

Reinforcing Cooperation Against Gray Zone Operations

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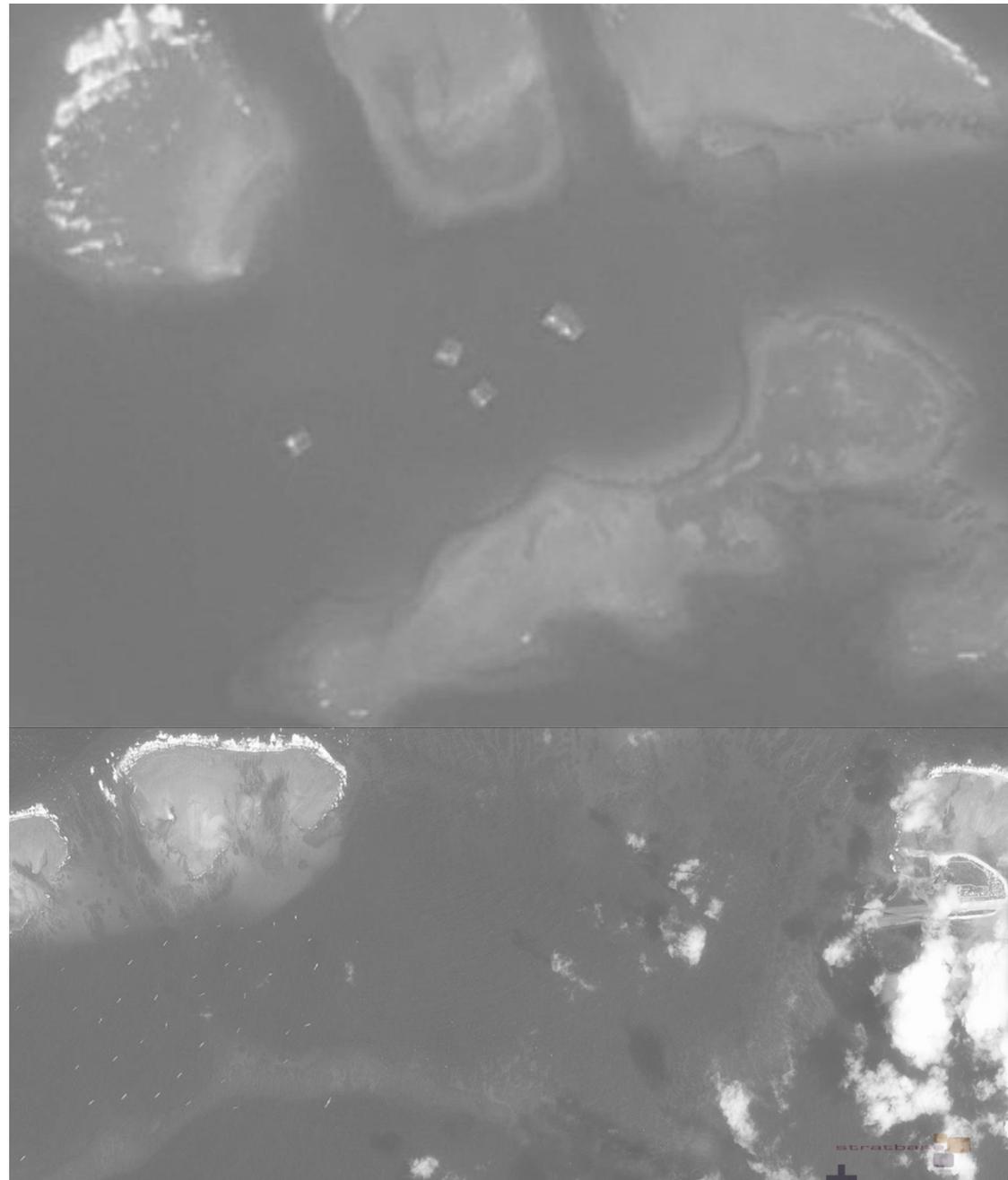


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The ambiguity and threatening features of gray zone operations undermine the established rules-based international order. Notably, gray zone operations' growing complexity disrupts the stability and peace of the Indo-Pacific. Blurring the line between military force and diplomacy, gray zone tactics challenge current policies and push states to realign strategies that can effectively counter these operations.

At Stratbase ADR Institute, we believe that defending a rules-based order is a collective responsibility of the international community. Strengthened through partnerships and alliances, a rules-based order assures us all of a stable and prosperous future. Hence, attempts to challenge the status quo and disturb this order by any means, including gray zone operations, cannot be tolerated.



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The Philippines, for its part, is dealing with several persistent issues that threaten its national security, including **gray zone operations in the West Philippine Sea**. China's activities within Philippine territory, driven by its expansionist ambitions and militarization, cannot be allowed. These activities include swarming their fishing and militia vessels in our territory, blocking our resupply missions, tailing scientific vessels, and pointing military-grade lasers against our Philippine Coast Guard, among others. **We cannot let this aggression continue.**



During President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr’s visit to China, the Philippine government agreed to establish a direct communication line with China to address issues and incidents in the West Philippine Sea. This is hardly a new or significant step in Philippine-China relations, as communication between the two sides has always been present. Since 2016, however, any agreement or initiative has not been effective in preventing China’s aggressive action in the disputed territory.



We call on China to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Permanent Court of Arbitration and respect its July 2016 ruling, recognizing the Philippines' territory. Moving forward, the Philippines and other Indo-Pacific states must engage in strategies that will ultimately change China's behavior to be symbiotic with the internationally established rules-based order. Instead of coercion, states must strengthen cooperation in bilateral, multilateral, and minilateral means.

Cooperation through joint patrols and maritime domain awareness (MDA) must be continued, with 80 percent of Filipinos agreeing to strengthen the military capability of the Philippine Navy and the Philippine Coast Guard as well as to conduct joint maritime patrols and military exercises with allied countries. This further validates the strategic importance of alliances and partnerships, particularly in safeguarding against gray zone tactics in the West Philippine Sea.



At Stratbase ADR Institute, we support all-out cooperation in defending the rules-based international order. As we move towards a complex, multipolar world, the Marcos Jr administration must continue implementing an independent foreign policy that is driven by and that upholds national interests. Responsive and strategic mechanisms to strengthen the rules-based order are critical in ensuring the country's territorial integrity and national sovereignty. In support of this endeavor, the Institute hopes that the current administration will continue to reinforce cooperation with like-minded states in defense of the rules-based order. We Filipinos deserve no less from our leaders.



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Thank you!



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