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**Countering China's Maritime Militia in the South China Sea
Utilizing All Instruments of National Power**

JCSP 47

Exercise Solo Flight

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COUNTERING CHINA'S MARITIME MILITIA IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA UTILIZING ALL INSTRUMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER

INTRODUCTION

The Peoples Republic of China (PRC) has pursued a maritime grey zone strategy of incremental expansion in the South China Sea. The construction of military bases on artificial islands to lay claim to the area and support anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) efforts is well documented. However, a lesser-known grey zone strategy has been China's quiet development of a civilian maritime militia comprised of armed commercial fishing vessels called the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM). These vessels are colloquially referred to as China's "Little Blue Men"¹ which are equated to Russia's "Little Green Men" of masked soldiers in unmarked green army uniforms involved in Russian hybrid war against Ukraine. While China does not officially acknowledge the maritime militia externally, these "Little Blue Men" are undoubtedly an organized naval force controlled by the state.

Allied nations lack a cohesive strategy to deter China's maritime militia aggression in the South China Sea. Unlike conventional warfare, the employment of military force alone is not a viable strategy, as grey zone tactics are designed to avoid traditional military conflict. To deter these grey zone activities, allied nations should expand the strategic framework from a primarily military-centric model to one that utilizes all instruments of national power. Using the DIME model, this paper argues that a cohesive strategy utilizing all instruments of national power is the most effective approach to counter China's maritime militia grey zone operations in the South China Sea. The first part of this essay will briefly describe China's maritime militia and how it is

¹ Andrew Erickson, "The South China Sea's Third Force: Understanding and Countering China's Maritime Militia." *Hampton Roads International Security Quarterly* (2017): 1.

employed to advance China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. The second part of this essay will examine in greater depth, how allied nations can counter China's maritime militia through the employment of specific instruments of national power.

PART I: DEFINING CHINA'S MARITIME MILITIA AND GREY ZONE ACTIVITIES

To develop strategies to counter China's maritime militia it is important to understand the type of force including equipment, personnel, and logistics. As well, knowledge of the PAFMM's Command and Control Structure (C2) structure and inter-operability with the People's Liberation Army (PLA), People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and the China Coast Guard (CCG) is crucial. Furthermore, examining the PAFMM's primary types of grey zone operations is essential.

Vessels, Personnel and Logistical Support

The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia is comprised of fleets of dual-purpose fishing vessels primarily operating in the South China Sea. Militia vessels can be categorized as professional militia vessels and commercial fishing vessels recruited into grey zone operations.² The main professional militia units are based in Danzhou, Tanmen, Hainan Island and Sansha.³ Many of the newer vessels are purpose built with reinforced steel hulls, external rails to mitigate collision damage, and water cannons with small arms and ammunition storage.⁴ In addition, vessels are outfitted with commercial VHF communications and BeiDou Navigation Satellite

² Gregory B. Poling, and Pretat Harrison. Pulling Back the Curtain on China's Maritime Militia (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2021), viii.

³ Andrew Erickson, "The South China Sea's Third Force...", 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

Systems to enable them to operate with the PLA, PLAN and CCG.⁵ While it is difficult to estimate the exact number of militia vessels, there are nearly 200,000 Chinese-registered fishing vessels of which 2,400 are larger-tonnage, steel hulled ships, suited for grey zone operations.⁶

PAFMM vessels are manned by commercial fisherman with the professional fleets comprised of military veterans. The PLAN provides training to the crews which includes reconnaissance, assisting in maritime rights protection, and shooting at sea.⁷ The PAFMM is financed by the national, regional, and local governments through subsidies for vessel construction, fuel, and crew salaries, with support varying by unit and region.⁸ For example, professional fleets' crews can be compensated up to US\$13,000 with captains earning US\$25,000, while other fleets are more dependent on commercial fishing income.⁹ As such, the level of skill, training and financial support varies by region and fleet.

Command and Control (C2)

The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia is a subcomponent of China's militia.¹⁰ It is controlled locally by a dual civilian-military system which reports to the National Defense Mobilization Department (NDMD) under the Central Military Commission. The local civilian administration, under direction of the PRC administrative-hierarchy, and provincial-level military districts, share responsibility for the maritime militia's funding, administration,

⁵ James Clad and Robert A. Manning. "Catching Controversy: China's Maritime Militia." *Jane's Defence Weekly* 54, no. 7 (2016): 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Andrew Erickson, "The South China Sea's Third Force...", 4

⁸ Shuxian Luo and Jonathan G. Panter. "China's Maritime Militia and Fishing Fleets." *Military Review* 101, no. 1 (2021): 13.

⁹ Andrew Erickson, "The South China Sea's Third Force...", 2; Shuxian Luo and Jonathan G. Panter. "China's Maritime Militia and Fishing Fleets.": 13.

¹⁰ Conor Kennedy, "The Struggle for Blue Territory: Chinese Maritime Militia Grey-Zone Operations." *The RUSI Journal* 163, no. 5 (2018): 8.

mobilization, and border defense.¹¹ At the same time, the fleets fishing operations are managed by commercial fishing companies which primarily own the vessels.¹² Due to dispersed fleets, bureaucratic competition and multiple lines of authority, command and control is inconsistent across units.¹³ The PAFMM works with the PLAN and CCG through the operational concept of a "first line of Militia (PAFMM), a second line of Administrative Law Enforcement (CCG), supported by a third line of the Military (PLAN)."¹⁴ Overall, the PAFMM's vague C2 structure permits plausible deniability by China with the ability to coordinate with the PLAN and CCG in grey zone operations.

Grey Zone Operations

China employs the PAFMM in coordination with the PLAN and CCG to advance its maritime claims in the South China Sea focused around the Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal, referred to as the nine-dash line on charts. This has led to disputes with the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Indonesia. The PAFMM's activities can be traced back to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions during the cold war in the 1960s and seizure of the western Paracel Islands from Vietnam in 1974.¹⁵ In 2013, the country's defense white paper specifically strengthened the maritime militia's role in defending claims of sovereignty¹⁶ with Chinese President Xi Jinping visiting the maritime militia in Hainan and declaring them a model for others to follow.¹⁷ While the PRC does not officially

¹¹ Shuxian Luo and Jonathan G. Panter. "China's Maritime Militia and Fishing Fleets...", 12.

¹² Gregory B. Poling, and Pretat Harrison. Pulling Back the Curtain on China's Maritime Militia..., 26

¹³ Shuxian Luo and Jonathan G. Panter. "China's Maritime Militia and Fishing Fleets...", 16.

¹⁴ Andrew Erickson, "The South China Sea's Third Force...", 1.

¹⁵ Conor M Kennedy, "Gray Forces in Blue Territory: The Grammar of Chinese Maritime Militia Gray Zone Operations" in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*. (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 201.

¹⁶ Gregory B. Poling, "A Brittle Status Quo in the South China Sea." In *Maritime Issues and Regional Order in the Indo-Pacific*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 7

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

acknowledge these “Little Blue Men” externally, they are undoubtedly an important force to advance China’s maritime claims.

The PAFMM grey zone operations can be categorized as presence, harassment and sabotage, escort, and ISR.¹⁸ The PAFMM provides presence by sailing in disputed waters under the guise as commercial fisherman, to show the flag and uphold the narrative of Chinese ownership.¹⁹ This includes helping China seize control of the disputed Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines in 2012 by working with the CCG to maintain a presence and deny access to Philippine vessels while China proceeded to occupy the reef.²⁰ As well, the PAFMM conducts harassment and sabotage including bumping, ramming, and cutting towed cables as seen in 2016 when the PetroVietnam Binh Minh seismic survey ship’s towed cables were cut by Chinese fishing vessels near gulf of Tonkin.²¹ The PAFMM also provides escort to Chinese oil & gas seismic survey vessels and drill rigs operating in disputed waters such as countering Vietnamese maritime law enforcement for the Hai Yang Shi You 981 drilling platform operating within Vietnam’s claimed waters in 2014.²² Lastly, the PAFMM regularly conducts ISR on foreign vessels for the PLA by surrounding, reporting and taking video footage as was the case for the USNS Howard O. Lorenzen missile-range instrumentation ship in 2014.²³ As demonstrated, the PAFMM has effectively employed presence, harassment and sabotage, escort, and ISR tactics in the grey zone to advance China’s maritime claims.

¹⁸ Conor Kennedy, "The Struggle for Blue Territory...", 10.

¹⁹ Conor M Kennedy, "Gray Forces in Blue Territory...", 192

²⁰ Conor Kennedy, "The Struggle for Blue Territory...", 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²² *Ibid.*, 16

²³ Conor M Kennedy, "Gray Forces in Blue Territory...", 198, 201.

PART II: INSTRUMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER

The DIME Model demonstrates how a cohesive strategy utilizing all instruments of national power can counter China's maritime militia in the grey zone. Diplomacy can be employed to raise PAFMM actions in the international arena to influence China. Information amplifies the messages conveyed through the other instruments of national power. Military power, when deployed in concert with the other national instruments of power, can more effectively function as a deterrent while preventing escalation. Lastly, Economic power can influence behaviours through rewards and punishments.

Diplomacy

Raise International Awareness of State Sponsored PAFMM Operations

Through diplomacy, documented evidence of PAFMM actions and the connection to the state can be publicly acknowledged to hold China to account and enable punitive measures. By removing China's plausible deniability of PAFMM operations it may influence the country's behaviour due to sensitivities around international perception with organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).²⁴ As well, by raising these controversial activities with international governing organizations responsible for the law of the sea, fishing regulations and navigation it places a responsibility on China to ensure the PAFMM obeys the impacted laws.²⁵ Overall, China may curtail the PAFMM's grey zone activities if it impacts relationships with other nations.²⁶

²⁴ Andrew S Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*. (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2019): 318.

²⁵ Jonathan G. Odom, "Guerrillas in the Sea Mist: China's Maritime Militia and International Law." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Ocean Law and Policy* 3, no. 1 (2018): 90.

²⁶ Gregory B. Poling, "A Brittle Status Quo in the South China Sea...", 12.

Strengthening Regional Alliances

Diplomacy can strengthen western nations alliances with regional players to diminish Chinese influence that has empowered the PAFMM to often operate unchallenged throughout the South China Sea. A strengthening of alliances shows support and alleviates fears of retaliatory actions for countering the PAFMM.²⁷ As well, “nations can better coordinate scenario-based plans, improve command and control mechanisms, and “federate” shared defense capabilities” to deter and respond to the PAFMM threat.²⁸ Ultimately, stronger regional alliances will give the impacted nations the confidence and the capabilities to counter the PAFMM.

Wholistic Approach to Countering China’s Three Sea Forces

Lastly, a wholistic approach to China’s three sea forces should be considered to hold the PAFMM to the same international rules and standards as the PLAN and CCG.²⁹ It can be argued that China’s exercise of control, direction or instruction over the PAFMM corresponds to Article 8 of the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts.³⁰ This could pressure China to ensure the PAFMM abides by all international standards of law, seamanship, communications, and collision regulations. As well, it could be argued that the PAFMM is a combatant force and subject to the same Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea as the PLAN and allied navies to prevent military escalation.³¹ Furthermore, PAFMM actions could be conceived as use of force or armed attack which in turn could trigger more aggressive self defence measures.³² As such,

²⁷ Michael Green et al, *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia : The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence*. (Lanham, MD: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2017), 274

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Andrew S Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations...,320.

³⁰ Jonathan G. Odom, "Guerrillas in the Sea Mist...",43.

³¹ Andrew S Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations...,320; Jonathan G. Odom, "Guerrillas in the Sea Mist...",43.

³² Jonathan G. Odom, "Guerrillas in the Sea Mist...",88.

PAFMM actions could subject China to disciplinary measures and trigger enhanced Rules of Engagement (ROE) by allies³³

Information

Expose PAFMM Grey Zone Operations

A coordinated information campaign that aligns with all instruments of national power can bring international attention to China's PAFMM grey zone activities and remove the benefit of plausible deniability. A persistent and cohesive narrative has the potential to unite the international community against China's "aggressive and coercive expansionist policies".³⁴ As such, every time the PAFMM violates established international rules and norms, allies need to gather evidence, publicise and condemn PAFMM actions to support the countries impacted. This could motivate the international community to criticize China's use of the PAFMM to exploit its maritime claims and impede its ambition to be seen as a respected global leader.³⁵ Thus, by publicly linking the PAFMM to the PRC and disseminating the PAFMM actions it can increase China's reputational costs and compel it to curtail the PAFMM's grey zone operations.

Targeted Information Operations Against PAFMM

A targeted information operations campaign directed at the PAFMM and the commercial fisheries companies, clearly outlining military and economic penalties, may curtail PAFMM activities. By directly targeting the PAFMM, it will ensure unfiltered messages are not lost

³³ Andrew S Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations...,320.

³⁴ Kurt Stahl, "Harnessing the Power of Information: A Better Approach for Countering Chinese Coercion." *Joint Force Quarterly* : JFQ no. 100 (2021): 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

through its multiple lines of authority.³⁶ Furthermore, less professional maritime militias may be more susceptible due to a weaker C2.³⁷ Thus, PAFMM may be influenced by creating awareness of direct economic penalties related to their actions and the diplomatic classification of the PAFMM as an enemy combatant. By using information to support the other instruments of national power allies may be able to influence the PRC and directly change the PAFMM's behaviors.³⁸

Military

Deployment of Allied Sea Power

Military power through the deployment of western allied sea power, comprised of naval and law enforcement ships can deter PAFMM grey zone activities. As demonstrated in the past, a sustained deployment of ships with clear communication of thresholds and responses can deter grey zone activities while ambiguous commitments have failed.³⁹ During the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff, US involvement to broker negotiations between Beijing and Manila, did not deter China due to its unwillingness to intervene militarily.⁴⁰ However, during the 2014 oil rig standoff near the Paracel Islands, Vietnam's willingness to deploy paramilitary vessels to disrupt the rig's operations and counter the PAFMM, CCG and PLAN resulted in China withdrawing the rig.⁴¹ As such, by demonstrating a sustained commitment of allied sea power presence while clearly articulating the consequences can deter China's maritime militia.

³⁶ Shuxian Luo and Jonathan G. Panter. "China's Maritime Militia and Fishing Fleets.": 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Kurt Stahl, "Harnessing the Power of Information...", 17.

³⁹ Michael Green et al, *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia...*, 272

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 273

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Equally important, deployment of allied sea power can strengthen the regional alliance and support their navies interdiction operations. This alleviates regional allies' fears of Chinese reprisals and emboldens them to pursue PAFMM incursions more aggressively in their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). As well, joint training opportunities enhance capabilities and enable quicker coordinated responses to PAFMM actions⁴² Furthermore, western allied vessels can assume some of the routine non-combat roles of regional nations navies in order to free up resources to directly counter the PAFMM.⁴³ As an example, a U.S. Navy ship could escort a Philippine oil-exploration drilling platform in the Philippines' EEZ or a U.S. Coast Guard cutter could conduct joint fisheries patrols with regional nations in the South China Sea⁴⁴. Thus, a sustained western allied sea power can support the regional nations to better counter the PAFMM.⁴⁵

Develop Regional ISR

The enhancement of regional ISR is necessary to effectively counter the PAFMM. It enables allied and regional nations to develop a more complete recognized maritime picture.⁴⁶ Earlier detection and improved tracking of maritime militia vessels permits quicker responses to limit, reduce, and deter PAFMM actions.⁴⁷ As well, it enables better information sharing amongst allied nations to enable more effective coordination of assets to counter PAFMM grey

⁴² Lyle J. Morris et al, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019): 159.

⁴³ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "Deterring China in the "Gray Zone": Lessons of the South China Sea for U.S. Alliances." *Orbis* (Philadelphia) 61, no. 3 (2017): 339; Lyle J. Morris et al, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone*...161.

⁴⁴ Lyle J. Morris et al, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone*...159.

⁴⁵ Andrew S Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*...,321.

⁴⁶ Lyle J. Morris et al, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone*...157.

⁴⁷ Michael Mazarr, "The Role of Deterrence in Responding to Chinese Gray Zone Campaigns" in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*. (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 297-299

zone activities.⁴⁸ Furthermore, enhanced ISR supports the gathering of evidence, required in diplomatic international legal forums and information campaigns.⁴⁹ Overall, enhanced ISR permits quicker responses and coordination to counter the PAFMM's grey zone activities.

Develop Grey Zone Tactics

Allies also need to develop grey zone tactics to counter the PAFMM.⁵⁰ This includes the development of nonlethal weapons to disrupt PAFMM operations, such as smart mines and unmanned underwater systems, reconfigured to deliver non-kinetic effects.⁵¹ Tactics could also include jamming, dithering and deception of PAFMM commercial communication and satellite navigation systems to disrupt C2 and degrade navigation capabilities.⁵² As well, employment of Unmanned Surface Vehicles, Unmanned Underwater Vehicles and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles can be utilized to covertly or semi-covertly frustrate PAFMM vessels through swarming, bumping, and ramming tactics⁵³. Overall, the employment of grey zone tactics, can covertly counter PAFMM tactics while not escalating military tensions.

Economic

Economic Partnerships and Support

The development of economic partnerships and provision of aid can indirectly counter the PAFMM by mitigating regional nations concerns over punitive economic actions from

⁴⁸ Ibid., 297

⁴⁹ Martin A. Sebastian, "China's Gray Zone Operations in the South China Sea; Manipulating Weaknesses." In *Maritime Issues and Regional Order in the Indo-Pacific* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 43.

⁵⁰ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "Deterring China in the "Gray Zone"..., 338.

⁵¹ Michael O'Hanlon, "China, the Gray Zone, and Contingency Planning at the Department of Defense and Beyond." In *Global China*, ed. Tarun Chhabra et al. (Brookings Institution Press, 2021): 267.

⁵² Shuxian Luo and Jonathan G. Panter. "China's Maritime Militia and Fishing Fleets..., 17.

⁵³ Martin A. Sebastian, "China's Gray Zone Operations..., 43

China, and influence them to assume more aggressive stances in their territorial waters.⁵⁴ This includes supporting regional allies exports to mitigate against Chinese trade actions and the provision of economic aid, which could also fund resources to combat the PAFMM.⁵⁵ Overall, a strengthening of allied economic partnerships increases regional influence to encourage regional players to more aggressively pursue the PAFMM.

Economic Actions Against the PRC

The economic instrument of power can also be used to influence China through rewards and punishment. This could include the imposition of formal economic sanctions. As well, informal economic consequences can be employed such as “delay or withholding of investments, business relationships, or partnerships for so-called technical reasons.”⁵⁶ One of China’s key sensitivities is economic growth with China’s Belt and Road Initiative a signature economic policy of President Xi Jinping.⁵⁷ As such, any actions that impact this economic growth may create leverage that could influence China to curtail its PAFMM grey zone activities.

Economic Actions Against the PAFMM

Directly targeting the PAFMM with punitive economic actions that impact its commercial fisheries profit may also temper grey zone activities.⁵⁸ As previously outlined, militia vessels fall into two major categories: professional militia and commercial fishing with varying levels of financial support across regions. As such, in some fleets, commercial fishing is

⁵⁴ Michael O’Hanlon, “China, the Gray Zone, and Contingency Planning...”, 266.

⁵⁵ Michael Mazarr, “The Role of Deterrence...”, 296.

⁵⁶ Lyle J. Morris et al, Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone..., 179.

⁵⁷ Denghua Zhang, “China in the Pacific and Traditional Powers’ New Pacific Policies: Concerns, Responses and Trends.” *Security Challenges* 16, no. 1 (2020): 85.

⁵⁸ Ryan Martinson, “Catching Sovereignty Fish: Chinese Fishers in the Southern Spratlys.” *Marine Policy* 125, (2021): 7.

more lucrative than subsidies for militia operations⁵⁹ Thus, any threat to the livelihood of commercial fisheries, may function as a disincentive to conduct militia grey zone activities.⁶⁰ In fact, these concerns have been raised to the local PRC administrations over “Chinese fishers suffering economic losses from property destruction, lost wages due to incarceration in foreign jails, and declines in fishing activities”⁶¹

In addition, directly targeting the profitability of the commercial fisheries companies, that own the PAFMM fishing vessels, and their suppliers, may influence grey zone activities. This could include banning the import of fisheries products. As well, targeting PAFMM suppliers, similar to sanctioning Chinese engineering firms involved in dredging activity in disputed waters, could be an option.⁶² Furthermore, limiting the fisheries companies access to international financial institutions could also influence the PAFMM activities.⁶³ While many of these fisheries companies are state owned, it “sends signals to the Chinese business community about consequences of grey zone provocations”⁶⁴ and financial impact on livelihoods.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

China utilizes the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia to advance its maritime claims in the South China Sea through grey zone operations to avoid military escalation. As outlined, the maritime militia is comprised of state subsidized professional militia and commercial fishing vessels, manned by fisherman and military veterans. The PAFMM’s C2 structure enables it to

⁵⁹ Shuxian Luo and Jonathan G. Panter. "China's Maritime Militia and Fishing Fleets...", 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶¹ Ryan Martinson, "Catching Sovereignty Fish...", 6-7.

⁶² Lyle J. Morris et al, Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone...178.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Ryan Martinson, "Catching Sovereignty Fish...", 6; Shuxian Luo and Jonathan G. Panter. "China's Maritime Militia...",16.

operate with the PLAN and CCG as a front line third maritime force to conduct presence, harassment and sabotage, escort and ISR grey zone activities. This permits China to advance its maritime claims while feigning plausible deniability of PAFMM grey zone operations.

A cohesive strategy, utilizing all instruments of national power is the most effective approach to counter China's maritime militia in the grey zone. Diplomacy can be employed to create reputational risk for China in international forums, strengthen regional alliances, and move the PAFMM out of the grey zone by subjecting it to the same laws and practices as the PLAN and CCG. An information campaign can reinforce diplomatic and economic efforts to influence China while directly targeting the PAFMM to modify its behaviors. Military power, in conjunction with the other national instruments of power, can effectively deter and counter grey zone activities through the deployment of sustained allied sea power, enhanced regional ISR and the development of grey zone tactics. Lastly, economic power can support regional players to pursue the PAFMM more aggressively, while modifying China's behaviors if it deems the economic repercussions to be too costly. Furthermore, PAFMM fleets may be influenced by economically targeting its commercial fisheries livelihood. Overall, a coordinated approach by employing all instruments of national power can directly and indirectly deter China and counter its "Little Blue Men" in the South China Sea.

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