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# Has the South China Sea Become Turbulent Because of the Taiwan Issue?<sup>1</sup>

## Analysis of China-Philippines Relations in 2023-2024

### China-Taiwan Study Group Commentary No. 5

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## Introduction

In recent years, as China has intensified its military activities around Taiwan, the Xi Jinping regime's intentions to unify Taiwan and related pressures on Taiwan have attracted public attention,<sup>2</sup> but U.S.-China competition over the Philippines, which is located south of Taiwan, and the Philippines' response to that competition have received disproportionately little attention. In April 2023, the Philippine government granted additional U.S. military access to four Philippine military bases, including two in northern Luzon Island near Taiwan, under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the United States. From February 2023, when this decision was announced, to the present day of writing this commentary in February 2025, the Philippines continues to suffer from increasingly intensified non-military coercion by China in the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea). There appears to be a correlation between the U.S.-China competition over Taiwan and China's pressure on the Philippines in the South China Sea.

Derek Grossman, Senior Defense Analyst of the U.S. research organization RAND, argues that the Philippines, which has previously prioritized domestic security issues such as the Mindanao conflict and China's encroachment into the Philippines' exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea, is now focusing on the external threat of a future Taiwan contingency.<sup>3</sup> However, while his observation that the U.S. and the Philippines would jointly respond to China's unification of Taiwan reflects U.S. expectations for the Philippines, there remains a gap between these expectations and the Philippines' actual stance toward China in recent years.

This commentary will therefore focus on the situation in the Philippines at the nexus of the South China Sea and the Taiwan issue from the following three perspectives and will examine whether the South China Sea became turbulent due to the Taiwan issue in 2023-2024. What are the Philippines' security priorities regarding China? How do China and the Philippines relate the Taiwan issue to the South China Sea issue? How can the success or failure of China's pressure on the Philippines be assessed?

## Differences in Strategic Interests between the U.S. and the Philippines

The threat of China has encouraged security cooperation between the Philippines and the United States. This security cooperation was no exception in the generally China-friendly Rodrigo Duterte administration. Philippine-U.S. security cooperation made progress after a threatening act in 2019 by China in which more than 200 Chinese fishing boats gathered around Thitu Island (which Manila calls “Pag-asa”<sup>4</sup>, which the Philippines effectively controls, in the Spratly Islands. In March 2019, the first term of the Trump administration, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made clear for the first time that the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines would be applied to the South China Sea.<sup>5</sup> Secretary Pompeo’s statement marked a shift in the traditional U.S. position<sup>6</sup> that excluded the Kalayaan Islands (Spratly Islands), which were first legally incorporated into Philippine territory in 1978, from the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines. The statement clarified that the U.S. will not tolerate China’s challenges to the rule of law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The year 2019, when the United States made clear its commitment to the defense of the Philippines in the South China Sea, was also the year that the Xi Jinping regime confirmed its goal of Taiwan unification. On January 2, 2019, in a key speech commemorating the 40th anniversary of the issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan, General Secretary Xi Jinping declared “We do not renounce the use of force” against Taiwan.<sup>7</sup> According to the report entitled “U.S. Department of Defense’s Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020,” the Chinese government has openly denied the existence of a “median line” across the Taiwan Strait by significantly increasing the number of Chinese air force aircraft entering inside Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ) after 2020.<sup>8</sup>

With China’s increased military activities around Taiwan, the Taiwan issue has emerged as a focus of U.S.-China competition. This development can be said to have made the strategic importance of the Philippines, which faces the South China Sea and is located south of Taiwan, more important than ever for both the U.S. and China. Facing Taiwan across the Bashi Channel, the Philippines is the closest country to Taiwan other than mainland China. The Philippines’ northernmost island, Mavudis (Yami) Island, is only 99 kilometers away from Orchid (Lanyu) Island, located southeast of the main island of Taiwan.

In November 2021, the U.S. and the Philippines announced the Joint Vision for a 21st Century United States-Philippines Partnership. This announcement meant that the Duterte administration, which had taken a conciliatory stance toward China, had turned to security cooperation with the U.S. to deal with China in the South China Sea. Here, the U.S. and the Philippines confirmed first the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines, the 1998 Philippines–United States Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), and the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) as the three pillars of security cooperation. Second, the joint vision clearly stated that any armed attack against either the U.S. or the Philippines in the Pacific region,

including the South China Sea, would be covered by the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines. Third, the joint vision confirmed the U.S.-Philippines opposition to China's expansionist claims in the South China Sea based on the 2016 decision of the International Court of Arbitration regarding the dispute between the Philippines and China over the South China Sea (the 2016 arbitral award). The joint vision made clear that the U.S.-Philippines partnership supports Philippine interests in the South China Sea and also paved the way for a future expanded U.S. military presence in the Philippines by confirming the VFA and EDCA as pillars of security cooperation.

However, President Duterte cautioned that the Philippines does not fully share strategic interests with the U.S. Although the new joint vision for the U.S.-Philippines partnership proclaimed that both countries would address common challenges they face in the future, President Duterte said, "We do not have the [Taiwan]—except 'yung South China Sea issue," emphasizing that the Philippines would remain neutral in any conflict between China and Taiwan.<sup>9</sup>

As the U.S.-China competition over Taiwan develops, the Philippines, which needs U.S. cooperation to deter China in the South China Sea, may come under pressure from the United States to accept U.S. requests to deter China from unifying Taiwan. In fact, Gregory Poling, senior fellow in charge of the Southeast Asia region at the U.S. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), once pointed out that U.S. forces cannot be expected to defend the Philippines in the South China Sea unless the Philippines supports the United States in a regional conflict.<sup>10</sup> President Duterte's statement in late December 2021 speaks for the Philippines' mixed feelings about being forced by the U.S. to side with the U.S. in a U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan as the "cost" of gaining U.S. cooperation in the South China Sea.

The Marcos administration, which took office in June 2022, is also concerned about being drawn into the U.S.-China competition over Taiwan. When the Chinese People's Liberation Army began military exercises on an unprecedented scale on August 4, 2022, shortly after U.S. Speaker of the U.S. House of Representative Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs immediately issued a brief statement calling for restraint from all concerned countries and stated that the Philippines would uphold the "One China" policy.<sup>11</sup> After concluding his visit to Japan in February 2023, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said that he could hardly imagine a scenario in which the Philippines would not be involved in a dispute over Taiwan due to its geographic location, but that the Philippines' priority was the 150,000 Filipino workers in Taiwan. He also said that safeguarding the Philippines' territorial waters in the disputed South China Sea is central to efforts to step up security arrangements with the U.S. and Japan.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, even in the Marcos administration, the Philippines' central security challenge with respect to China continues to be China's challenge in the South China Sea. Certainly, the Marcos administration is becoming increasingly alarmed by China's scenario of Taiwan unification, but its priority as the Philippine government is to ensure the safety and evacuation of Filipinos in Taiwan, rather than to deter Taiwan unification by intimidating China. The strategic interests of the U.S.,

which wants to militarily take advantage of the Philippines' geographical proximity to Taiwan, and the Philippines are not completely aligned.

## Taiwan Issue and the South China Sea: Interconnected Challenges

China has not been able to capitalize on the differences in strategic interests between the U.S. and the Philippines, and when President Xi Jinping agreed to 14 cooperation deals with President Marcos during his visit to China in early January 2023, including a crisis management mechanism in the South China Sea, China was taking a smart diplomatic stance to keep President Marcos away from the United States. Additionally, China had succeeded in keeping President Marcos satisfied. However, in February 2023, a few days after the U.S. and the Philippines announced the addition of four new Philippine military bases accessible to U.S. forces under the EDCA, China directed a China Coast Guard vessel to aim a military-grade laser at a Philippine Coast Guard ship near Second Thomas Shoal. Following the announcement of the four additional EDCA bases by the U.S. and Philippine governments, China appeared to have moved away from its previous diplomatic stance at the time of Marcos' visit to China—where it had sought to favor the Marcos administration and pull it away from the U.S.—and instead began applying obvious pressure on the Philippines.

The laser irradiation incident did not stop the Marcos administration's security cooperation with the U.S. In April 2023, the Office of the President of the Philippines announced that the four additional EDCA bases were the Naval Base Camilo Osias in Cagayan Province in northern Luzon Island near Taiwan; Lal-lo Airport in the same province; Camp Melchor F. dela Cruz in northeastern Isabela Province; and Balabac Island in the western province of Palawan.

The Philippine government has stressed that the four new EDCA bases will be used for the benefit of the Philippines. President Marcos explained that the four additional EDCA sites are for disaster response and that the U.S. has not broached the idea of using them for Taiwan support operations.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, by reiterating its adherence to the One China policy, the Philippine government was intending to convince China that its security cooperation with the U.S. was not an interference in the Taiwan issue.<sup>14</sup>

China, however, confronted the Philippines with the message that the cost of cooperation in security policy leading to U.S. support for Taiwan would be high. First, China stoked fears in the Philippines of becoming embroiled in a U.S.-China confrontation over Taiwan. Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian insisted that the Philippines should clearly oppose Taiwan independence and should not open its "military bases"<sup>15</sup> near Taiwan to the U.S. military if the Philippines is concerned about the safety of 150,000 Filipino workers in Taiwan.<sup>16</sup> Second, throughout 2023-2024, China continued to pressure the Philippines in the South China Sea. The laser irradiation incident by a China Coast Guard vessel in February 2023 was only the beginning of China's coercion on the Marcos administration in the South China Sea. Since August 2023, around Second Thomas Shoal and Scarborough Shoal, Chinese vessels continued to severely obstruct the Philippine Coast Guard and the navigation of Philippine fishing boats by high-pressure water guns

and deliberate collisions.

Under China's severe pressure in the South China Sea, President Marcos attempted to persuade China. He joined the U.S. and Japanese foreign ministers in January 2024 to congratulate Lai Ching-te on his election as Taiwan's president but had the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs state its adherence to the One China policy.<sup>17</sup> President Marcos himself subsequently made it clear that he would adhere to the One China policy and would not support Taiwan independence. At this time, President Marcos suggested that the government of the Philippines regards the method of future reunification is an internal affair of China, by making an in-depth statement, "Taiwan is a province of China but the manner in which they will be brought together again is an internal matter."<sup>18</sup> He President Marcos' statement suggesting that he would leave the decision on future reunification to China is clearly different from the position of the U.S. and Japan, which oppose the use or threat of force for Taiwan unification. As of January 2024, President Marcos appears to have been trying to defuse the situation in which China was pressuring the Philippines in the South China Sea by emphasizing that the Philippines was not interfering in the Taiwan issue.

## Developments in 2024

From its perspective, China would have found no positive reason to accept President Marcos' persuasion. First, in the Joint Vision Statement from the Leaders of Japan, the Philippines, and the United States issued at the first Japan-U.S.-Philippines Summit in April 2024, the three leaders not only expressed serious concern over China's dangerous and aggressive behavior in the South China Sea but also clearly stated that they would encourage a peaceful resolution of the cross-strait issue.<sup>19</sup> This statement would have reinforced China's belief that the three countries, Japan, the U.S., and the Philippines, are jointly intervening in the Taiwan issue.<sup>20</sup> Second, in advance of the 2024 U.S.-Philippines joint military exercise "Balikatan," the U.S. Army deployed the "Typhon" ground-based intermediate-range missile launch system in northern Luzon Island, near Taiwan.<sup>21</sup> Toward the end of August 2024, a senior Philippine military official explained that the Typhon remained deployed in the Philippines for training purposes, while China opposed the deployment, saying it would increase tensions in the region.<sup>22</sup>

China's pressure in the South China Sea reached its peak on June 17, 2024, when a Philippine Navy serviceman engaged in supply operations at Second Thomas Shoal lost his thumb due to China Coast Guard's interference. In addition, shortly after the incident, China intimidated the Philippines by sending the 12,000-ton China Coast Guard ship 5901, nicknamed "Monster," to sail near Second Thomas Shoal and the adjacent Sabina Shoal.<sup>23</sup>

The Philippine government, while condemning China, did not identify the clash as an armed attack that would trigger the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines<sup>24</sup> and sought to ease tensions through diplomacy with China. On July 21, 2024, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs announced that China and the Philippines had signed a "provisional agreement" over the supply mission to the Philippine warship Sierra Madre, which is

stranded on the Second Thomas Shoal.<sup>25</sup>

China's pressure on the Philippines in 2023-2024 achieved important results. First, China has demonstrated that the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines is ineffective in curbing China's gray zone tactics, particularly with regard to China Coast Guard and maritime militia ships. As Admiral Samuel Paparo, Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command stated that the U.S. military was ready to discuss the escort of Philippine vessels,<sup>26</sup> there were calls in the United States to consider invoking Article III of the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines, which provides for bilateral consultations to be held when problems arise.<sup>27</sup> However, the Philippine government took a cautious stance toward this U.S. idea. Chief of Staff General Romeo Brawner, the top military officer in the Philippines, responded to Admiral Paparo's statement by saying that for the supply mission, "We will depend on ourselves first," and President Marcos also said that there are no circumstances under which the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines should be invoked at this time.<sup>28</sup> Philippine National Security Adviser Eduardo Año said that President Marcos' directive at this time is that there is no need for direct U.S. military involvement in the supply mission and that it is purely a Philippine mission.<sup>29</sup> He indicated that the Philippines would not seek escort of Philippine supply ships by the U.S. military for a time. The Philippine government did not want to invoke the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines, which would escalate tensions with China.

Second, the fact that the Philippines had to proceed to negotiate a provisional agreement with China to ensure the security of supplies to Second Thomas Shoal signified the success of China's salami-slicing strategy. Moreover, China's pressure on the Philippines in the South China Sea did not stop even after the provisional agreement was concluded. A notable example of this pressure is that Chinese vessels cut off the supply of Philippine Coast Guard patrol vessels at Sabina Shoal, which is adjacent to Second Thomas Shoal, forcing the Philippine side to withdraw from the area in September 2024. In addition, in December 2024, China Coast Guard vessels also used high-pressure water guns against the Philippine Coast Guard around Scarborough Shoal.

However, the recent pressure from China does not signify a unilateral China victory. First, a poll conducted in the Philippines in October 2024 showed that China's manipulation of Philippine public opinion to stoke fears of being drawn into U.S. intervention in Taiwan had failed, at least in the short term: 73% of respondents said they would not vote for pro-China candidates in the midterm elections scheduled for May 2025. The United States (79%) was the most trusted partner for Philippine national development, followed by Japan (50%), with only 1% saying China.<sup>30</sup> In another poll, 84% of Filipinos supported the Marcos administration's initiative to defend Philippine sovereignty, sovereign rights, and maritime jurisdiction, although there were regional differences.<sup>31</sup> At least in the short term, the Filipino public will continue to support the Marcos administration's security policy of cooperation with the U.S. and Japan.

Second, China's pressure on the Philippine supply mission at Second Thomas Shoal resulted in

further U.S. and Japan support for the Philippines. On November 19, 2024, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Palawan Island on the occasion of the signing of the U.S.-Philippines General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), revealing that a U.S. military unit named “Task Force Ayungin” is deployed there. The Philippine National Security Adviser emphasizes that replenishing Second Thomas Shoal has always been a Philippine operation, but the U.S. military’s Task Force Ayungin is said to be helping the Philippines assess the maritime situation with unmanned vehicles and other equipment. Japan also announced on December 5, 2024 that it will provide alert monitoring equipment to the Philippine Navy and Air Force.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

The strategic importance of the Philippines, located south of Taiwan, has increased as the Taiwan issue has become the focus of U.S.-China competition. However, the Philippines’ top security priority with respect to China continues to be China’s challenge in the South China Sea. Although the Marcos administration has become increasingly concerned about a Taiwan contingency scenario, its concern is more with the safety of the 150,000 Filipino workers in Taiwan than it is with intimidating China. In other words, the U.S. desire to take advantage of the Philippines’ geographical advantages militarily concerning Taiwan and the Philippine government’s intention to use the U.S. military presence at home for the benefit of the Philippines do not necessarily perfectly coincide.

In 2023-2024, however, China hardened its attitude, recognizing that the increased U.S. military presence at Philippine military bases under the EDCA would lead to support for Taiwan. This recognition led China to refrain from taking advantage of the difference in strategic interests between the Philippines and the United States. While enduring China’s intense pressure in the West Philippine Sea, the Philippines appears to have tried to convince China that its security cooperation with the U.S. was not an intervention by the Philippines in the Taiwan issue by emphasizing its adherence to the One China policy. However, China’s continued overt pressure on the Philippines appears to have resulted in a backlash from Philippine public opinion which led to further support from the U.S. and Japan for the Philippines.

As of February 2025, at the time of writing this commentary, the tensions that had been rising in recent years surrounding the Philippines appear to have eased to a certain extent. First, as noted in this commentary, China’s pressure on the Philippines in the South China Sea was intense in 2024, but the Chinese government imperceptibly stopped criticizing the Philippines in relation to the Taiwan issue. Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian made a statement on April 15, 2023, suggesting that China would not guarantee the safety of 150,000 Filipino workers in Taiwan, which exerted strong intimidation in Philippine society. However, no further statement to the same effect has been confirmed since then. In December 2024, Ambassador Huang highlighted the success story of China’s economic development in front of Chinese and Philippine media.<sup>33</sup> On the surface, the central issue in China-Philippine relations in 2024 seems to have shifted to tensions in the South China Sea, and the relevance of a Taiwan contingency seems less apparent.

Second, on January 16, 2025, the governments of China and the Philippines agreed to continue the provisional agreement on the resupply of warships at Second Thomas Shoal. Although there was a brief period of heightened tension on Sabina Shoal after the July 2024 provisional agreement between the two countries, China has not interfered with Philippine resupply efforts at Second Thomas Shoal.

Third, on January 23, 2025, Reuters reported that the U.S. Army had moved a “medium-range missile launch system” from Laoag Airfield on Luzon Island to another location on the island, according to Philippine government officials.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, China’s intimidation of the Philippines continues in different forms: for a month beginning in early January 2025, China continued to intimidate the Philippines by bringing the 12,000-ton China Coast Guard ship 5901 close to the Zambales coast west of Luzon Island. In response, President Marcos said he would return the Typhon to the United States if China stopped pressuring the Philippines.<sup>35</sup>

It is relatively clear that while China applied strong pressure on the Philippines in the South China Sea in 2024, it quietly stopped criticizing the Philippines in connection with the Taiwan issue. Although in February 2025 the Chinese government protested to the Philippines about the remaining Typhons on Philippine soil, the points of its criticism were limited to general content such as geopolitical conflict and the risk of military expansion in the region, without mentioning the Taiwan issue.<sup>36</sup> This criticism is clearly different from the 2023 statement, which strongly criticized Philippine security policy for leading to U.S. military intervention in Taiwan.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This commentary is written based on the article named below which discusses the history of China’s maritime policy. However, unlike that article, this commentary focuses on the recent tensions in China-Philippine relations. Aki Mouri, “*Minami-shinakai ni Sasu Taiwan Mondai no Kage* [The Taiwan Issue Casts a Long Shadow in the South China Sea: Explaining the Development of Maritime Policy in China’s Security Strategy],” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 71, Issue 1, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> In March 2021, U.S. and Japanese security experts felt more threatened than ever, especially when then Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Admiral Philip Davidson suggested that China could try to take control of Taiwan in next six years. *U.S. Naval Institute (USNI)*, March 9, 2021. <https://news.usni.org/2021/03/09/davidson-china-could-try-to-take-control-of-taiwan-in-next-six-years> (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Derek Grossman, “[The Philippines Is Ever More Focused on Taiwan](#),” *Foreign Policy*, 2025, January 29, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> *Philippine News Agency (PNA)*, “Pag-asa Island sightings don’t equate to 600 Chinese vessels,” April 1, 2019. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1066163>

<sup>5</sup> Michael R. Pompeo, “[Remarks With Philippine Foreign Secretary Locsin, Jr. at a Press Availability](#),” U.S. Department of State website, March 1, 2019. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/remarks-with-philippine-foreign->



secretary-teodoro-locsin-jr/ (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Ian James Storey, “Creeping Assertiveness: China, the Philippines and the South China Sea Dispute,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 1999, 21(1), pp. 110-111.

<sup>7</sup> “Xi Jinping: Wei shixian minzu weida fuxing tuijin zuguo heping tongyi yici we gongtong fendou-zai gao Taiwan tongbaoshu fabiao 40 zhounian jinianhuishangde jianghua 為實現民族偉大復興 推進祖國和平統一而共同奮鬥-在告台灣同胞書發表 40 周年紀念會上的講話 [[Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation and Advance China’s Peaceful Reunification: Speech at the Meeting Making the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of Message to Compatriots in Taiwan](#)],” The State Council of the People’s Republic of China [[Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation of the Chinese](#) [https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-01/02/content\\_5354223.htm](https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-01/02/content_5354223.htm)] (Chinese) (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, [Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020](#), pp. 98-99, 117, 119-120.

<sup>9</sup> *Philippine News Agency (PNA)*, [“Government keeps neutral stance on China-Taiwan row,” December 26, 2021.](#) <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1163778> (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> Poling, Gregory B. (2023), “The Transformation of the U.S.-Philippines Alliance.” <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transformation-us-philippines-alliance> (last accessed September 22, 2024).

<sup>11</sup> [Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of the Philippines, “Statement on Developments in Cross-Strait Relations,” August 4, 2022.](#) <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/statements-and-advisoriestupdate/30944-statement-on-developments-in-cross-strait-relations> (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> “Marcos says ‘hard to imagine’ Philippines can avoid Taiwan conflict,” *NIKKEI Asia*, February 12, 2023. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Marcos-says-hard-to-imagine-Philippines-can-avoid-Taiwan-conflict> (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> “New EDCA Sites Are Not a Response To China, Philippines President Says During Washington Visit,” *USNI*, [May 5, 2023.](#) <https://news.usni.org/2023/05/05/new-edca-sites-are-not-a-response-to-china-philippines-president-says-during-washington-visit> (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Aki Mouri, “*Minami-shinakai ni Sasu Taiwan Mondai no Kage* [The Taiwan Issue Casts a Long Shadow in the South China Sea].”

<sup>15</sup> The Chinese government intentionally refers to U.S. military visits to the Philippines under the VFA and EDCA as visits to “U.S. military bases.” This expression is believed to be an attempt to reinforce the impression that the presence of U.S. forces in the Philippines violates the Philippine Constitution, which prohibits the establishment of foreign military bases in the country.

<sup>16</sup> “‘Chengwei mengyou bingbuyize chengwei fuyou’—Diba jie Zhong-Fei Manila luntan yingfa relielun’ ‘成為盟友 并不意味着成為附庸’--第八屆中菲馬尼拉論壇引發熱烈論 [‘Being an Ally Does Not Mean Being a Subordinate’: Eighth China-Philippines Manila Forum Draws Heated Discussions],” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines website, April 15, 2023. [http://ph.china-embassy.gov.cn/sgdt/202304/t20230415\\_11059816.htm](http://ph.china-embassy.gov.cn/sgdt/202304/t20230415_11059816.htm) (Chinese) (last accessed February 17, 2025). [http://ph.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sgdt/202304/t20230416\\_11060060.htm](http://ph.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sgdt/202304/t20230416_11060060.htm) (English) (last accessed March 27, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> “DFA says PH adheres to One China Policy following Taiwan polls,” *PNA*, January 15, 2024.

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1216912> (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> “PBBM: PH respects One China policy, not endorsing Taiwan independence,” *PNA*, January 23, 2024.

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1217514> (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “[Joint Vision Statement from the Leaders of Japan, the Philippines, and the United States](#),” April 11, 2024. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100652839.pdf>. (Chinese);

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100652855.pdf> (English) (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>20</sup> Arguments in China that the three countries (Japan, the United States, and the Philippines) are working together to increase their intervention in the Taiwan issue include, for example, 時殷弘 Shi Yinhong, “*Meiguo tongmeng he lianmeng tiyi de duihua junshi zhuantai xianzhuang* 美国同盟和連盟体系的對華軍事態勢現狀,” [Status Quo of the U.S. Alliances and Coalition’s Military State against China],” *亞太安全與海洋研究 [Asia-Pacific Security and Maritime Affairs]*, 2022, 2<sup>nd</sup> period, pp. 1013; 周士新 Zhou Shixin, “Meirifei Anquan hezuo: tezheng ji yingxiang 美日菲安全合作：動因、特征及影響 [Motivations, Features and Impacts of the Enhanced Trilateral Security Cooperations of the United States, Japan, and the Philippines],” *Asia-Pacific Security and Maritime Studies*, 2023, 6th period, pp. 50-67; 王競超 Wang, Jingzhao, “Maixiang “zhun tongmen”: Rifei haiyang anquan hezuo de yanjin, dongyin yu qianjing 邁向“准同盟”：日菲海洋安全合作的演進、動因與前景 [Toward a “Quasi-Alliance”: The Evolution, Dynamics, and Prospects of Japan-Philippines Maritime Security Cooperation],” *Asia-Pacific Security and Maritime Studies*, 2024, 4th period, pp. 56-75.

<sup>21</sup> “Balikatan 2024 builds Philippine-U.S. interoperability, multilateral partnerships,” *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum*, May 5, 2024. <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2024/05/balikatan-2024-builds-philippine-u-s-interoperability-multilateral-partnerships/> (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian’s Regular Press Conference on August 30, 2024,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China website, August 30, 2024.

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/wjdt\\_674879/zcjd/202408/t20240830\\_11481913.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/wjdt_674879/zcjd/202408/t20240830_11481913.shtml). (Chinese);

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202408/t20240830\\_11482129.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202408/t20240830_11482129.html) (English) (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> Aki Sakabe-Mori, “‘*Kaiyo Kyokoku*’ *Kensetsu no Genjo (3) Minami-shinakai Sekando Tomasu-sho* [The Current State of ‘Maritime Power’ Construction (3) Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea],” *Toa* [East Asia] journal, No. 688, 2024, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> “Año: China violated several int’l laws in Ayungin incident,” *PNA*, June 24, 2024.

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1227553> (last accessed February 17, 2025).

<sup>25</sup> “PH, China reach ‘provisional agreement’ on Ayungin missions,” *PNA*, June 21, 2024.

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