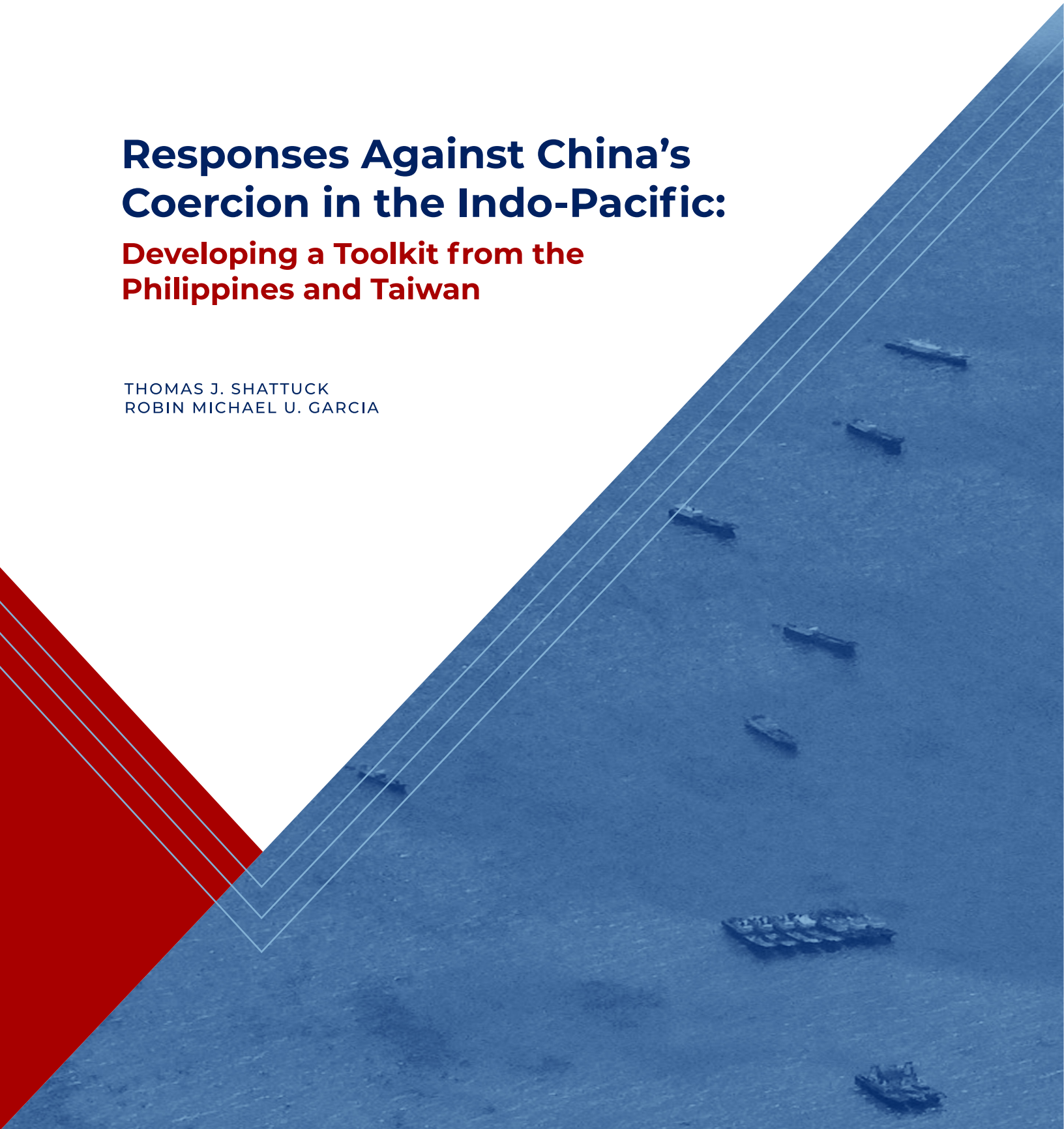


Responses Against China's Coercion in the Indo-Pacific:

Developing a Toolkit from the Philippines and Taiwan

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Perry World House at the University of Pennsylvania for supporting the publication of this white paper, as well as the Perry World House Wednesday Seminar participants for their feedback on the project. We would also like to thank Dr. Scott Moore, Dr. Michael Kenwick, and Dr. Francis Domingo for their peer review of an earlier draft of the paper. We are grateful to Charmaine Tadalán for research assistance and proofreading this manuscript.

Executive Summary

How does a government respond to a threat or coercive actions by a larger and better-resourced military? That is a question faced by countries across the Indo-Pacific when it comes to actions conducted by the People's Republic of China (PRC). Taiwan and the Philippines have experienced similar, yet unique, forms of PRC coercion that has resulted in both nations developing analogous responses that fall within an analytical spectrum. This paper focuses on how these two Indo-Pacific countries have attempted such a feat against the military apparatus of the PRC since 2022. The lessons from these two countries may help to inform how other countries may respond to their own powerful neighbors. This paper develops a toolkit for countries to counter military coercion across a spectrum of options.

The contribution of this study is conceptual, empirical, and practical. It focuses on actions of those states that are beset with a coercive China in defending their territorial integrity and agency. As such, the report falls within the broader literature of “small states” in international politics. This research spotlights recent actions of China and the behavior of Taiwan and the Philippines, the two countries most affected by China's coercive actions over the past few months. The report enumerates possible courses of action for countries who currently, or those who may, experience similar coercion from China.

Based on the recent responses of Taiwan and the Philippines, this paper proposes the following activities:

- Utilize mass and major media as quickly as possible, for as long as possible.
- Involve high-level politicians and government officials in responses.
- Internationalize the issue as quickly as possible.
- Force direct confrontation on suitable terms.

List of Abbreviations

ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
BRP	Ship of the Republic of the Philippines
CCG	Chinese Coast Guard
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CMM	Chinese Maritime Militia
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
EDCA	Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement
MND	Ministry of National Defense
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
PCG	Philippine Coast Guard
ROC	Republic of China
RoRe	Rotation and Re provisioning Mission

Introduction

How does a government respond to a threat or coercive actions by a larger and better-resourced military? That is a question faced by countries across the Indo-Pacific when it comes to actions conducted by the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Whether it is in the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, or Philippine Sea, leaders are faced with the difficult choice of how to protect the sovereignty of their territory against a more powerful competitor. Those decisions are critical for ensuring a country’s national security.

This report argues that Taiwan¹ and the Philippines have experienced similar, yet unique, forms of PRC coercion that has resulted in both capitals developing analogous responses that fall within an analytical spectrum. It focuses on how these two Indo-Pacific countries have attempted such a feat against the military apparatus of the PRC since 2022. The lessons from these two countries may help to inform how other countries may respond to their own powerful neighbor. It develops a toolkit

for nations to counter military coercion across a spectrum of options.

The contribution of this study is conceptual, empirical, and practical. Many studies have focused on making sense of China’s international behavior and its actions toward other countries, especially its Asian neighbors. This research flips the script and focuses on the international behavior of those countries that are the objects of China’s behavior and coercion. It is less concerned about China’s behavior because it draws from existing works that already demonstrate China’s coercion. This report attempts to make sense of actions of those states who are beset with a coercive China in defending their territorial integrity and agency. As such, this report draws similarities to works about states “living with China.”² Because these states in the Indo-Pacific region are smaller, less powerful states, this work is located in the broader literature of “small states” in international politics, or those that have “relational weakness” when faced with

1 This report refers to the Republic of China (ROC) as it is a commonly known term in Taiwan. Unless otherwise specified in the text, the use of the term “Taiwan” refers to the entirety of the country. And for the purposes of this report, the authors refer to Taiwan as a country despite its lack of membership in the United Nations and formal diplomatic recognition by a majority of the world’s countries. Taiwan meets the minimum qualifications for statehood as outlined in the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (permanent population, defined territory, government, and ability to enter into relations with states).

2 Tang, Shiping, Mingjiang Li, and Amitav Acharya, (2009), *Living with China: Regional States and China Through Crises and Turning Points*, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.

a bigger power.³ The analysis spotlights recent actions of China and the behavior of Taiwan and the Philippines. It enumerates possible courses of action for countries who currently, or those who may, experience similar coercion from China. This report focuses on events starting in 2022 because it was the year in which President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. took office, which resulted in a preferential shift in Manila, and the year in which then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, an action that changed the military status quo in the Taiwan Strait. The year 2022 was critical for change in the region and is a good starting point for analysis regarding how the two countries have reacted to overt Chinese military coercion and gray zone activities. Using 2022 as a starting point allows analysis to include the end of the Tsai Ing-wen administration and the beginning of the Marcos administration, a time period that includes Beijing’s increased military coercion of both countries.

The purpose of this report is not to analyze PRC coercion, but to evaluate how these two countries have responded to such coercive efforts. For this report, coercion is “the use of threatened force, including the limited use of actual force to back up the threat, to induce an adversary to behave differently than it otherwise would.”⁴ This definition includes the PRC threats and actions against both Taiwan and the Philippines. Given Beijing’s evolving strategy in the Indo-Pacific, it is important to emphasize that “coercion is anything but simple, straightforward, or formulaic.”⁵ More broadly, “The coercer forces another actor to calculate, to

<< The year 2022 was critical for change in the region and is a good starting point for analysis regarding how the two countries have reacted to overt Chinese military coercion and gray zone activities. >>

decide—based on his own interests and position—whether or not to resist the threat being made.”⁶ Beijing forces Taipei and Manila to make decision on how to respond to each threat or action, “placing the outcome in [their] hands.”⁷

Both Taiwan and the Philippines face similar asymmetric power imbalances vis-à-vis China. Neither Taipei nor Manila has the ability to defeat Beijing militarily without significant assistance from third parties, particularly the United States. While Beijing, and especially General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Xi Jinping, has ambitions to absorb Taiwan into the PRC peacefully (or militarily, if needed), it does not have such plans for the Philippines. However, the PRC holds a number of disputed natural features in the South China Sea and the West Philippine Sea. Both countries—and militaries—face decisions on how to respond to Chinese threats, coercion, and confrontation on a near-daily basis.

During her two terms in office, Tsai has attempted to maintain the status quo in cross-Strait relations and reinvigorate Taiwan’s ability to defend itself against PRC military aggression. Under her leadership, Taiwan purchased more than \$22 billion

3 Rostoks, Toms, “Small States, Power, International Change and the Impact of Uncertainty,” In: Steinmetz, Robert, and Anders Wivel (eds.), (2010), *Small States in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities*, Farnham, United Kingdom: Ashgate.

4 Byman, Daniel L., Matthew C. Waxman, and Eric Larson, “Chapter 2: How to Think About Coercion,” In: Byman, Daniel L., Matthew C. Waxman, and Eric Larson, (1999), *Air Power as a Coercive Instrument*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 9–26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mr1061af9>.

5 Biddle, Tami Davis, (2020), “Coercion Theory: A Basic Introduction for Practitioners,” *Texas National Security Review*, 3(2): 94-109, <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/8864>.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

in arms from the United States, invested in the development of indigenous-built military capabilities, such as diesel-powered submarines, and attempted to amplify the asymmetric PRC military threat against Taiwan to world powers. Given the immense power asymmetry between Beijing and Taipei, Tsai's ability to deter Beijing's so-called "anaconda strategy,"⁸ which seeks to slowly squeeze Taiwan into submission, has required unique responses to military coercion. As President-elect William Lai Ching-te will take power in May 2024 and conversations regarding the future of Taiwan's defense will continue, one of the goals of this report is to categorize and analyze the types of responses that Taiwan has implemented against PRC aggression in order to develop a playbook for not only Lai but also for other leaders facing similar circumstances. This playbook provides countries facing similar asymmetric threats and coercion with a variety of options that *could* work in their favor to lower the threat level.

Philippine foreign policy toward China has swung dramatically from capitulation under President Rodrigo Duterte's "pivot to China" toward a palpably firm affirmation of Philippine maritime rights and a pivot back to the United States for security and economic partnership under Marcos. The switch from Duterte to Marcos has resulted in a number of rhetorical and normative changes to how Manila responds to PRC actions. The difference is very stark. Just a few months after Marcos's inauguration, Biden administration officials prioritized visits to the Philippines, including visits

from Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, among others. The Philippines also announced the resumption and solidification of the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which allowed the United States to build and develop military sites in Philippine territory. Marcos increased these sites from five to nine in April 2023, some of which are located in the northern Philippines and are viewed as relevant in a Taiwan contingency.⁹ One of the most telling demonstrations of the Philippine challenge to China under Marcos was the Philippines' withdrawal from the Belt and Road Initiative in November 2023, after a series of incidents in the South China Sea, centered around the Ayungin Shoal and the Ship of the Republic of the Philippines' (or "BRP") *Sierra Madre*.¹⁰

There are a number of in-depth studies analyzing PRC aggression and coercion against countries throughout the Indo-Pacific region. This report builds on those works by focusing on the other side of that coercive coin: how countries, in this case, Taiwan and the Philippines, have responded to PRC actions.¹¹ This paper will first briefly break down the types and kinds of coercion conducted against Taiwan and the Philippines since 2022 and then analyze how the two countries decided to respond to such actions. It concludes by making policy recommendations for Taipei and Manila as well as for other countries facing similar power asymmetries in an effort to develop a first-draft playbook to respond to military coercion.

8 Dreyer, June Teufel, (2018), "The Big Squeeze: Beijing's Anaconda Strategy to Force Taiwan to Surrender," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, August 13, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/08/the-big-squeeze-beijings-anaconda-strategy-to-force-taiwan-to-surrender/>.

9 US Department of Defense, (2023), "Philippines, U.S. Announce Locations of Four New EDCA Sites," Press release: April 3, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3349257/philippines-us-announce-locations-of-four-new-edca-sites/>.

10 Walker, Tommy, (2023), "Philippines Drops China's Belt and Road as Tensions Flare," *DW*, November 8, <https://www.dw.com/en/philippines-drops-chinas-belt-and-road-as-tensions-flare/a-67344929>.

11 This report builds on previous studies on similar topics, such as: Wang, Vincent Wei-cheng, (2003), "Chinese Information Warfare Discourse," *Issues & Studies*, 39(2): 107-143; Schreer, Benjamin, (2017), "The Double-Edged Sword of Coercion: Cross-Strait Relations After the 2016 Taiwan Elections," *Asian Politics & Policy*, 9(1): 50-65; Zang, Ketian, (2019), "Cautious Bully: Reputation, Resolve, and Beijing's Use of Coercion in the South China Sea," *International Security*, 44 (1): 117-159; and Manantan, Mark Bryan, (2020), "The People's Republic of China's Cyber Coercion: Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea," *Issues & Studies*, 56(3): 1-29.

Types of Coercion Conducted by the People's Republic of China

China's international behavior has been assertive for over a decade. This was palpable not only in its slogans and approach to global affairs in general, but also through observable actions manifested in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. Several works have categorized the types of PRC behavior: compromise, delay, and use of force in territorial disputes;¹² declarative, demonstrative, coercive, and use of force for assertive behavior;¹³ and deter, dissuade, mitigate, and pressure in the gray zone.¹⁴ This report focuses on so-called gray zone tactics: "Coercive Chinese government geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber, and information activities beyond regular diplomatic and economic activities and below the use of kinetic military force."¹⁵ All of these typologies use a continuum of actions according to their "escalatory potential," whereby use of force is the most assertive.¹⁶ Beijing has utilized a variety of gray zone tactics and military coercion against both Taipei and Manila.

PRC Coercion Against Taiwan

The most prominent examples of PRC coercion against Taiwan occurred in direct response to high-level, high-profile events centered around Taiwan attempting to increase its international prominence. The PRC's two large-scale military drills conducted after the August 2022 Pelosi-Tsai meeting in Taipei and the meeting between Tsai and then-US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California in April 2023 demonstrate Beijing's ability to showcase developments in its military power and capabilities. These two specific examples encapsulate the major elements of PRC military coercion against Taiwan.

The drills also showed the power asymmetry between the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Taiwan's armed forces. During the August 2022

12 Fravel, M. Taylor, (2008), *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

13 Chubb, Andrew, (2022), *Dynamics of Assertiveness in the South China Sea: China Philippines, and Vietnam, 1975-2015*, NBR Special Report 9, Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 6.

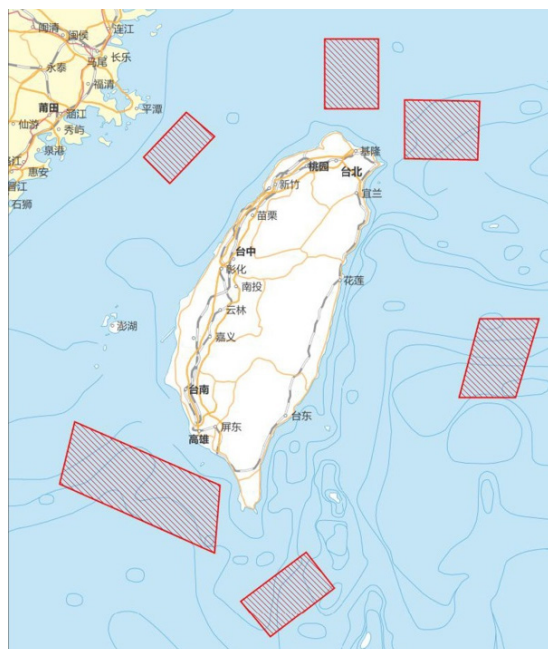
14 Lin, Bonny, Cristina L. Garafola, Bruce McClintock, et al., (2022), *Competition in the Grey Zone: Countering China's Coercion Against U.S. Allies and Partners in the Indo-Pacific*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2.

15 Ibid.

16 Chubb, *Dynamics of Assertiveness in the South China Sea. China Philippines, and Vietnam, 1975-2015*, 6.

exercises, the PLA blocked off six zones around Taiwan to simulate a blockade and conducted live-fire missile drills over the island.¹⁷ The exercises also marked the beginning of the degradation of the Taiwan Strait's median line, which for decades had essentially cut the waterway in half with each country's military staying on their own side for operations.¹⁸ Concurrent to these military exercises, Beijing conducted cyberattacks against Taiwanese government websites and initiated a series of economic bans on Taiwanese fruit and fish.¹⁹

Similarly, after the Tsai-McCarthy meeting in April 2023, Beijing initiated another coercive campaign against Taipei—though at a much more limited scale than the Pelosi exercises. The PLA conducted exercises in the western Pacific to Taiwan's east, around the island, and near Matsu.²⁰ These exercises, dubbed “Joint Sword,” specifically addressed training related to seizing Taiwan and cutting off support access to the island, as well as blockade simulations.²¹ As usual during these events, a high number of military aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait.²²



August 2022 People's Liberation Army military exercises around Taiwan. The red blocks are zones of operation for the military exercises.²³

Notably, a new development in the PRC coercive toolkit was the introduction of a “special joint patrol and inspection operation”²⁴ in the Taiwan Strait. The operation would be conducted in the central and northern Taiwan Strait, the Pingtan

17 China Power Team, (2023), “Series: The Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis,” *China Power*, April 26 (updated November 8, 2023), <https://chinapower.csis.org/series-fourth-taiwan-strait-crisis/>; and Stokes, Jacob, (2023), “Resisting China’s Gray Zone Military Pressure on Taiwan,” *Center for a New American Security*, December 7, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/resisting-chinas-gray-zone-military-pressure-on-taiwan>.

18 Shattuck, Thomas, (2022), “The PLA Air Force Erases the Taiwan Strait Centerline,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, 7(18), September, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/09/the-pla-air-force-erases-the-taiwan-strait-centerline/>.

19 He, Laura, (2022), “China Hits Taiwan with Trade Restrictions After Pelosi Visit,” *CNN*, August 3, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/03/economy/china-suspends-imports-taiwan-products-intl-hnk/index.html>; and Ives, Mike, and Zixu Wang, (2022), “Mostly Bluster: Why China Went Easy on Taiwan’s Economy,” *The New York Times*, August 12, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/12/business/china-taiwan-economy.html>.

20 Lin, Bonny, Brian Hart, Samantha Lu, et al., (2023), “Tracking China’s April 2023 Military Exercises around Taiwan,” *China Power*, April 10 (updated November 8, 2023), <https://chinapower.csis.org/tracking-chinas-april-2023-military-exercises-around-taiwan/>.

21 Xuanzun, Liu, and Guo Yuandan, (2023), “Shandong Aircraft Carrier Group Hosts J-15 Fighter Sorties on Final Day of PLA Drills Encircling Taiwan Island, Forming Blockade,” *Global Times*, April 10, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202304/1288803.shtml>.

22 Ministry of National Defense, ROC (@MoNDefense), (2023), “91 PLA aircraft and 12 PLAN vessels around Taiwan were detected by 6 a.m.(UTC+8) today. R.O.C. Armed Forces have monitored the situation and tasked CAP aircraft, Navy vessels, and land-based missile systems to respond these activities,” Twitter, April 11, <https://twitter.com/MoNDefense/status/1645609309840248832>.

23 Xinhua News Agency, (2022), “Authorization Announcement,” August 2, <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/qwfb/4917246.html>.

24 Fujian Maritime, (2023), “Special Joint Patrol in Central and Northern Taiwan Strait Launched,” *Fujian Maritime*, April 5, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/c-codJnpdrG0lclauwzqQ>.

container ship route, and the three “mini-links”²⁵ connecting Kinmen and Matsu to the PRC—all major naval corridors for international, cross-Strait, and Taiwanese traffic. The operation was supposed to be conducted on both sides of the median line of the Taiwan Strait. This was the first time that the PRC announced such an exercise. Beyond the military element, Beijing announced an investigation into over 2,400 Taiwanese products.²⁶ The investigation would target Taiwan’s alleged trade barriers against Chinese products entering Taiwan. The combination of military and economic coercion demonstrates that Beijing seeks to squeeze Taiwan across a variety of sectors.



*Haixun 06 Patrol Fleet conducting its special operation in April 2023.*²⁷

One of the regular ways in which Taiwan faces PRC coercion is through military aircraft incursions into its air defense identification zone (ADIZ). In 2022, over 1,700 violations occurred, while 2023 saw a large increase with over 4,800 violations.²⁸ In August 2022 alone (the month of the Pelosi visit), PLA aircraft violated Taiwan’s ADIZ 446 times,

compared with 259 in April 2023 in response to the McCarthy meeting. Beyond the increase in the number of violations, another way to evaluate the change in PRC military coercion of Taiwan is through the increase in Taiwan Strait median line crossings. In 2020, 22 such crossings occurred over the course of the entire year, and no such crossings occurred in 2021. That changed after Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan. In August 2022 alone, there were 302 median line crossings, with a total of 565 that year. The Pelosi visit served as a marker in how the PRC utilized the Taiwan Strait in its coercion of Taiwan. It essentially opened the door to regular, near-daily, median line crossings—violating a tacit understanding between Beijing and Taipei that has existed for decades. In 2023, there were 703 median line crossings, with the largest spike, 135, occurring in April after the McCarthy meeting.

These forms of coercion against Taiwan aim to demonstrate the immense power and resources of the PLA vis-à-vis Taiwan’s military and ability to repel an invasion. They do not pit the two militaries directly against each other. Beijing limits its coercion of Taipei to shows of force and economic manipulation. Despite the intense rhetoric by CCP officials regarding Taiwan, Chinese leadership is cognizant of the immense risks of direct coercion or confrontation—in the present moment.

This section provided a brief overview of the types of coercion that Taiwan faces. Understanding the ways in which Beijing seeks to coerce Taiwan in the military sphere will be instructive for analyzing how Taipei responds to such actions.

25 The three mini-links connect Taiwan’s offshore islands of Kinmen and Matsu to cities in Fujian Province. They are postal exchanges, transportation via ferry, and trade.

26 Hsiao, Russell, (2023), “China Rams Up Economic Coercion on Taiwan Ahead of 2024 Elections,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, 8(8), April 19, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/04/china-ramps-up-economic-coercion-on-taiwan-ahead-of-2024-elections/>; and Ministry of Commerce, PRC, (2023), “Ministry of Commerce Announcement No. 11 of 2023 Ministry of Commerce Announcement on the Investigation of Trade Barriers Regarding Taiwan’s Trade Restrictive Measures against the Mainland,” Policy release: April 3, <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/zwgk/gkzcfb/202304/20230403403369.shtml>.

27 Fujian Maritime Safety Administration.

28 All figures and data related to Taiwan’s air defense identification zone comes from: Brown, Gerald C., Benjamin Lewis, and Alex Kung, (2024), “Taiwan ADIZ Violations,” *PLATracker*. <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1qbfYFOVgDBJoFZN5elpZwNTiKZ4n-vCUcs5a7oYwm52g/edit?sharingacti#gid=2051027998>.



An August 2023 incident between the Philippines and the PLA.³⁰

PRC Coercion Against the Philippines

Over the years, China's coercive practices in the Philippines have demonstrated some continuity in methods. Aside from de facto control of and island-building in disputed areas, the most common methods of China to project force are the near-ramming and ramming of Filipino civilian and government vessels, Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM) and Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) vessels swarming disputed areas, and the use of water cannons and military-grade lasers on Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) vessels. The CMM is "a force of vessels ostensibly engaged in commercial fishing but which in fact operate alongside Chinese law enforcement and military to achieve Chinese political objectives in disputed waters."²⁹ This section will focus on three types of PRC coercion: CCG water-cannoning, CMM swarming, and events with dangerously close maneuvers.

Water-Cannoning from the Chinese Coast Guard

The use of water cannons to ward off other vessels is the most preferred form of coercion by the CCG since Marcos took office.³¹ The Philippines felt the brunt of this during at least two "rotation and reprovisioning" (RoRe) missions by the PCG at the Ayungin Shoal (or Second Thomas Shoal), the location of the BRP *Sierra Madre*, the Philippines' only outpost in the area. In August 2023, the PCG condemned the CCG for its "dangerous maneuvers and illegal use of water cannons" against PCG vessels. The PCG was escorting indigenous boats chartered by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to deliver supplies to the BRP *Sierra Madre*. China had claimed the Philippine government promised to remove the World War II-era vessel from the shoal. Manila denied any such agreement,

29 Polling, Greg, Tabitha Mallory, Harrison Pretat, and the Center for Advanced Defense Studies, (2021), *Pulling Back the Curtain on China's Maritime Militia*, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

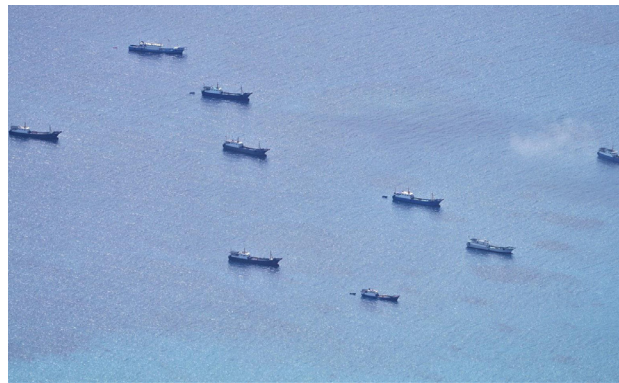
30 Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/coastguardph/>

31 Elemia, Camille, (2023), "What It Feels Like to Be the Target of China's Water Cannons," *The New York Times*, December 11, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/11/world/asia/china-water-cannon-philippines.html>.

and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) filed a *note verbale*, detailing Beijing's failure to respond to phone calls during the water-cannoning incident. This was not the only time that the PRC used water cannons against Philippine boats. In November of the same year, a CCG vessel (hull number 5203) fired a water cannon at the M/L *Kalayaan*,³² one of two Philippine resupply boats heading to the BRP *Sierra Madre* to unload supplies. This is on top of the "reckless" harassment, blockade, and dangerous maneuvers the CCG and the CMM executed to impede the resupply mission. A month later, the National Task Force-West Philippine Sea reported CCG ships used water cannons again,³³ this time to obstruct Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources vessels on a humanitarian mission at Panatag Shoal (Scarborough Shoal). This form of coercion—directly attacking Philippine personnel with nonlethal means—makes invoking the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Philippines, which includes a mutual security guarantee in the event of an "armed attack,"³⁴ difficult because the CCG fired water at the Filipinos and not live-fire munitions.

Swarming by the Chinese Maritime Militia

The CMM has used approximately 400 vessels to swarm the Spratly Islands and other areas.³⁵ Swarming, or the "cabbage strategy," imposes force and creates the conditions for control of islands by encircling islands with several layers of ships to ward off opponents through an overwhelming presence.³⁶ Swarming was a constant occurrence throughout 2022 and 2023.³⁷



*A July 2023 swarming: The increased presence of Chinese maritime assets was observed in Iroquois Reef and Sabina Shoal.*³⁸

In October 2022, between high-profile visits to Manila by Blinken (August) and Harris (November), CCG ships swarmed the Scarborough Shoal.³⁹

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- 32 Punongbayan, Michael, (2023), "China Blasts Philippine Vessel Anew with Water Cannon," *The Philippine Star*, November 11, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/11/11/2310549/china-blasts-philippine-vessel-anew-water-cannon>.
- 33 Ong, Ghio, (2023), "China Fires Water Cannon on Philippines Humanitarian Ships," *The Philippine Star*, December 10, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/12/10/2317740/china-fires-water-cannon-philippines-humanitarian-ships>.
- 34 Lillian Goldman Law Library, "Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines; August 30, 1951," https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/phil001.asp.
- 35 Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, (2022), "The Ebb and Flow of Beijing's South China Sea Militia," November 9, <https://amti.csis.org/the-ebb-and-flow-of-beijings-south-china-sea-militia/>.
- 36 Mazzar, Michael, (2015), *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*, Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College Press, 86.
- 37 Mangosing, Frances, (2022), "Chinese Militia Vessels Coming Closer to Palawan," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, December 7, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/208965/chinese-militia-vessels-coming-closer-to-palawan>.
- 38 Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/coastguardph/>.
- 39 Rita, Joviland, (2022), "4 Chinese Coast Guard Vessels Spotted in and Outside Panatag Shoal-PCG," *GMA News Online*, October 6, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/847172/4-chinese-coast-guard-vessels-spotted-in-and-outside-panatag-shoal-pcg/story/>.

In July 2023, the Philippine military spotted at least 47 Chinese militia vessels in Iroquois Reef and seven assets near Sabina Shoal.⁴⁰ In early December 2023, the PCG monitored more than 135 militia vessels near Julian Felipe (Whitsun) Reef in the West Philippines Sea, an increase from the initially reported 111 on November 13.⁴¹ This type of coercion is not limited to just one specific area in the South China Sea; it spans across all of the Philippines' claims, thus creating a difficult situation for Manila in determining what islands and features to prioritize.

Swarming forms part of Beijing's gray zone tactics, in which it intimidates its rivals by displaying its military capabilities. Swarming also allows China to gradually gain a foothold in the South China Sea as it deters claimants from asserting their sovereign rights. This was a lesson the Philippines learned the hard way in the case of Scarborough Shoal when eight Chinese vessels swarmed the shoal and prevented entry of Philippine boats.

Dangerous Maneuvers, Near Collisions, and Ramblings

Perhaps, the most public form of PRC coercion against Philippine assets has been the dangerous maneuvers resulting in near collisions and ramblings, as well as intentional ramming of vessels. In October 2023, the Philippines called out China for its "provocative actions" at sea that led to two near

collisions between Chinese and Filipino ships.⁴² Manila released video showing a PRC vessel intentionally ramming a Philippine vessel. In December, the two countries traded more accusations after the collision of two of their vessels.⁴³



In October 2023, CCG and militia vessels collided during a routine and regular rotation and resupply mission to BRP Sierra Madre.⁴⁴

China's use of water cannons already caused serious engine damage on a commissioned vessel delivering supplies to the BRP *Sierra Madre*. A ramming or collision between Chinese and Philippine vessels could lead to more damage or even to the sinking of ships. This could disrupt the latter's attempts to secure the West Philippine Sea. China's actions place lives at risk as it creates the possibility of Filipino or Chinese personnel going overboard. It is not difficult to imagine the PRC response if one its vessels sinks as a result of the ongoing standoff.

40 Lema, Karen, (2023), "Philippines Raises Alarm Over Increase in Chinese Boats in Disputed Sea," *Reuters*, July 7, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-raises-alarm-over-increase-chinese-boats-disputed-sea-2023-07-07/>.

41 Mendoza, John Eric, (2023), "PCG Monitors over 135 Chinese Maritime Militia Ships in Julian Felipe Reef," *Inquirer.Net*, December 3, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/223807/pcg-monitors-over-135-chinese-maritime-militia-vessels-in-julian-felipe-reef>.

42 News Agencies, (2023), "Philippines, China Trade Blame Over Collisions in Contested South China Sea," *Al Jazeera*, October 22, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/22/philippines-china-trade-blame-over-collisions-in-contested-south-china-sea>; and Gomez, Jim, (2023), "Philippines Says a Coast Guard Ship and Supply Boat Were Rammed by Chinese Vessels at Disputed Shoal," *Associated Press*, October 23, <https://apnews.com/article/south-china-sea-philippines-second-thomas-shoal-64d4fad7bb42b44f991df183fb39fe1d>.

43 Ereno, Jay, Peter Blaza, (2023), "Philippines, China Trade Barbs over Ship Collision," *ABS-CBN News*, December 12, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/video/news/12/12/23/philippines-china-trade-barbs-over-ship-collision>.

44 Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/coastguardph/>.

Types of Responses by Taiwan and Philippines

As discussed in the previous section, the PRC conducts different types of coercion against Manila and Taipei. These varying types of coercion and levels of severity have resulted in the two countries responding in very different ways. Just as the *modus operandi* of PRC coercion are tailored to specific situations, so too, are the response mechanisms. This section categorizes and analyzes the ways in which Manila and Taipei have responded to PRC coercion since 2022 and demonstrates how the two countries have utilized a wide array of responses. This analysis shows that small countries have a variety of mechanisms available to attempt to deter a more powerful actor. Smaller, less capable countries do have limitations in how they can project power, but this analysis shows that these situations allow Taipei and Manila to utilize their own agency to pressure Beijing into changing course.

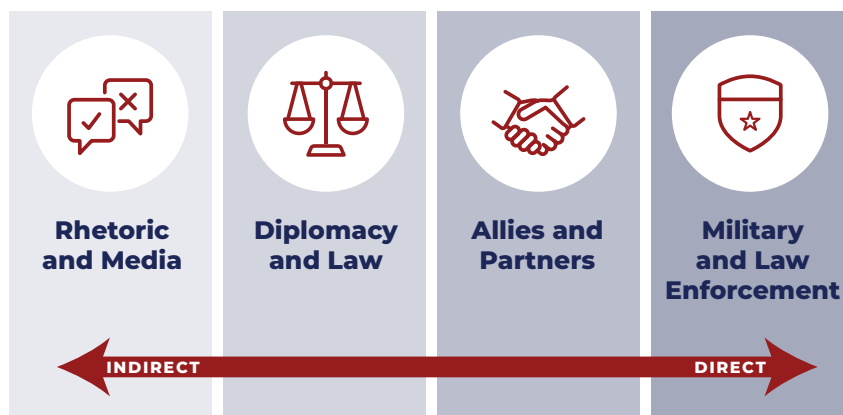
The responses that Manila and Taipei have utilized against PRC coercion range across a spectrum of options, from rhetorically addressing the incidents to directly confronting or challenging PRC actions.⁴⁵ The use of “indirect” vs. “direct” refers to the level of potential harm that military personnel and citizens face as a result of a specific response.

The spectrum includes the most indirect challenge (rhetorical statements and use of the media) to the most direct challenge (the use of the military and law enforcement personnel), with the use of politics, law, and diplomacy serving as a less indirect response and the utilization of allies and partners as a direct option. In this conception, a leader denouncing a certain action via statements or speeches does not directly pit their military personnel against the other military, while sending a naval vessel to confront the aggressor does put sailors directly in harm’s way.

There are some risks associated with this spectrum. The more rhetoric that a leader uses against a certain country, the greater the possibility that domestic opposition against that aggressor could increase. An increase in such domestic opposition could further constrain a leader’s decision-making during particularly tense times. There are also risks associated with brinkmanship: a leader could be emboldened by domestic opposition to not back down, or if there is a military standoff, a leader could refuse to back down, leading to the possibility that things spiral out of control. These risks are found within the PRC mindset vis-à-vis

45 Previous studies have utilized similar frameworks with broader categories focused on diplomacy, political intervention, and military action: Brighi, E., and Hill, C., “Implementation and Behaviour,” In: Smith, S., A. Hadfield, and T. Dunne (eds.), (2016), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Figure 1: Spectrum of responses against coercion, from indirect to direct challenges, ranging from rhetorical statements to the use of military forces



Taiwan and the Philippines through the use of aggressive “Wolf Warrior” rhetoric and the refusal to back down. They create certain expectations of shows of strength and limit CCP leadership’s ability to diffuse situations—though domestic pressures in the PRC factor in differently than in places like Taiwan and the Philippines.

The four categories reflect the primary ways in which Manila and Taipei have attempted to react to PRC coercion. There are different levels of severity within each theme; for example, in the military option, there is a big difference between Manila conducting a RoRe mission in the Second Thomas Shoal that directly challenges the PRC blockade and Taipei sending aircraft and naval vessels to shadow and monitor PLA military exercises.

How Taiwan Responds to PRC Coercion

In contrast to the Philippines, and perhaps a surprise given CCP rhetoric on Taiwan, Taipei faces less direct military coercion in the Taiwan Strait than Manila does in the South China Sea and West Philippine Sea. For this reason, Taiwan’s response toolkit is more subtle than Manila’s as there is little prudence in expanding the escalation ladder by responding to indirect threats with direct confrontation given the asymmetric military power

dynamic between Taipei and Beijing. This section will analyze four examples of how Taiwan responded to PRC coercion, fitting them within the spectrum illustrated in Figure 1:

1. Changes to the Ministry of National Defense’s (MND) air defense identification zone incursion reports and maps;
2. How the Taiwan military shadowed the August 2022 PLA joint exercises;
3. The strong rhetoric against the April 2023 “special joint patrol and inspection operation” by the Fujian Maritime Safety administration in the Taiwan Strait; and
4. Pushing out illegal Chinese sand dredgers near Kinmen and Matsu.

These four examples demonstrate different Taiwanese responses to PRC coercion since 2022. The list is not all-inclusive of the ways in which Taipei reacted to the various instances of gray zone activity, but they serve as a tool to show how seemingly outmatched countries can still enforce their sovereignty against a strong adversary. These examples do not focus on economic coercion as this report focuses more on the military dimension.

Changes to ADIZ Reports

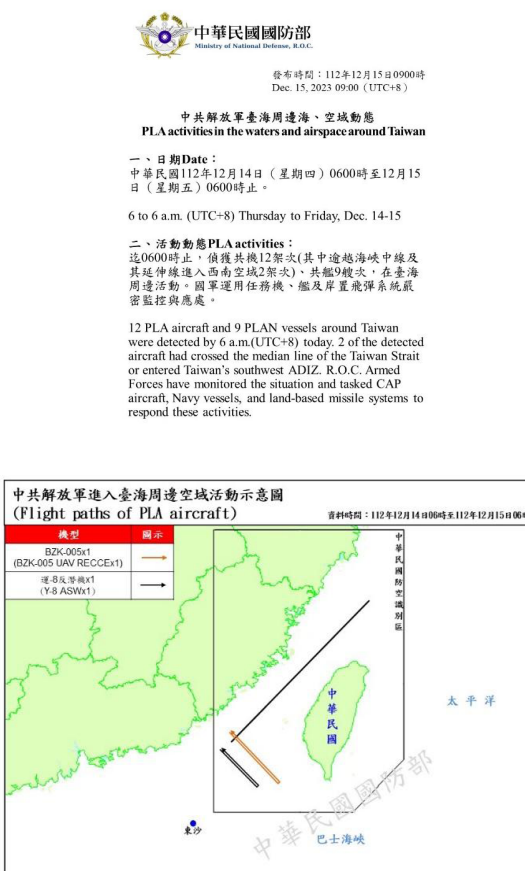
After Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022, the nature of China’s incursions in Taiwan’s ADIZ changed significantly—moving from a focus on the South China Sea to crossing the median line of the Taiwan Strait almost every day. The post-Pelosi PRC military coercion against Taiwan elevated to a greater scale, and Taipei responded by changing its ADIZ reports.

Before August 2022, the MND would only report and illustrate aircraft that entered Taiwan’s ADIZ on a 12-hour cycle. After Pelosi’s visit and changes to the cross-Strait status quo, these reports changed to a 24-hour cycle (from 06:00 to 06:00) over two days that includes naval incursions and additional aircraft sorties around Taiwan. Only the aircraft crossing the median line or in the southwestern ADIZ are illustrated on the report maps.⁴⁶ This change can be attributed to the desire to increase the amount of information shared with the public. Releasing the information signals resolve and Taiwan’s intelligence ability. As shown in Figure 2,⁴⁷ the reports are relatively easy to understand by outlining the types of aircraft and their flight routes. On December 14–15, 2023, one unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicle crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait, and one Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircraft entered Taiwan’s southwestern ADIZ just south of the Taiwan Strait.

These reports have shortcomings because this is the only “evidence”—there are no videos or photographs to accompany these violations as Taiwan’s Air Force stopped intercepting each incursion in

March 2021 due to cost constraints related to fuel and aircraft maintenance.⁴⁸ The MND then changed the format of the reports on January 15–16, 2024, which eliminated the specific flights paths and denotations of the aircraft in favor of a block through which the aircraft traveled (See Figure 3).

Figure 2: Example of a Ministry of National Defense ADIZ violation report after the August 2022 changes⁴⁹



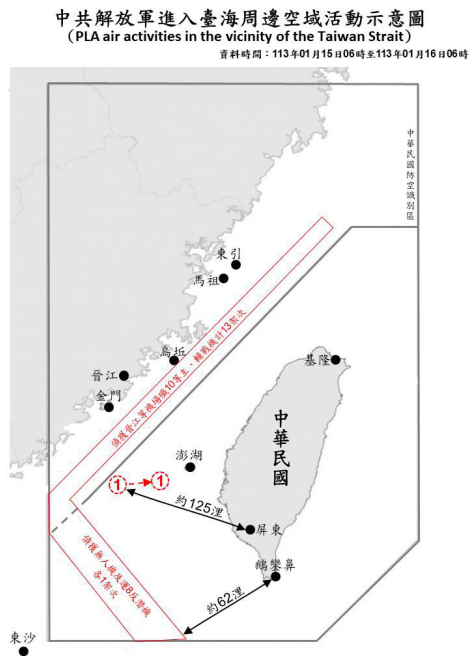
46 Shattuck, Thomas J., Benjamin Lewis, and Kenneth Allen, (2023), “Taiwan Should Follow the Philippines’ Model for Revealing China’s Gray Zone Tactics,” *The Diplomat*, November 3, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/taiwan-should-follow-the-philippines-model-for-revealing-chinas-gray-zone-tactics/>.

47 Ministry of National Defense, ROC, (2020), “China’s People’s Liberation Army’s Taiwan Strait Sea and Airspace Dynamics (December 15, 2012),” December 15, <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/Publish.aspx?p=82342&title=%e5%9c%8b%e9%98%b2%e6%b6%88%e6%81%fa&SelectStyle=%e5%8d%b3%e6%99%82%e8%bb%8d%e4%ba%8b%e5%8b%95%e6%85%8b>.

48 Blanchard, Ben, (2021), “Taiwan Says Tracks Intruding Chinese Aircraft with Missiles, Not Always Scrambling,” *Reuters*, March 29, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-security/taiwan-says-tracks-intruding-chinese-aircraft-with-missiles-not-always-scrambling-idUSKBN2BL0JS/>.

49 Ministry of National Defense, Republic of China (Taiwan), December 15, 2023.

Figure 3: January 15–16 change to the ADIZ violation reports⁵⁰



This response to PRC coercion falls on the left end of the conceptual spectrum: indirect confrontation using media to disseminate information related to the threat. These reports were initially quite successful in garnering major media attention, with outlets like CNN⁵¹ covering incursions into Taiwan’s southwestern ADIZ in 2020. However, because the status quo has changed so substantially since summer 2020, and because these reports are released just about every day, they are no longer the subject of such mass attention. As a result, their power and effectiveness have diminished. What once resulted in a CNN segment is now just

an average day for PRC ADIZ incursions. As this type of response to PRC coercion has decreased, it may be time for Taipei to develop a new information strategy to get the attention back.⁵²

Shadowing the August 2022 PLA Joint Exercises

In response to Pelosi’s August 2022 visit to Taiwan, the PLA conducted multi-day joint live-fire, exercises around Taiwan. The exercises took place in six blocks and included aerial incursions near Taiwan, a naval blockade simulation, and missile tests. On the first day of the exercises, Tsai delivered remarks to the people of Taiwan, stating: “We will neither escalate conflict nor instigate disputes. But we will resolutely defend our nation’s sovereignty and security as a bulwark of democracy and freedom.”⁵³ Her speech showed that under her leadership Taiwan would not quickly back down to PRC coercion; she also pointed out how the exercises were unilateral actions conducted by the PRC without instigation. In addition to a national speech, Taipei regularly publicly released information on the exercises, specifically the numbers, types, and locations of PRC assets.

On August 5, 2022, the MND announced that 68 aircraft and 13 vessels conducted “activities around Taiwan Strait, part of which had crossed the median line and jeopardized the status quo of the strait.”⁵⁴ The response was not limited to just rhetoric. Subsequent updates highlighted the Taiwanese response: “The national army closely

50 Ministry of National Defense, Republic of China (Taiwan), January 16, 2024.

51 Westcott, Ben, (2020), “US Holds its Second High-profile Visit to Taiwan in Two Months as Beijing Escalates Military Pressure,” *CNN*, September 18, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/17/asia/taiwan-us-china-keith-krach-intl-hnk/index.html>.

52 Shattuck, Lewis, and Allen, “Taiwan Should Follow the Philippines’ Model for Revealing China’s Gray Zone Tactics,” *The Diplomat*.

53 Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), (2022), “President Tsai Delivers Remarks on the Live-Fire Military Exercises China Conducting in Areas Around Taiwan,” Press release: August 4, <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/6295>.

54 Ministry of National Defense, R.O.C. (@MoNDefense), (2022), “PLA dispatched 68 aircraft and 13 vessels until 17:00 (UTC+8) for the activities around Taiwan Strait, part of which had crossed the median line and jeopardized the status quo of the strait,” Twitter, August 5, <https://twitter.com/MoNDefense/status/155528137613938688>.

monitored the enemy's situation. In addition to broadcasting to drive them away, they also used air reconnaissance and patrol forces, naval ships, and shore-based missiles to respond."⁵⁵ The Taiwanese military constantly shadowed the PLA vessels in a game of "cat and mouse."⁵⁶ The two sides' naval vessels were close enough to take clear and vivid photos of each other. It is important to note that the two militaries did not engage in any direct confrontations, but the exercises represented a rare opportunity in which both militaries had mobilized at a high level of readiness. An accident or nationalistic fervor could have pitted the two directly against each other, causing both sides to engage in brinkmanship. Even though the PLA exercises represented a dramatic shift in PRC behavior against Taiwan, the situation eventually diffused after the exercises formally concluded.

The Taiwanese response to the August 2022 exercises represents two points on the spectrum: (1) utilizing rhetoric, public statements, mass media, and maps to provide regular updates on the situation (the far left, indirect end of the spectrum), and (2) sending the military to monitor the situation but not engage in confrontation (the right end of spectrum). Tsai did not order her military to fight the PLA, but sending military personnel to monitor the exercises puts them at some level of risk. The key point for Taiwan's response in this example is that countries do not—and should

not—limit their responses to coercion to one space on the spectrum. Utilizing a multifaceted approach creates more options for a country to respond to coercion, allowing for a greater chance at succeeding in deterring future coercion. By limiting it to just rhetoric, for example, a country would run the risk of having a reputation of being all talk with no action.

Opposing the April 2023 "Special Joint Patrol and Inspection Operation" in the Taiwan Strait

In response to the Tsai-McCarthy meeting, the Fujian Province Maritime Safety Administration announced⁵⁷ a three-day special joint patrol and inspection operation. Taiwan's Ministry of Transportation's Maritime and Ports Bureau issued a statement⁵⁸ condemning the operation. The ministry lodged a protest with its PRC counterpart, and Taipei was firm in its statement instructing any Taiwanese-flagged vessels stopped by a PRC vessel to ignore the orders and immediately contact Taiwan's Coast Guard for assistance. This operation was the first time that the PRC would directly contest Taiwanese sovereignty by boarding Taiwanese-flagged vessels in such a coordinated fashion. However, at the conclusion of the three-day operation, there were no reports of PRC vessels stopping, boarding, or seizing any Taiwanese-flagged vessels. The operation did occur, but

55 Ministry of National Defense, ROC, (2022), "Press Release on Air Conditions in the Airspace Around the Taiwan Strait on August 6," Press release: August 6, <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/Publish.aspx?p=80189&title=%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E6%B6%88%E6%81%AF&SelectStyle=%E5%8D%B3%E6%99%82%E8%BB%8D%E4%BA%8B%E5%8B%95%E6%85%8B>.

56 Lee, Yimou, and Davi Brunnstrom, (2022), "Chinese and Taiwanese Warships Shadow Each Other as Drills Due to End," *Reuters*, August 8, <https://www.reuters.com/world/taiwan-says-chinese-planes-ships-carry-out-attack-simulation-exercise-2022-08-06/>; and Feng, John, Lauren Giella, Meghan Roos, and Alex Backus, "China Military Drills Updates: FBI Calls China the Greatest Future Threat to U.S.," *Newsweek*, August 4, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-taiwan-live-military-exercises-today-missiles-pelosi-1730777>.

57 Fujian Maritime, (2023), "Special Joint Patrol Operation in Central and Northern Taiwan Strait Launched," *Fujian Maritime*, April 5, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/c-codJnpdrG0lclauvzqqQ>; and Fuzhou Daily Staff, (2022), "'Haixun 06' Vessel Begins its First Maritime Patrol for Law Enforcement," *Fuzhou Daily*, August 2, http://www.fuzhou.gov.cn/zwgk/gzdt/rcyw/202208/t20220802_4408520.htm.

58 "In response to the mainland's announcement that it will carry out cruise inspections of cross-strait direct flights and mini-three links, the Port Bureau has expressed our solemn protest through the channels of mini-three links and maritime minors and two meetings." Maritime and Port Bureau, MOTC, April 5, 2023, <https://www.motcmpb.gov.tw/Information/Detail/77644765-b312-43d6-a504-9674cbf3747b?SiteId=1&NodeId=15>.

Beijing did not escalate the situation by engaging Taiwanese assets.

The two coast guards did not end up coming in direct contact with each other in a standoff over the boarding of a Taiwanese-flagged vessel. Yet, Taiwan's Coast Guard was prepared for a direct confrontation to protect its sovereignty and people. This operation fits primarily on the indirect, rhetorical side of the spectrum as Taiwan issued a strongly worded protest and instructions for how Taiwanese vessels were to proceed. Taipei was prepared to move into the other extreme by directly confronting a PRC vessel seeking to board a Taiwanese ship, but it never occurred and cannot be fully characterized as a direct response.

Driving Out Sand Dredgers

For years, PRC sand dredgers have illegally sailed in Taiwanese waters⁵⁹ to remove sand from the seabed for eventual use in the creation of artificial islands. The dredging primarily occurs near Taiwan's offshore islands of Kinmen and Matsu, as well as near Penghu, located in the Taiwan Strait. The interactions between the sand dredgers and Taiwanese Coast Guard perhaps mark the most dangerous and direct form of confrontation between the PRC and Taiwan, even if the sand dredgers are operated by civilians. The number of sand dredgers crossing

into Taiwanese waters has sharply declined over the last few years: In 2020, Taiwan expelled 3,991 sand dredgers. The number decreased to 665 in 2021 and 224 in 2022.⁶⁰

These incidents, and others, such as the expulsion of illegal Chinese fighting boats, has at times pitted the Taiwanese Coast Guard against these vessels. In 2020, illegal fighting vessels attacked Taiwanese Coast Guard ships. The Chinese vessels rammed the Taiwanese ships, and crew members threw bottles and other objects at the Taiwanese personnel.⁶¹ It is important to note that these incidents did not occur over sand dredgers but marked a significant escalation by Chinese citizens. And such incidents could return and affect sand dredgers due to a new Taiwanese law.

In December 2023, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan amended the Sand and Gravel Excavation Act and the Act on the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf of the Republic of China to provide the Coast Guard with greater enforcement measures in combating illegal sand-dredging.⁶² The amendments allow the Coast Guard to confiscate vessels conducting illegal operations in Taiwan's waters.⁶³ In addition to the changes in Taiwan's laws, the Coast Guard has improved its tracking, received more vessels, and increased its patrols in an effort to clamp down on opportunities for sand dredgers to operate.⁶⁴ These new laws provide the

59 Lee, Yimou, (2021), "Troubled Waters: China's Latest Weapon Against Taiwan: The Sand Dredger," *Reuters*, February 5, <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/TAIWAN-CHINA/SECURITY/jbyvrnzerve/>.

60 Chun-lin, Hsieh, and Chen Yu-fu, (2023), "Illegal PRC Dredgers to be Confiscated," *Taipei Times*, December 19, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2023/12/19/2003810833>.

61 Pan, Jason, (2020), "Shots Fired as Chinese Boats Ram Coast Guard Ship," *Taipei Times*, March 22, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/03/22/2003733168>; and Panda, Ankit, (2020), "Taiwan Coast Guard Reports Chinese Speed Boat Harassment Near Kinmen," *The Diplomat*, March 23, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/taiwan-coast-guard-reports-chinese-speed-boat-harassment-near-kinmen/>.

62 Chun-lin, Hsieh, and Chen Yu-fu, (2023), "Illegal PRC Dredgers to be Confiscated," *Taipei Times*, December 19, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2023/12/19/2003810833>.

63 Wu, Ryan, and Sally Jensen, (2023), "Illegal Chinese Sand Dredgers To be Seized," *Taiwan Plus*, December 19, <https://www.taiwanplus.com/news/taiwan-news/taiwan-china-relations/231219009/illegal-chinese-sand-dredgers-to-be-seized>.

64 Shan, Shelley, (2023), "Coast Guard Expels 652 Chinese Boats," *Taipei Times*, October 27, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/10/27/2003808298>.

legal apparatus to further enforce Taiwan's sovereignty against these illegal actions, but could open up the possibilities of Chinese crews acting more aggressively in order to evade arrest, fines, and the seizure of their vessels.

Taiwan's response to the ongoing sand-dredging issue hits three of the four spaces on the spectrum: rhetoric, law, and law enforcement. Taiwan's government ministries and bureaus are quite vocal in condemning the persistent sand-dredging of its seabed. These statements and rhetoric focus on the violations of Taiwan's sovereignty as well as the significant environmental degradation of marine life in affected areas. The dredgers are quite literally stealing Taiwanese land and decreasing the size of the beaches on the offshore islands. In this example, however, Taipei has moved beyond simple rhetoric by actively changing laws to improve enforcement. Due to the recent legal changes, sand dredgers face imprisonment and asset seizure, tools that had not existed in previous years. And the sand-dredging example represents the rare instance in which Taiwan's law enforcement (Coast Guard) plays a central role in responding to this form of PRC coercion. The Coast Guard patrols the affected waters every day and regularly expels the dredgers (as well as illegal fishing boats), marking the most direct form of response that Taiwan utilizes.

The Bigger Picture

The examples discussed above analyze the immediate, specific responses that Taipei utilized, but neglect the longer-term trends and developments that were taken in response to the larger PRC military threat. These four examples tell only part of

<< Taiwan's government ministries and bureaus are quite vocal in condemning the persistent sand-dredging of its seabed. >>

the story, and the responses outlined in this report are a part of a multifaceted response to combat PRC coercion. Other incidents, such as the severing of internet cables to Matsu, demonstrate that Taiwan faces other threats in which it is difficult to verify the specific culprit,⁶⁵ as well as economic coercion that occurs in various forms. Beijing has utilized economic bans and boycotts⁶⁶ as a primary lever to instill pain on specific sectors of Taiwan's economy in retaliation for Taipei's attempts to expand its international space. Since Tsai took office, her administration has worked to improve Taiwan's overall defense through a variety of mechanisms: the changes to Taiwan's overall defense concept, increases in the defense budget, emphasis on asymmetric defense procurement and strategy, and an increase in mandatory service from four months to one year. The four examples fit within this larger picture. That is to say, providing the Coast Guard with additional ships to counter illegal sand-dredging and fishing in Taiwan's water is a part of the larger effort to defend Taiwan's sovereignty with cost-effective means. It makes little sense for Taipei to invest significant resources in an aircraft carrier as that does not fit within Taiwan's defense needs. Taiwan needs cheaper, smaller, and more mobile defense assets to serve its needs. Tsai's efforts to reform the country's defense policies and needs have been largely positive, but overall has had mixed success due to pushback from the traditional views within the MND.

65 Wu, Huizhong, and Johnson Lai, (2023), "Taiwan Suspects Chinese Ships Cut Islands' Internet Cables," *Associated Press*, April 18, <https://apnews.com/article/matsu-taiwan-internet-cables-cut-china-65f10f5f73a346fa788436366d7a7c70>.

66 Thornell, Christina, (2022), "How China Uses Fruit to Punish Taiwan," *Vox*, April 1, <https://www.vox.com/23006359/china-taiwan-import-ban-fruit-pineapple-ate-moya>; Shepherd, Christian, and Pei-Lin Wu, (2022), "Their Fruit Forbidden in China, Taiwan's Pomelo Growers Feel Squeeze," *The Washington Post*, August 29, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/29/china-import-ban-taiwan-fruit-pomelo/>; and Nai-Chuan, Lin, (2023), "Taiwan Farmers, Candidates Feel Effects of China's Limit on Fruit Exports," *VOA News*, November 22, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taiwan-farmers-candidates-feel-effects-of-china-s-limit-on-fruit-exports-/7366813.html>.

How the Philippines Responds to PRC Coercion

The Philippine response to PRC coercion has varied widely throughout the years, but under Marcos, Manila has become more resolute. It has employed all the options in the typology of possible responses proposed in this report. However, Marcos has pushed back against China more resolutely than his predecessor. Three particular changes are worth evaluating in-depth:

1. “Communicative activism,” or activities aimed at revealing and dramatizing PRC coercion to galvanize domestic and international support;
2. Joint patrols in the South China Sea with partners and allies; and
3. Significantly increased military presence of the United States.

Communicative Activism

The first type of response is “communicative activism,” or the deliberate and systematic release of photos and video for public consumption. Some analysts call it “assertive transparency.”⁶⁷ This also includes the increase in the vilification of China in the House of Representatives and Senate of the Philippines, as well as in civil society groups and proponents of the Atin “To (or “This Is Ours”)” movement. The Atin “To specifically install nationalistic billboards on major thoroughfares in metro Manila.

Communicative activism reveals and dramatizes the PRC incursions and bullying in the disputed waters. This comes against the backdrop of media censorship during the Duterte administration. In 2021,⁶⁸ Duterte prohibited his cabinet members from holding public discussions on the West Philippines Sea. Moreover, while Duterte strengthened PCG personnel,⁶⁹ he focused more on the agency’s domestic role, particularly in tourism and terrorism. He also utilized the PCG to maintain relations with the PRC through initiatives, such as the establishment of the Joint Coast Guard Committee on Maritime Cooperation by the Philippines and China. The Marcos administration has taken the opposite approach. It has publicized dramatic video recordings and photos of the swarming, dangerous maneuvers, and water cannon incidents. The objective is to galvanize a domestic and international audience against China by placing its gray zone tactics under the spotlight.

Philippine Speaker of the House of Representatives Martin Romualdez, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, Senate Majority Leader Joel Villanueva, and Senate Deputy Minority Leader Risa Hontiveros criticized the PRC incursions. In 2023, Congress adopted resolutions that condemned the PRC, detailing its illegal activities that have become increasingly dangerous. The Senate even called on Marcos to expel Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian for hostile remarks.⁷⁰ Legislators’ resolutions demonstrate these efforts to strongly condemn China and assert the 2016 arbitral ruling, complementing the DFA’s constant filing of diplomatic protests putting PRC’s illegal actions on the record. The PCG and the AFP launched a transparency initiative, which brings

67 Powell, Ray, (2023), “Assertive Transparency: The Philippines Counter Grey Zone Operations,” *Sealight*, October 23, <https://www.sealight.live/posts/assertive-transparency-the-philippines-counter-gray-zone-innovation>.

68 Al Jazeera and New Agencies, (2021), “Duterte Bans Philippines Cabinet from Speaking on South China Sea,” *Al Jazeera*, May 18, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/18/philippines-duterte-issues-gag-order-over-south-china-sea>.

69 Tariella, Jay Tristan, (2018), “How Does Duterte Use the Philippine Coast Guard?” *The Diplomat*, January 4, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/how-does-duterte-use-the-philippine-coast-guard/>.

70 Brar, Aadil, (2023), “Lawmaker Reveals Chinese Ambassador’s Threat: ‘Don’t Provoke Us,’” *Newsweek*, December 14, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-philippines-ambassador-huang-xilian-south-china-sea-threat-persona-non-grata-1852296>.

more attention to PRC incursions and counters its disinformation campaign.⁷¹ This initiative even involved granting journalists access to maritime patrols where they witnessed CCG and CMM bullying. On top of this, civilians have taken a more active role in defending national security as shown by Atin 'To. In December 2023, the Atin 'To Coalition orchestrated a Christmas caravan that brought gifts and supplies to soldiers and fishermen in Ayungin, Patag, and Lawak.

Various agencies sought a politically dramatic realignment of the national budget to fund external and maritime defense. Budget deliberations at the House of Representatives led to the realignment of P1.23 billion from controversial, confidential funds in the proposed budget of the Office of the Vice President, the Department of Education, and three other agencies.⁷² These were instead earmarked for defense offices, such as the PCG, National Security Council, and National Intelligence Coordinating Agency.

Communicative activism primarily falls on the far left (rhetoric and media) and far right (military and law enforcement) on the spectrum. It also has elements in the middle of the spectrum with diplomatic and legal moves. The AFP directly confronts the CCG and CMM in the South China Sea; such confrontations often result in Chinese personnel ramming or water-cannoning Philippine assets. These confrontations are then publicized widely in mass media to show firsthand accounts. Filipino politicians then amplify these accounts, which has resulted in discussions about possible changes to laws and funding pools. Marcos himself addressed

these issues to Xi, demonstrating the far-reaching diplomatic nature of the Philippines' response.

Joint Patrols and Exercises with Strategic Partners and Allies

Since 2022, Manila has enlisted the help of strategic partners and allies in patrolling the waters claimed by the Philippines in the South China Sea. The Philippines has generally increased its patrols and maritime training and activities, but the more consistent and active involvement of allies, especially the United States, is currently underway.⁷³ In October 2023, the Philippines held the *Sama-Sama* (together) exercise, two weeks of joint naval and maritime drills with the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan.⁷⁴ In November 2023, the United States and the Philippines held joint military drills near the disputed waters.

Table 1 summarizes the major joint exercises that Manila has carried out with allies and partners.

Manila is also in the process of negotiating an agreement with Japan that's comparable to the Philippines' Visiting Forces Agreements with the United States and Australia. The November 2023 meeting on the planned Reciprocal Access Agreement closed with the Philippines and Japan agreeing to reach an early conclusion to the negotiations.

The joint patrols fall on the right side of the spectrum by utilizing allies and partners and Philippine military personnel. Allies play a role

71 Atienza, Kyle Aristophere, (2023), "Manila's 'Transparency Initiative' Working vs China," *BusinessWorld*, October 8, https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2023/10/08/550380/manilas-transparency-initiative-working-vs-china/#google_vignette.

72 Lalu, Gabriel Pabico, (2023), "PCG to Use Add'l Confidential Funds to Boost West Philippine Sea Protection," *Inquirer.Net*, November 7, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/222203/fwd-pcg-on-possible-higher-fund-for-2024>.

73 Reuters, (2024), "Philippine Military Says Second Joint Patrol With US Underway in South China Sea," *US News and World Report*, January 3, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2024-01-03/philippine-military-says-second-joint-patrol-with-us-underway-in-south-china-sea>.

74 Lema, Karen, and Mikhail Flores, (2023), "Philippines, Allies Kick Off Naval Drills Amid Asia-Pacific Tension," *Reuters*, October 2, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-allies-kick-off-naval-drills-amid-asia-pacific-tension-2023-10-02/>.

Table 1: Joint Military Exercises

Joint Drills and Patrols	Military Personnel and Assets
Sama-Sama Exercise October 2023	<p>For the seventh iteration of Maritime Training Activity Sama-Sama, the US Navy, US Marine Corps, and AFP were joined by Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and the United Kingdom.</p> <p>Among the assets employed during the drills were the US Navy's dry cargo ammunition ship USNS Wally Schirra (T-AKE 8), Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Dewey (DDG 105), and a maritime surveillance aircraft P-8 Poseidon along with the Philippine Navy's BRP Antonio Luna (FF 151), Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force's JS Akebono (DD 108), and the Royal Canadian Navy frigate HMCS Vancouver (FFG -331).</p>
Lumbas Exercise July 2023	<p>The twenty-third iteration of the week-long Lumbas Exercise between the Philippine Navy and Royal Australian Navy.</p>
Balikatan Exercise April 2023	<p>The thirty-eighth iteration of the exercise was the largest Balikatan to date, with more than 17,600 participants from the AFP and the US military, of which 5,400 were AFP personnel and 12,200 were US military personnel.</p>
Sama-Sama-Lumbas Multilateral Exercises October 2022	<p>The first time the Philippine Navy and US Navy (Sama-Sama) and the Philippine Navy and Royal Australian Navy (Lumbas) multilateral exercise was held.</p> <p>Military personnel from France, Japan, and the United Kingdom were also present during the eight-day exercise.</p> <p>The joint drill saw the deployment of PN frigate BRP Jose Rizal (FF 150), USN Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Milius (DDG 69), RAN destroyer HMAS Hobart (DDG 39), replenishment oiler HMAS Stalwart (A 304), Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer JS Kirisame (DD 104), and Royal Navy offshore patrol vessel HMS Spey (P 234).</p>
Balikatan Exercise April 2022	<p>The thirty-seventh iteration of the annual bilateral exercise was the first time the Balikatan exercise was held after two years of the pandemic.</p> <p>Nearly 9,000 AFP and US military personnel participated in the two-week joint drill. More than fifty aircraft, four ships, ten amphibious craft, four HIMARS rocket system launchers, and four Patriot missile systems were deployed.</p>

in the response, but given the limitations in those joint missions, the AFP is still on its own for the most dangerous missions. These patrols send a strong message of support for Manila's sovereignty against consistent PRC coercion. With the US and other navies conducting joint patrols with Philippine vessels in disputed areas, the CCG and CMM do not engage the Philippine vessels in the same dangerous ways (rammings, water cannons, etc.) as when they operate unilaterally, providing a more stable and safe mechanism for Manila to project power in the disputed regions. However, these joint patrols do not include RoRe missions, so the Philippine military is still left to its own devices in this regard. As PRC coercion intensifies, Manila may

pressure the United States and other countries to conduct joint RoRe missions to further limit PRC coercion.

Increased Military Presence of the United States

The extent of recent cooperation between the Philippines and the United States in qualitative terms seems to be unprecedented. Marcos has created perhaps the most elaborate bilateral security partnership since the initiatives under President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who established a partnership during Global War on Terror to defeat Islamic

radicals in the southern Philippines. Since 2022, the US footprint in the Philippines and South China Sea has grown largely due to Marcos's desire for a stronger relationship. His first year in office saw the acceleration of project developments⁷⁵ in the five existing EDCA sites, which include the construction of training facilities and warehouses. As of April 2023, only five projects were reported to have been completed, while eight of the sixteen remaining projects were in advanced stages.⁷⁶

Marcos expanded EDCA from the initial 2016 arrangement, which created five locations in the Philippines that the US military could develop, by adding four more in strategic locations. The initial EDCA locations included the Cesar Basa Air Base in Pampanga, Fort Magsaysay Military Reservation in Nueva Ecija, Lumbia Air Base in Cagayan de Oro, Antonio Bautista Air Base in Palawan, and Mactan Benito Ebuen Air Base in Cebu. The Department of Defense had allocated \$82 million to develop the initial five sites.

In 2023, Marcos announced the addition of Naval Base Camilo Osias in Santa Ana, Cagayan; Lal-lo Airport in Cagayan; Camp Melchor Dela Cruz in Gamu, Isabela; and Balabac Island in Palawan.⁷⁷ In October 2023, the two countries approved sixty-three additional projects across the nine EDCA sites.⁷⁸ The development of the sites has taken new urgency with the increased tensions in the South China Sea since Marcos took office.

The expanded presence of the United States throughout the Philippines and disputed areas falls on the right side of the spectrum (allies and partners) as it represents Manila's desire for greater US investment in Philippine security. These sorts of investments—mainly through EDCA—do not necessarily represent the same type of support as the joint patrols as these investments focus on building out Philippine military infrastructure and capabilities, not directly challenging PRC assets in the South China Sea. The two are intertwined but can be analyzed separately.

75 Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, (2023), "More than Meets the Eye: Philippine Upgrades at EDCA Sites," October 12, <https://amti.csis.org/more-than-meets-the-eye-philippine-upgrades-at-edca-sites/>.

76 Ibid.

77 Bacelonia, Wilnard, (2023), "New EDCA Sites Aim to Protect Entire PH, Galvez Assures Senators," *Philippine News Agency*, April 19, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1199716>.

78 Mendoza, John Eric, (2023), "PH, US Agree to 63 More Projects Inside All EDCA Sites-Browner," *Inquirer.Net*, October 19, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/221038/ph-us-agree-to-63-more-projects-inside-all-edca-sites-browner>.

Policy Recommendations and Response Toolkit

This report has attempted to evaluate and analyze how Manila and Taipei have responded to PRC coercion. The PLA, CCG, and CMM have more manpower and resources than the Taiwanese and Philippine militaries and coast guards, so these two countries must make conscious decisions on how to respond to coercive actions. Because the two example countries and other countries facing similar circumstances will have different military capacities, budgets, and capabilities, these hard power variations cannot be ignored. The toolkit developed in this section attempts to standardize the ways in which any country can respond to military coercion. A country with an extremely weak naval element will not be able to perform the actions that Taiwan or the Philippines has—even though these two militaries are not top tier.⁷⁹

As the analysis has shown, both Taipei and Manila attempt to limit the degree of direct interactions their militaries have with the various Chinese entities that carry out coercion. And Beijing, for its part, has made the decision to limit direct confrontation against Taiwan given the risks for escalation, but such “restraint” has not applied to the Philippines.

It is important to emphasize that neither Taipei nor Manila has the strength or resources to

completely push Chinese assets and personnel out of its space, and one could argue that their responses have largely been failures since the coercion persists. That is why this report exists: to provide a framework for less-resourced countries to utilize unique and asymmetric options against better-resourced competitors and adversaries. The case studies of Taiwan and the Philippines provide two examples for how countries facing similar circumstances could choose to respond to military coercion. Not every sort of response from these two countries may work in other situations, but they show the successes and failures to deter further coercion from a larger power. These responses do not guarantee success, but they do demonstrate to domestic and international audiences that the government intends to protect the nation’s people and sovereignty within its means.

Countries facing similar challenges should:

1. Utilize mass and major media as quickly as possible, for as long as possible.

The ability of a country to garner international media attention as quickly as possible when faced with coercive actions—such as PRC incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ and the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone—puts immediate pressure on the

79 Lowy Institute, “Asia Power Index, 2023 Edition,” <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/>.

aggressor to back down in the face of clear evidence. Publicizing these incidents and getting them featured as major stories is a low-cost response that does not put citizens or military personnel in direct danger. Media reports also force the aggressor to respond to the evidence and make it difficult to deny that they occurred. When diplomats from authoritarian governments are forced to address the incidents, they engage in Orwellian rhetorical gymnastics to deny them. The drawback to this approach, despite its low cost, is that after a period of time, the type of coercion stops being major news and gets ignored.

Major news outlets used to report on large-scale PRC ADIZ incursions as they occurred, but such incursions have now become so routine that they are not really newsworthy and headline-grabbing. The coercion persists but out of the spotlight. The Philippines has received a lot of attention for its novel approach with “communicative activism,” but as the incidents continue to occur, they will become more routine and receive less international coverage.

To get as much attention as possible, countries should invite reporters to the affected areas so they can independently verify and document the incidents in real time. Taking high-quality images and videos also provides easily accessible evidence for people to see and make their own judgments. Creating open and accessible databases makes covering these topics and subsequent scholarly work easier for outside parties to continue focusing on the incidents.

2. Involve high-level politicians and government officials in responses.

When faced with direct confrontation with an adversary (such as military-to-military interactions), countries should consider placing high-level, well-liked, and charismatic politicians and government officials on vessels or in the area. These individuals can then go out and directly speak about the

incidents and dangers of the coercive actions. Their presence can also in certain circumstances lower the threat of direct engagement by the stronger country—assuming it does not seek to escalate and only wishes to coerce. There is a certain level of risk in this option, but when considering gray zone tactics, it is unlikely that the aggressor would risk escalation by directly attacking or killing such a politician.

In one recent example, Philippines’ Special Envoy to China and former Foreign Minister Teddy Locsin participated in a RoRe mission to the BRP *Sierra Madre* to witness the PRC coercion firsthand. He was able to document and witness the PRC actions and then discuss them with the media and Marcos directly. Granted, such a tactic puts these individuals’ safety at risk, but when faced with such threats, it may take such an action to protect the military personnel. It also sends a message to the military and public that the politicians care about these issues and that they are not being left to go at it alone.

3. Internationalize the issue as quickly as possible.

By making the coercion more costly by bringing in allies, partners, and international organizations as quickly as possible, the targeted country will increase the monetary and reputational costs and risks to the coercing actor. Not every country has capable and reliable allies and partners that they can call on to support them in the face of coercion. However, United Nations members have the luxury of speaking to the General Assembly about the coercive threats if they do not have the direct support of other countries. Utilizing international diplomacy can have the benefit of “naming and shaming” the coercers, and in certain circumstances, even drafting UN resolutions to condemn the actions or punish the actors could change behavior.

Some countries, such as Taiwan, do not have formal treaty allies or UN membership to utilize

against coercive actors. Yet, Taipei has successfully internationalized its security vis-à-vis Beijing so that informal partners and diplomatic allies have invested in attempting to stabilize the situation by transiting the Taiwan Strait, speaking up at the UN on Taiwan's behalf, sending high-level political and business delegations to signal support, and directly pressing Beijing to reduce tensions.

The more international actors care about the issue, the more likely they are to carry out low-cost actions to support them. It can come in various forms; for the Philippines, it is joint patrols and rhetorical statements. If a country can make the case that its security and stability is beneficial to the international community or global economy, then it will likely have greater success. As with the case of the media, there is a limited timeframe for these types of actions to have success. Resources from third parties, especially non-treaty allies, will eventually get directed to other, more pressing crises.

4. Force direct confrontation on suitable terms.

While these recommendations are tailored to countries facing certain levels of power asymmetry, that does not necessarily entirely preclude such nations from ever using force or directly confronting the competitor. No country is completely helpless in these circumstances, so there are occasions where it would be appropriate to not back down when faced with direct confrontation. In the case of the Philippines, there may be future circumstances where the PCG finds itself in a favorable situation against the CCG or CMM and where directly engaging may be a fruitful option. Such a decision may escalate and spiral out of control, but defending sovereign territory should be taken seriously against such threats; otherwise, the powerful competitor may believe that the weaker country will not defend its interests with force. This is the most extreme option and should be taken as a last-resort measure.

Conclusion

This report has attempted to develop a framework to analyze how Taiwan and the Philippines have responded to constant, pervasive PRC coercion against their territories. By analyzing and categorizing these types of responses, similarities, and differences, as well as successes and failures, can become more apparent. This analysis has resulted in the creation of a toolkit of possible responses that other countries facing similar circumstances can implement to combat coercion.

These responses are not limited to how Taipei and Manila can successfully respond to PRC coercion in the future. The goal of the report is to provide a country like Vietnam, which faces similar challenges as the Philippines in the South China

Sea, options to determine how to respond to PRC coercion. Another current example is Guyana, which is on the receiving end of pressure from Venezuela over territorial disputes. By further publicizing and internationalizing the issue, Guyana has been able to create a supportive coalition against Venezuela's claims. The purpose of studying the issue and creating the toolkit allows for a generalization of asymmetric responses by smaller powers. Granted, these examples include aerial and maritime coercion and exclude land issues, so future studies could focus on how countries facing similar circumstances without the benefit of maritime boundaries—which provide a certain level of a buffer against the more powerful state—address these types of coercion.



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