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USINDOPACOM Legal Vigilance Update

Issue #37, 27 June 2025

PREVAIL

Teammates,

Below please find the 37th edition of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's (USINDOPACOM) Legal Vigilance Update (LVU). To access previous LVUs, please visit <https://www.pacom.mil/Contact/Directory/Jo/Jo6-Staff-Judge-Advocate/>.

Quote of the Week:

"The drones fly thick and fast towards Kyiv these days. Almost 500 were fired in a recent Russian attack on Ukraine's capital, in the early hours of June 10th. Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, fears that at current rates of production Russia may soon be able to launch raids that involve twice the number of machines. To pick through the debris and peer inside those weapons is to come face to face with a grim reality. **China is the most important—perhaps decisive—enabler of Russia's war machine.**"

[*China has become the most important enabler of Russia's war machine \(The Economist, Jun. 19, 2025\)*](#)

- 20 June 2025: Philippine government vessels harassed by China Coast Guard in South China Sea.
 - **Bottom-line:** China's Coast Guard and People's Liberation Army harassed Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Agriculture vessels resupplying fishermen at Scarborough Shoal.
 - References:
 - [Aaron-Matthew Lariosa, Philippine Offshore Vessels Face Chinese Cutters and Water Cannons at Scarborough Shoal \(USNI, Jun. 20, 2025\)](#)
 - [Philippine News Today, US, Japan, others condemn China Coast Guard's water cannon attack on PHL vessels \(Philippine News, Jun. 26, 2025\)](#)
 - Key points:
 - The China Coast Guard (CCG), backed by PLA Navy warships and maritime militia, dangerously intercepted and unlawfully harassed Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessels conducting a mission to support Filipino fishermen in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal.
 - [Video and still imagery of the interaction](#) clearly shows CCG vessel 4203 water cannoning *BRP Datu Matanam Taradapit* (MMOV 3006).
 - The incident reflects a growing Chinese campaign to assert de facto control over contested waters in the South China Sea through aggressive and reckless conduct at-sea—an approach that contravenes international law and threatens the stability of the Indo-Pacific.

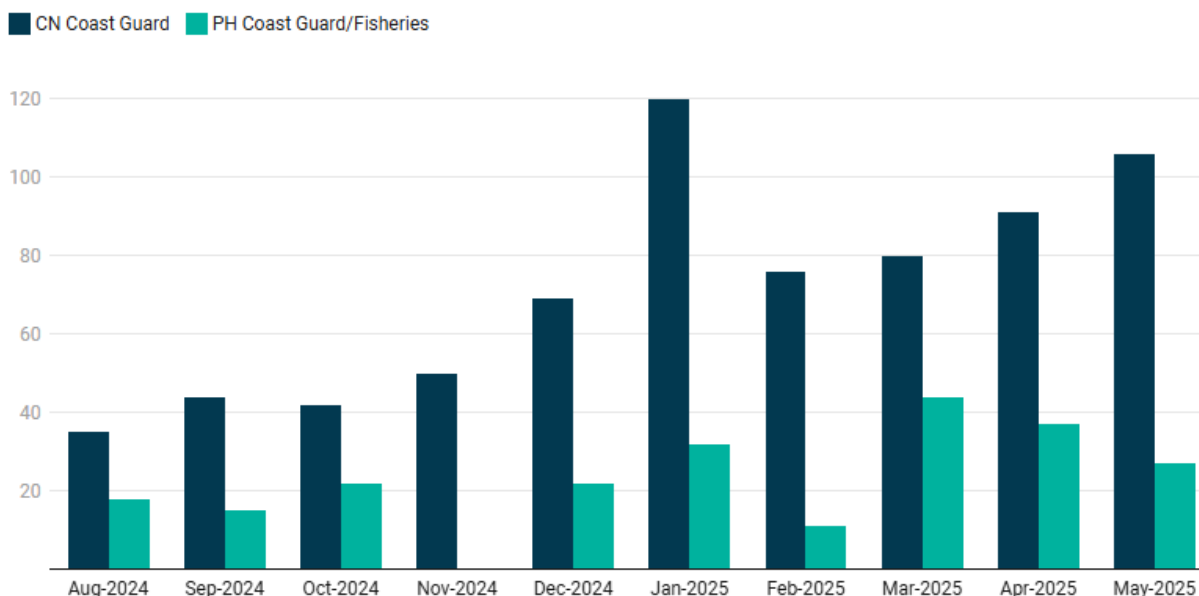


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- This incident occurred entirely within the Philippine EEZ where the Philippines exercises sovereign rights under UNCLOS, and violated the principle of due regard under Article 87 of UNCLOS as well as the COLREGs.
- The U.S. Embassy in Manila condemned the Chinese actions, stating that “the United States stands with the Philippines in upholding freedom of navigation and condemning the China Coast Guard’s dangerous actions that disrupted a lawful Philippine mission to provide supplies to fisherfolk within the Philippine EEZ.”
- Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the EU also issued strong statements of condemnation.
- Relatedly, in a new report, CSIS finds that China has increased the number and geographic range of CCG and maritime militia deployments near Philippine outposts and fishing grounds, with Scarborough Shoal alone seeing over 150 days of CCG and PLA harassment operations in the past year.
- ***China’s reckless and aggressive maritime behavior is not an isolated incident, but rather part of a continued pattern of coercion aimed at unlawfully enforcing excessive, ambiguous, and legally baseless sovereignty and jurisdictional claims in the Indo-Pacific.***

Monthly Patrol Days of Chinese and Philippine Vessels Near Scarborough Shoal

Chinese patrol presence consistently exceeds that of the Philippines from August 2024 to May 2025, with a sharp peak in January.



- 20 June 2025: UK and Japan conduct Taiwan Strait transits.
 - **Bottom-line:** on separate occasions in June, British and Japanese destroyers sailed through a corridor of the Taiwan Strait beyond the territorial sea of any coastal state, where all nations enjoy high-seas freedoms of navigation, overflight, and other internationally lawful uses of the sea.
 - References:
 - [Keishi Koja and Alex Wilson, British warship sails Taiwan Strait a week after Japanese destroyer’s passage \(Stars and Stripes, Jun. 20, 2025\)](#)
 - [Koh Ewe, China criticises UK warship’s patrol in Taiwan Strait \(June 19, 2025\)](#)
 - Key points:

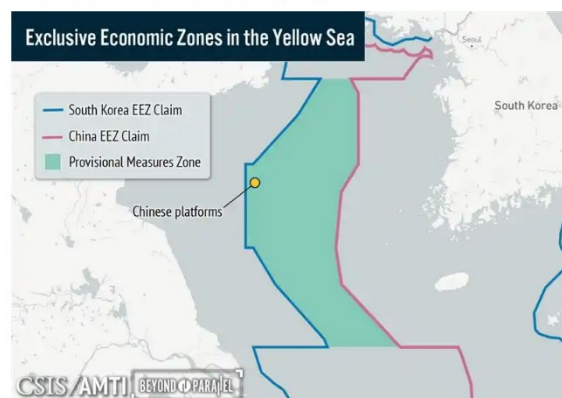
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- On 12 June, Japanese destroyer *JS Takanami* (DD-110) transited the Taiwan Strait en route to bilateral maritime activities with the Philippines in the South China Sea.
- One week later, on 19 June, Royal Navy offshore patrol vessel *HMS Spey* (P234) transited the Taiwan Strait.
- ***The Taiwan Strait includes a corridor beyond the territorial sea (TTS) of any state, in which all nations enjoy high-seas freedoms of navigation, overflight, and other internationally lawful uses of the sea and air.***
- These transits promote freedom, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, and serve as a rejection of any assertion by China of sovereignty over the entirety of the Strait or beyond its 12-nm territorial sea, and any assertion by China of excessive jurisdiction or control exceeding that provided for by international law of the sea as reflected in UNCLOS.



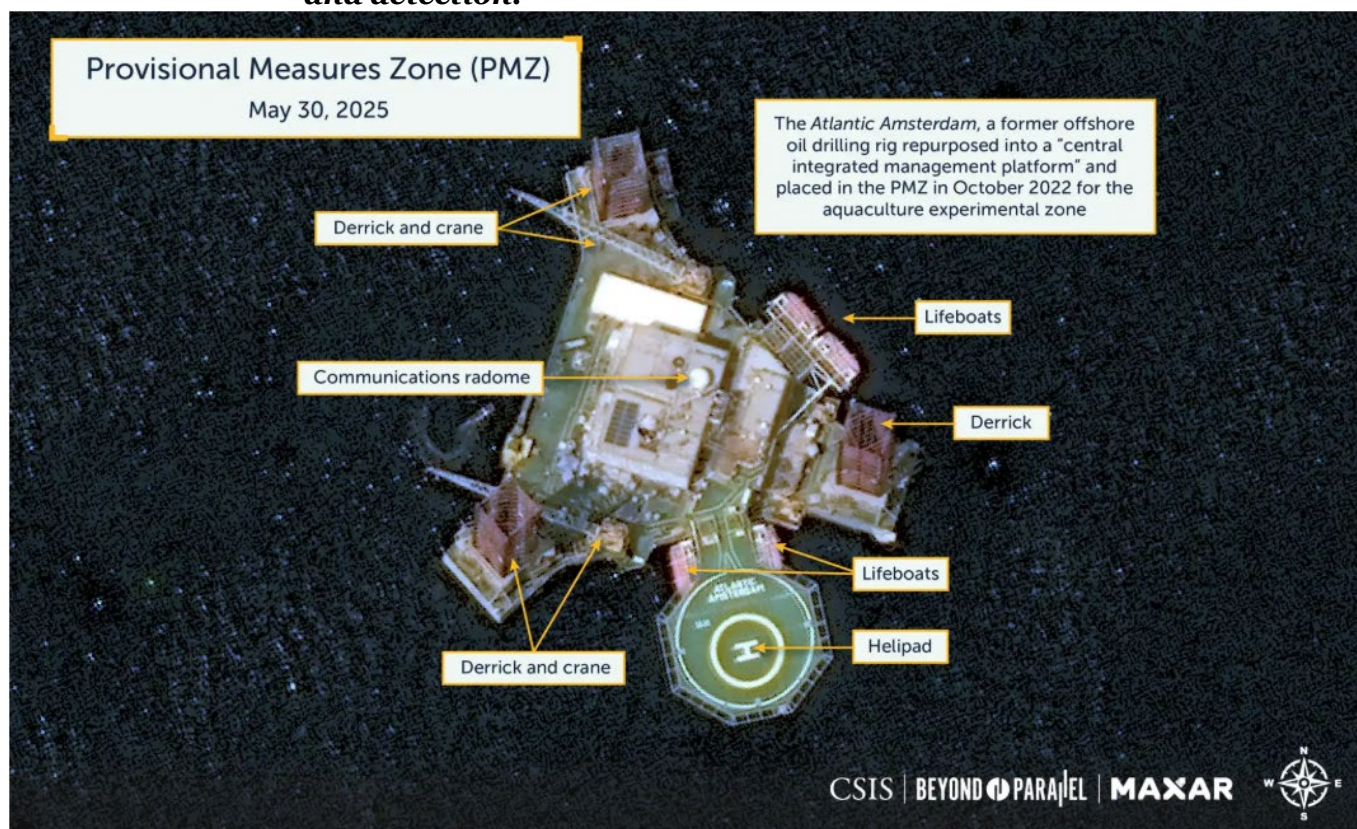
- **24 June 2025:** China intensifies destabilizing maritime activity in the Yellow and East China Seas, echoing its South China Sea playbook.
 - **Bottom-line:** China has stepped up construction of drilling rigs and other platforms in the Yellow and East China Seas, ostensibly to tap into maritime resources such as natural gas and fish—but these unilateral actions parallel Beijing’s destabilizing and excessive strategy in the South China Sea, and are raising fresh concerns in South Korea and Japan about Beijing’s regional ambitions.
 - **References:**
 - [Choe Sang-Hun, China Calls Them Fish Farms. South Korea Fears They Have Another Use. \(NY Times, Jun. 24, 2025\)](#)
 - [Jennifer Jun and Victor Cha, Chinese Platforms in the Yellow Sea’s South Korea-China PMZ \(Beyond Parallel, Jun. 23, 2025\)](#)
 - **Key points:**
 - Three Chinese maritime structures—one integrated management platform and two aquaculture cages—have been deployed inside the South Korea-China Provisional Measures Zone (PMZ) without prior consultation with the South Korean government.
 - The PMZ was established by South Korea and China through a bilateral agreement signed in 2001 to temporarily manage their overlapping EEZ claims in the Yellow Sea—the PMZ allows fishing activities from both sides, but does not authorize other actions such as installation of fixed structures.

Background: The Provisional Measures Zone (PMZ)



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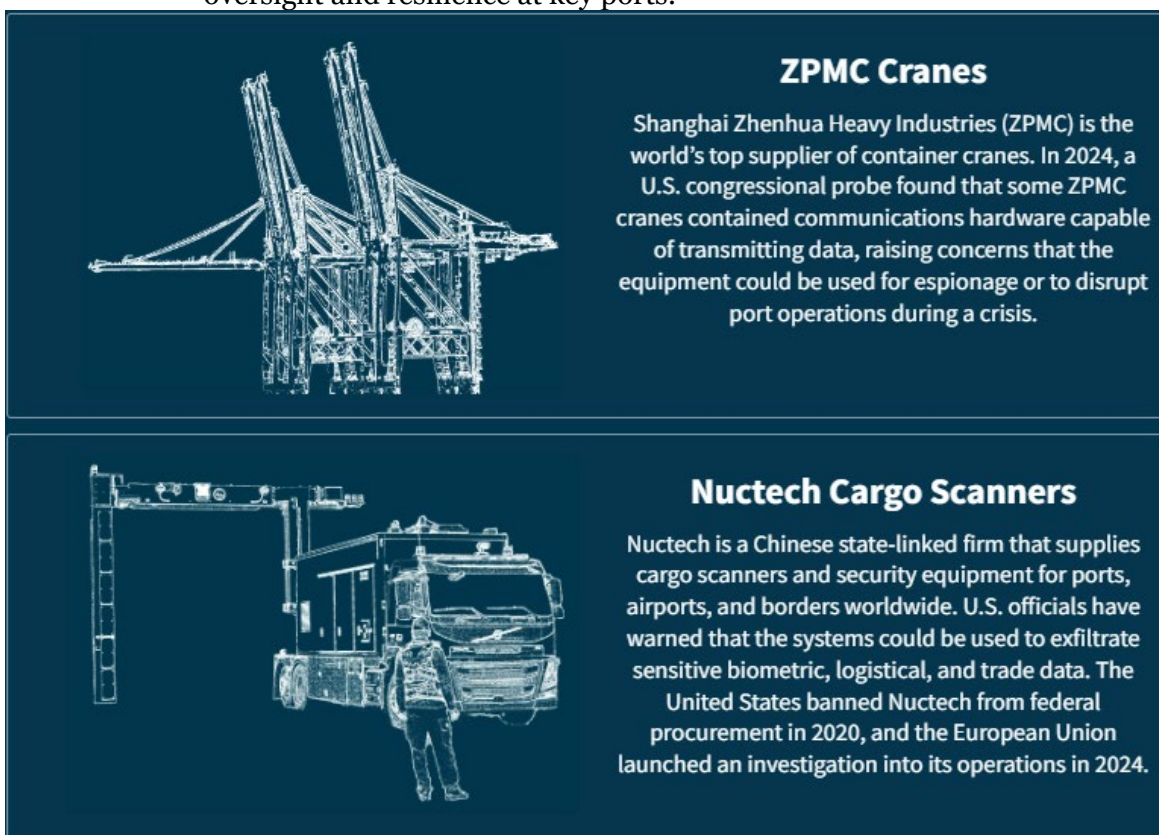
- South Korean requests for China to relocate the structures outside of the PMZ have not only been repeatedly rejected, but the Chinese government has also unilaterally declared “no-sail” zones within the PMZ.
- Meanwhile, [Japan said on Tuesday](#) that it lodged a protest with China after observing a new structure in a natural gas field in the East China Sea (Tokyo reported finding another similar Chinese structure in the same area in May).
- Neither Japan or South Korea have agreed maritime borders with China, raising the prospect that Beijing is looking to exert de facto control over a widening swath of the ocean by staking a claim with new structures.
- The New York Times reports: “South Koreans see striking parallels between the Chinese installations and what Beijing has done in the South China Sea. China initially built artificial islands there for civilian purposes, but they were gradually transformed into military outposts, leading to territorial disputes with countries including the Philippines and Vietnam.”
- With respect to the Yellow Sea, CSIS reports: “[w]hile available information suggests that the platforms are genuinely focused on aquaculture, concerns that the platforms may be dual-use are not unfounded, given China’s track record in the South China Sea, where what were originally weather stations later developed into major military outposts. Even without further expansion, the platforms are likely already collecting data that could have value for undersea navigation and detection.”



- 26 June 2025: new report evaluates risk of China's port projects in Latin America and the Caribbean.
 - **Bottom-line:** a detailed CSIS assessment titled *No Safe Harbor* reveals that the Chinese Communist Party is leveraging state-owned enterprises and technology contracts to build strategic influence over ports across Latin America and the Caribbean, including control over critical infrastructure such as port cranes and cargo scanners—raising serious concerns about espionage, data exfiltration, and the erosion of partner-nation sovereignty near critical maritime chokepoints.

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- References:
 - [Henry Ziemer, Jaehyun Han, and Aidan Powers-Riggs, *No Safe Harbor* \(CSIS, Jun. 26, 2025\)](#)
- Key points:
 - The report finds that China is rapidly expanding its influence over maritime ports across Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with [37 port projects tied to Chinese companies](#).
 - By building, financing, and buying up key ports, Chinese firms have become deeply embedded in the physical infrastructure connecting the region's dynamic maritime economy, opening the door for Beijing to gain strategic leverage, collect sensitive data, and expand its geopolitical influence closer to U.S. shores.
 - According to CSIS, "control or deep involvement in port operations can enable intelligence collection on U.S. and allied naval movements, privileged access to maritime logistics data, and the ability to deny or delay access during a crisis."
 - These ports often use Chinese-built cranes and scanners provided by firms like ZPMC (Shanghai Zhenhua Heavy Industries) and Nuctech, both of which have known affiliations with the Chinese Communist Party and People's Liberation Army.
 - Cranes and scanning equipment are capable of collecting and transmitting sensitive commercial and logistical data, offering potential avenues for Chinese intelligence services to monitor U.S. military logistics, commercial shipments, and customs operations.
 - To minimize risk at these ports, CSIS recommends that the U.S. consider port buybacks and buyouts; assess and reduce strategic exposure; and strengthen oversight and resilience at key ports.



- 26 June 2025: Czech military intelligence discloses China plan to intimidate Taiwan's Vice-President-elect during visit to Prague in March 2024.
 - **Bottom-line:** in *the latest example of China's brazen coercion campaign against Taiwan*, Czech military intelligence reported that diplomatic staff at China's embassy in Prague

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closely followed and planned to intimidate Taiwan's Vice-President-elect Hsiao Bi-khim during her 3-day visit to Prague in March 2024.

▪ References:

- [Jan Lopatka, Czechs say China followed, planned intimidation of Taiwan vice-president \(Reuters, Jun. 27, 2025\)](#)
- [StratNews Global, Czech Intelligence Accuses China of Tracking, Planning Intimidation of Taiwan Vice-President-Elect \(StratNews Global, Jun. 27, 2025\)](#)

▪ Key points:

- According to Czech military intelligence, China's plan bordered on engendering Vice-President Hsiao and included having Chinese diplomatic staff physically following in a harassing manner; attempts at gathering information about Hsiao's schedule; and documenting her meetings with leaders and groups in the Czech political sphere.
- The plan reportedly involved a Chinese driver following close behind the Vice-President's police convoy and driving erratically—when the car was stopped by Czech law enforcement, the driver reportedly presented a Chinese diplomatic passport.
- Jan Pejšek, spokesperson for the Czech Military Intelligence Service, reportedly told Czech Radio: "These activities, which flagrantly **violate the obligations arising from the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations**, were carried out, among other things, by persons legalized in diplomatic positions at the Chinese Embassy in Prague."



- 24 June 2025: investigation reveals Chinese organized crime syndicate functioning as covert foreign influence arm of the Chinese Communist Party.

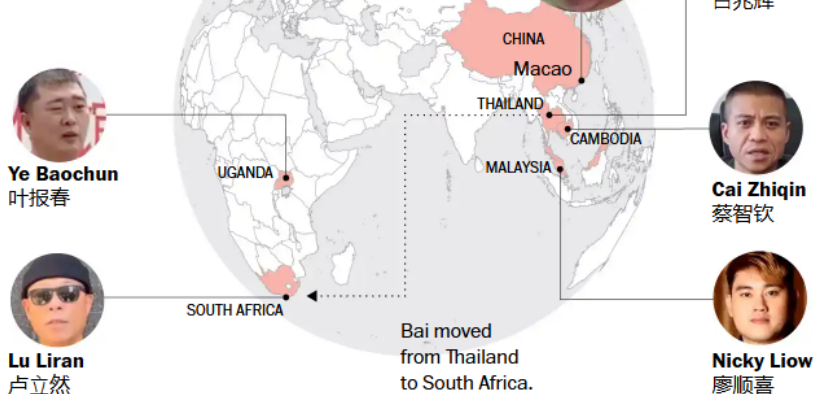
- **Bottom-line:** a joint investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and *The Washington Post* reveals that the World Hongmen History and Culture Association (Hongmen), a transnational organized crime syndicate with deep roots in triad networks, is serving as an unofficial proxy for Beijing's foreign influence and gray zone activities across the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

▪ References:

- [Rebecca Tan and Pei-Lin Wu, Chinese association accused of mixing crime and patriotism as it serves Beijing \(Washington Post, Jun. 24, 2025\)](#)

Current and former World Hongmen leaders

Main figures and areas of activity of the World Hongmen History and Culture Association. None of the leadership responded to requests for comment.



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- Key points:
 - The group's activities are part of a wider United Front strategy that blends criminal enterprise with state-sponsored information operations and coercive diplomacy.
 - The group is actively involved in Beijing's coercive and destabilizing "reunification" narrative concerning Taiwan, including attempts to sway ethnic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia toward pro-CCP views.
 - The report find that Hongmen serves as a non-attributable arm of Chinese foreign influence, facilitating activities that China's state organs cannot officially conduct—including harassment of dissidents, election interference, and strategic corruption.
 - The group's fusion of organized crime, intelligence gathering, and political subversion mirrors tactics seen in Hong Kong, where CCP-aligned triads have historically disrupted democratic activism with impunity.