

DoD JOINT INTERMEDIATE FORCE CAPABILITIES OFFICE

| News & Information



To get the latest information, click icons below to follow JIFCO on social media and visit our website.



This news and information summary is a compilation of selected unclassified stories and information distributed by the Joint Intermediate Force Capabilities Office's Public Affairs team. It is for official program use only. The intent of this summary is to provide media-based context regarding intermediate force capabilities (IFCs)/non-lethal weapons (NLWs) in all environments as well as other related program information of interest to the IFC/NLW communities. This e-mail contains material copyrighted by original media sources; copying or disseminating for private use or gain is prohibited without permission of the copyright owners. The views expressed in the selected stories are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. (DoD 5230.29, August 13, 2014).

NEWS SUMMARY:

- Ocean Affairs Council Minister Kuan Bi-ling said 6,000 volunteers will be recruited to serve at 159 coastal checkpoints to bolster Taiwan's maritime defense, as China has stepped up gray zone tactics in the past three months.
- China's use of "gray zone tactics" has been called out at a summit as Australia's defense scientists work to get new weapons into service as quickly as possible.
- The United States, Australia, India and Japan are planning joint coast guard and maritime police patrols amid growing Chinese activity in the region.
- Early next year, the US Air Force will see a demo of a new Honeywell system that combines kinetic interceptors, directed energy and electronic warfare capabilities to protect high-value targets from swarms of inbound drones.
- The University of California's Board of Regents approved the request for additional non-lethal weapons by UCLA police following protests related to the Israel-Hamas war.
- The Indian Defence Research and Development Organisation is planning to develop a high-power microwave system with a 1km range to counter drone threats.

- Two German armament manufacturers, MBDA Deutschland and Rheinmetall, through a collaborative working group called ARGE, will bring their joint naval product, a High-Energy Laser weapon system, to market in the next five to ten years.
- The UK Foreign Secretary has expressed concern about “rising tensions and civilian casualties” in Lebanon amid ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.
- Opinion: As China has done from the East to the South China Sea, it is updating its gray-zone tactics for a new great game in the Pacific.
- Opinion: Faced with a country indifferent to reputational costs, Manila’s campaign to illuminate China’s gray-zone activities in the South China Sea is producing diminishing returns.
- Opinion: If anyone has the temerity to call it out for its aggressive and illegal actions, the Chinese Communist Party simply gaslights them.
- Opinion: While the Pentagon suggests a possible conflict by 2027, China may act sooner, likely employing a blockade strategy rather than a full invasion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

GRAY ZONE COMPETITION:..... 3

Coast Guard seeks 6,000 volunteers to defend Taiwan 3

Defence scientists ready for China’s ‘grey’ warfighting 3

Quad nations plan joint coast guard patrols as China gets more aggressive, report says..... 5

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:..... 6

Honeywell to demo new kinetic, soft-kill C-UAS for Air Force 6

DOMESTIC:..... 7

UC board approves non-lethal weapons for UCLA police 7

OTHER FOREIGN COUNTRIES: 8

DRDO’s push for high-power microwave technology to counter emerging drone threats..... 8

German industry confirm delivery of naval laser weapon by 2030 10

David Lammy ‘concerned’ by civilian casualties in ongoing Lebanon conflict..... 11

COMMENTARY: 12

China’s Maritime Grey Zone Tactics Are Evolving 12

The Philippines Should Take Note: ‘Assertive Transparency’ Is Not a Strategy 13

China Gaslights the World About Its Aggression in the South China Sea..... 16

China Will Defeat America If They Blockade Taiwan..... 18

CONTACT INFORMATION: 20

GRAY ZONE COMPETITION:

Coast Guard seeks 6,000 volunteers to defend Taiwan

(Taiwan News, September 22)

Ocean Affairs Council Minister Kuan Bi-ling (管碧玲) said 6,000 volunteers will be recruited to serve at 159 coastal checkpoints to bolster Taiwan's maritime defense.

Kuan's announcement on Saturday (Sept. 21) comes after China has stepped up gray zone tactics in the past three months with two different incidents of speedboats entering Taiwan. "Our coast patrol is limited, but the power of the people is unlimited," said Kuan.

At the beginning, five volunteer teams will be based on geographical regions—north, central, south, east, and outlying islands—with 186 volunteers at the outset. Though the volunteers will be unarmed, they will be tasked with important functions such as reporting ships invading Taiwan's territorial waters, per Liberty Times.

Should ships cause a nuisance in Taiwan's territorial waters, reports will immediately be made to relevant authorities. Furthermore, marine patrol equipment for maritime patrol, land, sea, and air will be upgraded. Volunteers will be vital in correcting deficiencies experienced with radar-detecting small ships and vessels.

According to early reporting, 159 security checkpoints will be located in commercial ports, fishing ports, and coastal outposts. Each checkpoint will be a base for a coastal patrol volunteer team of 35 people.

Coast Guard officials said a pilot program for volunteers will begin at hotspot security checkpoints, gradually expanding nationwide. Once the volunteer group is formed, they will assist the Coast Guard in preventing maritime conflicts, gray zone activities, illegal immigration, smuggling, and illegal fishing.

Furthermore, when a major maritime disaster occurs, potentially causing marine pollution, volunteers will be permitted to sail their boats or accompany patrol ships to assist in rescue operations or decontamination, depending upon the mission. However, volunteers will not accompany Coast Guard ships carrying out law enforcement activities.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Defence scientists ready for China's 'grey' warfighting

(Daily Mail, September 19)

China's use of "grey zone tactics" has been called out at a summit as Australia's defence scientists work to get new weapons into service as quickly as possible.

Defence Minister Richard Marles has launched a new strategy he says will "turbocharge" defence innovation, science and technology (IS&T).

Opening an elite defence conference in Canberra, Mr Marles said science was an important part of ensuring regional and national security, along with operating together and joint exercises with allies.

"So many systems are comprehending the whole the whole battle space," he told the Australian Defence Science, Technology and Research (ADSTAR) summit on Tuesday.

Taking down drones by using a laser that can burn through steel and new navigation systems that can step in when GPS has been denied are among the weapons being developed under an accelerator program.

"It is trying to stimulate the industrial scientific base of our nation, to see new technologies evolve and get them into service as quickly as possible," he said.

Chief Defence Scientist Professor Tanya Monro said Bushmaster troop carriers were winning admirers on the battlefields of Ukraine, made in Bendigo by Thales Australia.

"But we need to do more together to protect Australia into an increasingly uncertain future," Prof Monro said.

The long-range, uncrewed Ghost Shark submarine, 3D-printed rocket boosters and the call to industry on Monday to manufacture rocket motors were "just the tip of the iceberg", she told the summit.

Quantum navigation systems developed by the University of Adelaide and the University of Queensland with defence were outperforming GPS in sea trials, while Adelaide-based Fleetspace has Australia's first low-earth orbit satellite, she said.

But technology should not take 10 years to develop and nor should it be restricted by commercial imperatives, former chief of the defence force Air Force Marshal Angus Houston said.

"It's absolutely essential that we put competition aside for the greater good," Sir Angus said.

China's build up was being done with "no transparency and absolutely no assurance", he warned.

"We also see China's assertion of sovereignty in the South China Sea with coercion, harassment and grey zone tactics evident on a frequent basis," Sir Angus said.

So-called "grey zone" confrontations, in the murky area between peace and war, can include espionage, cyber attacks and election interference.

He said Pillar 2 of AUKUS was working on advanced cyber technologies, electronic warfare, artificial intelligence and undersea warfare.

The ADF has become a force juggling major risks as the Australian government follows a regional balancing strategy as well as a military strategy of denial, Sir Angus said.

It will become integrated in a way that no other large force in the world has done.

"I don't think we should forget the need to get the minimum viable capability into the hands of the warfighter as quickly as possible."

A review in 2023 identified that Australia faced its most complex and challenging strategic environment since World War II, and was followed by a blueprint in 2024 to create an integrated force.

It also sparked the push to get an edge over enemies by accelerating defence IS&T and sharing breakthroughs with allies.

The new defence science strategy, Accelerating Asymmetric Advantage Strategy, builds on technical and other input from Australia's Five Eyes partners.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Quad nations plan joint coast guard patrols as China gets more aggressive, report says

(Stars and Stripes, September 16)

The United States, Australia, India and Japan are planning joint coast guard and maritime police patrols amid growing Chinese activity in the region, according to unnamed diplomatic sources cited Monday by Japan's Kyodo News.

The plan aims to stem illegal fishing and may be included in a joint statement issued at a summit of the four nations, known as the Quad, for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, on Saturday in Delaware, the agency reported.

It comes as clashes grow in number between Manila and Beijing over territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The Philippine navy reported 203 Chinese ships in disputed waters between Aug. 27 and Sept. 2.

Public affairs officials at Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo, which hosts U.S. Coast Guard Activities Far East, referred questions to U.S. Forces Japan on Monday. USFJ did not immediately respond that day to an email query.

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command chief Adm. Samuel Paparo spoke Sept. 9 via video conference with Gen. Wu Yanan, commander of China's Southern Theater Command, which oversees the South China Sea.

Discussions between senior leaders reduce the risk of misperception or miscalculation, Paparo said, according to a readout of the call from the command.

He cited recent "unsafe interactions" between China and U.S. allies and reinforced Beijing's obligation to comply with international laws and norms to ensure operational safety.

Paparo urged China to reconsider its use of “dangerous, coercive, and potentially escalatory tactics in the South China Sea and beyond.”

On Thursday, Lieutenant General He Lei, a former vice president of the Chinese army’s Academy of Military Sciences, sharply critiqued U.S. plans.

“If the United States insists on being a plotter that pushes others to stand on the front line to confront China, or if it has no other choice but to challenge us by itself, the Chinese people and the [army] will never waver,” he told reporters at a security forum in Beijing, according to a New York Times report Sunday.

China’s coast guard, authorized to use force in territorial waters since 2021, includes over 150 regional and oceangoing patrol vessels, according to an October report on China’s military by the Defense Department.

“The newer, larger [Chinese coast guard] vessels are equipped with helicopter facilities, high-capacity water cannons, multiple interceptor boats and guns,” the report states.

Joint coast guard patrols by the Quad nations in waters claimed by China could cause friction, said Ian Chong, an associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore.

“Such a situation could demonstrate the international nature of some of those waters,” he told Stars and Stripes in an email Monday. If Quad law enforcement vessels intercept Chinese boats involved in illegal fishing, “could that result in retaliation by [China]?” he wrote.

If the four nations pool efforts, especially surveillance and intelligence resources, and target and locate “high value” targets, such as fishing boats that have turned off electronic identification beacons, and inflict real punishment, that would be helpful, said retired Marine Col. Grant Newsham, a senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies in Tokyo.

“They might also target particular areas where the illegal fishing is most pronounced — and help out certain countries that have particular problems,” he said by email Monday.

New Zealand-based security expert Paul Buchanan said he doesn’t expect the Quad patrols to have a major impact on illegal fishing, especially if China’s military starts escorting fishing boats.

The move signals intent, he said by email Monday, “perhaps with the idea of curtaining illegal Chinese fishing in the first place, particularly in the Indian Ocean and blue water Western Pacific.”

[BACK TO TOP](#)

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:

Honeywell to demo new kinetic, soft-kill C-UAS for Air Force

(Breaking Defense, September 17)

Early next year, the US Air Force will see a demo of a new Honeywell system that combines kinetic interceptors, directed energy and electronic warfare capabilities to protect high-value targets from swarms of inbound drones.

The company used this year's Air & Space Forces Association conference outside of Washington, DC, to announce its Stationary and Mobile Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Reveal and Intercept capability that cobbles together host technologies from other vendors.

"Modern warfare is rapidly changing, and the threat swarm drones pose to high-value assets can have a devastating effect on military operations," Matt Milas, Honeywell Aerospace defense and space president, said in a press release. The scalable configuration, he added, is designed to be integrated onto vehicles, as well as fixed-based platforms to protect sensitive targets from incoming drones.

Although Honeywell did not disclose the technologies on the new system, key pieces of equipment are coming from Blue Halo, Leonardo DRS, Pierce Aerospace, Silent Sentinel, Walaris, Rocky Research and Versatol.

In a subsequent statement to Breaking Defense, a Honeywell spokesperson said the system marries up radar, electro-optical/infrared, and artificial intelligence detectors, and then knocks the drones down by either launching a kinetic interceptor, using a directed energy weapon or severing the radio contact back to the controller.

"This system's multi-layered defensive capabilities set it apart in the industry and enable it to not only track and detect, but also defeat multiple threats," Milas said in the press release.

The Air Force Global Strike team has now tasked Honeywell with demonstrating the system in January 2025, at which time the C-UAS system will be used to first detect an unspecified number of drones moving at a high speed before disabling them.

The growing role of drones on the battlefield inside Ukraine and in the Middle East has not only pushed the US military to ramp up its hunt for new capabilities, but also systems to defeat them. Part of that focus has revolved around existing kinetic options like Stinger missiles, while also testing out new directed energy ones like high-energy laser and high-powered microwaves that may one day drive provide a cheaper per unit kill option.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

DOMESTIC:

UC board approves non-lethal weapons for UCLA police

(The Sun, September 20)

The University of California's Board of Regents approved the request for additional non-lethal weapons by UCLA police following protests related to the Israel-Hamas war.

The equipment included pepper balls, sponge rounds, projectile launchers, and drones. Approval was also given for similar equipment requests for the nine other police departments on UC campuses.

Driving the news: Clashes between protesters and counterprotesters on the UCLA campus resulted in over a dozen injuries and more than 200 arrests.

Following the protests, concerns were raised about the use of non-lethal weapons by UCLA police, with faculty and students criticizing the department for injuries sustained during demonstrations.

The big picture: The requested equipment additions included more pepper balls, sponge and foam rounds, less lethal projectile launchers, and drones.

The drones were intended for assisting with search and rescue missions. The report indicated that the equipment was used for training purposes and to respond to life-threatening circumstances or violent protests.

California law requires law enforcement agencies to report on the acquisition and use of weapons categorized as military equipment.

The UC police systemwide director of community safety clarified during the meeting that the weapons were not meant for crowd control or peaceful protests but for situations where law enforcement deemed the use of force necessary to defend themselves or others.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

OTHER FOREIGN COUNTRIES:

DRDO's push for high-power microwave technology to counter emerging drone threats

(The News Mill, September 21)

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is planning to develop a high-power microwave (HPM) system with a 1km range to counter drone threats, according to a report from The Indian Express.

This initiative follows the earlier development of a 1KW laser weapon, also with a range of 1km, integrated into the D4 Anti-Drone System, which is already in service. DRDO aims to further strengthen India's directed-energy weapons arsenal to handle the increasing challenges posed by unmanned aerial systems.

What are high-power microwave weapons?

High-power microwave (HPM) weapons utilise concentrated electromagnetic radiation to disrupt or destroy the electronic systems of drones. These weapons generate intense microwave pulses that interfere with the internal electronics, effectively disabling the target's ability to fly.

Unlike conventional weapons that rely on physical impact, HPM systems focus on electronic warfare principles.

HPM systems emit microwave energy that penetrates various materials, impacting sensitive components like sensors and communication devices within the drone. This neutralises the drone without causing physical destruction, making HPM systems valuable in scenarios where drones depend on electronics for navigation and control.

Differences between high-power microwave and laser weapons

Although both high-power microwave (HPM) and laser systems are classified as directed-energy weapons, they operate on distinct principles. Laser weapons utilise focused light waves to inflict damage on drones by generating intense heat. This concentrated energy can burn through surfaces and disrupt critical components, such as cameras and control circuits. Laser systems primarily target specific parts of a drone, like wings or electronic housings, which can lead to loss of control and forced crashes. They are typically limited to engaging one drone at a time, and the speed at which the laser weapon neutralises the drone depends on its power output. The need for precise targeting and continuous tracking can limit their ability to handle saturation attacks.

In contrast, HPM systems operate by emitting microwave energy that can affect multiple drones simultaneously. The emitted microwaves can penetrate various materials, directly impacting the electronic systems within the drones, such as navigation and communication devices. This broad area of effect allows HPM systems to disrupt or neutralise several drones at once, making them particularly effective against swarm tactics, where multiple drones may be launched simultaneously. The rapid response capability of HPM systems means they can engage threats quickly without the need for precise tracking.

Overall, while laser systems excel in precision targeting, HPM systems provide a wider coverage area and faster engagement capabilities, making them complementary technologies in counter-drone operations.

Cost effectiveness against swarm drones

Both high-power microwave (HPM) and laser weapons are significantly more cost-effective than missile-based defence systems when addressing drone swarms. Missiles are expensive to manufacture and deploy, often costing several times more than the drones they target. For instance, US and NATO allies shot down Houthi drones, which cost only a few thousand dollars, using missiles worth more than \$1 million each. Given that each missile typically engages a single drone, this leads to much higher costs during swarm attacks involving numerous drones.

In contrast, HPM and laser systems operate using electricity, significantly reducing operational costs. These systems can be used repeatedly without the expense of restocking ammunition. The low cost per engagement allows them to handle multiple threats without incurring substantial financial burdens.

Additionally, the maintenance costs of HPM and laser systems are generally much lower compared to traditional missile-based defences. Their cost efficiency, along with the ability to neutralise multiple drones, makes them a practical and sustainable choice for modern air defence. By introducing HPM systems in conjunction with existing laser weapons, DRDO aims to significantly enhance India's capability to defend against swarm drone threats.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

German industry confirm delivery of naval laser weapon by 2030

(Global Data, September 20)

Two German armament manufacturers, MBDA Deutschland and Rheinmetall, through a collaborative working group called ARGE, will bring their joint naval product, a High-Energy Laser (HEL) weapon system, to market in the next five to ten years.

Confident in their respective skills in the field of laser technology, both companies have concluded a corresponding cooperation agreement to develop a military HEL weapon.

This announcement comes after the system's 15-month trial onboard the German Navy frigate, FGS Sachsen (F219), between June 2022 and September 2023.

A month after the successful test, in which the demonstrator was fired more than 100 times, Naval Technology was invited to MBDA Deutschland, where the company discussed its plans to deploy the weapon in the coming years.

What does the HEL weapon do?

HEL systems engage targets at the speed of light, with very low optical detectability, while operating with the highest possible precision and minimal collateral damage.

Crucially, the low cost per engagement will certainly balance the net cost of conventional missile systems throughout their lifecycle – accounting for supplementary equipment and projectiles.

This is significant given the rate at which missiles and projectiles are being spent by the two sides amid the two-and-a-half-year Russian invasion of Ukraine. The rate is high enough for Russian forces to resort to using more sophisticated weaponry, such as the Kh-101 missile – a supposedly 'hypersonic' missile that is, in actuality, an air-launched ballistic missile.

Deploying the HEL weapon

Although the technology is ready, the German Armed Forces require a smaller, integrated and modular system as opposed to the 20-foot, six-and-a-half tonne container unit that the German Navy deployed on the Sachsen frigate last year.

Likewise, Germany wants a HEL system that is more powerful than the current demonstrator, along with the ability to engage more difficult targets such as drone swarms.

Currently, the demonstrator's beam operates at 50-100kw, which requires a three-to-five-second engagement time to destroy a target.

During the October 2023 update, Doris Laarmann, head of laser business development, MBDA Deutschland, suggested the company expects to fulfill these additional developments by 2027+. Though, now, after Rheinmetall's announcement on 20 September 2024, this will be sometime between 2029-30.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

David Lammy 'concerned' by civilian casualties in ongoing Lebanon conflict

(Manchester Evening News, September 19)

The Foreign Secretary has expressed concern about "rising tensions and civilian casualties" in Lebanon amid ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.

Israel is reported to have carried out air strikes on southern Lebanon on Thursday afternoon as Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah vowed to retaliate following this week's attacks that targeted Lebanese militants with exploding pagers.

In a televised speech, Mr Nasrallah said the attacks, widely believed to have been carried out by Israel, had been a "severe blow" and claimed they had killed dozens, including children, and wounded thousands.

On Thursday evening, David Lammy said he had spoken to Lebanese prime minister Najib Mikati and "expressed my deep concern over rising tensions and civilian casualties in Lebanon".

He added that he and Mr Mikati had discussed "the need for a negotiated solution to restore stability and security" across the border between Israel and Lebanon.

Mr Lammy went on to repeat the Foreign Office's warning to British nationals, urging them to leave Lebanon "while commercial options remain" as the situation "could deteriorate rapidly".

Also on Thursday, two Israeli soldiers were reported to have been killed by Hezbollah in the group's own cross-border attacks.

Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant meanwhile vowed that Israeli civilians would return to the country's north as he promised Hezbollah would "pay an increasing price".

Fears of an all-out war have mounted as Israel and Hezbollah continue to exchange fire across Lebanon's southern border.

Hezbollah's renewed offensive followed Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, and both groups are backed by Iran.

Western countries including the UK have repeatedly urged restraint, arguing escalation could lead to a regional war.

The Foreign Office continues to advise against all travel to Lebanon.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

COMMENTARY:

China's Maritime Grey Zone Tactics Are Evolving

(Real Clear Defense, September 21, Brent Sadler)

Back in May, Beijing responded to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's inauguration speech by quickly ordering a large-scale military demonstration: Joint Sword 2024A. Chinese military flexing against Taiwan is nothing new, of course. Since at least 2022, Beijing has repeatedly proven that, even when caught off guard, it can respond to events and sustain an elevated military presence around Taiwan within days.

This muscular naval approach came to a head this summer with violent clashes at Second Thomas Shoal. While Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) crews were using boat axes against Filipino sailors - one losing a finger - a large Chinese amphibious warship was loitering nearby in Philippine waters.

The event was indicative of an important change in China's pattern of maritime coercion. While previously, Beijing sought to maintain plausible deniability when using its maritime militia to coerce southeast Asian nations, it is now adopting a more direct and aggressive strategy, that can escalate quickly using warships more directly in confrontations.

The CCG's path to increasingly violent provocations, from water cannons to boat axes, follows a known pattern. A similar and instructional trend occurred around the Senkaku Islands, where there has been a nearly continuous Chinese CCG and naval presence. Since Japan nationalized the islands in 2012, China has sustained this naval presence and historically high levels of intrusions into Japan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Taken together, these actions indicate that China's military is no longer sitting on the sidelines but shifting its strategy.

A recent report makes clear, as China has done from the East to the South China Sea, it is updating its gray-zone tactics for a new great game in the Pacific.

Flush with confidence, China has also recently increased military activities with Russia in new and noteworthy ways. In July, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin met at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Kazakhstan, discussing coordinated responses to various security challenges. This trend began in earnest in July 2019 when Russian and Chinese nuclear weapon capable bombers operated together in the Sea of Japan. Since then, similar naval operations have become routine. Land operations are not far behind, with the Chinese-Belorussian military exercise taking place near the Polish border in July as NATO leaders met in D.C.

All this recent activity provides context for the periodic Chinese Communist Party's Third Plenum. Chaired by Xi Jinping, the Plenum focuses on long-term economic policies. Given the Chinese Communist Party's secrecy, little information of the Third Plenum's agenda has been divulged, but it isn't hard to imagine that the Party is preparing to face economic blowback for adopting this more direct and aggressive maritime approach.

If, in fact, China's modus operandi of so-called gray-zone operations is changing, hardening its economy to reprisals would make sense and would likely mean wider Chinese Communist Party coordination. Should China's leaders come to see this summer's events as successful, it will likely mean more aggression ahead, and not limited to the South and East China Sea.

In March 2022, Foreign Minister Wang Yi signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands. And since then, there have been more Chinese presence and overtures to this region. As such, we could be witnessing the vanguard of a new Chinese strategic maritime effort just getting underway.

So, what can the United States do about this changing Chinese approach and widening geographic focus?

Naval statecraft should be the first option. An example of this was on display in the 2020 West Capella incident, in which the U.S. response then was guided by a now declassified strategic framework for a free and open Indo-Pacific. That framework merged economic and security interests in a common approach. The lesson from the crisis was that a persistent naval presence backed by clear-eyed diplomacy saw the Chinese Coast Guard and maritime militia backdown without a shot being fired.

Unfortunately, the current administration has failed to fully leverage the lessons of that crisis, nor apply them more broadly across the Pacific. And now, as China evolves its approach, the U.S. and its allies find themselves a step behind.

From the East to the South China Sea, and soon the South and Central Pacific, a militarily confident China is on the march. It is time to respond.

Brent D. Sadler is a senior research fellow in naval warfare and advanced technologies at The Heritage Foundation.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

The Philippines Should Take Note: 'Assertive Transparency' Is Not a Strategy *(The Diplomat, September 19, Vincent Kyle Parada)*

The nexus of South China Sea tensions is shifting. Only weeks after agreeing to a "provisional arrangement" for resupply missions to the Philippine warship-turned-military outpost BRP Sierra Madre at Second Thomas Shoal, Beijing is establishing new fronts in its decades-long dispute with Manila. Chinese fighter jets have since performed dangerous maneuvers against Philippine aircraft at Scarborough Shoal. Members of the Philippine Coast Guard have found themselves under siege amid several ramming incidents around Sabina Shoal.

But while Manila has continued to highlight these incidents under the banner of "assertive transparency," China does not seem to be responding in the way that the Philippines hoped.

As a tool of foreign policy, "naming and shaming" is nothing new. Indeed, scholars such as Wendy He Qingli and Haridas Ramasamy have highlighted Washington's use of rhetorical

coercion to illuminate China's gray-zone activities since the Obama administration. Taking a page from the United States' playbook, it was in 2023, spurred on by the likes Raymond Powell and the folks at Project Myoushu, that the Philippines began publicizing maritime incidents in the South China Sea – a clear departure from the policies of the previous government under Rodrigo Duterte. The goal was simple: strengthen national resilience by shaping public opinion; secure international support from like-minded actors and defenders of the “rules-based order”; and increase the reputational costs of Chinese aggression.

Indeed, to the eyes of the Marcos administration in 2023, it was clear that Manila's greatest advantage rested with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the 2016 arbitral ruling that invalidated Beijing's sweeping claims over the disputed territories. Philippine officials wanted to leverage the country's image as an upstanding member of the community of nations as a backdrop to China's revisionist behavior in the South China Sea. “Assertive transparency” was the logical policy option, and it has worked – to an extent.

By July 2024, 61 percent of Filipinos were calling for a complete withdrawal of Chinese vessels from the disputed territories. Manila has signed several defense cooperation agreements with its partners, including the United States, Japan, France, Germany, and Vietnam. And in every confrontation with Beijing, the international community – from North America and Europe to East Asia and Oceania – has expressed near-unanimous support for the Philippine position. The problem is that, contrary to their proponents' expectations, these successes did not actually bring about meaningful changes to the status quo.

Months into the assertive transparency initiative China has proven itself more than capable of taking on the Philippines' reputational punches, countering opposing narratives through its vast (dis)information machinery, regardless of whether anyone actually believes them. While the two countries operate within the same space politically, the different arenas through which they responded ensured that neither side could ever truly gain ground from the other.

This has been less of a problem for Beijing, which, having already consolidated its initial gains in the disputed territories, has the time, resources, and willingness to sit down and wait for a mistake. Manila's position is infinitely more precarious. As the weaker actor in a fundamentally asymmetric conflict, the Philippines does not have the luxury of an idle moment.

The Philippines' immediate objective was to prevent further encroachment and maintain control over its remaining maritime features in the Spratly Islands. To do this, Manila cultivated a diverse network of allies and partners, hoping that their collective influence could offset its military deficits. Yet again, however, the friction between the Philippines' strategic objectives and the means it employs resurfaces.

Despite its efforts at minilateralism, the Marcos administration was still very much convinced of the need to confront China alone, both to prove that it could uphold the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity by itself, as well as to dispel allegations that it was acting on behalf of U.S. interests. In fact, the United States has extended several offers of assistance to deliver supplies to the Sierra Madre over the past few months – offers that the Philippine government has consistently declined. If the goal of alliances is to lend to each other a collective strength –

political, economic, or otherwise – then Manila has deliberately handicapped itself with marginal returns from its alliance-building.

Now, does this mean that the Philippines should send in its navy, establish its own maritime militia, or resort to ramming Chinese vessels in return? Not quite. Having the United States or a coalition of the willing involved in resupply missions to Second Thomas Shoal is a policy option. It would undoubtedly lead to a dressing down from Beijing, but it would secure Manila's lifeline to the disputed territories. However, if the Philippines is adamant at projecting a self-reliant defense posture, then it must develop its capabilities to independently monitor, patrol, and safeguard the country's territorial waters all the way up to its exclusive economic zone. Besides acquiring more ships, this means establishing a permanent presence in the South China Sea. After all, it was the withdrawal of Philippine vessels from Scarborough Shoal that allowed the Chinese to take over back in 2012.

There have been efforts to that end since the grounding of the Sierra Madre in 1999. The development of the Spratlys had been in the works as early as 2014 but stalled due to shifting priorities and the lack of adequate resources. Things had only just gotten back on track under Marcos, meaning that the planned upgrades were unlikely to have a substantial impact on the balance of power anytime soon. To compensate, the Philippine Coast Guard anchored the BRP Teresa Magbanua off Sabina Shoal last April to serve as a temporary outpost in the area – a response to the increasing number of Chinese vessels loitering off the coast of Palawan.

But while the reasoning behind it was sound, it did not change the fact that, like at Second Thomas Shoal, China simply had to dislodge the vessel from its current position – either physically through ramming or towing, or by cutting off its supply lines – and then swoop in and occupy the territory. Sure enough, the Teresa Magbanua withdrew from Sabina Shoal on September 13. Manila could, in theory, rotate the deployment of ships to serve as outposts, and the Philippines has pledged to do just that. But with only a few assets available from the outset, this would simply multiply the damage sustained across multiple vessels. It is not a sustainable practice in the long run.

Rather than confront Beijing head-on, Manila needs to fight smart. In the absence of permanent outposts in the Spratlys, the first order of business should be refurbishing the crumbling Sierra Madre and sustaining the long-term at-sea deployment of Philippine Coast Guard vessels. Critical to both is a steady inflow of supplies necessary to maintain and repair against structural damage, either from the elements or the China Coast Guard.

In an ideal situation, temporary outposts like these should already be fitted to enable a limited degree of self-sufficiency, minimizing the need for resupply to begin with. Something like desalination machines would provide crews with a stable water supply by converting seawater. But with conventional maritime resupply having already proven dangerous in the past, defense planners need to come up with new ways of conducting resupply missions, either through use of rotary/fixed-wing aircraft or smaller, more maneuverable platforms at sea. Naval drones, for example, provide a unique opportunity by removing the risk posed to human operators and the associated issues, which could lead to escalation. Even if apprehended or destroyed, their loss

would not be enough to compromise the country's overall defense posture while still managing to deliver the intended reputational costs for Beijing.

The bottom line is that the Philippines has to do something tangible to compel China to modify its behavior rather than wait for the unlikely scenario that international pressure will do so on its behalf.

At the end of the day, what Philippine authorities need to understand is that “assertive transparency” has reached its saturation point. Defense cooperation and capability development may be beneficial in the long run, but right now, what Manila needs is the will to back up the courage of its beleaguered servicemen. “Naming and shaming,” while crucial, must always be subsumed under a broader framework for national security. Dialogue and diplomacy constitute one element; the modernization of the Philippines’ armed forces constitutes another. But actually responding to Chinese provocations on the ground – that is where the future of its struggles in the South China Sea will be determined, whether in the eyes of Filipinos, the Chinese, or otherwise.

Vincent Kyle Parada is a former defense analyst for the Philippine Navy and a graduate student at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), based in Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

China Gaslights the World About Its Aggression in the South China Sea

(Newsweek, September 19)

On Aug. 25, a ship from the Philippines' Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the BRP Datu Sanday, set sail from the island of Palawan to resupply Filipino fishermen stranded near Sabina Shoal, a nearby atoll in the South China Sea. Unfortunately, the Datu Sanday never arrived. The reason? An armada of naval, coast guard, and maritime militia ships from the People's Republic of China (PRC) was blocking its way.

The fact that Sabina Shoal is located well within the Philippines' internationally recognized exclusive economic zone did not deter the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from ordering its ships to block the Datu Sanday, falsely claiming the Filipino ship was "intruding" into sovereign PRC waters. After it continued its mission, footage captured by the Philippines showed one of China's coast guard ships ramming the Datu Sanday's hull, seriously damaging the ship and causing its engine to fail.

Unfortunately, the CCP's aggression in the South China Sea encapsulates a broader worldview, one in which might makes right and Beijing does as it pleases, including ramming ships belonging to its smaller neighbors that dare to challenge its sweeping—and illegal—sovereignty claims.

If anyone has the temerity to call it out for its aggressive and illegal actions, the CCP simply gaslights them. After the Philippines released its footage clearly showing China's coast guard

ramming into the stern of the *Datu Sanday*, Beijing bizarrely claimed that the Philippines had "deliberately approached and rammed" its ship.

This gaslighting and disregard for international law is nothing new. After an international court ruled in 2016 that the CCP's so-called "nine-dash line" sovereignty claims over almost the entire South China Sea had "no legal basis," Beijing infamously declared the court's ruling to be "null and void" and amount to "nothing more than a piece of paper."

Nor is the CCP's disregard for its neighbors' sovereign rights a recent development. In 2010, years before the rise of current top leader Xi Jinping, the PRC's foreign minister made clear to a summit of Southeast Asian countries their place in the CCP's vision for a new global pecking order. "China is a big country, and other countries are small countries," the top diplomat warned.

For anyone familiar with the Melian Dialogue between ancient Athens and Melos, one of Athens' smaller neighboring city-states, the implication of this language was clear: in the world according to the CCP, just as Athens told Melos, "The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must."

For the CCP, this worldview means bullying its smaller neighbors at will and then lying about it.

It means stating at the White House that China "does not intend to pursue militarization" of the South China Sea and then building a slew of military bases in its neighbors' exclusive economic zones, including several that are similar or larger in size than the U.S. base at Pearl Harbor.

It means claiming to pursue a "peaceful" settlement of differences with Taiwan and then escalating its use of military and economic coercion in an attempt to intimidate the democratic, self-governing island into submission under the PRC's rule.

And it means Xi claiming that China has "fully fulfilled the commitments it made" when it entered the World Trade Organization and then violating every rule of international trade in the book, including dumping artificially underpriced goods into the U.S. market, evading customs duties, and stealing hundreds of billions' worth of U.S. intellectual property.

For decades, the CCP has gaslighted the world about its aggressive actions and intention to drag the world back into an earlier era where rights were not guaranteed by law but arbitrarily granted—and revoked—by autocrats.

Today, we must firmly and persistently call out the CCP for its aggression and untruths, from the South China Sea and Taiwan to technology and trade. Alongside our allies and partners, we have made incredible sacrifices to put that earlier era of history behind us. And we cannot allow the world to ever go back.

Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Ill.) is the ranking member of the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

China Will Defeat America If They Blockade Taiwan

(The National Interest, September 19, Brandon J. Weichert)

Key Points: Many experts argue that China is preparing to seize Taiwan, driven by economic, geopolitical, and historical motivations. The CCP views Taiwan's annexation as a way to solidify its dominance in the Indo-Pacific and erase the legacy of the Chinese Civil War.

Why We Should Worry: While the Pentagon suggests a possible conflict by 2027, China may act sooner, likely employing a blockade strategy rather than a full invasion. A blockade would choke off Taiwan, disrupt its military and communications, and potentially deter international intervention.

Bottomline: If successful, this move would mark the end of the U.S.-led global order and the rise of a new, China-dominated era.

Will China Use a Blockade to Conquer Taiwan?

China wants Taiwan. This is as much about economics and geopolitics as it is about historical grievance. When these all move in the same direction, you've got yourself a very strong and dangerous motivator for powerful actors to behave belligerently, especially when both Beijing and Washington are no longer on the same page diplomatically.

For China, conquering Taiwan not only gives them economic and geopolitical advantages over their rivals, but it allows for the Chinese Communist Party under President-for-life Xi Jinping to finally declare that the dangers posed to them by Taiwan's "splittism" have been put to bed. It would be a clear announcement to the world that, indeed, a new world order had been birthed – a world order in which the CCP stood as the dominant power in the economically dynamic Indo-Pacific.

Further, it'd be a world order in which the CCP could claim ultimate legitimacy both at home and abroad for finally having defeated the ghosts of the bloody Chinese Civil War. For the Americans, who have spent so much diplomatic and financial capital on Taiwan's independence, it would be a severe blow.

Whether it comes in the next six weeks, six months, or six years, China is preparing itself to overwhelm the island democracy of Taiwan militarily. And they will likely win.

The only questions to be answered at this point are: When will they attack? What form will the attack take, as an outright invasion, a blockade, or some combination thereof? And of course, what will the outcome of the pending attack be?

Answering the Right Questions

For the first answer, the Pentagon assumes it won't be before 2027, if at all. This author is far more concerned China might give it a go much sooner than that, especially as the Americans remain distracted by events elsewhere.

The answer to the second question is a bit more complex, though nonetheless depressing. China has already built up its forces in such a way that they could technically conduct an invasion now and have a decent shot of victory. But perhaps China doesn't want to go through what will likely be a bloodbath.

A better strategy would likely be a blockade along with cyberattacks to disrupt life on the island and prevent help from arriving, after which China plans to simply walk onto the island once the besieged Taiwanese people have had enough.

Unless the United States is willing to involve itself in a third world war, in which even if the Americans defeated China, it would be a Pyrrhic victory at best under present conditions, the Chinese would likely achieve their aims in annexing Taiwan.

The U.S. Navy is more worried about a possible Chinese blockade than they are about a Gulf War-style air blitz coupled with Normandy-like amphibious landings. The Navy might be onto something.

What a Blockade Looks Like

After all, a blockade would prove devastating to Taiwan. Plus, China's moves in the South China Sea and East China Sea can be understood in the context of basically choking off the maritime passes that lead to Taiwan as a prelude to a more direct blockade of the island. Before they surrounded Taiwan, though, the Chinese would first need to absorb Taiwan's outlying Matsu, Kinmen, and Penghu Islands. From there, the Chinese would encircle Taiwan, daring anyone to challenge their blockade.

In the course of their blockade, Chinese forces would likely destroy key Taiwanese naval capabilities and would work assiduously to clip the wings of Taiwan's American-provided air force. Meanwhile, the country will be smothered by debilitating cyberattacks and likely disruptions to the electromagnetic spectrum.

At the same time, the island will be deprived of access to the rest of the world, both literally and metaphorically. During this time, there will likely be confusion and consternation among Taiwan's allies as to what to do.

It is possible that Japan will directly intercede on behalf of Taiwan, forcing America's reluctant hand, as the Americans and Japanese share a mutual defense treaty. Then again, even if the Americans wanted to get involved, the nature of China's defenses surrounding the area with their anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities would likely negate the ability of the expeditionary U.S. military to reliably project power.

The goal for China would be to keep the U.S. military just over the horizon long enough for the Chinese to achieve their goal: overthrowing the government of Taiwan and absorbing it into their budding co-prosperity sphere. And with China's growing A2/AD capabilities, their counterspace assets and their cyberwarfare capacities, Beijing just might be able to achieve their goal.

The balance of power in the Indo-Pacific has shifted away from the United States and toward China in the last decade. Should Beijing opt to hit Taiwan now with a blockade, they will be able to do so. China will likely be victorious.

Once that happens, the U.S.-led world order that has persisted since 1945 will be dead. A new, messier, inherently anti-American system that is dominated by the Eurasian autocrats will arise in its place.

Brandon J. Weichert, a National Interest national security analyst, is a former Congressional staffer and geopolitical analyst who is a contributor at The Washington Times, the Asia Times, and The-Pipeline. He is the author of Winning Space: How America Remains a Superpower, Biohacked: China's Race to Control Life, and The Shadow War: Iran's Quest for Supremacy. His next book, A Disaster of Our Own Making: How the West Lost Ukraine, is due October 22 from Encounter Books. Weichert can be followed via Twitter @WeTheBrandon.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Approved by: Joint Intermediate Force Capabilities Office (JIFCO), Strategic Communication

E-mail: JIFCOInfo@usmc.mil

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DoDJIFCO>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dod-jifco>

JIFCO's website: <https://jifco.defense.gov/>

[BACK TO TOP](#)