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Subject: INDOPACOM Legal Vigilance Update #27 (11 Apr 2025)
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Teammates,

Below please find the 27th edition of INDOPACOM's Legal Vigilance Update.

- **11 April 2025:** China reportedly admits role in U.S. infrastructure hacks, links attacks to U.S. Taiwan policy.
 - **Bottom-line:** in a closed-door meeting in Geneva in December 2024, officials from *China reportedly acknowledged responsibility for cyber intrusions targeting U.S. critical infrastructure*—marking a significant escalation in China's use of cyber capabilities to coerce the United States over its Taiwan policy.
 - **References:**
 - [Dustin Volz, In Secret Meeting, China Acknowledged Role in U.S. Infrastructure Hacks \(Wall St. Journal, Apr. 10, 2025\)](#)
 - [Dustin Volz, Chinese Hacking Against U.S. Infrastructure Threatens American Lives, Officials Say \(Wall St. Journal, Jan. 31, 2024\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - According to a new Wall St. Journal report, officials from China linked years of cyberattacks against U.S. ports, utilities, and airports to U.S. support for Taiwan's self-defense capacity—interpreted by U.S. officials as a veiled threat of retaliation in the event of a Taiwan contingency.
 - The intrusions are part of the broader Volt Typhoon operation, a China-sponsored effort to pre-position in U.S. critical infrastructure to potentially enable disruptive attacks during future crises.
 - The FBI previously warned that China's Volt Typhoon campaign targets “everything from water treatment plants to the power grid.”
 - *China's reported admission that its cyber prepositioning in U.S. civilian infrastructure was a response to U.S. Taiwan policy marks a brazen leap in coercive statecraft—weaponizing critical infrastructure access to interfere in sovereign decision-making and deter lawful (and longstanding) U.S. support to a democratic partner.*
 - **Bottom-line:** Taiwan has criminally charged a Chinese ship captain for intentionally damaging a submarine cable off its southwestern coast, underscoring growing concern over China's malign and destabilizing activities.
 - **References:**
 - [Taiwan charges Chinese captain with damaging undersea cables \(Reuters, Apr. 11, 2025\)](#)
 - [Erin L. Murphy and Matt Pearl, China's Underwater Power Play: The PRC's New Subsea Cable-Cutting Ship Spooks International Security Experts \(CSIS, Apr. 4, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - Taiwanese prosecutors allege that the Chinese-crewed Hong Tai 58, flagged in Togo, dropped anchor and damaged a sea cable just off Taiwan's southwest coast—within Taiwan's 12-nautical-mile territorial sea.
 - The cable that was damaged [connected Taiwan's main island to the Taiwan's Penghu Islands](#), which lie about 30 miles west of the main island.
 - The incident is one of five cable disruptions reported by Taiwan in 2025. Previous cases include allegations of vessels loitering in cable zones, deactivating AIS, or dragging anchors in erratic patterns—behavior consistent with past Chinese-linked cable incidents in the Taiwan Strait and Baltic Sea.
 - *Because the reported undersea cable damage occurred within Taiwan's territorial sea, Taiwan has jurisdiction to enforce its domestic laws for protection of undersea infrastructure* (Article 21 of UNCLOS states “[t]he coastal State may adopt laws and regulations, in conformity with the provisions of this Convention and other rules of international law, relating to innocent passage through the territorial sea, in respect of...the protection of cables and pipelines”).
 - The recent incidents threatening Taiwan's undersea cables, as well as similar incidents in the Baltic Sea, have focused the U.S. and likeminded partners on the urgent need for [coordinated measures](#) to counter threats to undersea infrastructure. These measures include insurance-based vessel screening, tighter sanctions alignment and enforcement, promotion of economic liability for undersea harm, development of shared best practices, and ongoing information-sharing to anticipate and counter shadow fleet threats.
- **10 April 2025:** United States welcomes Bangladesh's signing of the Artemis Accords.
 - **Bottom-line:** Bangladesh became the 54th signatory of the Artemis Accords at a ceremony at the 2025 Investor Summit in Dhaka on April 8, joining the U.S. and 52 other nations in affirming the Accord's principles for *sustainable civil space activity*.
 - **References:**
 - [U.S. Department of State Press Release, United States Welcomes Bangladesh's Signing of the Artemis Accords \(Apr. 10, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - The United States and seven other countries—Australia, Canada, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom—established the Artemis Accords in 2020 to serve as a set of practical principles to guide responsible space exploration.
 - Grounded in the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 (OST), the Artemis Accords are a [non-binding set of principles](#) designed to guide civil space exploration and use in the 21st century.
 - *The Artemis Accords represent the best of multilateral leadership in civil space diplomacy and bring together a diverse set of nations with a shared vision of peaceful space cooperation.*

6 April 2025: *China Coast Guard endangers Philippine patrol vessel in Philippine EEZ.*

- **Bottom-line:** on April 6–7, 2025, two China Coast Guard (CCG) vessels—CCG-3302 and CCG-21612—executed reckless and dangerous maneuvers against the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) vessel *BRP Cabra* in the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), violating international maritime safety norms and threatening regional peace and stability.
 - **References:**
 - [CDRE Jay Tarriela, PCG Holds the Line Despite Dangerous Maneuvers by China Coast Guard \(X, Apr. 7, 2025\)](#)
 - [Christina Chi, China Coast Guard nearly collides with Philippine vessel near Zambales \(PhilStar, Apr. 7, 2025\)](#)
 - [China Coast Guard Cutter Nearly Hits Philippine Patrol Vessel Head-On \(The Maritime Executive, Apr. 6, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - A China Coast Guard vessel (CCG-3302) attempted a head-on collision with Philippine Coast Guard vessel *BRP Cabra* on April 6 and, the following day, both CCG-3302 and CCG-21612 made repeated attempts to ram the PCG vessel from astern. These maneuvers violate customary international law and the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs), to which China is a party.
 - The incident occurred well within the Philippines' EEZ, where the Philippines has exclusive sovereign rights over resource activities.
 - The 2016 Arbitral Tribunal ruling rejected China's expansive maritime claims and confirmed that China has no lawful basis for interfering with Philippine operations in this region.
 - **China's aggressive and reckless maritime behavior in the South China Sea threatens freedom of navigation and undermines regional security.**
 - The U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty extends to armed attacks against either country's armed forces, aircraft, and public vessels – including those of their coast guards – anywhere in the South China Sea.
- 9 April 2025: Palau pushes back on China's malign influence.
 - **Bottom-line:** *Palau continues to play a leading role among Pacific Island partners in countering China's malign influence.*
 - **References:**
 - [Cleo Paskal, Palau departs Chinese criminals, reinforces Indo-Pacific security \(Asia Times, Apr. 9, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - Regional expert Cleo Paskal reports that, **from blocking political interference and organized crime to rejecting coercive economic pressure, Palau is actively reinforcing Indo-Pacific security and demonstrating the value of the U.S.-Palau Compact of Free Association.**
 - Palau deported two Chinese nationals in March 2025 who were convicted in U.S. court for bribery in a failed scheme to establish a China-aligned "special zone" in the Marshall Islands. Palau's refusal to admit them blocked an effort to reestablish their influence network in the region.
 - In her [testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission](#) on March 20, 2025, Cleo Paskal said: **"China's attempt to gain influence, if not control, in the Pacific islands is a few decades old — relatively recent by strategic standards. However, the effort made to accomplish that goal is deep, broad, and relentless."**
 - Palau, a Compact of Free Association (COFA) partner, plays an integral role in supporting the U.S. security presence in the Pacific Islands region at a time of increasing strategic competition between the United States and its allies, on the one hand, and China, on the other.
 - The COFAs govern the relationships between the United States and the three sovereign nations collectively known as the Freely Associated States (FAS): the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the Republic of Palau.
 - The COFAs grant the U.S. military access to a strategic area in the Indo-Pacific, allow FAS citizens to live and work in the United States and its territories as lawful nonimmigrants, and provide economic support and security assistance for the FAS.
 - More than 94,000 FAS citizens live in the U.S. and over 1,000 FAS citizens serve in the U.S. Armed Forces.

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

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