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NEWS SUMMARY:

- Beijing's hybrid warfare tactics against the Philippines have gone beyond "gray-zone" activities in the disputed South China Sea, according to a high-ranking Philippine National Security Council official.
- The United States should provide its ally the Philippines with the type of sound cannons the Chinese coast guard employs to harass Philippine vessels, according to an expert on international relations in the Indo-Pacific.
- Recent tests in the U.S. and U.K. signal a growing global interest in laser-based weaponry, representing a major shift in modern warfare tactics.
- Police have arrested a man for allegedly making a bomb threat at an entrance to Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland.
- Irish police use a 'less than lethal' weapon to disarm and arrest a man following robbery.
- Ontario's police watchdog is investigating after two police officers fired "less-lethal" firearms at a 15-year-old boy in Brampton.
- A Ukrainian military commander has announced the successful use of the country's first laser weapon on the battlefield.

- From China to India, countries are developing ambitious plans for their own laser weapons.
- A Kenyan woman died after inhaling tear gas.
- Opinion: The HELIOS is a necessary step toward challenging China and for creating reliable defenses against these threats.
- Opinion: The U.S. needs to develop effective counter-strategies to address China's pursuit of gray zone warfare.

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GRAY ZONE COMPETITION:

Chinese hybrid warfare ops surge in Philippines: top security official

(The Japan Times, February 7)

Beijing's hybrid warfare tactics against the Philippines have gone beyond "gray-zone" activities in the disputed South China Sea, a high-ranking Philippine National Security Council official has warned, pointing to a recent increase in Chinese disinformation as well as suspected surveillance and espionage activities in the country.

“When you say gray zone, most people only think of Chinese activities out at sea, but information and psychological warfare have also become part and parcel of their malign influence,” NSC Assistant Director General Jonathan Malaya told The Japan Times in a recent interview in Manila.

Gray-zone activities are calibrated actions that fall below the threshold of armed conflict, such as Beijing’s use of ramming, water cannons and acoustic devices against Philippine vessels in disputed parts of the South China Sea.

Beijing’s hybrid warfare, meanwhile, employs different entities, according to Malaya, most of which come through the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front Work Department, which is believed to be responsible for gathering intelligence and seeking to influence individuals and organizations both in and outside China.

“They are very active here in the Philippines and have significantly ramped up their actions since February 2023 when the Philippine government implemented a policy to expose and shed light into what’s happening in the West Philippine Sea,” he added, referring to parts of the South China Sea within the archipelago’s exclusive economic zone.

The rise in such activities — somewhat similar to those Taipei has accused Beijing of conducting against Taiwan — has resulted in Manila stepping up both international intelligence cooperation as well as its own counterespionage operations, efforts that Malaya says “have already borne fruit.”

Late last month, for instance, Philippine authorities announced the arrest of five Chinese nationals suspected of espionage activities in the country. That case is believed to be linked to another arrest weeks earlier involving a Chinese national and two Philippine accomplices who were caught in a vehicle carrying surveillance equipment around different military camps and strategic facilities.

The Philippines’ National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) told local media that the five suspects were in possession of video footage captured by drones and high-resolution, military-grade video cameras disguised to look like civilian security closed-circuit TVs (CCTVs).

The cameras, which also reportedly relayed data in real-time to an undisclosed location, are said to have captured images of Philippine air and naval bases, including the movements of government vessels supplying military garrisons in contested parts of the South China Sea.

“That could be why, in the past, ships were always aware when we deploy coast guard and naval resupply ships,” Philippine military chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. told local media last month.

While it’s too early to tell whether acts by the suspected spy ring are state sponsored, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has said already he is “very disturbed” about recent developments.

At the same time, Malaya said he believes the recent arrests, which are happening amid heightened geopolitical tensions over territorial disputes in the South China Sea, might only be the tip of the iceberg.

“We hope that the suspects’ testimonies and the seized equipment, including cellphones, will lead us to other individuals,” he said, adding that more arrests are likely to follow.

“We need to protect our sovereignty and territorial integrity, and part of this effort is also to defend our information space to make sure that we are not infiltrated and that critical information is held by the government and not sent somewhere else,” Malaya said.

But Chinese activities in the Philippines appear to go beyond just the suspected spy rings.

The senior NSC official said local fishermen have also spotted small submersibles and maritime drones at strategic chokepoints in Philippine waters, including the San Bernardino and Surigao straits — narrow passages that link the Philippine internal seas and the Pacific Ocean, as well as at the Bashi Channel between the Philippines and Taiwan.

“We have found Chinese-made submersibles in all of these strategic waterways, and because they could pose a significant threat to Philippine national security, we are now looking carefully into the motives and intentions of these actors to disrupt further activities,” Malaya said.

At the same time, the security official accused Beijing of using “third-party proxies” pretending to be experts or academics to influence Philippine public opinion and promote what he described as “pro-China” narratives in both social and mainstream media.

“While their actions are obvious to us, they are operating on the gray zone, a thin line between exercising their right to freedom of speech and supporting the information warfare actions of a foreign power,” Malaya said, adding he will make an important announcement on the matter in the near future.

The Philippines’ territorial and maritime disputes with China have resulted in Manila turning to both regional and extraregional partners to bolster its defense and diplomatic posture — efforts that have also led to greater cooperation in the intelligence field, as highlighted in last year’s signing of a military intelligence-sharing pact — formally known as a General Security of Military Information Agreement — with Washington.

“We have been cooperating with many countries around the world in the areas of intelligence sharing, cyber defense and other areas,” Malaya said, noting “tremendous” progress with both allies and like-minded countries in recent years.

This has also been the case with Tokyo, he said, arguing that Japan, which is also embroiled in territorial disputes with China, understands the need to stand up for international law and the rules-based international order.

Asked whether he expects the same level of trilateral intelligence and security cooperation with Tokyo and Washington to continue under the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump,

Malaya said he is “very encouraged” by recent statements coming from top American officials underscoring Washington’s defense commitments to the Philippines.

“We do not see a major change in U.S. foreign policy right now,” he said.

“We can only expect that the intelligence sharing between our three nations will continue to improve going forward under Trump 2.0.”

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Expert wants US to arm Philippines with sound cannons to fight China’s gray-zone tactics

(Stars and Stripes, February 4)

The United States should provide its ally the Philippines with the type of sound cannons the Chinese coast guard employs to harass Philippine vessels, according to an expert on international relations in the Indo-Pacific.

China’s coast guard recently deployed a sound cannon, able to blast noise loud enough to cause pain and damage hearing, as part of a harassment campaign targeting Philippine vessels in disputed South China Sea waters.

The long-range acoustic device was used Jan. 25 against a Philippine coast guard vessel, according to Philippine navy and coast guard officials quoted by Philippine media.

The nation’s coast guard did not reply to questions emailed Monday about the incident. However, Patricio Abinales, a professor at the University of Hawaii’s School of Pacific and Asian Studies, recommended the U.S. provide the Philippines with its own sound cannons to deter Chinese vessels pushing deeper and deeper into the country’s territorial waters.

“This is a game of brinkmanship now,” he said by email Monday.

Sound cannons are relatively inexpensive, according to Arizona State University engineering professor Braden Allenby.

“Over 25 navies around the world currently deploy such devices, and civilian ships may use them to discourage piracy,” he said in an email Tuesday.

Police in the U.S. and elsewhere have such devices, Allenby added.

“Whether to deploy them in a confrontation with an aggressive Chinese force is, of course, another matter entirely,” he said.

The Chinese could respond with an array of nonlethal, gray-zone tactics, including irritating gases and chemicals, energy devices, tasers and rubber bullets, Allenby added. Cyber sabotage and disinformation campaigns are also possible, he said.

“Moreover, given the behavior of their Russian allies, sabotage of undersea and terrestrial infrastructures, and even assassination, cannot be ruled out,” he said. “It would be wise to assume that the Chinese will potentially use whatever they think they can get away with, without triggering a kinetic response by the United States.”

The sound cannon incident occurred near Capones Island, just off the coast of the Philippines’ main island of Luzon and about 20 miles from Subic Bay, once home to America’s largest overseas naval base, the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported Jan. 27.

The device was apparently used to deter the Philippine coast guard vessel BRP Cabra from approaching a Chinese ship, a Philippine coast guard spokesman told reporters after the incident, according to the newspaper.

China had moored the 12,000-ton CCG 5901, the world’s largest coast guard vessel, off the island while smaller Chinese vessels moved closer to the coast, said Commodore Jay Tarriela.

The Chinese “monster ship” retreated that day to 90 miles from the Zambales coast following hourly radio challenges from the BRP Cabra, he said.

The use of the sound cannon reflects “an increase in the aggression of the Chinese Communist Party in the West Philippine Sea,” Philippine navy spokesman Rear Adm. Roy Trinidad told reporters Tuesday, according to a report on the Philippine Star the next day.

The West Philippine Sea, according to Philippine authorities, refers to parts of the South China Sea within the Philippines exclusive economic zone. Beijing has reclaimed land and built military facilities in disputed South China Sea territory.

Its claims are challenged by neighboring countries, including Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam. China has employed so-called gray zone tactics that fall short of warfare against the Philippines in disputed waters.

For example, the Philippines has accused China of ramming its vessels, pointing lasers at crew and buzzing fishermen with helicopters.

In December, diplomats from the U.S., the Philippines and Japan met in Tokyo and reiterated their expectation that Beijing comply with a 2016 international court ruling against its claim to virtually the entire South China Sea.

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:

Image captures US Navy testing its new laser weapon: What to know about HELIOS

(USA Today, February 5)

An incredible image buried deep in an annual military report released last month shows the U.S. Navy test-firing a high-powered laser weapon at a drone target from one of its warships.

The photo of the laser weapon in action was published in in January as part of a 2024 report released by the Office of the Director, Operational Test & Evaluation, which advises the Department of Defense on weapons systems.

The undated image shows the U.S. Navy testing a weapon system known as HELIOS from the USS Preble destroyer in the middle of the ocean. The demo was "to verify and validate the functionality, performance, and capability" of the laser weapon against an uncrewed aerial vehicle target, the report stated.

The U.S. Center for Countermeasures was responsible for collecting imagery of the test.

The report was short on specific details about the test, neglecting to specify where the warship was station at the time of the test or when the laser weapon was fired.

What is the HELIOS weapon?

The High Energy Laser and Integrated Optical Dazzler and Surveillance (HELIOS) is a weapon system developed by Lockheed Martin capable of engaging targets at the speed of light.

The system can destroy drones, watercraft and missiles by either melting or overheating them. The weapon not only can use a high-energy laser to destroy targets, but is designed to disrupt intelligence-gathering efforts and reconnaissance sensors from adversaries.

The Navy plans to continue testing HELIO in 2025 from the Preble, according to Naval News who first reported on the test. According to the annual report, the Department of Defense would also require new specialized test and training ranges to continue testing HELIOS.

United Kingdom also tested laser weapons

The United Kingdom has also been developing its own laser-based defense system.

Last year, the U.K. successfully tested its own high-powered laser weapon, DragonFire, against aerial targets.

The range of DragonFire is classified, but the U.K. Ministry of Defence said in a press release in January 2024 that the line-of-sight weapon can engage with any visible target with precision equivalent of hitting a coin from a kilometer away.

"This type of cutting-edge weaponry has the potential to revolutionize the battlespace by reducing the reliance on expensive ammunition, while also lowering the risk of collateral damage," U.K. Defense Secretary Grant Shapp said in a statement at the time.

How do laser-based weapons work?

Taken together, the U.S. and U.K. tests signal a growing global interest in laser-based weaponry, representing a major shift in modern warfare tactics.

Laser-directed energy weapons can engage targets at the speed of light, using an intense beam of light to cut through targets.

What's more, the weapons systems are low-cost alternatives to traditional weaponry. Firing such a weapon for 10 seconds is the cost equivalent of using a regular heater for just an hour, according to the UK military.

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Man arrested for alleged bomb threat at JBSA-Lackland security gate

(San Antonio Express News, February 2)

Police have arrested a man for allegedly making a bomb threat at an entrance to Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland.

The incident occurred at about 4:30 a.m. on Monday at Luke East Gate, at the intersection of Military Drive and Luke Boulevard, according to a San Antonio police report.

The man, 41, walked up to the gate and told security forces that he had a device strapped to his body, according to JBSA officials.

After the man made the threat, he walked to a nearby parking lot.

The man complied with officers' commands and was taken into custody without incident, a police report states.

No explosive devices were found on the man.

JBSA security personnel cordoned off the area and conducted a sweep. No devices were found in the area, JBSA officials said.

The man was taken to a hospital, then placed in emergency detention so he could be evaluated at a psychiatric facility. This is a normal procedure when someone in custody exhibits signs of mental illness.

Luke East Gate was later reopened to traffic.

It was the second incident at a San Antonio-area military base in two days.

On Saturday, a motorist was shot and injured after attempting to ram through the Walter Street security checkpoint around noon at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston.

A policeman from the 502nd Security Forces Group fired a weapon at the person, injuring them. The suspect, who has not been identified, was taken to a hospital for treatment.

JBSA officials said it was the first time this year a motorist had attempted to breach a gate at Fort Sam Houston or any of the three other installations that make up JBSA: Randolph and Lackland Air Force bases and Camp Bullis, an Army training range.

On Monday afternoon, Rob Strain, a Joint Base San Antonio spokesman, told the San Antonio Express-News, "there's no reason to believe that the events are connected."

Last August, there was a pair of armed attacks at the entrance to a training annex at Lackland.

In that incident, teens Joseph Jimenez, 19, and Ricardo Samaniego, 18, were charged with deadly conduct with a firearm for allegedly opening fire near the main gate to the Chapman Annex at Lackland and at homes in a neighborhood nearby. No one was injured.

Air Force guards believed they were under attack by unidentified gunman twice within several hours. An investigation revealed the teens were not targeting the base.

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OTHER FOREIGN COUNTRIES:

Gardaí use 'less than lethal' weapon to disarm and arrest man following robbery *(The Irish Times, February 9)*

Gardaí disarmed and arrested a knife-wielding man following a robbery in Ballymun, Dublin on Sunday afternoon.

Just after 2.30pm, the man entered a shop on Marewood Crescent, Ballymun and threatened staff with the weapon before leaving on foot with property.

Gardaí were alerted and, with the support of the Armed Support Unit, located the man and arrested him in the Sandyhill Gardens area.

"Less than lethal force options were deployed by gardaí in the arrest of the individual," the Garda said in a statement.

It is understood gardaí shot the man with a less than lethal 40mm impact round, which caused him to drop the knife.

The suspect remains in custody in a Dublin Garda station. He is also being questioned in relation to a number of other similar robberies which have taken place in Dublin in recent days.

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SIU investigating after teen injured by officers who fired 'less-lethal' weapons during Brampton distress call

(CTV News, February 9)

Ontario's police watchdog is investigating after two police officers fired "less-lethal" firearms at a 15-year-old boy in Brampton early Sunday morning.

The incident happened in the area of Oaklea Boulevard, which is north of Highway 407 and west of McLaughlin Road South.

Peel Regional Police said they were called to that area just after 3:20 a.m. for weapon-related call and found a distressed male with a knife.

“Two officers deployed Anti-Riot Weapon Enfield rounds and three other officers discharged conducted energy weapons at the male,” the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) said in a news release.

The victim was taken to the hospital, but was not seriously injured, the civilian agency said.

Three investigators have since been assigned to the case.

The SIU, which is called in to investigate when police are involved in an incident that results in death, serious injury, sexual assault, and/or the discharge of a firearm at a person, is urging anyone who may have information about this investigation, including video or photos, to contact the lead investigator at 1-800-787-8529 or online.

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Ukraine Announces Successful Use of First Laser Weapon on Battlefield

(The Defense Post, February 6)

A Ukrainian military commander has announced the successful use of the country’s first laser weapon on the battlefield, revealing that it has effectively targeted specific objects.

“I will repeat: laser technologies are already striking certain targets at certain altitudes,” Kyiv’s Unmanned Systems Forces commander Vadym Sukharevskyi stated.

No further details regarding the laser weapon’s deployment, including the date and location, were provided.

In December 2024, Sukharevskyi confirmed that Ukraine became the “fifth country to possess” such a weapon.

The laser weapon is dubbed “Tryzub” (Trident), with a reported operational range of two kilometers (1.24 miles).

A Strategic Shift in Air Defense

The laser weapon’s deployment is a part of Ukraine’s broader strategy to enhance its air defense capabilities, particularly in countering drone threats.

It also reflects Kyiv’s commitment to advancing cutting-edge military technology to stay competitive in modern warfare.

Russia has increasingly relied on sophisticated unmanned aerial systems, including Iranian-supplied Shahed drones, to target Ukrainian military positions and critical infrastructure.

However, defense expert James Black, assistant director at RAND Europe, explained that the laser weapon’s use might currently be “limited and largely experimental.”

He emphasized the technical, logistical, and operational hurdles that Ukraine could face as it looks to scale up deployment of such systems.

Black also highlighted other key challenges, including integrating the laser system with other air defense assets, ensuring a reliable energy supply, and operating in adverse weather conditions.

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Race For Rays: From China To India, The Worldwide Quest For Laser Weapon Systems

(ETV Bharat, February 6)

The US Navy reportedly tested its laser weapon "Helios" from the USS Preble against a drone. The undated picture of the test was revealed in the US Centre for Countermeasures' annual report. While it does not provide details about the location or date of the test, it mentions that the objective of the test was to "verify and validate the functionality, performance, and capability of the High Energy Laser with Integrated Optical Dazzler and Surveillance (HELIOS) system" against an unmanned aerial vehicle.

This test follows the UK's successful trial of its own laser weapon, DragonFire, which targeted aerial objects last year. Notably, India also has ambitious plans for its own laser weapons, with two DRDO labs working on developing the technology.

Since its invention in 1960 by Theodore Maiman at Hughes Research Laboratory in California, LASER, or light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation, has had high global appeal as a weapon. While several countries already have laser defence systems, others have been investing efforts and money to utilise the technology as a weapon.

Countries and their Quest for Laser Weapon Systems

CHINA: Back in 2006, there were claims that China used lasers to blind a US satellite, suggesting they have some pretty powerful laser weapons. Even though they've reportedly deployed lower-energy laser systems that target slower and smaller objects, China is said to have some serious laser firepower with their Silent Hunter weapons. Fast forward to August 2024, and news reports stated that China had armed one of its Type 071 amphibious assault ships with a laser-directed energy weapon.

GERMANY: In September 2023, the German Navy tested their laser weapon demonstrator (LWD) on the Sachsen F-124 air-defence frigate. They conducted over 100 test firings, proving its functionality under realistic conditions with various targets. Fast forward a year to September 2024, and Germany's Rheinmetall and MBDA announced they were teaming up to develop a maritime-based laser weapon system, aiming to have it ready in the next five to six years.

ISRAEL: In November 2024, Israel's Ministry of Defence inked a \$500 million deal to ramp up production of the high-power laser system, Iron Beam. Created by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Elbit Systems, Iron Beam is built to tackle aerial threats like rockets, mortar

bombs, drones, and cruise missiles. The Israel Defense Forces will be the first military to deploy this high-energy laser weapon on a large scale with the Iron Beam Air Defence System.

JAPAN: In November 2024, Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) rolled out a 10kW-class high-power laser electronic warfare (EW) combat truck, developed by the country's Defense Acquisition Agency. This cutting-edge laser system represented a big leap forward in Japan's directed-energy weapon (DEW) capabilities.

RUSSIA: Russia has experimented with the Peresvet laser weapon system, which began equipping the Russian Armed Forces in 2017 and was deployed for experimental combat duty in December 2018. President Putin announced its service entry in December 2019, and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu confirmed its deployment with five Strategic Missile Forces divisions. Peresvet autonomously neutralises enemy reconnaissance satellites with powerful laser beams and can affect satellites at altitudes of 200 to 1,100 kilometres with a coverage diameter of 130 to 180 kilometres. Russia also has another laser weapon system called Zadira, which, according to Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov in May 2022, is being used to shoot down Ukrainian drones.

SOUTH KOREA: In December 2024, the South Korean Army introduced the Block-I Laser-Based Anti-Aircraft Weapon, designed to take down aerial threats for just \$1.50 per shot. The Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) announced a 100 billion won contract to develop this effective and budget-friendly drone-killer. This laser system is praised for being quiet, invisible, and with each shot costing only 2,000 won.

Türkiye: In 2023, the Turkish Naval Forces Command received its first laser weapon system, the NAZAR Laser Electronic Warfare System. The full-scale prototype passed initial tests back in October 2012 when it was mounted on a frigate. It was showcased at the International Defence Industry Fair in 2021, where its turret with 11 windows in two rows caught attention.

UK: In March 2024, the UK's defence ministry released a video of their first-ever laser weapon test, named DragonFire, designed to knock drones out of the sky. They hope this test will pave the way for a low-cost alternative to missiles for shooting down targets like drones. The DragonFire system is said to be precise enough to hit a coin from a kilometre away and is estimated to cost just £10 (\$13) per shot.

USA: During the Cold War, the US came up with the idea of Project Excalibur, the first space-based x-ray laser anti-ballistic missile system. However, it was shelved in 1992 due to funding issues and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), also known as "Star Wars," aimed to use space-based lasers to intercept missiles but never developed. More recently, the US Army tested the Directed Energy-Maneuver Short-Range Air Defense (DE M-SHORAD) system, which can intercept drones, rockets, artillery shells, and mortars.

The US Navy demonstrated the Laser Weapon System Demonstrator (LWSD) on the USS Portland, successfully downing an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). In 2021, Lockheed Martin delivered the High Energy Laser with Integrated Optical-dazzler and Surveillance (HELIOS) to

the US Navy, with over 60KW of power. Initially built to target smaller surface ships and drones, HELIOS is expected to be upgraded with increased power to target anti-ship missiles.

India's Quest for Laser Weapon System

India has two dedicated Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) laboratories — Centre for High Energy Systems and Sciences (CHESS) and Laser Science & Technology Centre (LASTEC) — that have been working on developing laser weapons technology for the last few years.

In 2017, DRDO tested a 1KW laser weapon mounted on a truck at a test facility in Chitradurga. The test was conducted in the presence of then-defence minister Arun Jaitley, and the laser hit a target 250m away. The source of the laser, called the “heart of the system”, was imported from Germany. The weapon is not ready yet and is expected to take years to complete.

According to Defence News, DRDO sought \$100 million in 2021 from the Ministry of Defence to develop a high-power laser weapon for the Indian Army under a classified project, dubbed DURGA II-- Directionally Unrestricted Ray-Gun Array. Said to be in the concept stage, the project aims to develop a 100KW lightweight directed-energy system in addition to developing and improving various laser-generation techniques for defensive and offensive use. DURGA II is expected to be integrated with land, sea, and air-based platforms.

As per the report, the Laser Science and Technology Centre at Delhi was the lead laboratory in developing laser weapons, which so far made a 25KW laser that can target a ballistic missile during its terminal phase at a maximum distance of 5 kilometres.

Notably, the report claims the existence of a DURGA project has been around for two decades, dating back to the early 2000s and mentions a study published by the United Service Institution of India (USI) in 2008 referring to DURGA and noting there was little progress in the project.

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Woman Dies After Inhaling Tear Gas

(The Kenya Times, February 6)

A family is mourning after their kin died due to the effects of a teargas canister in Nakuru County.

In an interview, the family narrated how Mercy Wanja encountered a teargas canister while she was in the house during the protests by Nakuru residents over the disappearance of Brian Odhiambo.

Wanja was rushed to hospital on Sunday, February 2, after developing complications after being hit by a teargas canister on Thursday, January 30, 2025.

Wanja, who was the last-born daughter, succumbed on Tuesday, February 4.

Her mother, Naomi Wanjohi, said her daughter was coming out of the house when she bumped into the teargas canister.

“She was coming out when she encountered the canister, it hit the ground and then entered the house. When I was outside, I heard her screaming,” Naomi said.

Another relative explained that Wanja was hit by the teargas on her back while she was walking out of the house because there was a cloud of smoke inside.

“The smoke had filled the house, and then she went out, only to encounter the teargas,” the relative said.

Brian Odhiambo’s Family Losing Hope

In another incident, the family of Brian Odhiambo is losing hope in finding him 19 days after his disappearance allegedly at the hands of Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) officers from the Lake Nakuru National Park.

This family said they have searched for him far and wide since the January 18, but all efforts have been futile.

“I’ve searched everywhere, but I haven’t seen him. Yesterday, we were in Elbergon to check at the mortuary. We were told that there were three bodies found there, but we didn’t find Brian. Up to that point, we have now left it to God, knowing that He will act, and He is able,” says Brian’s mother, Elizabeth Auma.

Brian’s wife, Alvy Okello, says that the family has not been able to go to work since he went missing.

She mentioned that they have been preoccupied with searching for him, and the children have also been asking about their dad.

Court Ruling

Additionally, she said their only hope is the anticipated ruling by Magistrate Julius Nangea on Thursday, February 6, on whether security agencies had a hand in his disappearance.

“We are waiting to return to court tomorrow, but we haven’t heard anything. We’ve searched for him, listened carefully everywhere, but we haven’t heard anything,” Brian’s mother added.

“Now, at this point, we have left it to God, and we pray the court will fight for us.”

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COMMENTARY:

The “HELIOS” Test Proves America Is Serious About Laser Weapons

(The National Interest, February 6, Brandon J. Weichert)

Today, the United States finds itself living in a world that its elites—in spite of decades of warnings—had not prepared for. No longer is the United States the undisputed hegemon of the world. Instead, it is merely one of three major global powers—the others being the rising People’s Republic of China and the resurgent Russian Federation.

Indeed, after two failed Mideast wars, a failing proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and various economic woes, the United States finds itself as the great power that’s in relative decline.

To ward off signs of this decline and to send signals to both Moscow and Beijing that Washington means business, Washington has presided over a series of military technology demonstrations designed to remind the world of the U.S. military’s overwhelming lethality. One system stands out among the others coming to the forefront. That system is the High-Energy Laser with Integrated Optical Dazzler and Surveillance (HELIOS). In other words, the HELIOS is a laser weapon.

What is HELIOS?

HELIOS was put on display by the United States Navy. In October 2024, the USS Preble, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, was equipped with the HELIOS laser weapon system. Based out of Yokosuka, Japan and assigned to the U.S. Seventh Fleet, Preble tested the laser weapon as part of the Pentagon’s push to finally prove that directed energy weapons could work.

What’s more, the HELIOS system is a response to the dangerous trends in modern warfare that the Ukraine War has highlighted: notably, what the presence of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) does to drones. Fearing that either the Russians or the Chinese can use swarms of aerial drones to overwhelm the onboard defenses of America’s surface warships, the Pentagon believes HELIOS can help to knock those drone threats out en masse.

How the HELIOS laser weapon system works against drones is that the directed energy—the laser beam—is concentrated on attacking UAVs. That laser beam quickly heats the targeted drone’s body, basically melting it. Military researchers also speculate that directed energy weapons (DEW) can be used for missile defense. Given President Donald Trump’s recent remarks calling both for a “national Iron Dome” as well as “space-based missile interceptors,” scientists believe that lasers could be more economical and efficient as missile defenses rather than existing interceptors.

And HELIOS is not the only DEW system being developed. China, too, has been feverishly working on their own DEW system. Until very recently, most experts assumed that the Chinese were ahead of the Americans. But the October 2024 test aboard the USS Preble seems to have breathed new life into the U.S. Navy’s race to fully develop this technology.

HELIOS was awarded the initial development contract by the US Navy in 2018. By 2022, the first HELIOS system was delivered. Combining a high-energy laser with an optical dazzler, HELIOS can both destroy and disable threats, as well as disrupt enemy sensors. It is a 60-kilowatt class system capable of scaling up to 120 kilowatts, giving it the ability to damage or destroy targets such as drones, incoming missiles, or even small boats.

Some Problems

While innovative, the system is not without its flaws. It is an experimental and newer weapon, meaning there are many complications to work out before it goes into full production and is installed on more U.S. warships. But the October test was important for moving the research and development forward on this weapon.

Some of the drawbacks to the HELIOS laser weapon system include environmental complications, massive power requirements, and the need for protracted target lock on fast-moving, radically maneuvering systems in a complex combat environment.

Inclement weather conditions, or even just fog or heavy cloud cover, significantly degrade the laser's effectiveness due to something known as "beam scattering." This is when the laser from HELIOS interacts with matter.

Such an interaction can often lead to the light from the beam being redirected away from the intended target, rather than following a straight path. As such, intensity—and lethality—of the HELIOS system is lost. Beam scattering imposed by atmospheric conditions can greatly reduce the range of and effectiveness of the laser beam.

Adversaries have the capacity to use active countermeasures that would scatter the beam. For instance, they can deploy aerosols or other scattering agents into the path of the laser in order to disrupt the function of the HELIOS system.

There's also the problem of power requirements for the HELIOS being great. High-energy lasers require substantial power as a rule of thumb. But the demands of the HELIOS can strain the shipboard electrical systems.

Then there's the problem of the system needing to have prolonged target acquisition time to effectively engage incoming enemy targets. That's a key vulnerability of the HELIOS, especially in a fast-paced combat environment—in which the system might have only fractions of a second to intercept a hypersonic missile.

Nevertheless, the Americans are in the DEW race to win it. America's enemies are developing laser systems to rival and surpass its own. The HELIOS is a necessary step toward challenging China and for creating reliable defenses against these threats.

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Develop Strategies to Counter China's Gray Zone Tactics

(CIMSEC, February 3, Roshan Kulatunga)

China's national security strategy is shrouded in secrecy, making it challenging to access clear policy documents that shed light on its strategic ambitions. This need for reliable intelligence is underscored by China's increasing interest in the Indian Ocean region, an area that has become a focal point of concern for U.S. policymakers and military strategists. The potential expansion of Chinese influence in this critical maritime zone raises alarms about the implications for regional security and U.S. interests, necessitating the development of effective counter-strategies to address China's pursuit of gray zone warfare.

Gray zone warfare refers to activities that fall between conventional warfare and peace, often involving subversive tactics that can destabilize adversaries without triggering open conflict. China's approach involves a systematic infiltration of various sectors, including technology, academia, media, and even political domains, to gather intelligence and insights into the strategies of possible adversaries. This multifaceted approach allows China to build a nuanced understanding of U.S. capabilities and intentions while subtly undermining them.

Chinese interests in Sri Lanka has extended to various levels of society. There has been extensive infrastructure development projects focused on roads, airports, seaports, energy facilities, telecommunications, and water supply systems. Most of these projects are funded through loans, while some key strategic initiatives are structured as direct investments. A significant portion of this development is driven by Chinese involvement, including state-owned enterprises, private investors, contractors, and laborers. This involvement raises concerns about economic dependencies and geopolitical leverage. The noticeable presence of Chinese nationals across critical infrastructure projects, when hiring locals would have often been sufficient and even more beneficial to the host nation's economy, highlights the need for a thorough assessment of their roles. It is essential to investigate any potential subversive tactics, such as economic coercion, intelligence gathering, or long-term strategic positioning, that could impact Sri Lanka's sovereignty and regional security dynamics.

Despite the growing body of literature analyzing gray zone tactics, there remains a significant gap in research that delves deeply into the specific methodologies employed by China in executing these tactics. Understanding the precise methods of infiltration and influence is critical for developing effective countermeasures.

China's strategy involves expanding its influence across diverse societal domains, from cultural exchanges to economic investments, which serve to extract valuable information and develop points of leverage against the United States and its allies. To effectively counter these actions, it is imperative for the U.S. to conduct a thorough evaluation of China's gray zone activities and to create robust, comprehensive strategies that address the multifaceted nature of these threats.

In addition, the United States must strategically leverage its intelligence networks, tapping into various sectors of society to gather insights, enhance situational awareness, and bolster its

response capabilities. By doing so, the U.S. can better prepare itself to confront the challenges posed by China's expanding influence and protect its national interests in an increasingly competitive global environment.

The alliance between the United States and India represents a significant counterbalance to China's influence in the Indian Ocean region. This partnership is characterized by a shared commitment to promoting stability and security in a region that is increasingly strategic in global affairs. To achieve its objectives, China effectively utilizes an extensive intelligence network that spans the region, allowing it to gather crucial information on military deployments, economic activities, and political developments. However, the covert nature of China's security strategies presents a considerable challenge, often concealing the critical information needed to properly interpret the intent behind its actions.

In general, the security interests and posture of the United States can be anticipated with a fair degree of accuracy due to the democratic principles underpinning its foreign policies and strategic decisions. These democratic mechanisms promote transparency and debate, thereby enabling allies and adversaries alike to gauge potential U.S. responses and how they may impact the rules-based order. In contrast, China's approach to security is characterized by a more secretive methodology, which often complicates external analysis and understanding of its strategic ambitions. This fundamental difference in approach underlines the contrasting philosophies that guide the United States and China in their respective security strategies. The U.S. must manage this asymmetry as it develops strategies to counter China's gray zone tactics.

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