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**Subject:** INDOPACOM Legal Vigilance Update #29 (25 Apr 2025)  
**Date:** Friday, April 25, 2025 5:29:07 PM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[image002.png](#)  
[image004.png](#)  
[Counter-Lawfare One Pager v3.pdf](#)

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Teammates,

Below please find the 29<sup>th</sup> edition of INDOPACOM's Legal Vigilance Update.

But first a few notes:

- Today we honor **Anzac Day** and pay tribute to the courage, sacrifice, and enduring spirit of the Australian and New Zealand forces who have stood alongside allies in the defense of freedom.
- We have updated our [website](#). Hopefully you find an improved user experience, but we always welcome your feedback on how we can continue to improve the page.
- Also updated and available on our website (and attached here) is our [counter-lawfare one-pager](#), with slightly refined and refreshed verbiage. Hopefully you find this to be a helpful aid in your own counter-lawfare efforts.

Now, for the update:

- **April 2025:** U.S. counters China's misuse of legal frameworks at the U.N.
  - **Bottom-line:** speaking before the U.N. Security Council, *the U.S. directly challenged China's mischaracterization of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 2758 to isolate Taiwan.*
    - **References:**
      - [U.S. Mission to the United Nations, Remarks by Deputy Political Counselor Ting Wu at the U.N. Security Council \(Apr. 23, 2025\)](#)
      - [U.S. blasts China for misusing U.N. resolution at Security Council meeting \(Taipei Times, Apr. 25, 2025\)](#)
    - **Key points:**
      - On April 23, 2025, U.S. Deputy Political Counselor Ting Wu condemned China's misrepresentation of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 2758 during remarks to the U.N. Security Council.
      - Wu reaffirmed that Resolution 2758 solely addressed the question of China's representation at the United Nations and does not resolve the issue of Taiwan's participation in the U.N. system or other international organizations.
      - Wu further **denounced China's broader pattern of coercive practices**—including economic coercion, predatory development finance, and unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea—which she argued threaten the integrity of the international system.
  - **April 2025:** CSIS' annual Space Threat Assessment for 2025 details emerging (and concerning) trends in space.
    - **Bottom-line:** according to CSIS, *"China continues to launch and operate highly maneuverable satellites, [which] could enable a formidable on-orbit counterspace arsenal," while Russia continues to engage in provocative counterspace activities efforts, as well as jamming and spoofing of GPS signals on Earth.*
      - **References:**
        - [Clayton Swope, Kari A. Bingen, Makena Young, and Kendra LaFave, Space Threat Assessment 2025 \(CSIS, Apr. 2025\)](#)
      - **Key points:**
        - CSIS reports that, "Chinese and Russian satellites in both low Earth orbit (LEO) and geostationary Earth orbit (GEO) continue to display more and more advanced maneuvering capabilities, demonstrating operator proficiency and tactics, techniques, and procedures that can be used for space warfighting and alarming U.S. and allied officials."
        - According to CSIS, "[t]his past year also saw the growth of commercial and military dual-use technologies that could be modified to serve a counterspace purpose."
        - CSIS writes: **"Counterspace threats should be viewed within the broader context of efforts by adversaries to degrade the ability of the United States and its allies to fight and win a war and disrupt the economy and day-to-day life on Earth, not merely as efforts to degrade a space capability."**
        - For America's part, the U.S. Department of Defense has committed to [tenets of responsible behavior in space](#) and [tenet-derived specific responsible behaviors](#), including:
          - Operating with due regard to others by avoiding harmful interference or risky maneuvers near other space objects.
          - Limiting the generation of long-lived debris by designing and operating space systems with responsible end-of-life plans.
          - Enhancing spaceflight safety and stability through timely communication and notifications about space object maneuvers, anomalies, and risks.
  - **24 April 2025:** executive order on seabed mineral resources and U.S. strategic supply chains.
    - **Bottom-line:** on April 24, 2025, President Trump signed an **Executive Order (EO) to enhance the exploration, characterization, collection, and processing of critical deep seabed minerals**. The EO reflects a calibrated effort to strengthen U.S. supply chain resilience while promoting responsible resource development consistent with international principles, even as multilateral seabed governance remains unresolved.
      - **References:**
        - [Unleashing America's Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources \(White House, Apr. 24, 2025\)](#)
        - [Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Unleashes America's Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources \(White House, Apr. 24, 2025\)](#)
        - [Gracelin Baskaran and Meredith Schwartz, Trump's Deep-Sea Mining Executive Order: The Race for Critical Minerals Enters Uncharted Waters \(CSIS, Apr. 25, 2025\)](#)
      - **Key points:**
        - The Executive Order invokes U.S. domestic authorities to streamline deep seabed mineral licensing, aiming to reduce reliance on foreign critical mineral supply chains.
        - It directs agencies to map priority seabed areas, expand domestic processing capacity, and coordinate with allies on joint exploration and benefit-sharing frameworks.
        - The initiative positions the United States to lead in responsible seabed development, counter authoritarian influence, and strengthen strategic supply chain resilience amid intensifying global competition.
  - **23 April 2025:** Philippines relaxes restrictions of official visits to Taiwan.
    - **Bottom-line:** the Philippines has eased longstanding restrictions on official travel to Taiwan, expanding opportunities for economic diplomacy and reflecting Manila's evolving recognition of Taiwan as a critical economic and security partner in the region.
      - **References:**
        - [Alan Lu, Philippines loosens decades-old ban on official visits to Taiwan \(Radio Free Asia, Apr. 23, 2025\)](#)

- Key points:
          - As of April 15, 2025, the **Philippines will allow most government officials to travel to Taiwan for economic, trade, and investment engagements, easing longstanding restrictions.**
          - The policy signals a growing recognition of Taiwan as a critical regional economic and security partner.
          - The move builds on warming unofficial ties, including President Marcos Jr.'s public congratulations to Taiwan's new president in 2024.
- **23 April 2025:** new report details China's expanded use of maritime militia for intelligence collection.
  - **Bottom-line:** a new report from the **China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI) highlights China's growing use of maritime militia forces as a core component of the PLA's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) apparatus.**
    - References:
      - [Ryan Martinson, China's Fisherman Spies \(China Maritime Studies Institute, Apr. 23, 2025\)](#)
    - Key points:
      - China's maritime militia—civilian vessels operating under military command—serves as a covert ISR force integrated into China's national defense system.
      - Militia vessels conduct passive intelligence gathering and targeted surveillance of foreign naval activity under the direction of People's Armed Forces Departments (PAFDs) and have recovered sensitive U.S. military equipment.
      - By embedding intelligence operations under the guise of routine fishing vessels, China sustains persistent maritime surveillance for military purposes under a veneer of deniability.
      - By [exploiting civilian protections upheld by international law](#), the PAFMM are emboldened to infringe on other nations' lawful uses of the sea, as evidence by the PAFMM's ubiquitous presence in disputed maritime zones and routine interference with the sovereign rights of other nations.
- **22 April 2025:** Stimson Center releases reports on illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing across the Pacific.
  - **Bottom-line:** the **Stimson Center's new regional risk assessments highlight the growing threat of IUU fishing across the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing the economic, resilience, and governance risks—and warning that escalating maritime tensions, particularly with China, may fuel instability.**
    - References:
      - [Noat Fritzhand, Regan Kwan, Madelyn MacMurry, Brian Eyler, IUU Fishing Risk Analysis in Southeast Asia Digital Dashboard \(Stimson Center, Apr. 22, 2025\)](#)
      - [Madelyn MacMurray and Brian Eyler, Policy Roadmap: Addressing IUU Fishing in Southeast Asia \(Stimson Center, Apr. 22, 2025\)](#)
      - [Additional Stimson reports \(Apr. 22, 2025\)](#)
    - Key points:
      - Stimson's reports highlight that IUU fishing poses a strategic threat to economic security, coastal state resilience, and governance across the South China Sea littoral states, with China's activities a major driver of instability.
      - Maritime tensions have triggered a “race-to-fish” dynamic, undermining sustainable fisheries management and raising the risk of maritime conflict.
      - ASEAN efforts to coordinate fisheries enforcement face persistent gaps in data sharing, technical capacity, and interoperability, limiting regional response effectiveness.
      - Stimson analysts call for strengthened marine governance, regional enforcement cooperation, and targeted capacity building to close enforcement and technical gaps.
- **21 April 2025:** U.S and ASEAN reaffirm strategic cooperation at 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Dialogue.
  - **Bottom-line:** the United States reaffirmed its commitment to the U.S.-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership at the 37th U.S.-ASEAN Dialogue in Cambodia, underscoring ASEAN's centrality in a free and open Indo-Pacific and emphasizing cooperation on maritime security, emerging technologies, and democratic resilience.
    - References:
      - [The 37<sup>th</sup> Annual U.S.-ASEAN Dialogue \(Department of State, Apr. 22, 2025\)](#)
    - Key points:
      - U.S. Department of State Senior Bureau Official for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs Sean O'Neill:
        - “emphasized the importance of expanding cooperation on cybersecurity, developing emerging technologies, upholding freedom of navigation, and combating transnational crime, including online scam centers and synthetic drugs,”
        - “reiterated U.S. support for Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN,”
        - discussed “the importance of facilitating a free and open Indo-Pacific and effectively standing against aggression from outside parties,” and
        - “expressed the need to uphold freedoms of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea in the South China Sea.”
- **18 April 2025:** Dean Cheng highlights China's lawfare and military-strategic rise at Duke Law School's 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Law Ethics, and National Security (LENS) Conference.
  - **Bottom-line:** at the 30th Annual LENS Conference, **Dean Cheng delivered a sobering assessment of China's transformation over the past thirty years, emphasizing that lawfare is not peripheral but central to Beijing's political warfare strategy.**
    - References:
      - [Charlie Dunlap, Podcast: Dean Cheng on “The Challenge of China: Lawfare, Technology, and More” \(Duke University, Apr. 18, 2025\)](#)
    - Key points:
      - Cheng traced China's transformation from a 1995 military reliant on outdated Cold War platforms to a 2025 force fielding competitive capabilities across air, sea, space, and cyber domains.
      - Lawfare is a core weapon in China's political warfare arsenal—not mere compliance or circumvention, but a deliberate effort to redefine international law to legitimize aggressive actions, shape global perceptions, and constrain adversaries.
      - Cheng underscored that China's enduring strategic priorities—regime preservation, sovereignty claims (Taiwan, South China Sea, land borders), and economic growth—drive its integrated military, technological, and legal strategies.
- **17 April 2025:** China retaliates against U.S. sanctions, doubling down on repression of supporters of democracy in Hong Kong.
  - **Bottom-line:** China announced retaliatory sanctions targeting unnamed U.S. lawmakers, government officials, and NGO leaders in response to March 2025 U.S. sanctions against six Chinese and Hong Kong officials involved in repression of Hong Kong's autonomy.
    - References:
      - [Kanis Leung, China to retaliate with sanctions on US officials, NGO leaders over Hong Kong issues \(AP News, Apr. 20, 2025\)](#)
    - Key points:
      - In March 2025, the United States sanctioned six senior Chinese and Hong Kong Officials under U.S. human rights authorities for their roles

in undermining Hong Kong's civil liberties.

- China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun announced retaliatory measures against U.S. government officials, legislators, and NGO leaders deemed to have "performed poorly" on Hong Kong issues.
  - China imposed the sanctions under its Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law, a sweeping measure that grants broad authority to counter foreign actions deemed hostile to China's sovereignty or internal affairs.
  - *U.S. sanctions since 2020 have responded to Beijing's imposition of the 2020 National Security Law in Hong Kong, which curtailed free expression, shuttered media outlets, and prompted exile and arrest of pro-democracy activists.*
- **19 March 2025:** U.S. convicts China-directed agent in Operation Fox Hunt transnational repression case.
    - **Bottom-line:** a federal court sentenced Quanzhong An to 20 months in prison for acting as an illegal agent of China as a part of "Operation Fox Hunt," a cover China campaign targeting Chinese nationals abroad for coerced repatriation.
      - **References:**
        - [\*Leader of Multi-Year 'Operation Fox Hunt' Repatriation Campaign Directed by the People's Republic of China Sentenced to 20 Months in Prison \(Department of Justice, Mar. 19, 2025\)\*](#)
      - **Key points:**
        - Quanzhong An, a U.S. resident, was convicted for acting as an unregistered foreign agent and participating in a multi-year harassment campaign directed by China against a U.S. resident and their family.
        - An's activities, conducted without notification to U.S. authorities, violated federal law and involved repeated threats to the victim's family to coerce repatriation to China.
        - The case highlights China's use of transnational repression under Operation Fox Hunt and the growing U.S. legal response to unlawful foreign influence and covert operations on U.S. soil.

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

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