



By: The Editorial Board

# The discreet alliance between Taiwan and the Philippines sets new limits to Chinese influence



Ferdinand Marcos Jr., President of the Republic of the Philippines, and Lai Ching-te, President of Taiwan, have entered into a **discreet** but increasingly visible cooperation in recent months that has the potential to change the balance of power in the Western Pacific.

The governments in Manila and Taipei have established joint coastal patrols in the Bashi Channel, a narrow sea passage that separates the northernmost Philippine Mavulis Island (part of Batanes province, north of the main Philippine Luzon Island) from the southern coast of Taiwan.

The Bashi Channel is part of the wider Luzon Strait, which connects the East China Sea with the Philippine Sea and is one of the busiest trade **routes** in the world.

Dozens of cargo ships transporting raw materials and finished products between Northeast and Southeast Asia pass through this channel every day, as do underwater communications cables that carry vital internet and telecommunication traffic between China, Japan, Taiwan, and the rest of Asia to Europe.

According to recent media reports, the Philippine Coast Guard and Taiwanese intelligence structures have already conducted several joint patrols to **monitor** the activities of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

At the same time, Philippine and Taiwanese officials are conducting closed trilateral security consultations with representatives of the United States of America, further strengthening the network of operational cooperation in this strategically important part of the world.

These initiatives represent a major transition for the Philippines, which for decades strictly **adhered** to the One-China policy and avoided any military and security cooperation with Taiwan so as not to provoke Beijing.

In the face of increasingly frequent **incursions** by Chinese ships and fishing fleets in the

Philippine Sea and around the Batangas Port (on the southern coast of Luzon) and Subic Bay (a former US military base that is now a major trading hub), Manila is increasingly openly linking the stability of its own economy and maritime security to the situation around Taiwan.

## Not just fishing vessels

More than a billion tonnes of goods are transported through the Bashi Channel every year. Any serious disruption to shipping through this passage could lead to disruptions in global supply chains, an increase in energy prices, and a halt in the supply of electronic components, which would affect not only the economies of East Asia but also markets in Europe.

In addition, most of the undersea cables that carry internet and telecommunication traffic between Japan, China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia run through the same channel.

Manila and Taipei are thus sending a clear signal that they do not want to leave control of this important passageway to the Chinese People's Liberation Army alone.

These developments point to a new phase in power relations in the Western Pacific, in which the middle powers are increasingly openly making mutual agreements to protect their interests, even if they still formally avoid binding defence alliances so as not to directly challenge Beijing.

**These vessels are not exclusively fishing vessels but operate with the informal support of Chinese coastal forces**

According to estimates by the Philippine Coast Guard in the region of the port of Batangas (a major commercial and industrial port on the southern coast of Luzon) and Subic Bay, a significant increase in the number of Chinese fishing and patrol vessels has been observed

over the past two years, exceeding previous averages by several tens of per cent, according to the authorities.

Philippine officials **warn** that these vessels are not exclusively fishing vessels but operate with the informal support of Chinese coastal forces, effectively extending Beijing's presence in the waters claimed by Manila.

As for the economy, more than 150 thousand Filipino workers are **employed** in Taipei and other parts of Taiwan.

Their remittances are important to the Philippines' foreign exchange reserves and directly help thousands of families in Manila and other cities. Therefore, any threat to free shipping through the Bashi Channel poses a real danger to the Philippines' macroeconomic stability.

## Without formal alliances

China reacted sharply. The Ministry of Defence in Beijing announced that the joint maritime activities of the Philippines and Taiwan are a "serious provocation" and reiterated that it considers the South China Sea a historical right and part of the security space of vital importance.

However, this time the Philippines acted pragmatically. Instead of a formal alliance that could directly confront it with China, Manila has **established** a discreet cooperation with the United States through fuel and ammunition depot agreements on the islands of Luzon and Mindanao.

The aim of these depots is to be able to respond quickly in the event of a crisis in the Taiwan Strait without the need for prior approval of complex political procedures.

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At the same time, the Philippines' National Cyber Security Centre has established cooperation with Taiwanese institutions to protect key information systems in the ports of Batangas and Subic Bay.

In 2024, these ports were the target of cyberattacks that Filipino experts believe were the result of activities linked to Chinese state structures. These attacks temporarily disrupted the operation of the container terminal management and navigation control system.

In May 2025, Filipino and Taiwanese engineers began jointly testing an advanced electronic system to monitor ocean currents and ship movements in Davao Bay, on the southeast coast of Mindanao Island.

The project includes cameras, radars, and sensors. In the next phase, the introduction of unmanned submarines is planned to monitor the bottom of the Bashi Channel and enable early detection of unusual activity.

According to official statements from Tokyo, Japan is **prepared** to provide radar systems with a range of up to 130 kilometres and send experts for electronic reconnaissance.

This would form an extended surveillance network linking Okinawa, Taiwan, and the Philippines into a single early warning system.

## A strong signal to Beijing

Analysts in Manila and Taipei estimate that this form of cooperation is currently the most reliable way to avoid miscalculations at sea that could escalate into incidents.

Previous cases in the South China Sea have shown that even short-term disruptions in shipping traffic have the potential to **shake** energy markets and cause commodity prices to rise across the region.



*If the Philippines and Taiwan can maintain peace in the region without directly confronting China, it could become a model for how middle powers jointly protect their own interests in complex relationships with great powers - Ferdinand Marcos Jr*

If China expands the activities of its maritime militias in the disputed waters or introduces a stricter control regime in its own ports, this could directly disrupt the supply chain of goods and raw materials for the rest of Asia and Europe.

In such a scenario, Australia and India, as countries that already have joint exercises and intelligence contacts with Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan through formats such as the Quad, would likely further intensify this cooperation to jointly ensure the stability of trade routes.

Philippine and Taiwanese officials are currently in talks to formalise intelligence sharing and establish emergency coordination procedures. This would send a strong signal to Beijing that Manila and Taipei are no longer acting in isolation.

The aim of all these activities is to ensure stable and safe shipping through the Bashi Channel and the wider South China Sea area, which handles more than a billion tonnes of cargo annually.

If the Philippines and Taiwan can maintain peace in this region without directly confronting China, it could become a model for how middle powers jointly protect their own interests in complex relationships with great powers.

Otherwise, rising tensions could open a new chapter of competition in the Western Pacific, the consequences of which would be felt by the global economy.