limited North Korea's take from its traditional cash cows, including arms sales, coal smuggling and overseas labor. Crypto theft offers a low-risk way for Pyongyang to fill its coffers, said Eric Penton-Voak, who served as coordinator of the U.N. panel overseeing sanctions enforcement of North Korea from 2021 to 2023."
- 3 April 2025: U.S. Indo-Pacific Command representatives meet with China counterparts at Military Maritime Consultative Agreement working group.
 - ***Bottom-line: military officials from the U.S. traveled to Shanghai, China to meet for working-level talks focused on decreasing the incidences of unsafe and unprofessional PLA Navy and PLA Air Force actions.***

- References:
 - [USINDOPACOM Press Release, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command representatives meet with China counterparts at Military Maritime Consultative Agreement working group \(Apr. 3, 2025\)](#)
- Key points:
 - Representatives from U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. Pacific Air Forces, and U.S. Coast Guard met with representatives from China's People Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and Air Force for the semi-annual Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) working group.
- 1 Apr. 2025: U.S. sanctions China-based manufacturer as part of network facilitating Iran's ballistic missile and drone program.
 - **Bottom-line:** the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in coordination with the Justice Department, designated several entities involved in Iran's ballistic missile and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) programs, including a China-based manufacturing company.
 - References:
 - [The Departments of Treasury and Justice Take Action Against Iranian Weapons Procurement Network \(Department of Treasury Press Release, Apr. 1, 2025\)](#)
 - Key points:
 - The action designated six entities and two individuals involved in a procurement network supplying critical components to Iran's Defense Ministry. The network employed front companies and intermediaries to acquire dual-use materials, including advanced electronic components used in missile guidance and drone manufacturing.
 - The sanctions were imposed pursuant to Executive Order 13382, which targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. The sanctions prohibit U.S. persons from engaging in transactions with the designated parties.
 - ***China-based motor manufacturer Zibo Shenbo Machineelectronics Co Ltd authorized an Iranian intermediary company to be its distributor, and supplied tens of thousands of motors for the end user Shahid Bakeri Industrial Group, a key part of Iran's military industrial complex.***
 - The action reinforces the U.S. commitment to enforce sanctions against actors contributing to Iran's destabilizing military capabilities.
- 1 Apr. 2025: questions arise regarding China's undersea cable capabilities and intentions.

Bottom-line: China's recent announcement of an advanced

undersea cable-cutter raises questions regarding China's capability and intent in light of its pattern of destabilizing behavior, disregard for global security norms, and military-civil fusion.

■ References:

- [Jill Goldenziel, *China's Cable Cutter Claims Deserve A Sharper Look*, \(Forbes, Mar. 31, 2025\)](#)

■ Key points:

- In March of 2025, the South China Morning Post reported that China had developed a cable-cutting vessel capable of severing fortified undersea communications at depths of up to 4,000 meters, well beyond the operational depth of most undersea cables.
 - The timing of the announcement raised questions as it quickly followed Beijing's denials that a Chinese-crewed vessel intentionally severed an undersea cable near Taiwan.
 - According to the International Cable Protection Committee, cables at depths of 4,000 meters are rarely fortified in a way that would require advanced technology to sever.
 - [CSIS recently wrote](#): "It is difficult to overstate the urgency of finding and implementing solutions to address [challenges of undersea cable protection]. Multiple cuts to a subsea cable system, whether to the trans-Pacific cables or in the Suez Canal, would lead to immediate and devastating economic and information security consequences. And ***the reveal of China's cable cutting ship should silence any doubts regarding the threat of intentional cuts.***"
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- 31 March 2025: U.S. expands visa and sanctions measures against Chinese officials undermining access to Tibet and autonomy of Hong Kong.
 - **Bottom-line**: in late March 2025, the U.S. Department of State implemented two coordinated sets of targeted actions against Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials under U.S. human rights and accountability laws to address CCP violations in both Tibet and Hong Kong.

■ References:

- [Implementing Visa Restrictions under the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act \(Department of State Press Statement, Mar. 31, 2025\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of State Imposes Visa Restrictions on Chinese Communist Party Officials for Undermining Hong Kong's High Degree of Autonomy and Restricting Human Rights \(Department of State Press Release, Jun. 26, 2020\)](#)
- [Sanctioning Those Undermining Hong Kong's Autonomy \(Department of State Press Release, Mar. 31, 2025\)](#)
- [U.S. Sanctions Six Individuals for Undermining Hong Kong's](#)

[Autonomy \(Department of State Press Release, Mar. 31, 2025\)](#)

- [Report to Congress on Conditions in Hong Kong of Interest to the United States Section 125 of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 \(Department of State Report, Mar. 31, 2025\)](#)

■ Key points:

- The DoS imposed visa restrictions against CCP officials under the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act (RATA) and Executive Order 13936, **reflecting sustained U.S. efforts to counter Beijing's systematic human rights abuses and violations of international commitments**. The CCP officials were responsible for obstructing U.S. officials, journalists, and researchers from accessing the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).
 - In addition, the U.S. sanctioned six individuals, including officials from the Hong Kong Police Force's National Security Department (NSD), for their role in enforcing the National Security Law to suppress civil liberties and autonomy in Hong Kong. The sanctioned individuals were identified as responsible for arbitrary arrests, suppression of independent media, and the ongoing erosion of Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy promised under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and Hong Kong's Basic Law.
 - The 2025 Hong Kong Policy Act Report indicated that Hong Kong's autonomy has further deteriorated. For the fifth consecutive year, Hong Kong does not warrant treatment under U.S. law as enjoying a high degree of autonomy from China, triggering continued application of sanctions and export control measures under EO 13936.
 - The expansion of visa restrictions under RATA and sanctions under EO 13936 signals an enduring **U.S. commitment to holding CCP officials accountable for restricting access to Tibet and undermining Hong Kong's autonomy**, while setting a precedent for broader international action.
- 31 March 2025: U.S. condemns China's reporting system targeting Taiwan independence supporters.
 - **Bottom-line:** the U.S. Department of State strongly criticized China's launch of an online reporting system that encourages individuals to denounce alleged Taiwan independence supporters, characterizing the move as "reprehensible" and a direct threat to free expression, cross-Strait stability, and regional peace.
- References:
- [U.S. slams China's call for informants on Taiwan independence as 'Irresponsible and Reprehensible' \(Asian News International, Mar. 31, 2025\)](#)

- Key points:
 - [China's Taiwan Affairs Office \(TAO\) established an online platform](#) that enables individuals to report acts allegedly committed by “Taiwan independence henchmen and accomplices.” The system solicits allegations of political expression, civil engagement, and opposition to China’s unification goals, purporting to accept evidence of such “vile acts” for public and state scrutiny.
 - A U.S. State Department Spokesperson reportedly ***denounced the reporting system as irresponsible and reprehensible, labeling it as part of a broader intimidation campaign targeting Taiwan’s democratic system.***
 - Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council called China’s reporting system a blatant interference in Taiwan’s internal affairs and an escalation in Beijing’s political warfare strategy.
 - Notably, on June 21, 2024, China laid out the “Opinions on Punishing Crimes of Separatism and Inciting Separatism by ‘Taiwan Independence’ Diehards in Accordance with Law” (aka “[22 Articles](#)”), which impose criminal punishment on leaders and advocates of Taiwan independence. Punishment in circumstances China deems severe includes the death penalty.

Thank you for your continued participation in our Counter-Lawfare community of interest.

V/r Ian

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