

Countering China's Gray Zone Operations in the South China Sea: The Challenge of Addressing China's Surging Second Sea Force



Presentation for the Webinar “Maintaining a Rules-Based Maritime Order, Albert De Rosario Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ADRI), April 14, 2021

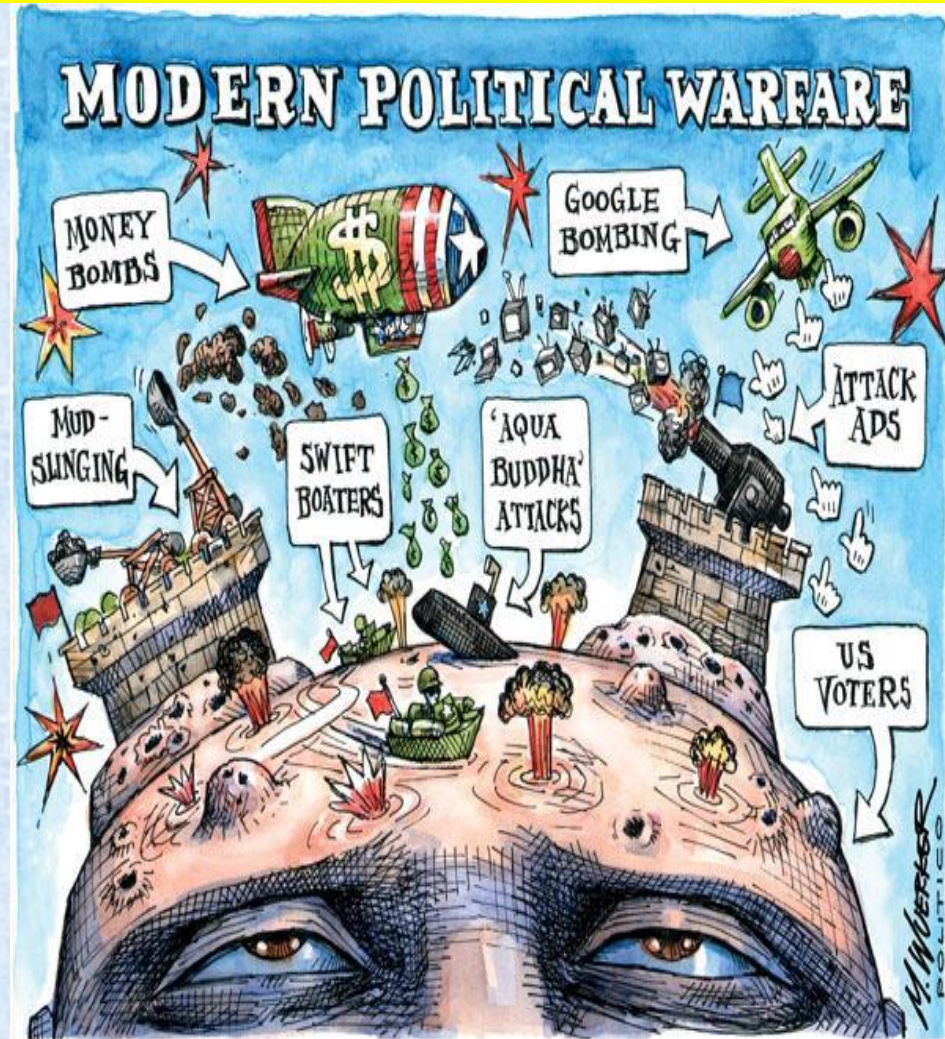
The Strategic Dimension of China's Gray Zone Operations in the West Philippine Sea.



Gray zone operations are political warfare as it refers both to the whole of warfare directed at producing political results and to that part of warfare that employs political means to attain the political goals of war even without actual battlefield engagement of either armies or navies.

The Strategic Dimension of China's Gray Zone Operations in the West Philippine Sea.

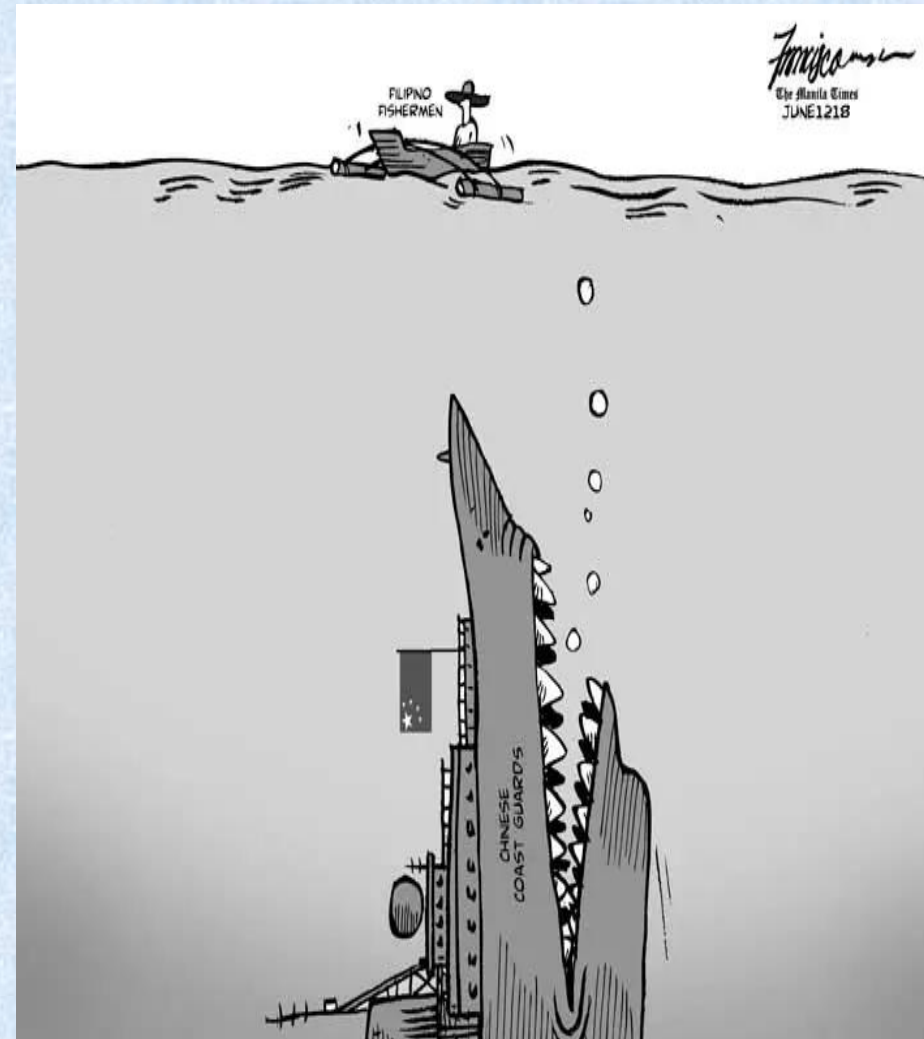
Historically, political warfare includes all forms of propaganda from gray to black, subversion, and related measures such as Special Forces operations into the enemy country, sabotage or use of agents of influence aimed to form or break ideas in the enemy's mind.



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The Strategic Dimension of China's Gray Zone Operations in the West Philippine Sea.

Gray zone operations are generally considered as measures that apply the persuasive force of power to force adjustments in military, economic, political, and cultural relations with other states short of war. It involves the dividing or weakening the power of enemies, opponents and rivals.



The Strategic Dimension of China's Gray Zone Operations in the West Philippine Sea.

Gray zone operations blur the line separating the military and non-military platforms, actions, and attribution for coercive actions directed or undertaken to pursue specific political goals ranging from territorial claims to creating a sphere of influence to undermining an international order.



Understanding The Unique Nature of Chinese Gray Zone Operations



Understanding The Unique Nature of Chinese Gray Zone Operations

China is now engaged in a tense and protracted geopolitical competition with the U.S., the country in whose image much of the current global order is fashioned and is determined to maintain an international order it helped established in 1945.



Understanding The Unique Nature of Chinese Gray Zone Operations



The Chinese see the evolving context of U.S.-China relations in particular and this ongoing great power competition based on the Sun Tzu's notion of the Chi or the momentum of the any situation at a given moment.

Understanding The Unique Nature of Chinese Gray Zone Operations



In this strategic competition, Chinese strategists see the competition as primarily psychological and political; military campaigns are a secondary concern.

Understanding The Unique Nature of Chinese Gray Zone Operations

China should seek victory not in a decisive war but thorough incremental and slow moves designed to gradually improve its diplomatic and strategic position vis-à-vis the U.S. and its allies.



China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces



China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces

Since 2013, China has also implemented hardline policies along its periphery to defend what it sees as its “core interests.” China has put particular interest on securing and expanding its maritime rights and interests’ such as territorial sovereignty and economic interests.



China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces



Development of the entire People's Liberation Army's (PLAN) into an effective joint force that can respond to maritime challenges of war against a high-tech adversary, an attempted conquest of Taiwan or the Senkakus, and the long-range aspect of joint campaigns in China's near seas.

China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces



China has ramped up the activities of the PLAN and its maritime law enforcement agencies in its surrounding seas-namely, the South and East China Seas

China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces

This enabled China to apply pressure on countries on its periphery with which it has disputes regarding territorial sovereignty, and maritime resources, and the like, promoting the securement and expansion of Chinese maritime rights and interests through a reliance on the use of force.



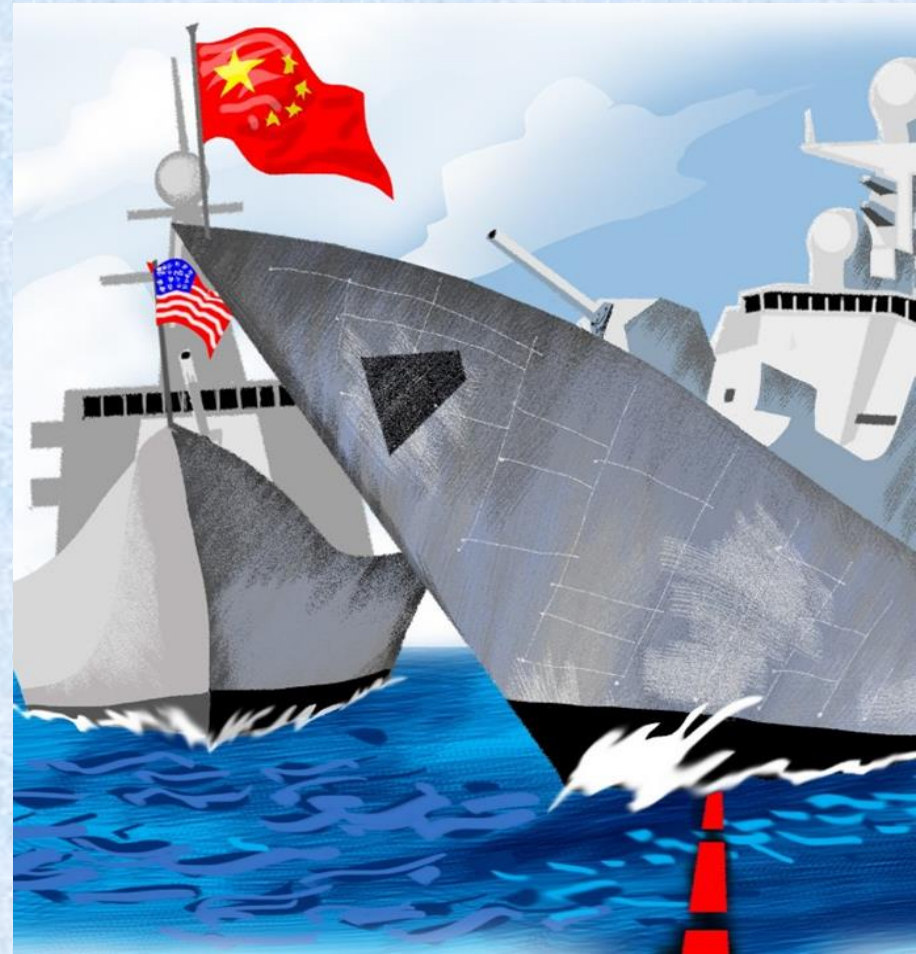
China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces



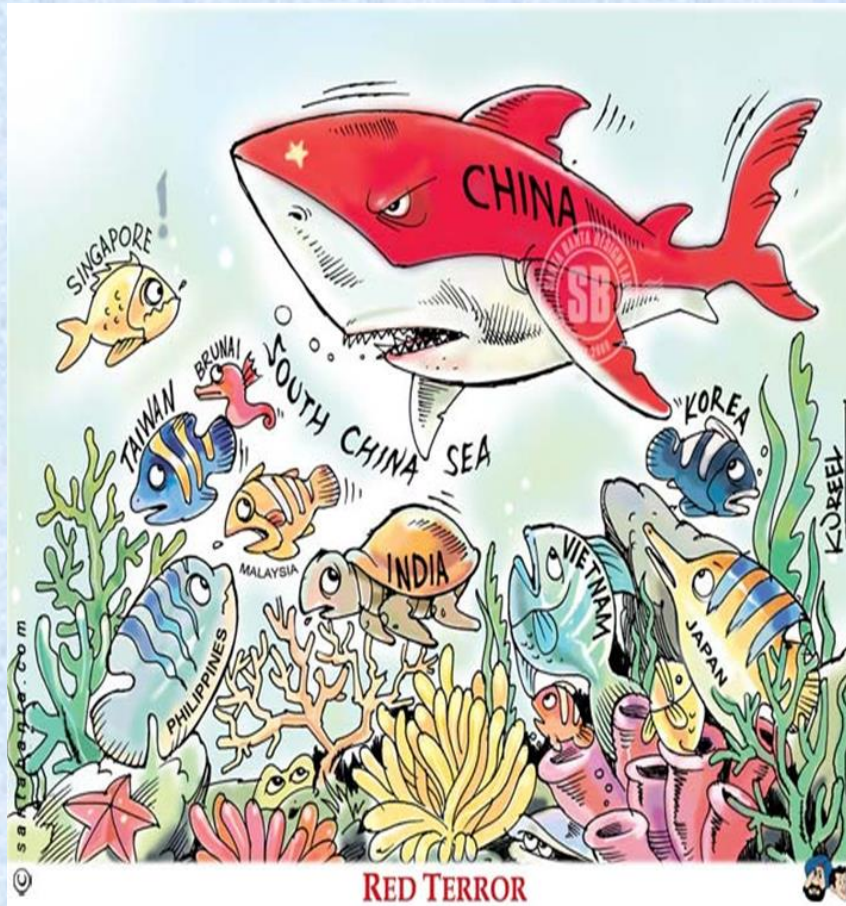
China has recently accelerated its expansion into its surrounding seas capitalizing on its both its naval and its maritime law enforcement power, aiming to change the status quo by coercion in disputes over sovereignty issues and maritime resources.

China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces

The Gray-Hull People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) that currently claims a growing portion of the entire People's Liberation Army's personnel and budget.



China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces



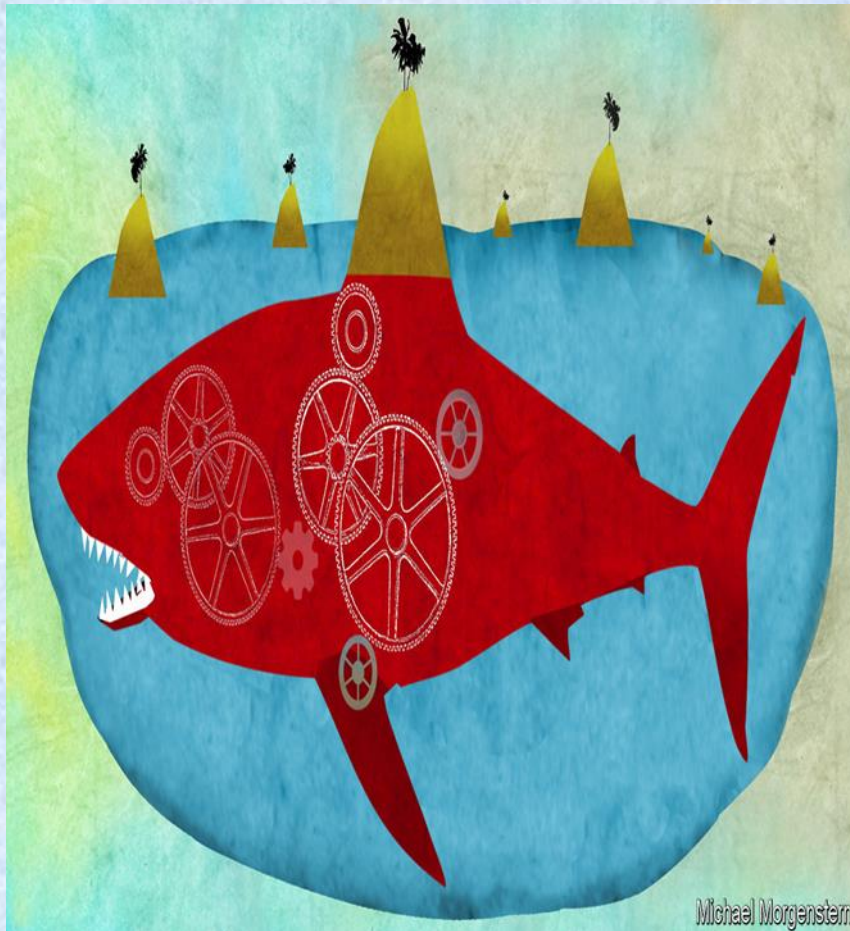
The People's Armed Policy (PAP)—is the paramilitary wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), with the primary responsibility of maintaining domestic stability and a secondary role of providing rear support to the PLA during wartime.

China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces

The PAP leads and controls China's white-hulled maritime law-enforcement (MLE) forces, including the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG). The CCG is usually considered the Surging Second Sea Force.



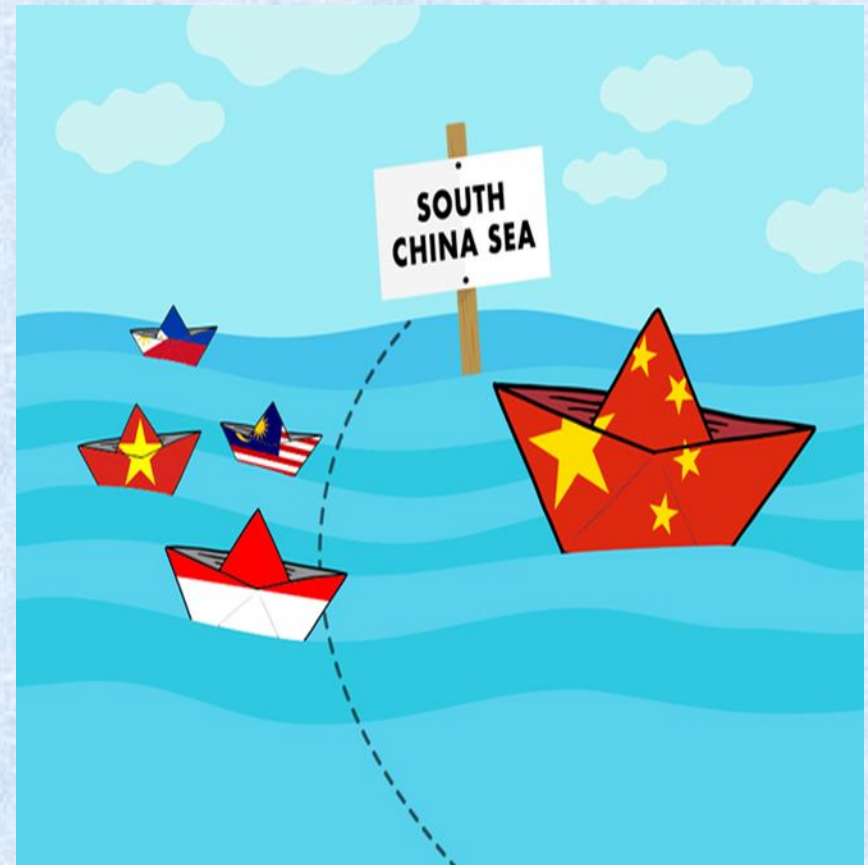
China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces



The PLA-controlled blue-hulled People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM). It is a separate organization from the PLAN and CCG, consist of ordinary citizens working in the marine economy.

China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces

Militias receive training from the PLAN and CCG to perform task including but not limited to border patrol, surveillance and reconnaissance, maritime transportation, search and rescue, auxiliary tasks in support of naval operations in wartime.



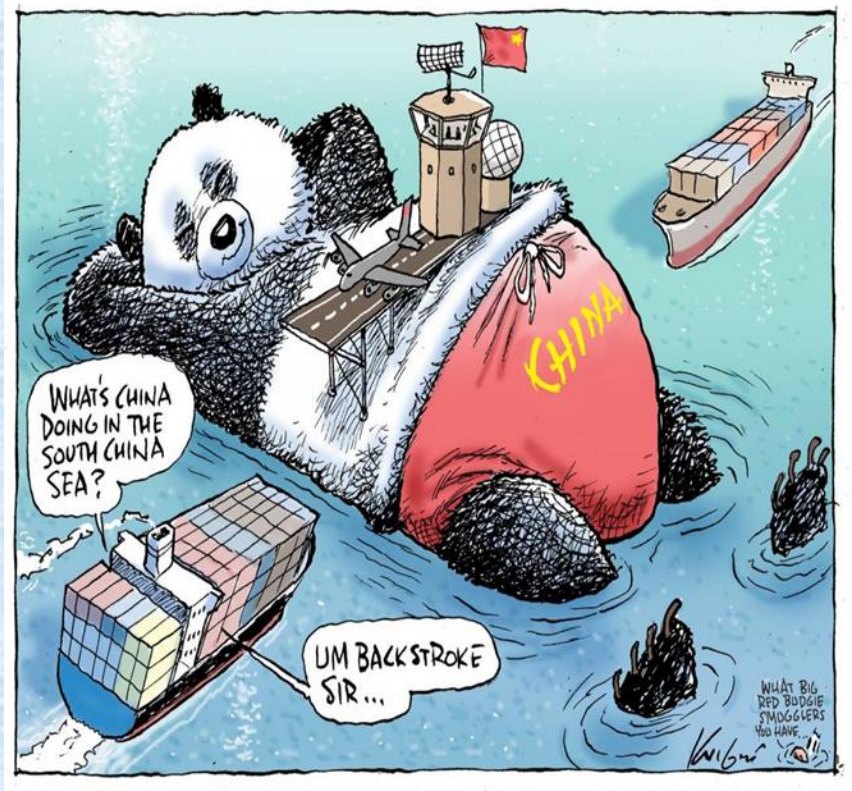
China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces



There is no single maritime militia organization in China, but rather it is a constellation of forces among localities and provincial governments that support the national defense efforts of maritime expansion.

China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces

At the national level, militia policies are prescribed by the Central Military Commission (CMC) headed by President Xi Jinping. However, the various militia are under local and provincial leadership.



China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces



PAFMM is made up of two components. The fishing cooperatives that are part of the PAFMM and operate as commercial fishing ventures.

China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces

The more professional and better equipped for direct action missions, operating as maritime vanguard of naval auxiliaries to enforce maritime rights protection and assertion instead of commercial fishing.



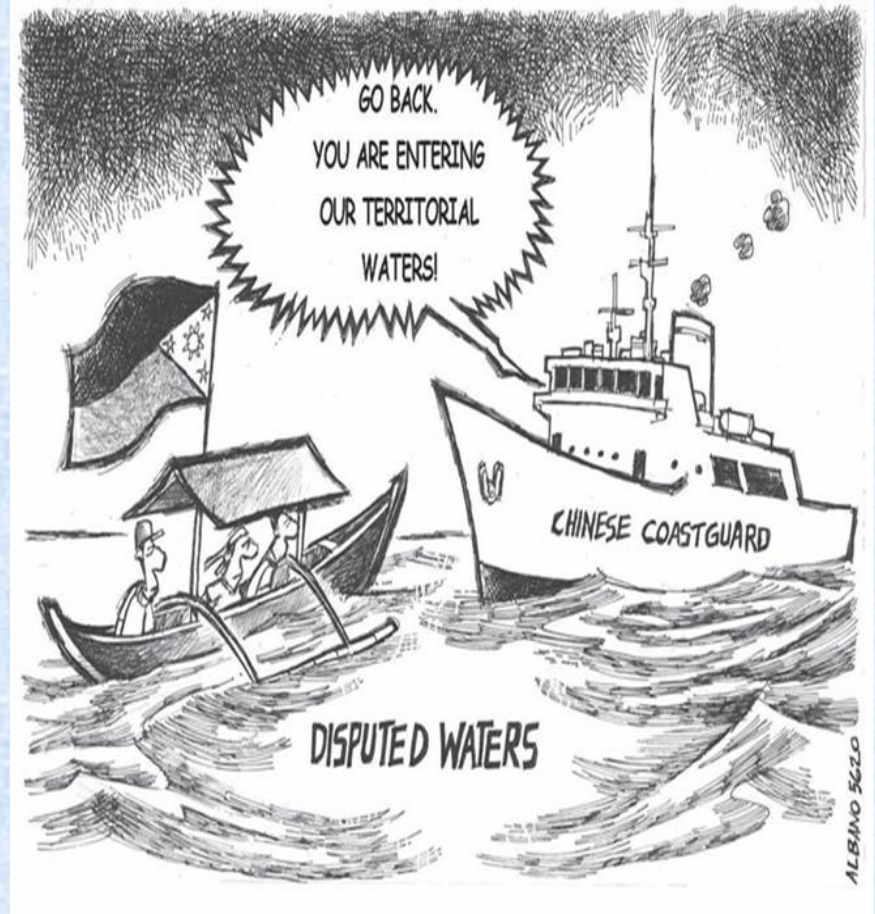
China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces



- Broadly seen, these two general types of militias are considered the PAFMM and operate as the Surging Third Sea Force.

China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces

The existence of China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces yielded China with a formidable second navy. Chinese fleet boast not only the world largest navy in terms of number but also the world largest maritime law-enforcement and militia fleets.



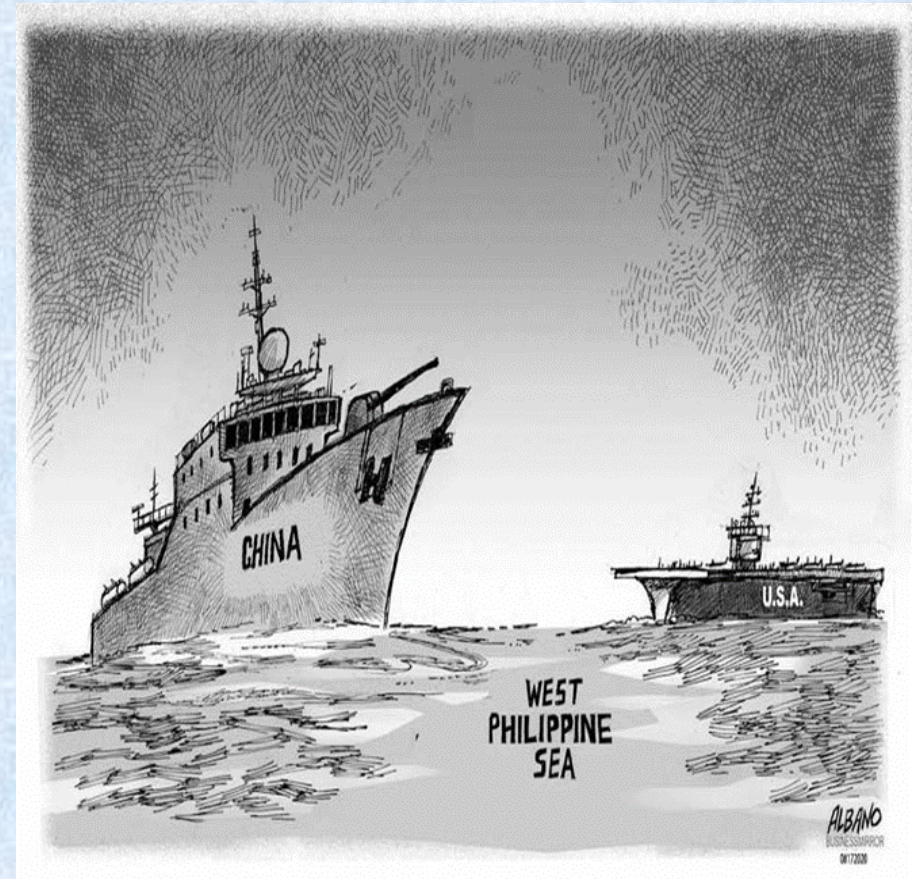
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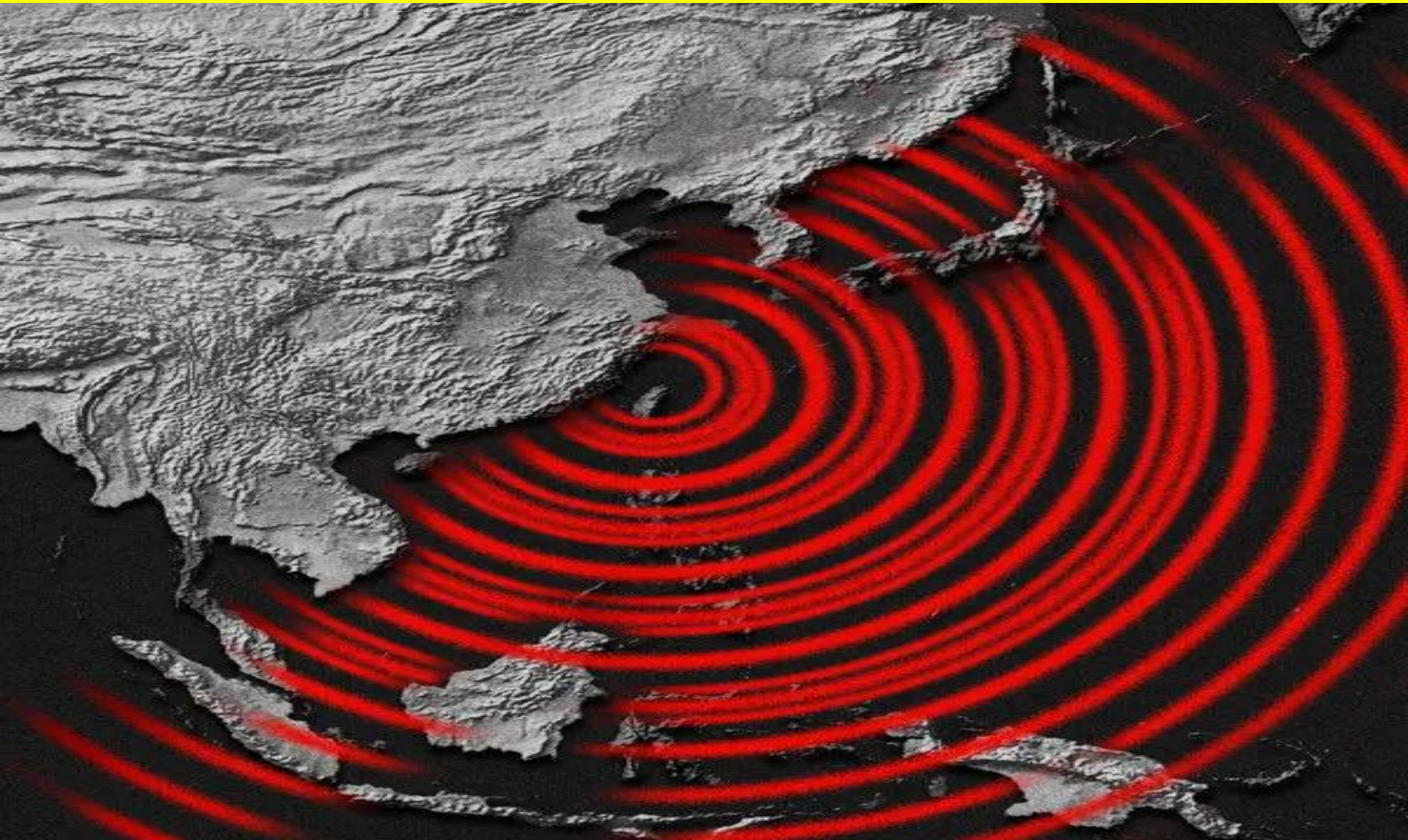
A major contribution of China's second navy is to advance Chinese sovereignty claim in the realm of the gray zone between peace and war, as they afford China increasing clout and influence over regional maritime situation without the PLAN's gray ships.

China's Surging Second and Third Sea Forces

China's second navy demonstrates a form of naval power that reduces the risk of escalation while allowing the PLAN to focus on other, more naval mission farther afield—power projection and warfighting.



Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines



Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines

In 1995, a captain of a Filipino fishing vessel reported the presence of Chinese-built structures on Mischief Reef—a small, rocky outcrop lying 135 miles west of Palawan and well within the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).



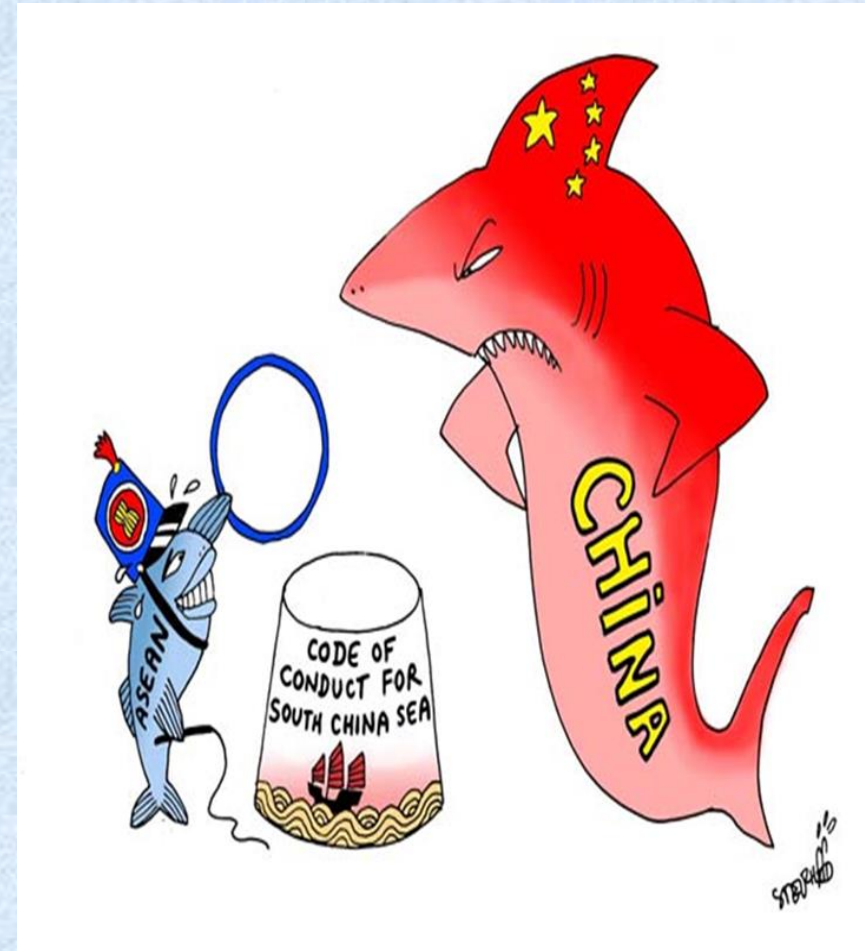
Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines



Philippine Air Force (PAF) reconnaissance flights confirmed the existence of Chinese structures on the reef. PAF reconnaissance flights also revealed the presence of several Chinese vessels surrounding the reef.

Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines

In August 1995, the Philippines and China signed a code of conduct, aimed at preventing similar incidents occurring in the future, and increasing Philippine-China bilateral cooperation in the South China Sea.



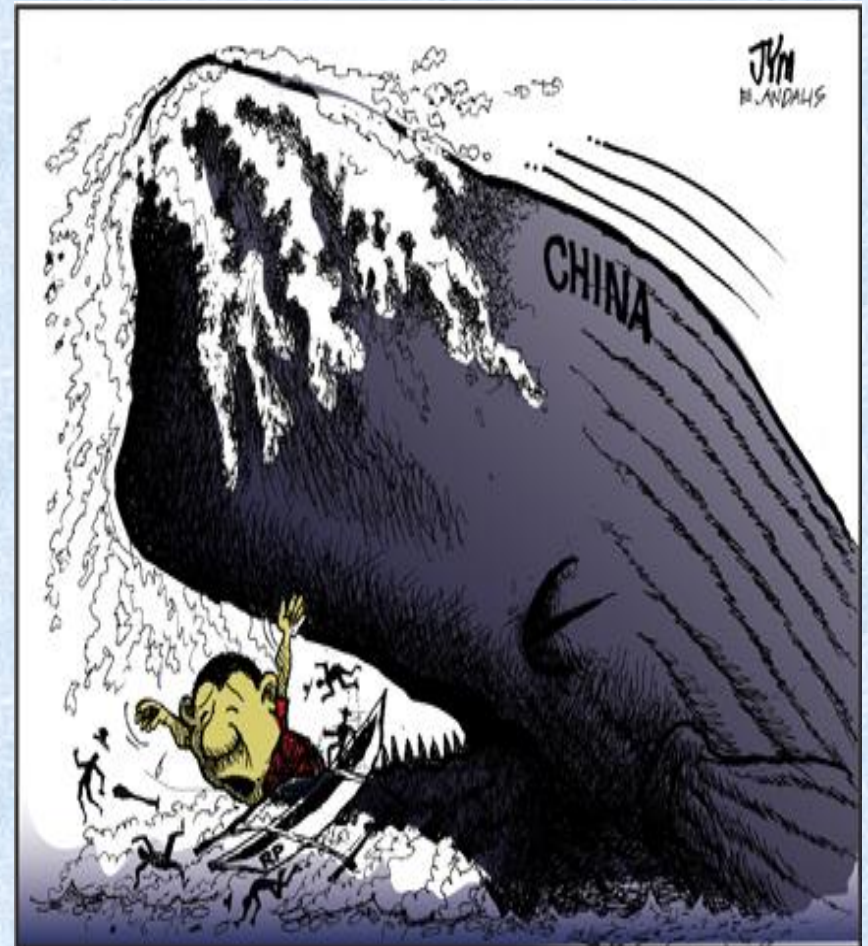
Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines



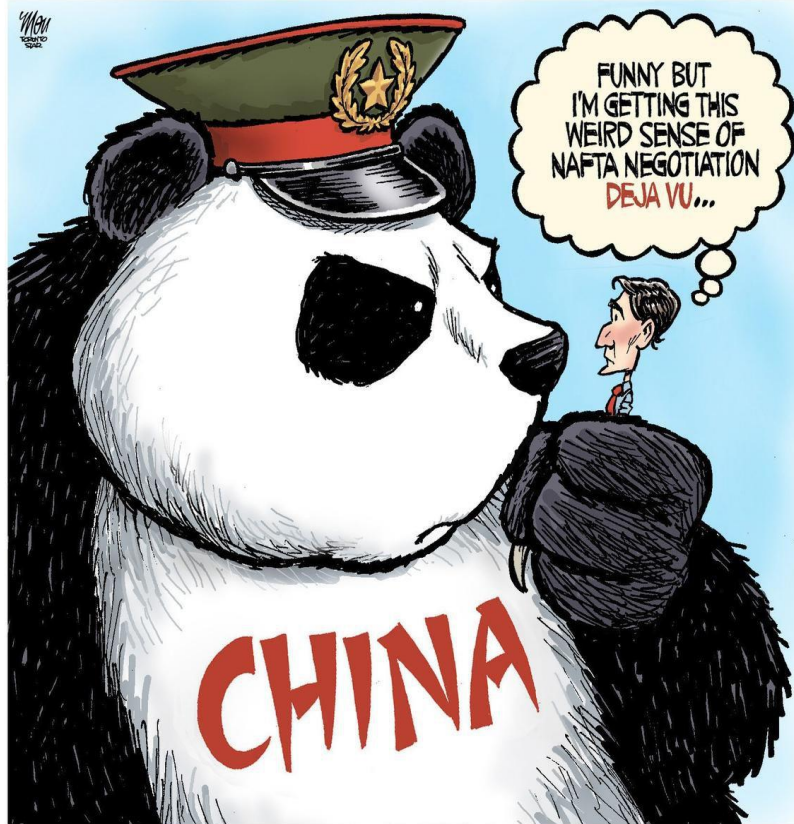
The stand-off began on April 10, 2012 when the Philippine Navy's (PN's) flagship, the *BRP Gregorio Del Pilar*, tried to arrest more than 10 Chinese fishing vessels that were spotted fishing in Scarborough Shoal, which is only 220 kilometers from the main Philippine island of Luzon and well within the country's EEZ.

Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines

However, before the Gregorio Del Pilar could apprehend the fishing vessels, two Chinese marine surveillance vessels arrived and prevented the arrest of the Chinese fishermen. The two Chinese civilian ships then boldly informed the Filipino captain that his ship had strayed into Chinese territorial waters and was ordered to leave immediately.



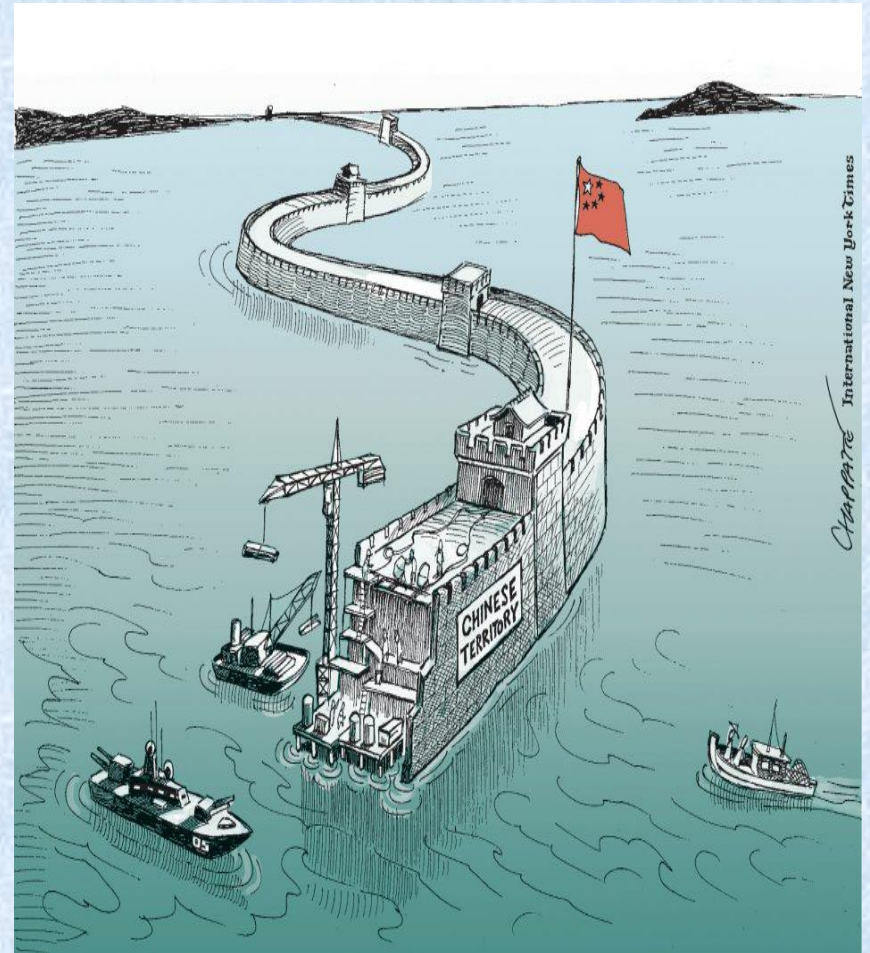
Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines



China had gained the upper hand when it forced the PN's surface combatant to withdraw from the shoal. With an armada of armed civilian vessels at its disposal, China put the onus of either escalating or deescalating the impasse squarely on the Philippines.

Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines

China then sent additional patrol ships, and consequently, three huge and imposing Chinese civilian vessels confronted a lone PCG patrol craft in the shoal.



Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines



On March 20, 2021, Department of National Defense Secretary (DND) Delfin Lorenzana informed the Filipino nation of the enigmatic presence of an estimated 220 Chinese fishing vessels that are believed to be manned by Chinese maritime militia in Julian Felipe Reef (Whitsun Reef).

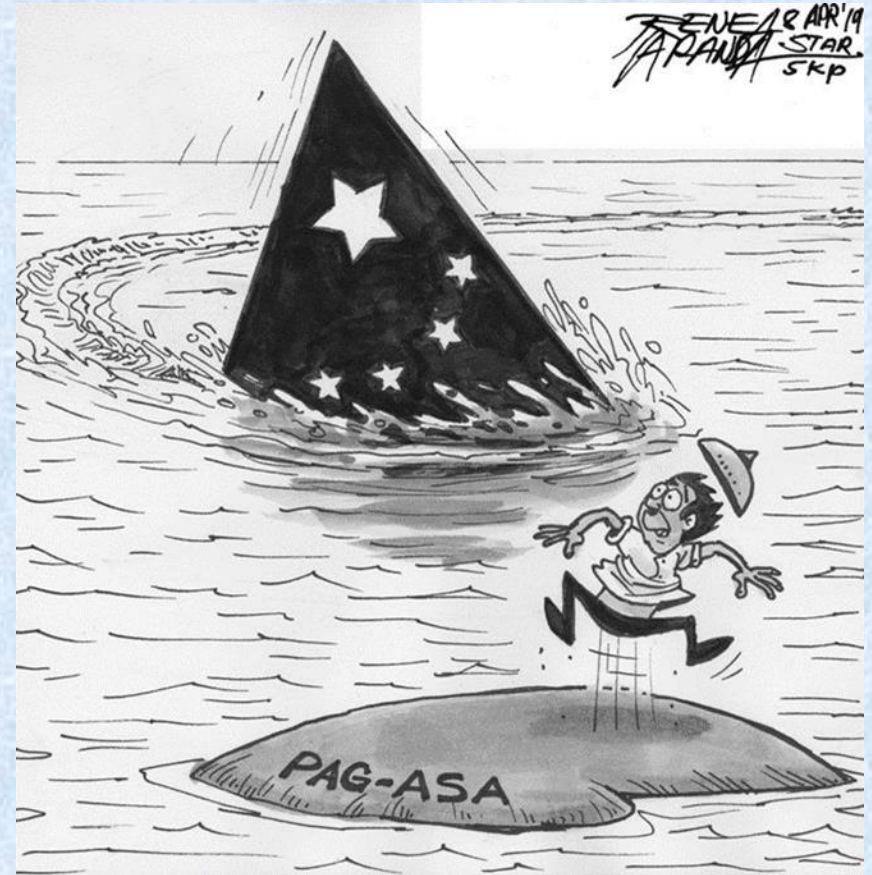
Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines



Secretary Lorenzana announced an increase in sovereignty patrols near Whitsun Reef, which is within the Philippines' 200 nautical miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). He also expressed his concern as he called the presence of these alleged Chinese militia boats as a “clear provocative action of militarizing the area.

Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines

In the evening of the same day, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Secretary Teodoro Locsin announced that the DFA had already filed a diplomatic protest to the Chinese Embassy in Manila.



Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines

The Philippine government's animated reaction to this incident reflects its recognition of Chinese gray zone operation. It had taken note that China has incrementally asserted its expansive claim in the South China Sea by building artificial islands and fortifying them with missiles, ports, and airstrips in disputed waters also claimed by the Vietnam and the Philippines.



Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines



This was made possible because it has been swarming the South China Sea with both public and civilian vessels effectively defying and overwhelming the littoral states' efforts to drive them away.

Chinese Gray Zone Operations Against the Philippines

The objective is to accomplish by overwhelming presence what its had been unable to do through diplomacy or economic statecraft or naked naval power.



Challenging Chinese Gray Zone Operations in the West Philippine Sea



China has a different view and perspective from the Philippines

The Philippines must understand and be very wary that China's foreign policy to the Philippines in particular, and to other Southeast Asian countries in general will be guided by this dictum:



China has a different view and perspective from the Philippines



Chinese leaders believe that their country has the preponderance of economic and military power to alter the rules, norms, and institutions that governed the world order to suit their country's interests.

Countering China's Gray Zone Operations

The essence of political and military warfare consist primarily of neither words or deeds or actions but of intentions. China's intention is to “win all without fighting.”



Countering China's Gray Zone Operations



Victory should not be measured through successful military battles nor campaign but instead, it is better to win “without fighting.”

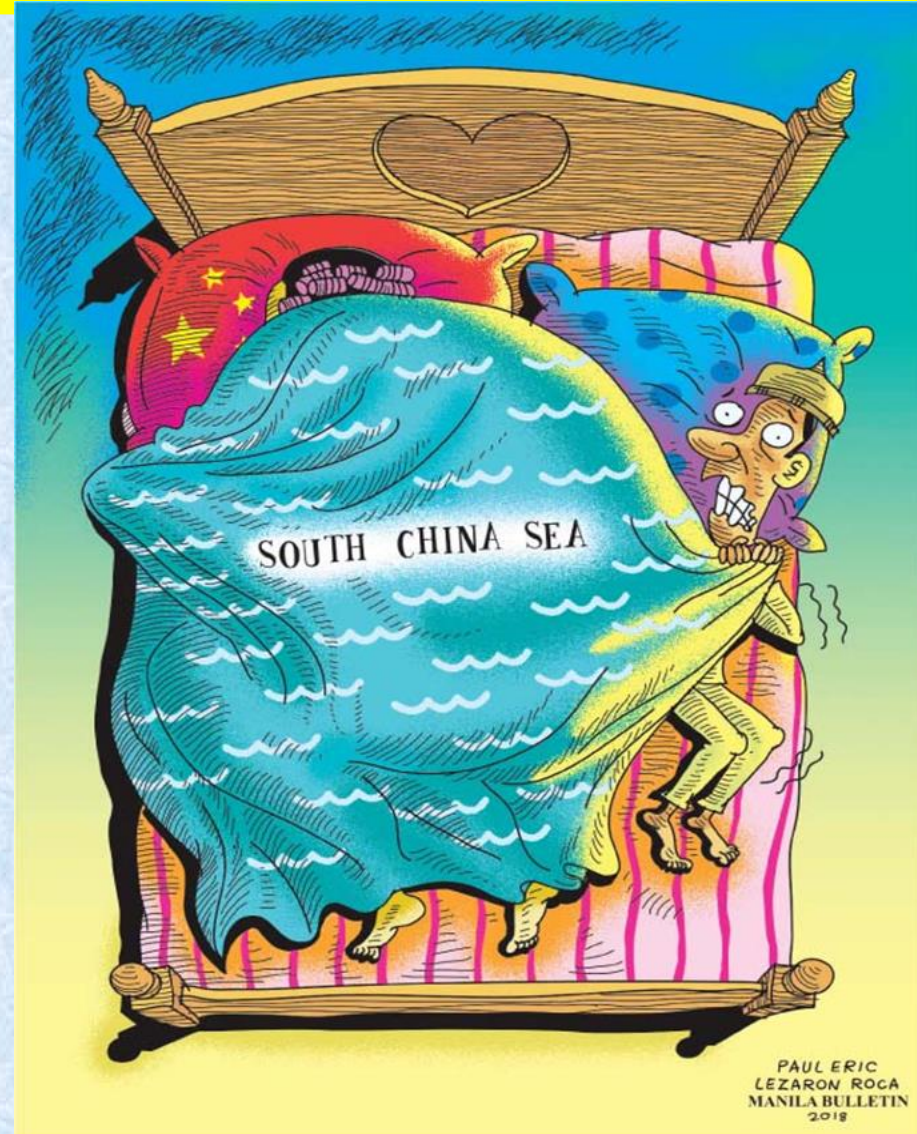
Countering China's Gray Zone Operations



In its gray zone operations, China is following the game plan of Go rather than Chess. It is best to win not by eliminating the enemy but avoiding fighting and moving strategically to achieve relative dominance, survival and prosperity.

Countering China's Gray Zone Operations

The Philippines' goal is to prevent China from winning without fighting. This requires the application of subtle, indirect, and less threatening and visible counter-measures that must prevent China from achieving its strategic goal.



Countering China's Gray Zone Operations



This will require the Philippines applying asymmetric warfare by adopting the strategic principle of “water.” Water has no constant

Countering China's Gray Zone Operations

It is formless and adopts to the terrain. The ability to gain victory is to adapt to one's opponent.



Countering China's Gray Zone Operations



This would first require the deployment of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and its newly acquired assets from Japan and France to the West Philippine Sea instead in the country's prime tourist spots like Boracay etc.

Countering China's Gray Zone Operations

The Philippines should develop a credible defense capability by focusing its limited resources on building the navy and the air force.



Countering China's Gray Zone Operations



Both armed services, supported by the army, should train for asymmetrical warfare against the bigger and more powerful threat.

Countering China's Gray Zone Operations

The Philippines should strengthen its strategic alliance with U.S. and enhancing its security partnerships with Japan, Australia, South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, the QUAD, and even possibly Taiwan.



Countering China's Gray Zone Operations



Philippine strategy should be based on avoiding war through limited deterrence and an alliance/security partnerships.

Countering China's Gray Zone Operations



The Philippines should move strategically to achieve relative power vis-à-vis China in the West Philippine Sea with the goal of national mobilization based on a whole-nation approach aimed at achieving the goals of national survival and resilience amidst a great power competition.



Thank you
very much
for your attention!