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| News & Information



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NEWS SUMMARY:

- Experimenting with and potentially fielding Intermediate Force Capabilities should be considered as part of the broader strategic development of tactical options in the West Philippine Sea.
- China's Coast Guard claimed it entered waters of the Arctic Ocean for the first time as part of a joint patrol with Russia.
- The White House is being urged to speed up the sharing of sensitive military technology with its AUKUS partners as Australia reportedly pushes for access to US precision weapons, undersea drones and maritime acoustic systems.
- Vietnam protested to China over what it said was an attack on a Vietnamese fishing boat in contested South China Sea waters that injured several fishermen.
- A Chinese Navy missile boat directed a military-grade laser at a Philippine aircraft over the South China Sea.
- Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration is adopting new measures to improve maritime law enforcement, in response to increasing gray zone tactics employed by Chinese forces.

- Spain will reform the most controversial articles of its public safety law, gradually phasing out rubber bullets and reducing disobedience to police officers to a minor offense.
- Yemen's Houthis emailed alerts to Red Sea ships telling them to prepare for attacks.
- QinetiQ Australia has commenced planning and preparations to accelerate the delivery of an Australian sovereign Laser Directed Energy Weapon capability into service.
- India's border tension with China is continuing despite dozens of rounds of military-level talks, and the Indian Army Chief has said that the country needs to be alert against grey zone battles.
- Houthi rebels launched an explosive-loaded drone that crashed into one ship Tuesday in the Red Sea and a missile that exploded against another.
- Opinion: Indonesia must start beefing up its maritime security agency and move toward increasing the number of ships under its disposal to conduct its policing tasks.

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FEATURE:

Intermediate Force Capabilities: Gaining Competitive Advantage in the West Philippine Sea

(Joint Intermediate Force Capabilities Office, October 1)

The U.S. Sea Services are a vital force in maintaining order and ensuring freedom of navigation in the contested waters of the West Philippine Sea, the place of unfolding strategic power struggles. The top leaders of the United States Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard stated in the U.S. Tri-Service Maritime Strategy that we “must maintain clear-eyed resolve to compete with, deter, and, if necessary, defeat our adversaries while we accelerate development of a modernized, integrated all-domain [maritime] force for the future.”

As China’s assertive maritime claims defy international norms, their presence underscores a renewed focus on preserving a competitive edge in a region that is crucial for global security and commerce. The escalating tensions demand a sophisticated approach to upholding international law and deterring aggression, reflecting the dynamic nature of modern geopolitical conflicts.

China has recently intensified its aggressive tactics near the Philippines, from detaining foreign vessels to colliding with Philippine ships in disputed areas. As part of his response, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. created the National Maritime Council in March to strengthen the nation’s maritime security. He took the step amid “a range of serious challenges that threaten not only the country’s territorial integrity, but also the peaceful existence of Filipinos.”

According to analysts, these increased operations by China also serve as Beijing’s attempt to gauge the United States’ commitment to supporting allies in the Indo-Pacific region. The tensions are so high that in August, Washington responded to the collision between Chinese and Philippine coast guard ships, reminding Beijing of the U.S.’s 73-year-old Mutual Defense Treaty with its oldest Asian ally. In the September readout of a call between the Defense heads of the Philippines and the U.S., the Pentagon stressed “the historic momentum” in defense ties between the two countries. The balance of power in the West Philippine Sea now depends on more than just traditional military strength—it requires innovative approaches and technologies to deter illegal, coercive, aggressive and deceptive (ICAD) activities and maintain strategic superiority in complex, gray-zone conflicts.

In this geopolitical landscape, the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard continue to develop new models for organizing, training, and equipping nautical warriors. The current environment sheds light on the clear need to focus on Intermediate Force Capabilities (IFCs). These advanced technologies bridge the gap between mere presence and lethal force which are essential for navigating the modern maritime environment.

The Joint Intermediate Force Capabilities Office (JIFCO) is currently working to enable U.S. and allied forces to deliver accurate, tailorable, and compelling effects in complex and ambiguous scenarios while preventing unnecessary loss of life or destruction of property by enhancing the ability of our sea service personnel to operate effectively below the level of armed conflict.

Employing IFCs in the West Philippine Sea: Enhancing U.S. Options

Let's consider three maritime scenarios that could potentially emerge in the West Philippine Sea where IFCs may more effectively address the conceptual challenge of supporting maritime operations across the competition continuum.

Scenario One:

A high-speed waterborne craft is evading detection in the disputed waters of the West Philippine Sea. Tactically, these boats are nearly impossible to interdict, and primary options for commanders typically are restricted to firing warning shots in attempts to compel these boats to stop. Whether these vessels are operated by smugglers or intelligence collectors, they are skilled at exploiting U.S. Sea Services' hesitance to apply any lethal force. In a scenario where a speed boat would be largely responsible for any type of harmful activity, which could range from intelligence collection to violation of a UN resolution, any lethal weapons engagement is not an acceptable option, assuming the vessel did not immediately demonstrate hostile intent to justify use of lethal force. Other than to temporarily track and report these violating speedboats, U.S. naval forces in the West Philippine Sea can currently do little else. Only with demonstrated hostile intent could U.S. Sea Services be authorized to fire lethal rounds from small caliber weapons to defend themselves.

By using Alternative IFC technologies, a Commander could effectively stop the speed boats without the risk of deadly force or permanent damage to the vessel. For example, the Vessel Incapacitating Power Effect Radiation (VIPER) system can disable engines and prevent boats from approaching by emitting microwave energy that disrupts the vessels electronic system. Beyond Directed Energy, vessel stopping technologies encompass a range of innovative solutions designed to immobilize, repel or redirect boats. These tools enhance the Sea Services' ability to respond to threats while safeguarding service members and minimizing risks to non-combatants in maritime settings.

Scenario Two:

Consider the risks the boarding team would face when confronting the mission described in Scenario One. During Visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) operations, which are among the most routine missions throughout the Sea Services, one of the most common tactics used by a Coast Guard/Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) to disable a small boat is to shoot the engine of a small boat to disable its outboard motors. This tactic has its own set of challenges, as the LEDET search must happen quickly, given that a small boat captain could easily sabotage their space and cause the boat and cargo to quickly sink. The LEDET must also be careful during boarding operations to not inadvertently cause any explosion or fire while subduing attackers.

Previously, the LEDET did not possess any option other than their small caliber arms or pyrotechnic grenades to distract and subdue any hiding persons prior to safely apprehending them. These pyrotechnic grenades must detonate their propellants chemically to generate the desired flash, bang, and pressure wave effect. This involves risks of igniting any volatile vapors or fuels in the compartment causing an explosion or fire, destroying the evidence and the boat, as well as injuring any persons onboard.

The utilization of the IFC Non-Pyrotechnic Flash-Bang Grenade (NPFBG) mitigates these hazards by replacing non-pyrotechnically generated equivalent effects of “flash, bang, and pressure wave” to avoid the chemical combustion and ignition risks. Using a combination of pneumatic, piezo-electric, and mechanical means, an NPFBG delivers the desired “distract and suppress” response of the traditional flash-bang grenade without risk of explosions or fire, unlike traditional pyrotechnics.

Scenario Three:

IFCs can be useful beyond VBSS Operations in the West Philippine Sea. Against small boat swarm attacks in both littoral and blue waters from Chinese vessels, Directed Energy (DE) Vessel Stopping Capabilities like VIPER could prove effective. VIPER uses high power microwaves (HPM) to electronically stop the engines of the hostile boat in its path, which could also be used to neutralize swarm tactics.

This DE Vessel Stopping

This DE Vessel Stopping method greatly simplifies the targeting dilemma of a “one against multiple” targeting scenario. Its electronic “magazine” continually replenishes as long as the ship is generating electrical power; in contrast a conventional naval gun—even if it were to achieve a 100% kill rate for all rounds fired—will still likely empty its magazines well before all small fast attack craft in the swarm are successfully engaged.

The Path Ahead: Building and Reinforcing Cooperation with Regional Partners

The JIFCO is currently working with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command to incorporate these a multitude of IFCs into upcoming military exercises. Experimenting and potentially fielding these systems to regional partners such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and other Pacific allies should be considered as part of the broader strategic development of tactical options in the West Philippine Sea.

The JIFCO also continues to work on IFC capabilities to enable the Sea Services to better operate between peaceful day-to-day presence and full-scale violent conflict, in the West Philippine Sea or anywhere. To develop IFCs for widespread use, the process of planning, as reflected in wargaming, modeling, and simulation, will be absolutely essential to shape strategic and operational knowledge of how systems can be procured and fielded. This engagement is critical for IFCs because the widely utilized U.S. government procurement cycle of planning, programming, budgeting and execution drives the sustainability of DoD programs. Without the essential simulations, modeling, and wargaming work, many IFCs may never be seen outside of research labs, thus rendering the research operationally ineffective and strategically wasteful.

“By developing new intermediate force capabilities (IFCs)—scalable armaments that can deliver effects short of lethal force—we can increase our options for responding to provocations and coercion in both competition and crisis,” concludes Advantage at Sea, the service strategy for the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

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GRAY ZONE COMPETITION:

China’s Coast Guard claims to have entered the Arctic Ocean for the first time as it ramps up security ties with Russia

(CNN, October 3)

China’s Coast Guard claimed it entered waters of the Arctic Ocean for the first time as part of a joint patrol with Russia – in the latest sign of enhanced coordination between the two in a region where Beijing has long wished to expand its footprint.

The statement came a day after the US Coast Guard said it spotted four vessels from the Russian Border Guard and Chinese Coast Guard in the Bering Sea – the “northernmost” location it said it had ever observed the Chinese ships.

The joint patrol “effectively expanded the scope of the coast guard’s ocean-going navigation” and tested their ability “to carry out missions in unfamiliar waters,” the China Coast Guard (CCG) said in a post on its official social media account Wednesday.

The CCG did not release the exact location of the patrol. A banner visible on one of the vessels in accompanying photos read “China Coast Guard devoting its heart to the Party; demonstrating loyalty in the Arctic Ocean,” referring to China’s ruling Communist Party.

The Russian government has not officially acknowledged the patrol, which Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said took place “a few days ago.” Russian state media TASS published a report on the patrol, citing the CCG statement.

The US Coast Guard (USCG) on Monday said it spotted the four vessels from the Russian Border Guard and Chinese Coast Guard “transiting in formation in a northeast direction” in the Bering Sea, some five miles inside Russia’s Exclusive Economic Zone on Saturday.

The Bering Sea stretches between Russia and Alaska and is part of the North Pacific Ocean. It connects to the Arctic Ocean through the Bering Strait, a narrow passage separating Asia and North America.

“This recent activity demonstrates the increased interest in the Arctic by our strategic competitors,” Rear Adm. Megan Dean, commander of the 17th Coast Guard District, said in the USCG statement.

The US has raised concerns about China's growing role and coordination with Russia in the strategically and environmentally sensitive Arctic region, as the two countries tighten their security and economic ties more broadly.

US and Canadian forces in July intercepted Russian and Chinese bombers flying together near Alaska for the first time, while their two navies operated together in international waters off the Alaskan coast in 2022 and 2023, according to the US military.

Last year, CCG and Russia's Federal Security Service, which operates its coast guard, agreed to strengthen their "maritime law enforcement cooperation" and China was invited to observe Russia's "Arctic Patrol-2023" security drills.

Analysts say the new patrol is part of a broader pattern of collaboration – and designed to send a message to Washington, whose maritime activities in the South and East China Seas have longed irked Beijing.

"The significance of the (China) Coast Guard operating farther north than it has ever done implies (China) is extending its Coast Guard into areas the US has traditionally considered its own domain," said Carl Schuster, a retired US Navy captain and former director of operations at the US Pacific Command's Joint Intelligence Center.

"China in particular is signaling that the US Coast Guard is not the only one that (can) operate within and near other countries' Economic Exclusion Zones from their own home waters," he said.

Arctic ambitions

Beijing has for years sought to increase its footprint in the Arctic, declaring itself a "near Arctic state" and beefing up its icebreaker and research capabilities in the region, where it's also heavily invested in Russian energy projects.

Russia, as one of eight Arctic states, has historically been wary of being too welcoming to China in a region key to its own security and military power.

But observers say Moscow's increasing reliance on China – its most important diplomatic and economic partner – in the wake of its war on Ukraine may be changing that calculus.

In its first update to its Arctic strategy in five years, the US Department of Defense in July warned that "growing cooperation" between Russia and China in the region has the "potential to alter the Arctic's stability and threat picture."

The recent joint activities, including the July patrol near Alaska, raise questions of whether Russia's focus on controlling access to the Russian Arctic is "increasingly overshadowed by economic and political considerations," said Sophie Arts, a fellow with the German Marshall Fund of the US's Geostrategy North team.

"However, when it comes to growing Russian willingness to cater to Chinese interests, we have to take into account the location in which these activities are taking place," she added, pointing

to how the strategically peripheral patrol location suggests “Russian concerns about controlling access and maintaining its bastion (of) defense remain a priority.”

Andreas Østhagen, a senior researcher at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Norway, expressed skepticism that Chinese vessels had operated in the Arctic Ocean proper.

He said that operating north of the Bering Strait normally requires ice-breaking capabilities and noted that the US Coast Guard did not report the ships entered the Bering Strait, where the Arctic Ocean starts. CNN has reached out to the USCG for comment.

“It still links to the wider Arctic region, even if this is not the Arctic Ocean. Operating off the coast of Alaska or in the Bering Sea at large is part of an ongoing trend where China is asserting its ability to be present in the Arctic, or near the Arctic,” he said.

Economic interests

The China Coast Guard is part of the country’s People’s Armed Police, which is under the command of the Central Military Commission – and it has frequently been at the frontline of China’s efforts to assert its territorial claims in disputed waters in the South China Sea.

The Philippines, for example, has repeatedly accused the CCG of targeting its fishing and other ships with water canons and other tactics, including in what it described as a “brutal assault” with bladed weapons on Filipino forces in June.

In addition to projecting strength, Beijing has a practical interest in expanding its cooperation with Russia and presence in far north waters, where its coast guard could in the future protect its economic interests, experts say.

In its 2018 Arctic policy, Beijing described its vision for a “Polar Silk Road,” linking Asia to Europe by developing shipping routes like the Northern Sea Route across the Arctic and down to China. That route, now largely navigable only in summer and autumn, is expected to become more commercially viable for global shipping as climate change melts sea ice.

Transit along the Northern Sea Route during the summer-autumn navigation season is poised to hit record levels of transit cargo by the season’s end, according to data from the Centre for High North Logistics affiliated with Norway’s Nord University. As of September 30, about 95% of the cargo volume along the route went from Russia to China, it said in a recent report.

The coast guard collaboration “relates to Chinese interests in maritime transportation along at least parts of the Northern Sea Route,” according to Østhagen. “The fact that they have initiated these types of operations is yet another step in the ongoing practical cooperation between the two states in an Arctic or near-Arctic context.”

And when taken alongside other recent joint operations, “this is all about expanding both the Chinese footprint in this part of the Arctic and China’s abilities to operate this far north,” he said.

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US President Joe Biden urged to speed up sensitive military exports to Australia, over 'grave and imminent' China threat

(ABC Australia, October 3)

The White House is being urged to speed up the sharing of sensitive military technology with its AUKUS partners as Australia reportedly pushes for access to US precision weapons, undersea drones and maritime acoustic systems.

Two powerful Republican figures are warning current restrictions on defence exports are hindering America's ability to develop key capabilities under AUKUS pillar two, which they argue is needed to counter a "grave and imminent threat" from China.

Under AUKUS, the US and UK are first helping Australia acquire nuclear powered submarines, while under the second part of the deal all three are also jointly developing future technologies including hypersonic missiles and directed energy weapons.

In a letter sent this week, the chairs of the US House Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees pushed the Biden administration to share more defence equipment with Australia and the United Kingdom by loosening the "excluded technologies list" (ETL).

"We urge you and your senior leaders to continue to review items included on the ETL and remove as many as possible that do not warrant inclusion in order to unleash AUKUS's full potential," congressmen Mike Rogers and Mike McCaul wrote.

"[President] Xi and the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] pose a grave and imminent threat to the stability of the Indo-Pacific. Half-measures pose an unacceptable risk to our national security," the Republican representatives added.

In August, the US agreed to loosen up strict requirements known as International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) for its AUKUS partners, allowing Australia and the UK to access 80 per cent of its defence exports without first applying for a licence.

However, the two Republican committee chairs are concerned about the length of time required to get licences for the remaining 20 per cent of exports, given the lengthy US process to review applications for weapons exports.

According to the Republican politicians, the lengthy ETL "jeopardises the viability of Pillar Two" and "is not in the spirit of the agreement to promote cutting edge and innovative technology essential for enhancing the Indo-Pacific security environment".

"Australia has committed to a direct investment of more than \$US3 billion (\$4.7 billion) in the US submarine industrial base. The administration must trust our closest allies and meet their shared commitment to AUKUS."

US publication Defense News has reported that Australia is particularly concerned about delayed access to restricted exports under the ETL such as precision weapons (also known as smart bombs), undersea drones and maritime acoustic technology.

Defense News cited a Republican staff member as claiming "the Australians have done a full-court press to the Hill, but they've also been very vocal to the administration" about loosening the restrictions.

ETL items include lethal equipment that is restricted by law such as biological weapons or cluster bombs but also other exports that are only restricted by US policy, such as precision missiles, which are considered high priorities by AUKUS partners.

A spokesperson for Defence Minister Richard Marles wouldn't confirm whether those capabilities were of special interest but insisted the government "welcome[ed] continued bipartisan congressional interest in removing barriers to create a seamless trilateral defence industrial base".

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Vietnam protests Chinese force's attack on fishermen in contested waters

(Reuters, October 2)

Vietnam on Wednesday protested to China over what it said was an attack on a Vietnamese fishing boat three days ago in contested South China Sea waters that injured several fishermen.

The Vietnamese foreign ministry said in a statement that Chinese law enforcers beat the Vietnamese fishermen and took away their fishing equipment when their boat was operating near Hoang Sa, Vietnam's name for the Paracel Islands.

The Chinese-controlled islands, also claimed by Vietnam, are in the South China Sea, a busy global maritime waterway, almost all of which is claimed by China.

"Vietnam is extremely concerned, indignant and resolutely protests the brutal treatment by Chinese law enforcement forces of Vietnamese fishermen and fishing boats operating in the Hoang Sa archipelago of Vietnam," foreign ministry spokesperson Pham Thu Hang said in a statement.

The ministry delivered a strong protest to the Chinese embassy in Hanoi demanding that China respect Vietnam's sovereignty, investigate the incident and desist from further such actions, Hang said.

Vietnamese state media reported this week that around 40 people from two foreign vessels had beaten the fishermen with iron pipes, injuring 10.

China's foreign ministry said on Tuesday that the Vietnamese boats had been fishing illegally in Paracel waters without the permission of the Beijing government, and that Chinese authorities had taken measures to stop them.

"The on-site operations were professional and restrained, and no injuries were found," it said in response to a Reuters request for comment, without specifically referring to the attack.

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Chinese Navy Fires Military-Grade Laser At Philippines Aircraft Over SCS; Dazzles Pilot, Infuriates Manila

(The Eurasian Times, October 1)

A Chinese Navy missile boat directed a military-grade laser at a Philippine aircraft over the South China Sea, seemingly as part of an ongoing intimidation campaign against Manila amid rising tensions between the two nations.

A Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) aircraft conducting maritime surveillance on September 28 over the West Philippine Sea was reportedly targeted three times by a Chinese Navy missile boat using a “high intensity” laser, endangering the crew of the Filipino aircraft.

A summary report from BFAR shared with the Inquirer states: A BFAR Cessna patrol aircraft spotted a Chinese coast guard vessel with bow No. 21555 and two navy Type 22 Houbei-class missile boats chasing two BFAR vessels (BRP Taradipit and BRP Romapenet) near Hasa-Hasa Shoal. The shoal is a feature located just about 111 kilometers off Palawan.

Shortly after, the BFAR aircraft was targeted by a laser beam from one of the Chinese Navy’s two missile boats. The BFAR pilots radioed the Chinese vessel to request they cease firing the laser but received no reply.

Instead, about five minutes later, one of the Chinese missile boats fired two more laser shots. According to the report, the “high-intensity white light” that the laser produced caused extreme discomfort in the pilot’s eyes.

The incident has triggered a fierce reaction in Manila. The National Maritime Council said on October 1 that the People’s Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN) firing a laser at a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) aircraft in the West Philippine Sea was a serious matter for the Philippines.

In a message to GMA News Online, the NMC spokesperson, Undersecretary Alexander Lopez, termed the incident a “gross violation of international laws,” including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

“We don’t take this lightly, as such irresponsible, dangerous, and provocative actions conducted well within our EEZ impacts on the safety and security of overflights in our maritime domain, notwithstanding a gross violation of international laws and the UNCLOS,” Lopez said.

China’s Type-22 or Houbei-Class missile boat also chased the BRP Romapenet on September 27, with the crew of ABC-CBN news outlet aboard.

The Type 22 Chinese missile boat is designed to operate in China’s littoral zone and conduct coastal patrols. It can carry twelve crew members and is armed with eight anti-ship missiles, making it a significant threat.

This is not the first instance of a Chinese aircraft harassing a Filipino aircraft conducting a routine patrol over the South China Sea. Recently, there has been a noticeable increase in such incidents, triggering concerns of an escalation.

In August this year, a Philippine fisheries bureau plane was threatened by laser flares shot from a Chinese island base. As the BFAR Cessna 208B Grand Caravan aircraft approached Subi Reef, it observed flares being fired from the fishing atoll, which China has transformed into a militarized island base.

China's use of military-grade lasers is not limited to use in the air. In February 2023, China was accused by the Philippines of training military-grade lasers at a ship to scuttle a resupply mission to a marooned Filipino ship at the disputed Second Thomas Shoal.

China, nonetheless, has a history of deploying military-grade lasers or dazzlers to intimidate foreign aircraft.

In May 2024, Australia alleged that China fired flares in the path of an MH-60R Seahawk helicopter, which was flying over international waters of the Yellow Sea on an international patrol.

This marked the second occasion when the Australian crew faced a threat from a Chinese laser. In May 2022, a J-16 aircraft of the PLA Air Force reportedly fired these lasers at an Australian P-8A flying over the South China Sea.

China has also shone military lasers on US pilots. In 2018, the Chinese military stationed in Djibouti was accused by US officials of threatening US pilots with a laser fired at a US C-130J aircraft. Later, in 2020, the US Navy accused China of firing a military-grade laser at its P-8 Surveillance aircraft flying over the Pacific.

Military-grade laser beams, sometimes known as "dazzlers," create powerful beams of light that can travel enormous distances and can temporarily blind pilots by illuminating aircraft cockpits. It is considered extremely dangerous for pilots to be dazzled by the dazzlers. China has widely adopted lasers to intimidate pilots flying over international airspace.

Besides using military-grade lasers to blind pilots, China is also working on laser weapons capable of destroying targets in the air. Meanwhile, the US has deployed its warship equipped with laser weapons to Japan in its bid to deter China.

Laser Showdown In The Indo-Pacific

The US Navy has dispatched a warship outfitted with a cutting-edge laser weapon for deployment in Japan in response to growing Chinese military action in the Indo-Pacific.

On September 22, the US Navy destroyer USS Preble, armed with the latest US laser weapon, departed San Diego and headed toward Yokosuka, Japan. The deployment was announced on August 1 in an official statement: "The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Preble (DDG 88) will move to Yokosuka, Japan, as part of a scheduled rotation of forces in the Pacific."

The USS Preble is the only destroyer in the U.S. military's 73-ship Arleigh Burke-class that has a high-energy laser armament that can be used to shoot down drones and missiles.

The USS Preble's High-Energy Laser with Integrated Optical Dazzler and Surveillance System (HELIOS) is a 60-kilowatt-class directed energy laser weapon.

HELIOS is a multipurpose system powerful enough to destroy or severely damage smaller boats and drones, among other targets. It can also function as a "dazzler" to disorient or blind optical seekers when a missile, hostile ship, or aircraft approaches using optical sensors.

The deployment came a month after a photograph of the Type-071 Amphibious Assault Ship of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) equipped with laser weapons was published on social media, triggering speculation that the latest Chinese Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs) were undergoing testing.

An image of an amphibious transport dock ship Type 071 with a laser weapon was posted on the social media site X. The system appeared to be mounted just below the recently renovated bow's 76mm dual-purpose gun.

Experts have observed that the laser weapon is likely being tested on the Type 071, with the potential for future deployment on other warships. After the trial testing, it could also be deployed on the Type 075 and Type 055 vessels. These two vessels are expected to play a crucial role in future operations in Taiwan.

An expert who did not want to be named told EurAsian Times: "I think it's probably a DEW in the late stages of testing out on the ship, and probably relatively bespoke, indicating it's probably somewhat mature. Everyone is working on DEWs/ lasers. The product on the 071 is not unexpected. We've been expecting something like this for a few years now, and they have a variety of land-based DEWs that have already been developed and sold."

This information could not be verified as China's military programs typically remain shrouded in secrecy. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that laser weapons will soon be introduced on Chinese warships.

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Taiwan adopts non-lethal ammunition to strengthen maritime law enforcement against gray zone tactics

(Army Recognition, September 30)

According to information published by Liberty Times Net on September 28, 2024, Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (CGA) is adopting new measures to improve maritime law enforcement, in response to increasing gray zone tactics employed by Chinese forces, which include frequent incursions into Taiwan's air and maritime zones as well as the deployment of Chinese Coast Guard vessels.

Senior government officials have confirmed that the Executive Yuan has approved a three-year pilot program to procure non-lethal ammunition and equipment, aiming to boost enforcement capabilities.

Starting in fiscal year 2025, the program will trial the use of non-lethal munitions, such as high-decibel shock rounds, which will be compatible with the Zhenhai rocket system aboard the CGA's 600-ton vessels. These vessels are currently equipped with domestically produced 2.75-inch rockets capable of launching high-explosive, armor-piercing, and cluster munitions—powerful weapons deemed unsuitable for standard law enforcement operations in Taiwan's waters. The new non-lethal options, designed to deter rather than destroy, are intended to be safer alternatives during such operations.

According to military sources, these shock rounds will emit a loud noise upon detonation, creating a psychological deterrent. Taiwan's National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology will work with the CGA to produce and supply these rounds according to the approved annual plan.

The project has an allocated budget of NT\$86.24 million (approximately USD 2.7 million) and is scheduled to be implemented over the next three years. Besides shock rounds, the procurement plan also includes 40mm flashbangs, single-shot 40mm grenade launchers, and other non-lethal firearms. Depending on the results of the trial, the program may be expanded in future years.

The Zhenhai rocket system, developed by Taiwan's National Chung-Shan Institute, is a remotely controlled weapon platform with six launchers capable of firing various 2.75-inch rockets with an effective range of up to 5 kilometers and a maximum range of 10 kilometers. Currently, the system is configured to launch high-explosive, armor-piercing, cluster munitions, and flares for search and rescue operations.

About the Anping class

The Anping-class offshore patrol vessels have a displacement of 750 tons and measure 65.4 meters in overall length, with a waterline length of 60.7 meters. The vessels have a beam of 14.8 meters and a draft of 2.1 meters. Powered by two MTU 20V4000M93L engines driving four Hamilton HT900 waterjet propulsion systems, the ships produce a total output of 8,600 kW. Electrical power is provided by two MTU 16V4000M93L generators and an emergency generator, delivering a total output of 6,880 kW.

These patrol vessels are capable of reaching a maximum speed of 44.5 knots and have a range of 3,250 nautical miles at a cruising speed of 12 knots. They carry a crew of 30 personnel and are equipped with two electro-optical fire control systems, as well as X-band and S-band navigation radars. The vessels are also fitted with a FLIR SeaFLIR 280-HD infrared camera for surveillance.

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OTHER FOREIGN COUNTRIES:

Spain to reform controversial 'Gag Law', ending border pushbacks and phasing out rubber bullets

(Catalan News, October 4)

Spain will reform the most controversial articles of the 'gag law,' a public safety law passed in 2015 by the conservative People's Party, which expanded police powers.

The reform follows an agreement between the Basque pro-independence party EH Bildu, the Socialist government, and their coalition partner, the left-wing Sumar.

The deal includes the "gradual phasing out" of rubber bullets and reducing disobedience to police officers to a minor offense. Additionally, the reform will end pushbacks at the borders for asylum seekers.

Pro-independence Esquerra, which will co-sign the bill, expressed satisfaction with the agreement, celebrating that "the Socialists have finally agreed to implement this reform."

However, for the law to be approved, it will need the support of several parties, some of which have criticized it.

The left-wing Podemos, whose votes are crucial for the law's approval, argued that the reform falls short.

"Rubber bullets aren't banned and illegal deportations continue. It's a largely cosmetic adjustment that doesn't address the main problems. In short, it bears the hallmark of the Socialists: a big headline with very, very, very little reform," said the party's spokesperson Pablo Fernández.

The pro-independence Junts has also been cautious in expressing support for the law.

The party's spokesperson in Congress, Míriam Nogueras, confirmed that Junts will present its own amendments. However, she stressed that they "have always defended the repeal of this regressive law."

The conservative People's Party, which enacted the law in 2015, accused Spanish PM Pedro Sánchez of "handing over the design of public security policy to a party that disrespects the police and believes that [terrorist group] ETA did the right thing," said PP spokesperson Borja Sémper.

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Houthis' email alert to Red Sea ships: Prepare for attack, with best regards

(Reuters, October 3)

On a warm spring night in Athens, shortly before midnight, a senior executive at a Greek shipping company noticed an unusual email had landed in his personal inbox.

The message, which was also sent to the manager's business email address, warned that one of the company's vessels travelling through the Red Sea was at risk of being attacked by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi militia.

The Greek-managed ship had violated a Houthi-imposed transit ban by docking at an Israeli port and would be "directly targeted by the Yemeni Armed Forces in any area they deem appropriate," read the message, written in English and reviewed by Reuters.

"You bear the responsibility and consequences of including the vessel in the ban list," said the email, signed by the Yemen-based Humanitarian Operations Coordination Center (HOCC), a body set up in February to liaise between Houthi forces and commercial shipping operators.

The Houthis have carried out nearly 100 attacks on ships crossing the Red Sea since November, acting in solidarity with Palestinians in Israel's year-long war in Gaza. They have sunk two vessels, seized another and killed at least four seafarers.

The email, received at the end of May, warned of "sanctions" for the entire company's fleet if the vessel continued "to violate the ban criteria and enter the ports of the usurping Israeli entity".

The executive and the company declined to be named for safety reasons.

The warning message was the first of more than a dozen increasingly menacing emails sent to at least six Greek shipping companies since May amid rising geopolitical tension in the Middle East, according to six industry sources with direct knowledge of the emails and two with indirect knowledge.

Since last year, the Houthis have been firing missiles, sending armed drones and launching boats laden with explosives at commercial ships with ties to Israeli, U.S. and UK entities.

The email campaign, which has not been previously reported, indicates that Houthi rebels are casting their net wider and targeting Greek merchant ships with little or no connection to Israel.

The threats were also, for the first time in recent months, directed at entire fleets, increasing the risks for those vessels still trying to cross the Red Sea.

"Your ships breached the decision of Yemen Armed Forces," read a separate email sent in June from a Yemeni government web domain to the first company weeks later and to another Greek shipping company, which also declined to be named. "Therefore, punishments will be imposed on all vessels of your company ... Best Regards, Yemen Navy."

Yemen, which lies at the entrance to the Red Sea, has been embroiled in years of civil war. In 2014, the Houthis took control of the capital, Sanaa, and ousted the internationally recognized government. In January, the United States put the Houthis back on its list of terrorist groups.

Contacted by Reuters, Houthi officials declined to confirm they had sent the emails or provide any additional comment, saying that was classified military information.

Reuters could not determine whether the emails had been also sent to other foreign shipping companies.

Greek-owned ships, which represent one of the largest fleets in the world, comprise nearly 30% of the attacks carried out by Houthi forces to early September, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence data that did not specify whether those ships had any ties with Israel.

In August, the Houthi militia - which is part of Iran's Axis of Resistance alliance of anti-Israel irregular armed groups - attacked the Sounion tanker leaving it on fire for weeks before it could be towed to a safer area.

The strikes have prompted many cargoes to take a much longer route around Africa. Traffic through the Suez Canal has fallen from around 2,000 transits per month before November 2023 to around 800 in August, Lloyd's List Intelligence data showed.

Tensions in the Middle East reached a new peak on Tuesday as Iran hit Israel with more than 180 missiles in retaliation for the killing of militant leaders in Lebanon, including Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on Friday.

NEW PHASE

The European Union's naval force Aspides, which has helped more than 200 ships to sail safely through the Red Sea, confirmed the evolution of Houthis' tactics in a closed door meeting with shipping companies in early September, according to a document reviewed by Reuters.

In the document, shared with shipping companies, Aspides said the Houthis' decision to extend warnings to entire fleets marked the beginning of the "fourth phase" of their military campaign in the Red Sea.

Aspides also urged ship owners to switch off their Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders, which shows a vessel's position and acts as a navigational aid to nearby ships, saying they had to "shut it off or be shot".

Aspides said the Houthis' missile strikes had 75% accuracy when aimed at vessels operating with the AIS tracking system on. But 96% of attacks missed when AIS was off, according to the same briefing.

"Aspides are aware of those emails," its operational commander, Rear Admiral Vasileios Gryparis, told Reuters, adding that any response should be carefully considered and that companies are strongly advised to alert their security experts if contacted before sailing.

"In particular, for the HOCC, the advice or guidance is not to respond to VHF calls and e-mails from "Yemeni Navy" or the "Humanitarian Operations Command Center" (HOCC)."

The Houthis' email campaign began in February with messages sent to shipowners, insurance companies and the main seafarers union from HOCC.

These initial emails, two of which were seen by Reuters, alerted the industry the Houthis had imposed a Red Sea travel ban on certain vessels, although they did not explicitly warn companies of an imminent attack.

The messages sent after May were more menacing.

At least two Greek-operated shipping companies that received email threats have decided to end such journeys via the Red Sea, two sources with direct knowledge told Reuters, declining to identify the companies for security reasons.

An executive at a third shipping company, which has also received a letter, said they decided to end business with Israel in order to be able to continue to use the Red Sea route.

"If safe transit through the Red Sea cannot be guaranteed, companies have a duty to act – even if that means delaying their delivery windows," said Stephen Cotton, General Secretary of the International Transport Workers' Federation, the leading union organisation for seafarers, which received an email from HOCC in February. "The lives of the seafarers depend on it."

The email campaign has increased alarm among shipping companies. Insurance costs for Western ship owners' have already jumped because of the Houthi's attacks, with some insurers suspending cover altogether, the sources told Reuters.

Greece-based Conbulk Shipmanagement Corporation stopped Red Sea voyages after its vessel MV Groton was attacked twice in August.

"No (Conbulk) vessel is trading in the Red Sea. It mainly has to do with the crew safety. Once the crew is in danger, all the discussion stops," Conbulk Shipmanagement CEO Dimitris Dalakouras told a Capital Link shipping conference in London on Sept. 10.

Torben Kolln, managing director of German-based container shipping group Leonhardt & Blumberg, said the Red Sea and wider Gulf of Aden was a "no go" area for their fleet.

Contacted by Reuters, the companies did not respond to a request for comment on whether they had been targeted by the Houthi email campaign.

Some companies continue to cross the Red Sea due to binding long-term agreements with charterers or because they need to transfer goods in that particular area. The Red Sea remains the fastest way to bring goods to consumers in Europe and Asia.

The Houthis have not stopped all traffic and the majority of Chinese and Russian-owned ships - which they do not see as affiliated with Israel - are able to sail through unhindered with lower insurance costs.

"We are re-assuring the ships belonging to companies that have no connection with the Israeli enemy that they are safe and have freedom (of movement) and (to) keep the AIS devices going on all the time," according to an audio recording of a Houthi message broadcast to ships in the Red Sea in September shared with Reuters.

"Thank you for your cooperation. Out."

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Sovereign Lasers for future air defence

(Australian Defence Magazine, October 3)

Recent combat operations in Ukraine and the Middle East have demonstrated once again that the cost of defending against swarms of attacking drones and waves of missiles using current solutions favours the attacker. Continuing to rely on expensive weapon systems with limited rounds will, eventually, enable the attacker to win by overwhelming defences using large numbers of inexpensive drones, shells and missiles. A new system is required for providing short-range air defence and close-in protection that changes the calculus in favour of the defender.

Enter the Laser Directed Energy Weapon (LDEW). With an approximate cost per shot of \$20 and the ability to hit a one-dollar coin at one kilometre, the UK's DragonFire 50kW-class laser has demonstrated its effectiveness during trials. Thanks to the UK's recent transition to a minimum deployable capability procurement approach, it is expected to be deployed on Royal Navy ships by 2027 rather than the original 2032 timeframe. The result of a £100 million investment from both government and industry, the program is led by the UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), on behalf of the Ministry of Defence (MOD), working with its industry partners MBDA, Leonardo and QinetiQ.

QinetiQ's work with both the Dstl and the ADF's Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) has created an opportunity for the establishment of a sovereign LDEW capability for the ADF. ADM recently met with Paul Gray - Head of Business Development for advanced weapons from QinetiQ UK - and Russell Maddalena, Campaign Director for Advanced Capabilities, from QinetiQ Australia to discuss this new initiative.

"We were chosen because DSTG believed their technology & ours would come together to accelerate the development of sovereign capability for Australia," Maddalena said. DSTG were aware of Dstl's LDEW project and identified that, by merging QinetiQ's coherent beam combining technology from the UK with DSTG's high power amplifiers, it would be possible to create an advanced, indigenous solution at an accelerated pace.

QinetiQ's UK and Australian entities worked together to establish the project between the two countries well in advance of AUKUS being established. While the support and involvement of both governments assisted with the resolution of the roadblocks that existed at the time, it still required extensive efforts to achieve. "It's been a great success story from the point of view in terms of international collaborative programs," Gray said, noting that the project could be used as an exemplar for establishing future partnerships under AUKUS.

DSTG's \$12.9 million contract with QinetiQ Australia was awarded in April 2023 and is expected to deliver in Q1 2025. It is a true collaborative effort with QinetiQ's UK team building some of the laser components, and the Australian team building the remainder. The Australian team are also being trained on the coherent beam combining technology and the systems integration work is

being performed in Adelaide. The result will be a trial system at a lower Technology Readiness Level (TRL) than DragonFire but still capable of demonstrating that the UK and Australian Laser technologies can work together effectively. Once delivered, DSTG will test the system with QinetiQ's support and, although the test plan has not yet been disclosed, it will likely commence with short range firings before progressing to longer range tests.

Looking beyond the trial system, QinetiQ is already in discussions with DSTG and Defence for the next stage of an accelerated program that could produce a minimum deployable capability onto the front lines to complement existing weapon systems. "We can't wait for testing to be complete before we take the next step. The pace of relevance is now," Maddalena said. With highly specialist staff engaged on the project, he also notes that it's important to maintain continuity for them as well as build on the trial stage to improve sub-systems for the future program.

Although not assured of being involved beyond the trial, QinetiQ has commenced planning and preparations, building on their existing relationship with DSTG and a shared goal of accelerating the delivery of an Australian sovereign LDEW capability into service. As demonstrated by recent combat operations, this is a capability that Australia may need sooner rather than later.

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On Chinese Construction Along LAC, Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi's 'Grey Zone Battle' Warning

(Zee News, October 1)

India's border tension with China is continuing despite dozens of rounds of military-level talks. While the political-level talks claim to have broken the initial deadlock, the security forces on the ground remain wary of China's tactics. The Indian Army is in operational readiness mode along the LAC ahead of the winter. While the Army continues to engage in talks with China's army PLA, Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi has said that India needs to be alert against grey zone battles.

"They are carrying out this artificial immigration, settlement. No problem, it's their country, they can do whatever they want. But what we see in the South China Sea. When we talk about the grey zone..." said the Army Chief.

The Army chief further added, "Do we call Doklam a war? Do we call Kargil a full-fledged war? Do we call Galwan a war? The answer is no. So all these are basically part of the grey zone battle. So we need to be prepared for it...This means that there should be common thinking at the entire level because a small tactical misaction will lead to a strategic ramification which can involve the entire country. So, keeping this in mind, we are preparing ourselves for grey zone battles."

Speaking at the Chanakya Defence Dialogue, Indian Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi said that India needs to compete, confront and co-exist with China. "With China, you have to compete, cooperate, coexist, confront, and contest... So what's the situation today? It's stable,

but it's not normal and it's sensitive. We want the situation to be restored back to what it was before April 2020, whether in terms of the ground occupation situation or the buffer zones which have been created or patrolling which have been kind of planned as of now. So until that situation is restored, as far as we are concerned, the situation will remain sensitive and we are fully operationally prepared to face any kind of contingency," said the army chief, adding that the trust has become the biggest casualty.

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Yemen's Houthi rebels launch drone boat that hits ship in Red Sea as missile strikes another

(The Associated Press, October 1)

Yemen's Houthi rebels launched an explosive-loaded drone that crashed into one ship Tuesday in the Red Sea and a missile that exploded against another.

The attacks are the rebels' first assaults on commercial shipping in weeks as the Israel-Hamas war threatens to become a regional conflict.

They come as Israeli ground forces entered Lebanon after days of Israeli airstrikes that killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and other top officials, and earlier explosions of sabotaged electronic devices used by the Shiite militia. The Houthis threatened "escalating military operations" targeting Israel on Monday after they apparently shot down a U.S. military drone flying over Yemen.

The first attack took place some 110 kilometers (70 miles) off the port city of Hodeida and targeted the Panama-flagged oil tanker Cordelia Moon, the multinational Joint Maritime Information Center said. A captain on a ship saw four "splashes" near the vessel, the center overseen by the U.S. Navy said. That likely would have been missiles launched at the vessel that missed.

The drone boat later damaged the Cordelia Moon, which sustained a puncture to one of its ballast tanks in the attack. Those tanks control a ship's buoyancy. Houthi strikes in the past have targeted ships at their waterline to disable the vessels.

Drone boats have been increasingly used by the Houthis. The ship had been heading north to the Suez Canal with armed private security guards aboard, the private security firm Ambrey said.

Another attack with a missile targeted a separate ship also heading north to the Suez Canal with armed security on board, Ambrey said. The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center later identified it as the Liberian-flagged bulk carrier Minoan Courage.

Houthi military spokesperson Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree later claimed the two attacks in a prerecorded message, though he identified a different vessel as the second ship attacked. The discrepancy could not be immediately reconciled.

Saree said in a prerecorded video earlier Tuesday that the rebels had launched drones targeting Israel — attacks unreported by Israel as it faces incoming fire from Hezbollah. The Houthis have exaggerated claims in the past.

The Red Sea has become a battlefield for shippers since the Houthis began their campaign targeting ships traveling through the waterway, which once saw \$1 trillion a year of cargo pass through it.

Houthis have targeted more than 80 merchant vessels with missiles and drones since the war in Gaza started last October. They have seized one vessel and sunk two in the campaign that has also killed four sailors. Other missiles and drones have either been intercepted by a U.S.-led coalition in the Red Sea or failed to reach their targets, which have included Western military vessels.

The rebels maintain that they target ships linked to Israel, the U.S. or the United Kingdom to force an end to Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the conflict, including some bound for Iran.

The Joint Maritime Information Center assessed the Cordelia Moon had been attacked over "affiliations within the vessel's operational structure," without elaborating. The Indian managers of the Cordelia Moon also manage the Andromeda Star, which came under Houthi attack in April.

The last attack on a merchant ship by the Houthis was on Sept. 2.

The Houthis claimed responsibility for an attack targeting American warships last week. The rebels fired more than a half dozen ballistic missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles and two drones at three U.S. ships that were traveling through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, but all were intercepted by the Navy destroyers, a U.S. official said Friday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet publicly released.

The Houthis also continue to launch missiles targeting Israel, drawing retaliatory airstrikes from the Israelis this weekend on Hodeida.

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COMMENTARY:

Gray Hulls in the Gray Zone: Indonesia's Conundrum in the South China Sea

(The Diplomat, October 2, Joseph Kristanto)

The South China Sea has seen its fair share of clashes and conflicts as China tries to assert its claim over nearly the entire body of water. Such efforts continue even after an arbitral tribunal set up under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea ruled overwhelmingly against China's claims in the South China Sea back in 2016. The stakes are high: The South China Sea sees the movement of up to 64 percent of global maritime trade and contains 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

However, China also realizes the potential of this conflict escalating into a full-blown war with the United States, especially with the Philippines, another claimant state, having a mutual defense treaty with the superpower. As a result, China has resorted to what some scholars have called a gray zone strategy to assert its claim in the South China Sea. Beijing hopes that it can push its Southeast Asian neighbors to back off by realizing that they can not win in a fight with China while at the same time keeping the risk of potential U.S. intervention at bay.

Indonesia claims that it is not a claimant state in the South China Sea dispute, which is true in the sense that Jakarta does not claim any maritime features that China also asserts ownership over. However, the southernmost part of the ten-dash (formerly nine-dash) line that China uses to assert its claim overlaps with Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) just north of the Natuna Islands, a body of water that the Indonesians called the North Natuna Sea. As a result, Indonesia's fishermen often encounter a myriad of Chinese vessels, from China's maritime militias and China Coast Guard (CCG) to Chinese survey vessels and warships in the North Natuna Sea.

While deploying Chinese naval vessels to the North Natuna Sea could be seen as an escalatory act on Beijing's part, it was Jakarta that first deployed warships to the area to counter the frequent incursions of Chinese maritime militias and CCG vessels. Although the Indonesian public might see this deployment of gray-hulled warships to the region as an assertive step by the Indonesian government, it is the wrong move to be made.

Sending warships to patrol against white-hulled CCG vessels marked an escalatory act in gray zone conflicts. This allowed China to cry foul first, giving Beijing some justification for deploying People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warships to the North Natuna Sea. Beijing could simply argue that Jakarta is responding to water pistols with an AK-47 assault rifle. This escalation would not end well for Indonesia, as it has nothing in its fleet that can match the capabilities of the PLAN vessels deployed in the North Natuna Sea.

To be fair to Indonesia, there is no other option for it to respond effectively to these Chinese incursions without involving the Indonesian Navy (Tentara Nasional Indonesia Angkatan Laut, or TNI-AL). Jakarta simply does not have a capable civilian maritime law enforcement agency that can go head-to-head with the CCG. While Indonesia does have a Maritime Security Agency (Badan Keamanan Laut, or Bakamla), with only ten patrol ships in its fleet, it simply does not have the resources to effectively counter Chinese incursions into the North Natuna Sea, especially considering the fact that Bakamla's area of responsibility covers the entire Indonesian archipelago.

This situation is a result of some serious structural challenges that have hampered Jakarta's ability to effectively counter China's gray zone strategy in the North Natuna Sea. One of the main issues is the Indonesian government's constant underinvestment in Bakamla. The ten ships under its disposal are a far cry from the 90 patrol ships needed to adequately patrol the vast Indonesian archipelago. However, the agency continued to be on the receiving end of endless budget cuts from 2017 until 2022. While Bakamla has seen an increase in funding since then, it still receives only 10 percent of what it needs to operate its already small fleet.

There is also the fact that there is a significant overlap in responsibilities between Bakamla and TNI-AL. This situation is a result of the blurring lines between “defense” and “security” due to the constant Chinese incursions. While the fact that Chinese fishing vessels are fishing illegally in the North Natuna Sea presents a maritime security challenge, there is also a political dimension to the presence of those fishing vessels and their CCG escorts, which is meant to assert Chinese claims over the North Natuna Sea – delivering a direct challenge to Indonesian sovereign rights in its own EEZ.

This reality, combined with the continued underinvestments in Bakamla, results in Jakarta’s continuous dependence on TNI-AL to deal with the Chinese incursions in the North Natuna Sea. However, relying on its navy will only continue to put Indonesia on the back foot when dealing with China’s gray zone strategy: After Indonesia escalates the situation by sending in its warships, it will only find itself facing even stronger Chinese warships later.

To rectify this issue, the Indonesian government needs to increase its investments in Bakamla and acquire further coast guard vessels to supplement the existing fleet. For too long, the Indonesian government has tried to modernize its maritime capabilities by investing almost exclusively in TNI-AL. This situation must change. While it is true that TNI-AL is in desperate need of modernization, the navy is not supposed to be in the vanguard of Indonesian responses to CCG and Chinese maritime militia incursions into the Indonesian EEZ – or any other matter regarding maritime security. This constabulary function firmly lies within Bakamla’s area of responsibility.

To that end, Jakarta must be able to start beefing up Bakamla and move toward increasing the number of ships under Bakamla’s disposal to conduct its policing tasks. A well-funded and well-equipped Bakamla is needed to confront Chinese incursions and any other maritime security challenges that might emerge in the future without the involvement of gray-hulled vessels whose presence could result in unwanted escalations.

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