

DEFENDING THE FRONTLINE: COUNTERING PRC'S MARITIME COERCION AND COGNITIVE WARFARE

REPORT FROM
THE 3RD WPS-INDSR TRACK 1.5 WORKSHOP

REPORT BY
FRANCES MANGOSING





About WPS

WPS Foundation was founded at a time of intensifying maritime challenges and growing strategic uncertainty. Across the South China Sea, East China Sea, Yellow Sea, and the South Pacific, coercion at sea has become more pronounced, while environmental pressures, divergent national responses, and renewed debates over the future of a rules-based maritime order have further complicated the regional security landscape.

In this demanding environment, WPS has remained steadfast in its mission to advance principled, practical, and inclusive approaches to maritime security and ocean governance.

Throughout 2025, the Foundation deepened its role as a convenor, catalyst, and bridge between policy, practice, and research. In May 2025, WPS convened the **Inaugural Dialogue on ASEAN Maritime Security** in Manila, bringing together policymakers, practitioners, and experts to strengthen cooperation on maritime governance, coast guard engagements, and regional stability. The dialogue served as sherpa to **The Manila Dialogue on the South China Sea**.

WPS also expanded its work at the science-policy interface. The establishment of the **Expert Working Group on Marine Environmental Protection and Scientific Research in Southeast Asia**, led by Dr. Abe Woo of Universiti Sains Malaysia, marked a major institutional step forward. Under this initiative, the Foundation convened a regional workshop in Tokyo and conducted a pilot marine scientific research expedition in the West Philippine Sea, strengthening linkages between scientific inquiry and maritime policy.

Public engagement likewise remained a priority. Through multiple screenings of the award-winning documentary *Food Delivery: Fresh from the West Philippine Sea*, WPS helped elevate awareness of the human consequences of coercion at sea. In November, the Foundation convened the **second edition of The Manila Dialogue on the South China Sea**, now among the largest and most influential conferences on the issue, gathering more than 270 officials, maritime practitioners, scholars, and policy leaders from at least 25 countries and territories. This was followed in December by the **Philippines-Taiwan Track 1.5 Dialogue**, which advanced pragmatic cooperation on shared maritime challenges.

A defining milestone for the Foundation in 2025 was its designation as the **Philippine Committee for the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP)** – the region's largest Track II network of research institutions and think tanks. Established in 1992 to complement official ASEAN-led processes, CSCAP plays a vital role in shaping strategic dialogue across the Indo-Pacific. WPS assumes this responsibility with a renewed commitment to strengthening Track II diplomacy in the Philippines and beyond.

For 2026, planned initiatives include the **National Workshop on Marine Science, Research, and Policy** under the Expert Working Group; the National Symposium on the Law of the Sea and the West Philippine Sea, the National WPS Summit commemorating the 10th year of the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award, the **third Manila Dialogue on the South China Sea**; and the hosting of the **15th CSCAP General Conference** in Manila – alongside a growing portfolio of research, dialogue, and capacity-building programs.

We invite our partners and stakeholders to continue – and expand – their collaboration with WPS Foundation. Your support enables us to strengthen our institutional capacity, broaden our regional reach, and help deliver the innovative, credible, and principled solutions that today's maritime challenges require.

DEFENDING THE FRONTLINE: COUNTERING PRC MARITIME COERCION AND COGNITIVE WARFARE

REPORT FROM THE THIRD TRACK 1.5 WORKSHOP ON COUNTERING PRC'S ILLEGAL/COERCIVE MARITIME OPERATIONS AND COGNITIVE WARFARE



This report examines the evolving landscape of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) coercive activities across the First Island Chain, with a particular focus on the Philippines and Taiwan as frontline states confronting sustained pressure in both maritime and information domains. Drawing on discussions from a March 2026 Track 1.5 workshop co-organized by the WPS Foundation and Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Security Research, it analyzes how the PRC employs an integrated strategy combining maritime coercion, lawfare, and cognitive warfare to reshape the regional security environment below the threshold of armed conflict. The report highlights how China's actions—ranging from persistent coercive operations at sea to coordinated influence campaigns—are mutually reinforcing, gradually normalizing its presence and undermining legal norms, including the 2016 Arbitral Award. Through comparative perspectives from the Philippines, Taiwan, and Japan, the report identifies common patterns in China's approach, including the use of civilian-military integration, United Front activities, and legal ambiguity to advance strategic objectives. It emphasizes the need for a coordinated, whole-of-society response grounded in data-driven analysis, transparency initiatives, and strengthened institutional resilience. The report concludes with practical recommendations for enhancing cooperation—particularly in non-sensitive areas such as joint research, information sharing, and strategic communications—while navigating political constraints, and calls for a more integrated regional approach to deterrence and resilience to effectively counter persistent gray zone challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

About this Report

This report presents a synthesis of discussions from a closed-door Track 1.5 workshop titled “Countering PRC’s Illegal/Coercive Maritime Operations and Cognitive Warfare,” co-organized by the WPS Foundation and Taiwan’s Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR) in Cebu on March 10–11, 2026. It brings together insights from academics, policy experts, and key stakeholders from the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, the United States, and other partner countries, all participating in their private capacities. The report aims to capture key themes, shared assessments, and practical recommendations for addressing China’s maritime coercion, lawfare, and cognitive warfare, with a focus on enhancing regional resilience and cooperation. Discussions were conducted under a non-attribution format to encourage candid exchange; as such, the analysis reflects a general synthesis of perspectives and does not represent a consensus or the official positions of any participant or institution.

The statements made and views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the project convenors, or the workshop participants’ respective organizations and affiliations. For questions, please email jeffrey@wps-ph.org.



About WPS

WPS is a non-government, nonprofit, and nonpartisan volunteer-based organization duly registered with the Philippines’ Securities and Exchange Commission. WPS Foundation seeks to advance principled approaches to resolving disputes in the West Philippine Sea and the broader South China Sea through rigorous research and dialogues involving academia, public policy, military, and industry throughout Southeast Asia and beyond.

An Advisory Board guides WPS’ numerous programs, funded by grants from foundations, corporations, individuals, and governments. WPS projects are objective and nonpartisan, and it does not engage in classified or proprietary work.

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*REPORT FROM THE THIRD TRACK 1.5 WORKSHOP ON
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by

FRANCES MANGOSING

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines and its closest neighbor, Taiwan, are at the frontlines of Chinese aggression—both at sea and in the information space. Located along the First Island Chain alongside Japan, they occupy a strategically vital position in the Indo-Pacific security landscape. Their security postures are significantly influenced by China’s actions, and any shift in their respective situations would be detrimental to the Indo-Pacific or even the global security environment. In this context, it is increasingly important to work together to find practical ways to enhance stability, manage shared risks, and strengthen cooperation.

China has significantly militarized the South China Sea, where it has built artificial islands with air and naval facilities—including within the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone (EEZ)—claiming almost the entire area under its so-called nine-dash line. Alongside this, China maintains its claims over Taiwan, which it has said could be brought under its control one day, by force, if necessary. China’s coercive approach, however, extends beyond the maritime domain. Through lawfare and cognitive warfare, Beijing seeks to shape perceptions and narratives, distort reality, and build support for its expansionist goals. These efforts can influence public opinion, sway policy debates, and normalize decisions that may undermine national interests.

A Chinese invasion of Taiwan would carry serious and direct consequences for the Philippines. The country’s northernmost islands lie just 190 kilometers from Taiwan—just slightly farther than Japan’s nearest territory—placing the Philippines in immediate proximity to any potential conflict. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. himself has acknowledged this reality, noting that Manila would likely be drawn into any conflict over Taiwan due to its geographic proximity and the presence of a large Filipino community on the self-ruled island. Any such scenario could also spill over into the South China Sea, further expanding the scope and impact of the conflict. Maintaining the status quo is in the Philippines’ best interests, as a major conflict would have far-reaching consequences, including refugee flows and potential spillover of conflict into Philippine territory.

But even in the absence of open confrontation, the Philippines and Taiwan are already adapting to a persistent low-intensity conflict environment determined by China’s pattern of coercive activities across the First Island Chain. A different kind of war below the threshold of direct conflict is unfolding in the domains of information, perception, and societal resilience. This underscores the importance of developing a shared understanding and adopting a coordinated approach to deal with Chinese aggression.

This report provides an overview of, and recommendations drawn from the Track 1.5 workshop organized by the Philippines’ WPS Foundation and Taiwan’s Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR), held on March 10 to 11, 2026 in Cebu. Titled “Countering PRC’s (People’s Republic of China) Illegal/Coercive Maritime Operations and Cognitive Warfare,” the workshop gathered academics, policy experts and other key stakeholders from the Philippines, Taiwan, and partner countries, all participating in their personal and private capacity. The discussions focused on translating shared concerns into practical collaboration to strengthen regional resilience and enable more coordinated responses. Participants recognized that some proposals may be constrained by legal and political considerations, particularly given the Philippines’ adherence to its One-China policy, which precludes any official security cooperation with Taiwan. As such, priority was placed on practical and non-sensitive areas of engagement, including joint research, information sharing, and coordinated public communication initiatives.

To encourage open and candid dialogue, the workshop was held in a closed-door format, with this report summarizing key points without attribution to individual participants. Each session began with opening presentations from Filipino, Taiwanese, Japanese and American experts to spark discussion. Participants exchanged perspectives on China’s coercive behavior, analyzing impacts across their jurisdictions and identifying common patterns and challenges. They also explored how China constructs and sustains an “alternative reality” that seeks to normalize and legitimize coercive behavior, including the use of lawfare, and discussed ways to counter these efforts. The workshop emphasized developing evidence-based, actionable recommendations to counter maritime coercion, protect institutions from foreign influence, and safeguard public discourse.

Toward the end of the workshop, the WPS Foundation and INDSR signed a memorandum of understanding that will guide the two organizations’ collaboration on research and dialogues related to maritime security, countering cognitive warfare—including malign influence operations—and other regional security issues.

VIEWS FROM THE PHILIPPINES

China’s aggression in the West Philippine Sea is the Philippines’ most immediate security concern. The Philippines continues to face persistent harassment from China across both maritime and air domains, including the use of water cannons, vessel ramming, and other dangerous maneuvers. These actions, however, represent only one component of a broader set of multi-domain challenges that span maritime, air, cyber, space, electronic warfare, and

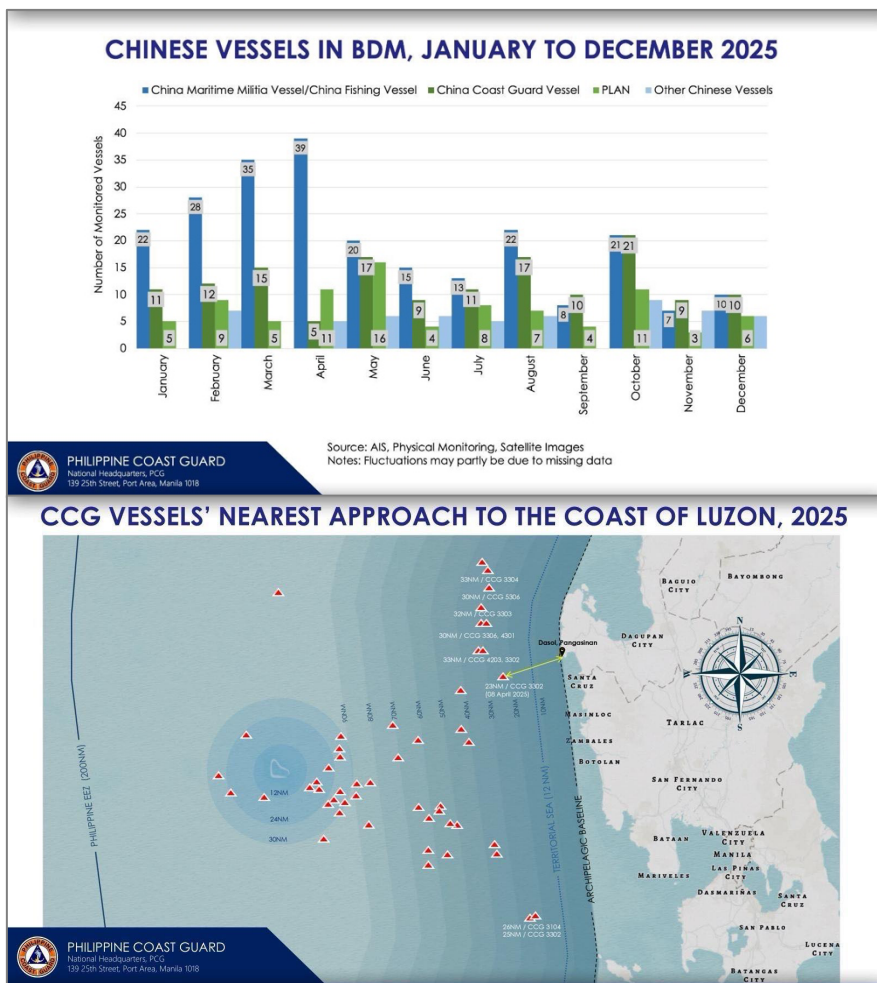


Figure 1: Data from the Philippine Coast Guard on the PRC's Presence close to the coast of western Luzon.

information operations. Rather than occurring in isolation, these activities are best understood as interconnected elements of a coordinated approach, generating sustained pressure while simultaneously altering the operational environment for potential contingencies. At sea, China maintains a constant presence of 300 to 350 maritime militia vessels at any given time in the Philippines' EEZ that are supported by coast guard and naval forces. This approach enables a flexible posture that blends civilian and military elements, allowing for sustained operations without triggering full escalation. Since 2025, Chinese vessels have also increasingly operated closer to Philippine coastlines, at distances as near as 23 nautical miles from western Luzon. Clusters of Chinese ships near Pagasa (Thitu) and Bajo de Masinloc (Scarborough Shoal) were seen as indicative of preparations for potential blockades, capable of rapidly shifting from mere presence to interdiction. Chinese air incursions and close intercepts reflect efforts to test the Philippines' response times, radar coverage, and operational readiness, while conditioning routine operations in national airspace. These combined maritime and aerial activities are designed to compress early-warning time and gradually

normalize incremental encroachments, influencing both operational and political decision-making under sustained pressure. In contrast, the northern Philippines – facing toward southern Taiwan – has remained relatively less active, with fewer reported incidents involving Chinese forces.

At the same time, China has intensified its online messaging to reinforce its coercive activities at sea, with the Philippines especially vulnerable due to its highly active online population. Since late 2025, the Chinese embassy in Manila has played a central role, issuing inflammatory statements on social media that target Philippine officials critical of Beijing. These efforts follow consistent patterns: discrediting individuals by accusing them of smearing China, dismissing evidence of maritime incidents as false or propagandistic, and twisting narratives to favor

China's position – downplaying legal rulings, shifting blame to other countries, and reframing disputes. Such messaging is amplified through state media, bot networks, local influencers, and, at times, local politicians, demonstrating how foreign narratives can penetrate domestic discourse and exploit internal divisions. Collectively, these actions place pressure on the Philippine government and undermine transparency initiatives related to China's activities at sea.

These online activities form part of a broader strategy that the Philippines characterizes as "foreign interference and malign influence" (FIMI) operations, which differs from the more widely used definition of "foreign information manipulation and interference." From the Philippine perspective, FIMI extends beyond disinformation to encompass the integration of messaging with coordinated actions across political, economic, and societal domains to bend public perception, influence decision-making, and erode institutional trust. In this way, FIMI operations complement China's activities at sea, reinforcing strategic objectives while remaining below the threshold of outright conflict.

Yet, the Philippines is still in the process of developing a comprehensive law to address FIMI, which would feature the creation of a national task

force to strengthen coordination across government agencies. A major challenge in countering Chinese coercion is the fragmented response across government agencies, driven by limited coordination, reactive attribution of malicious narratives, and underdeveloped legal and analytical tools. Significant gaps also remain in identifying and assessing influence operations, with key obstacles that include language barriers, limited technical expertise, resource constraints, difficulty of analyzing activities within diaspora communities and attributing them to state actors. Militarily, while the Philippines is undergoing modernization, its capabilities still lag behind regional counterparts such as Taiwan, underscoring the need for sustained investment and capacity-building. In response, the Philippines' Department of National Defense launched the Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept in 2024, an initiative that focuses on modernizing naval and coastal defense capabilities, enhancing control over the country's exclusive economic zone, fortifying strategic outposts in the West Philippine Sea, and expanding security partnerships beyond traditional allies.

VIEWS FROM TAIWAN

Taiwan faces a wide spectrum of coercive and hybrid operations from China, spanning both military and non-military domains that are often mutually reinforcing. These include near-daily air and maritime incursions, as well as large-scale exercises marked by shorter preparation times and increasing jointness across forces. The expanding role of coast guard units alongside military assets is widely interpreted as preparation for potential blockades or quarantines aimed at isolating Taiwan in a crisis. Recent drills suggest a pattern of incremental escalation, with operations occurring closer to Taiwan's coastline – this was the first time in which China's publicly announced exercise zones overlapped with Taiwan's 12-nautical-mile

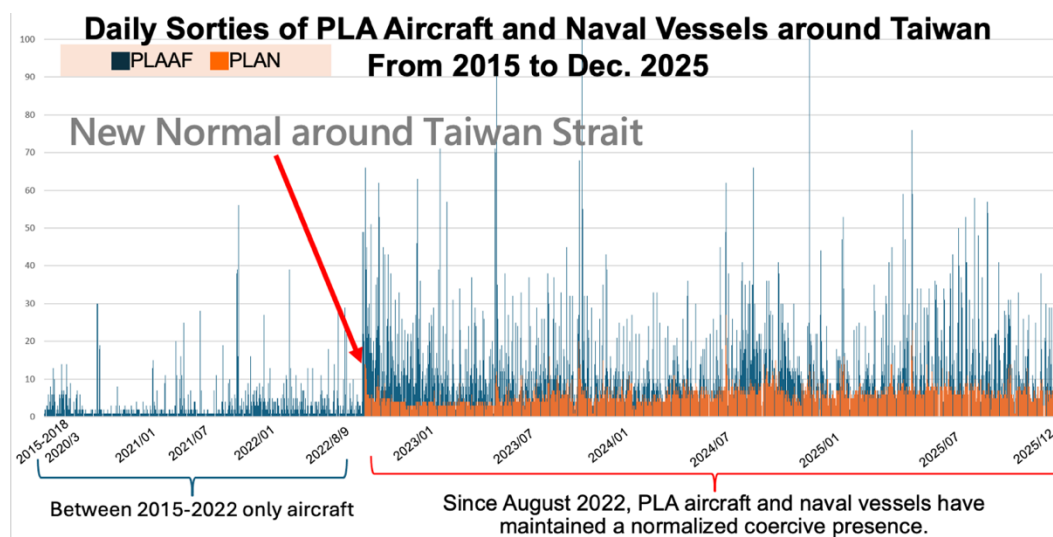
threshold; though the actual operations remained in the contiguous zone between 12 and 24 nautical miles – simulating maritime blockades and disrupting civilian air traffic. Taken together, these developments raise concerns that China is progressively shaping conditions to compel Taiwan's capitulation without triggering large-scale conflict.

The Taiwan Strait is widely recognized as an international waterway where freedom of navigation and overflight is guaranteed as provided under international law. However, Beijing is gradually challenging this longstanding principle by normalizing short-notice military exercises and by propaganda and lawfare to refashion maritime practices and norms to its advantage.

Reported incidents of suspected undersea cable sabotage and activities involving vessels linked to Chinese actors also show the expanding scope of these operations and their potential to disrupt critical infrastructure. In addition, Taiwan continues to face espionage and infiltration risks, with intelligence-gathering and influence efforts targeting both active and retired personnel in the defense and maritime sectors, often through financial incentives or coercion. Concerns have also emerged regarding smaller political actors allegedly engaging in espionage or expressing support for undermining government authority in contingency scenarios, alongside broader efforts to sow internal divisions and weaken societal cohesion.

Taiwan is adopting a holistic approach to preparing for future contingencies, both natural and geopolitical. Central to this approach is the concept of resilience, which guides the coordination of resources and efforts across government agencies as well as between the public and private sectors. On countering infiltration and united front tactics, Taiwan has undertaken a broad set of reforms, proposing more than 120 reform efforts – including laws, regulations, and monitoring systems – to counter influence operations.

Figure 2: Patterns of China's Maritime Lawfare in the Taiwan Strait (Source: National Defense University, Taiwan)



President Lai Ching-te has also introduced 17 new national security measures to address intensified infiltration, espionage, and “united front” activities linked to the Chinese Communist Party

party. The government is also promoting “China literacy” education for younger students to enhance media literacy and national identity.

Complementing these efforts are planned

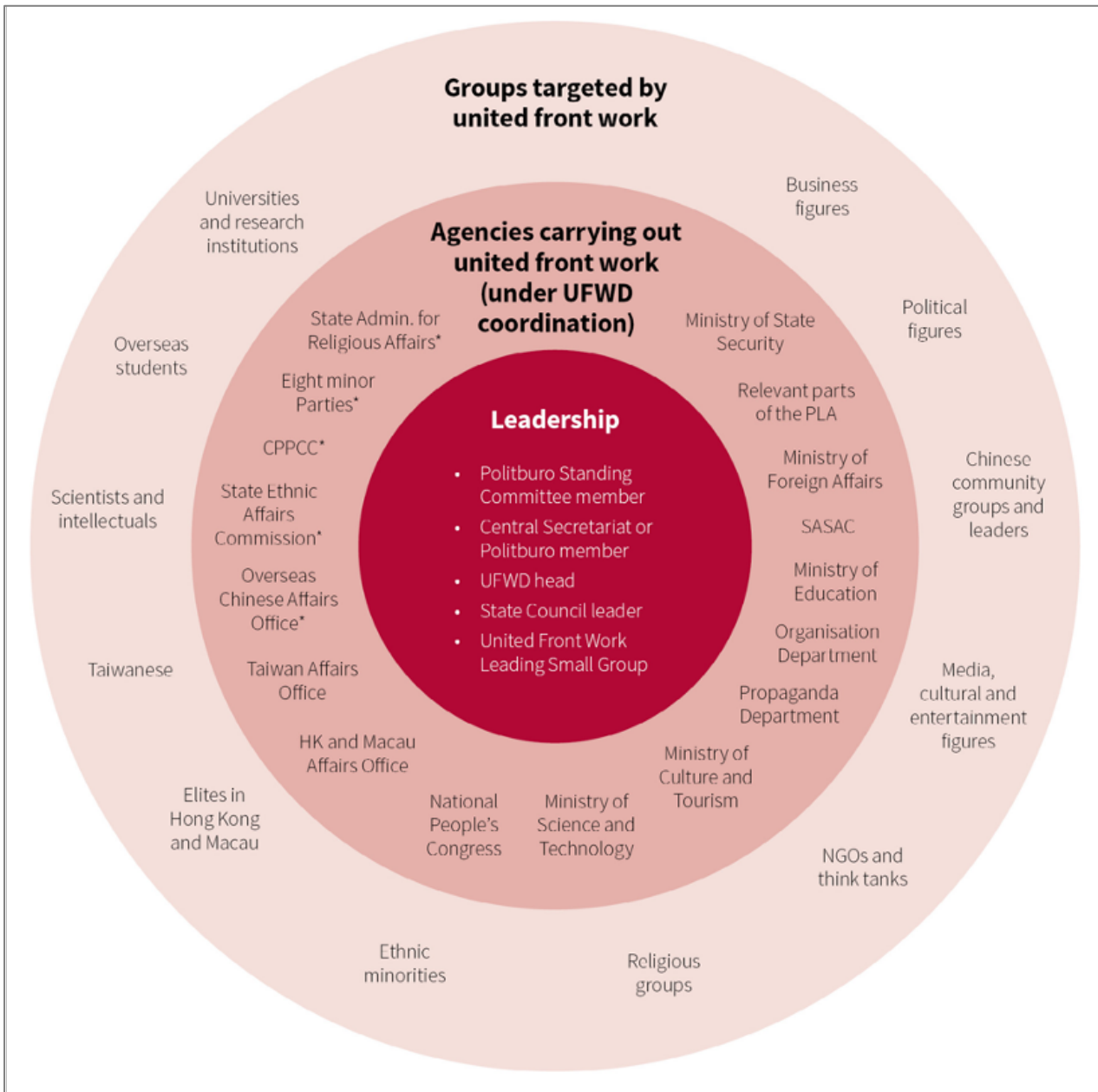


Figure 3: The graphic shows how the United Front Work System’s reach goes beyond the borders of the Chinese Communist Party and extends into foreign political parties, multinational corporations, diaspora communities, etc. Source: Alex Joske, *The Party Speaks For You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front System*, Policy Brief 32 (ASPI, 2020)

(CCP). These measures focus on strengthening internal security, countering cognitive warfare, tightening oversight of cross-strait exchanges, and enforcing accountability. Specific reforms include increasing transparency in cross-strait engagements through registration requirements for government officials and elected representatives interacting with China, strengthening vetting procedures for Chinese nationals with potential United Front affiliations, and imposing penalties on retired senior military officers or civil servants who participate in CCP-linked events or express public support for the

increases in defense investment aimed at enhancing resilience and deterrence. Taiwan is boosting military spending, advancing capabilities in areas such as unmanned systems and submarines, and strengthening the protection of critical infrastructure. The aim is to raise defense spending to 3.32 percent of GDP this year, with a longer-term target of approximately 5 percent by 2030. At the same time, Taiwan is prioritizing investments in communication, transportation, and energy systems to strengthen its capacity to respond effectively across a wide range of contingencies.

THE PRC'S UNITED FRONT WORK

Like elsewhere in the world, the CCP's United Front Work Department conducts influence operations in the Philippines and Taiwan. These efforts target political elites or decision makers, influential groups, business leaders, media, academic institutions, overseas Chinese, and civil society to manipulate narratives, weaken support for Taiwan independence, and foster pro-Beijing sentiment. Many activities usually appear benign—such as cultural exchanges, language programs, or academic initiatives—but once influence is established, these networks can be mobilized to support specific objectives, including coordinated messaging, public demonstrations, espionage, and emergency resource deployment. For example, overseas Chinese groups have organized protests aligned with Beijing's messaging in response to visits by foreign political figures to Taiwan.

In the Philippines, sister city and provincial agreements between Philippine and Chinese localities provide potential channels for cooperation that may also create political leverage, while some universities in the Philippines were also reported to have received donations and infrastructure support from Chinese technology firms, such as Huawei, when they were less aware of foreign influence risks.

Such operations are challenging for democracies like the Philippines and Taiwan to counter, as most United Front activities operate within legal boundaries and appear non-threatening until the harm is done. Government intervention is typically limited to cases where misconduct, such as espionage, can be clearly established. For democratic societies to remain open yet resilient, it is critical to understand the mechanisms and objectives of United Front work.

THE PRC'S LAWFARE

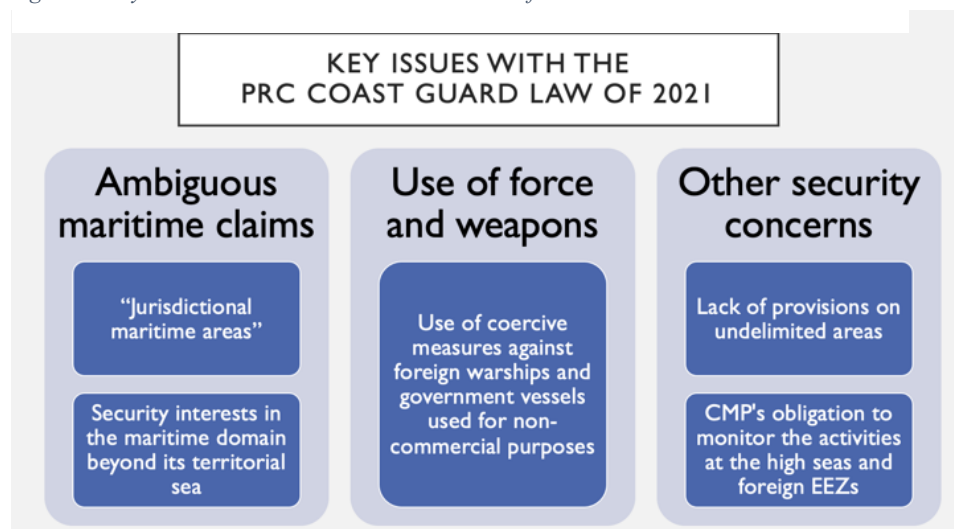
China employs 'lawfare'—the use or misuse of legal tools to achieve strategic objectives—as a key gray zone tactic against both the Philippines and Taiwan. By using domestic legislation and selective interpretations of international law, Beijing seeks to legitimize its expansive claims and justify actions that infringe on the sovereign rights of others. Participants expressed concern that China increasingly relies on its domestic maritime laws and civilian agencies to advance

its objectives in contested waters, particularly within the First Island Chain. Examples include the use of the nine-dash line, the integration of the China Coast Guard under the Central Military Commission, and coast guard legislation that authorizes the use of force in so-called "jurisdictional waters." Ambiguities in China's domestic legislation—often framed in terms aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)—allow activities such as inspections, patrols, and traffic control to be presented as routine law enforcement while advancing broader strategic aims. There are concerns that China could impose "quarantine"-style exclusion zones, restricting access, inspecting vessels, and redirecting maritime traffic under the guise of law enforcement rather than a full military blockade in a future scenario. As these law enforcement operations grow in scope and complexity, China is gradually exercising the skills necessary to assert control over territories administered by other regional states, i.e., Taiwan's outlying islands, the Senkakus, or Second Thomas Shoal, and to force regional leaders to engage in negotiations under constrained conditions.

Beijing also continues to disregard international legal rulings, including the 2016 arbitral award, which the Philippines maintains is legally binding on both parties and should serve as a foundation for clarifying maritime rights and responsibilities. In this context, partners, including Taiwan, are encouraged to explore constructive ways to support the award.

In response to China's lawfare tactics, the Philippines and Taiwan have adopted transparency initiatives—evidence-based information campaigns aimed at exposing China's legal distortions and building international support. But such measures alone are insufficient to fully counter lawfare strategies. The international community must express opposition to China's deliberate misapplication, misrepresentation, and misinterpretation of international law, especially in

Figure 4: Key issues with China's Coast Guard Law of 2021



the UNCLOS. They should speak out against China's illegal conduct whenever there is an opportunity in international forums to protect shared values and the foundation of international law.

VIEWS FROM JAPAN

In Japan— which also forms part of the First Island Chain—coercive activities by China exhibit patterns similar to those affecting the Philippines and Taiwan. China Coast Guard activity has

steadily increased over the past years in both frequency and duration around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. These operations are widely viewed as part of a long-term effort to normalize China's presence and gradually assert control without triggering open conflict.

China has also sought to exploit vulnerabilities, including Japan's economic ties and its business sector as potential leverage points. Okinawa remains another area of concern, given its strategic importance and historical sensitivities. Attention to Okinawa intensified online following statements by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi that framed a Taiwan contingency as also a Japanese contingency. Chinese narratives seek to drive a wedge between Okinawa and Japan by exploiting local grievances and sowing internal divisions by promoting themes such as criticism of U.S. military bases— many of which are in Okinawa— and by advancing claims about the People's Liberation Army supposed superiority over the militaries of Taiwan and Japan. Coordinated online activities, including suspicious or automated accounts, have amplified these narratives, though linking these actions directly to state actors remains a challenge. This complicates policy responses and enforcement mechanisms, especially in a democratic society.

Despite this sustained pressure, the domestic political impact has been considered limited, as recent election results have shown. There has been stronger support for a more security-oriented policy direction. Issues once approached with caution, such

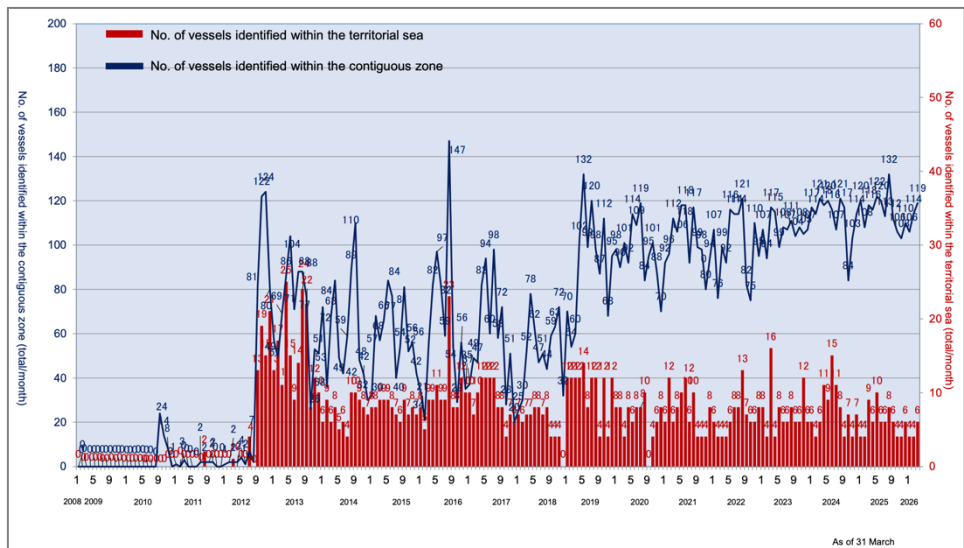


Figure 5: Trends in China Coast Guard and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Response (Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

as a potential Taiwan contingency, are now discussed more openly in policy debates. Japan also passed its biggest defense budget yet — 9 trillion yen in 2026, a 9.4 percent increase from the previous year— demonstrating a commitment to enhanced national and regional security.

THE NEED FOR DATA-DRIVEN ANALYSIS

Recent drills around Taiwan have demonstrated how maritime pressure could be applied in a contingency, including the possibility of restricting or inspecting commercial shipping in and around the Taiwan Strait. Taiwanese think tanks are actively using data analytics and predictive modeling to simulate a contingency scenario. For instance, a one-day disruption in the Taiwan Strait could result in economic losses of approximately \$3.5 million

“China has also sought to exploit vulnerabilities, including Japan’s economic ties and its business sector as potential leverage points.”

USD, according to a study. Given the high volume of vessel traffic transiting the Strait— serving not only Taiwan but also regional economies such as Japan, South Korea, and China— any disruption would have significant spillover effects across Indo-Pacific maritime trade routes.

Such a scenario would also threaten Taiwan’s access to critical supplies such as LNG, with broader implications for regional energy security. In response, participants proposed that territories

along the First Island Chain, together with the United States, strengthen evidence-based maritime logistics cooperation.

The Philippines was identified as a critical transit corridor linking major OECD energy exporters to Australia, Brunei, and key East Asian markets, including China. A study mapping LNG vessel movements through the Taiwan Strait highlighted critical transit nodes that ships must pass through to reach Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

This data-driven approach supports more effective contingency planning and response preparation. It also highlights opportunities to enhance regional cooperation and information sharing. These efforts can improve the tracking of evolving patterns and enable the development of more coordinated strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is growing awareness in the Philippines and in Taiwan of common security challenges, but differences in perception, capability, and political constraints continue to influence their responses. Participants agreed that Chinese actions should not be viewed as separate incidents but as part of a broader strategy to refashion the regional security environment in China's favor and potentially prepare for conflict. Thus, the emerging consensus among participants suggests that future stability will depend on strengthening coordination, enhancing transparency, and building more integrated regional approaches to deterrence—particularly in addressing gray zone activities. This would require a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach involving government agencies, the private sector, civil society, and regional bodies.

The concept of a “one theater” approach—treating the First Island Chain as a unified operational environment rather than a set of separate maritime zones—was raised repeatedly during the workshop. This perspective implies that

operational doctrines, command structures, and tactics could be standardized across the region to enable more coordinated and effective responses from a strategic standpoint rather than a military one. First Island Chain territories should deepen exchanges with one another and with other like-minded countries, building multi-layered international linkages through reciprocal visits, institutionalized dialogue mechanisms, observer participation in key forums, and other forms of cooperation. The United States, as outlined in its latest National Defense Strategy, is also expected to prioritize the First Island Chain to deter China's military expansion and stand by key regional allies and partners.

Civil defense cooperation between the Philippines and Taiwan can serve a dual purpose by strengthening preparedness for both natural disasters and potential security contingencies. Conducting Track 1.5 and Track 2 workshops and tabletop exercises involving not just experts but also local and regional actors offers a practical way to build interoperability and coordination, while remaining low-profile enough to avoid triggering political sensitivities. Both parties can also strengthen resilience by drawing on successful international best practices to improve domestic inter-agency mechanisms, particularly on sea and air transport resilience. Coordinating resources and exchanging lessons on handling maritime coercion—including blockades or quarantine scenarios—can help ensure the uninterrupted flow of goods and protect critical transportation networks.

The Philippines and Taiwan can strengthen cooperation on data-driven threat analysis related to maritime coercion, cognitive warfare, and infiltration activities. This could include organizing workshops with partner countries to exchange experiences, compare analytical frameworks and methodologies, and identify best practices for monitoring and responding to gray zone threats.

Both sides can work toward developing shared indicators and standardized data formats to enable more effective cross-national comparisons and information sharing. The use of advanced technologies—including data analytics platforms and AI-assisted tools—can further enhance the ability to detect patterns, attribute activities, and support timely decision-making.

“The concept of a “one theater” approach—treating the First Island Chain as a unified operational environment rather than a set of separate maritime zones—implies that operational doctrines, command structures, and tactics could be standardized across the region to enable more coordinated and effective responses from a strategic standpoint.”

Such collaboration would enhance situational awareness and facilitate more coordinated and evidence-based policy responses. In addition, as both parties already utilize Canada's dark vessel detection system and the United States' SeaVision system to support maritime domain awareness, they can explore ways to better integrate and coordinate these tools to strengthen information exchange and operational cooperation.

Participants also proposed advancing joint research and coordinated publications among experts from the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, Australia, Canada and the United States on maritime coercion, lawfare, and FIMI. Co-authored op-eds and think tank outputs were identified as practical policy tools to raise public awareness and counter false narratives.

To maximize impact and avoid duplication, participants suggested putting up a coordinating platform or center to align research priorities and combine findings into a more comprehensive picture. Strategic communication was highlighted as another key area. This includes tailoring messaging to different audiences, such as using legal frameworks like UNCLOS for international stakeholders, while emphasizing local-interest narratives – such as environmental protection and livelihoods – for affected communities.

Coordinated public messaging can also enhance deterrence by demonstrating solidarity and reducing the effects of divide-and-conquer strategies. Name-and-shame campaigns are most effective when amplified by partners through joint statements condemning unlawful Chinese activities. Long-term resilience can be strengthened by improving public awareness of hybrid threats, enhancing institutional coordination, and deploying proactive communication strategies.

The Philippines can also benefit from examining Taiwan's legislative approaches in dealing with foreign interference and espionage. In this regard, in-depth exchanges should be pursued to look into Taipei's national security legislation regarding anti-infiltration, anti-United Front measures, and disinformation countermeasures.

Such engagements can look at identifying and assessing preventative measures adopted by partner countries to address coercive and malign influence activities.

Greater attention should also be given to cyber cooperation to address hybrid threats. Practical areas for collaboration include information sharing on emerging threats, joint capacity-building initiatives, exchanges on cybersecurity governance, and cooperation between relevant agencies and research institutions. Strengthening cyber resilience through these non-sensitive and technically focused efforts can enhance both sides' ability to detect and respond to evolving threats.

China's coercive actions at sea and ashore against the Philippines and Taiwan are likely to persist and even become more aggressive. Both sides, therefore, face a sustained and expanding range of challenges. This underscores the need for continued, carefully calibrated cooperation, including deeper engagement between public and private sector stakeholders, to address growing uncertainties in the Indo-Pacific.

The One-China policy should not be invoked as a blanket constraint on contingency planning, nor should it inhibit cooperation with Taiwan and other like-minded partners on challenges involving Taiwan.

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LEAD RAPPORTEUR

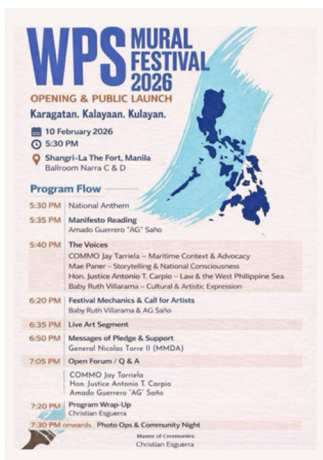
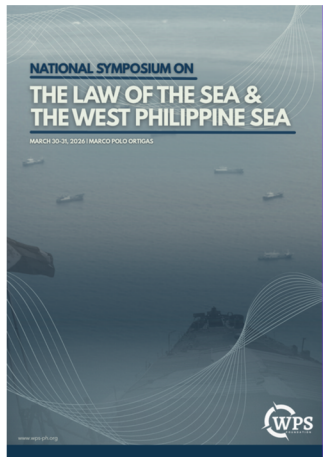
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