



# Legal Vigilance Bulletin

*A bulletin for the broader Legal Operations community*

*NATO ACO Office of Legal Affairs (OLA)*

———— # ISSUE 092 ————

#Issue 092 – Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2025

## Quote of the Issue

*“Today, we reiterate our firm belief that Japan and NATO share strategic interests and common values, such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and recognise our partnership is of strategic importance for the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific regions. We reaffirm our commitment to international peace and stability. We recognise that the security of the Euro-Atlantic and of the Indo-Pacific are interconnected, and that we face many of the same challenges.”*

*– Joint Statement H.E. Mr Ishiba Shigeru, Prime Minister of Japan and H.E. Mr Mark Rutte, NATO Secretary General (April 9, 2025, Tokyo)*



Photos from Shutterstock Database  
Japanese Prime Minister,  
H.E. Ishiba Shigeru  
and NATO Secretary General,  
H.E. Mr. Mark Rutte

## Russia and Eastern Europe

- Russian Authorities Vow to Take ‘All Measures’ to Extradite and Arrest Exiled Navalny Associates, Calling them ‘Traitors to the Motherland’ ----- 3
- Countering Russian Lawfare and Gray Zone Operations ----- 3
- Iran and Russia Pursue Multipolar World Order ----- 4
- Putin's New Decree Part of Plan to Forcibly Russify Ukrainians ----- 4

## Asia & Indo-Pacific

- China in the Taiwan Strait: Feb 2025 ----- 5
- Inside China’s Grey Zone Strategy ----- 5
- Navigating the Risks of China’s Dual-Use Shipyards ----- 5

## Middle East

- The New Syria and Its Obligations Under the Chemical Weapons Convention ----- 6

## Further Reading

- Protecting Maritime Infrastructure from Hybrid Threats: Legal Option ----- 6

# Legal Operations



We are living in “peace times” of Strategic Competition, where the combined use of different instruments of power in the Diplomatic, Intelligence, Military, Economic, Financial, Information and Legal (DIMEFIL) spectrum allows potential opponents to generate significant impacts while avoiding the use of kinetic means. By avoiding kinetic measures, opponents can remain below the threshold of the use of force and are able to achieve effects in a more cost-effective way, evading the risks that accompany the use of force. Opponents have integrated these tools into modern strategies that advance their interests while preconditioning, complicating, delaying and hindering the ability of their competitors to respond to threats in a swift, coherent and effective manner. In this regard, several state and non-state actors increasingly leverage the legal domain to achieve tactical, operational and strategic military and non-military objectives, instrumentalising and/or reshaping the rule of law and the rules-based international order, i.e. they use legal operations.

Thus, the term Legal Operations refers to the use of law as an instrument of power. It encompasses all types of action in the legal environment by state and non-state actors aimed at gaining/undermining legitimacy, advancing/undermining interests, or enhancing/denying capabilities at the tactical, operational and/or strategic/political levels. Such actions may occur across the peace-crisis-conflict spectrum alone or in conjunction with other instruments of power in the DIMEFIL spectrum.

This is of great concern for modern militaries, as disregarding legal and other instruments of power may result in later military disadvantage and increase the economic and human cost of conflict or crisis. Worse yet, to paraphrase Sun Tzu, militaries that ignore these critical instruments risk losing the war before even entering battle. But through enhanced legal vigilance, the Alliance can improve its ability to anticipate, identify, assess and respond to legal operations, enhance the effectiveness of its deterrence posture, and mitigate threats early on, thus avoiding unnecessary damage or escalation.

This Legal Vigilance Bulletin is the fruit of an informal, non-comprehensive review of open sources. It compiles extracts that have not been subject to further analysis but may still be of interest to the broader legal operations, intelligence, strategic communications, and ‘hybrid’ communities. Through this Bulletin, the Legal Operations Team does not modify, endorse or comment on the contents of the articles and media reports whose extracts are reproduced. The aim, as part of the wider legal vigilance activities of the NATO ACO Office of Legal Affairs, is simply to raise awareness about the increased activities in the legal domain by various actors.

This document neither constitutes an official NATO or ACO Office of Legal Affairs-approved product nor represents official policy.

The Legal Operations Team welcomes and encourages the feedback and contributions from the recipients at **SHAPE OLA SAGLEG@shape.nato.int**



*By*  
Legal Operations Team

# Russia and Eastern Europe



Photo from Shutterstock dababase  
Russian opposition leader Aleksey Navalny,  
died in February 16, 2024

## Russian Authorities Vow to Take ‘All Measures’ to Extradite and Arrest Exiled Navalny Associates, Calling them ‘Traitors to the Motherland’

*In this article, published in Meduza, it is claimed that:*

The Russian Interior Ministry issued a press release on Tuesday stating that it continues to provide “operational support in criminal cases against individuals accused of terrorism – and extremism-related offenses.”

According to the ministry, associates of the late opposition politician Alexey Navalny — Dmitry Nizovtsev, Rus-

lan Shaveddinov, and Nina Volokhonskaya — are wanted on charges of “serious and especially serious crimes.” The statement notes that all three are accused of involvement with an extremist organization, while Shaveddinov and Nizovtsev also face charges of spreading “disinformation” about the military and failing to comply with “foreign agent” requirements.

Read the full article at [MEDUZA](#).



Photo from Shutterstock dababase

## Countering Russian Lawfare and Gray Zone Operations

*In this article, published in Just Security, it is claimed that:*

Legal warfare, more commonly known as lawfare, is a pillar of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)’s military doctrine. Although the Russian Federation has not explicitly defined a lawfare strategy, it also uses the legal do-

main to maneuver for strategic advantage. Russia erodes principles of international law by enforcing non-standard legal interpretations. Russia also passes domestic laws to support its strategic aims, coupled with information operations advancing false or misleading legal positions. By doing so, Russia attempts to lend a veneer of legitimacy to its illegal and gray zone operations: hybrid warfare activities that exist between peace and war.

Russia’s lawfare is part of an explicit strategy to undermine international law itself. By failing to forcefully confront Russian gray zone operations that are tacitly legitimized by its skewed legal interpretations, the international community risks permitting Russia’s freedom of maneuver to reshape established international norms.

Utilizing international venues to confront Russian malign efforts will be key to effectively calling out illegitimate and illegal Russian activities.

Read full article at: [Just Security](#)





Photo from Shutterstock dabatase

## Iran and Russia Pursue Multipolar World Order

*In this article, published in Jamestown Foundation, it is claimed that:*

Iran and Russia signed a new comprehensive strategic agreement on January 17, serving as a comprehensive framework to build closer ties and cooperate in what the two states refer to as a just and multipolar world order. The treaty highlights expanding trade routes, reducing reliance on the U.S. dollar, and enhancing military collaboration without formal alliance commitments, including via Iran's continued supply of drones and potential ballistic missile transfers.

Moscow and Tehran maintain a pragmatic partnership despite tensions over Russia's support for Azerbaijan's plans for the Zangezur corridor. The two states are avoid-

ing rigid alliances to preserve flexibility in their geopolitical maneuvering.

Despite expanding cooperation, Moscow and Tehran have not included stipulations on forming a formal alliance, nor pledges on mutual defense in case one of the countries is attacked by a third party. Conversely, for example, the treaty between Russia and North Korea signed in 2024 does have a special mutual defense clause, effectively elevating Moscow-Pyongyang relations to an alliance (Al Jazeera, November 12, 2024). This difference highlights Tehran and Moscow's need to maintain flexibility in their partnership in such a way that evades formal alliance.



Read full article at [Jamestown Foundation](#).



## Putin's New Decree Part of Plan to Torcibly Russify Ukrainians, UK Intelligence Says

*In this article, published in Kyiv Independent, it is claimed that:*

British intelligence has deemed the decree signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 20 as a new

wave of "Russification policy" in illegally occupied parts of Ukraine.

The decree mandated that Ukrainian citizens "illegally" staying in Russia must obtain Russian documents of leave before Sept. 10.

"Putin's decree is almost certainly intended to force the departure from Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory of Ukrainian nationals who refuse to accept Russian passport and citizenship," the British intelligence report said.

Russia illegally annexed fully occupied Crimea in 2014 and partially occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts in 2022, following sham referendums at gunpoint rejected by the international community as null and void.



Read full article at: [Kyiv Independent](#).



# Asia & Indo-Pacific



## China in the Taiwan Strait: Feb 2025

*In this article, published in Council on Foreign Relations, it is claimed that:*

Taiwan accused the People's Republic of China (PRC) of violating international norms and undermining stability by carrying out military exercises forty nautical miles off the coast of Taiwan on February 26. The Eastern Theater Command of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) executed a joint combat readiness drill to the southwest and west of Taiwan, which included fighter jets, other aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, and warships.

Twenty-two PLA aircraft crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait during the drills. Although Beijing initially claimed the exercise would involve "shooting training," indicating potential live-fire drills, Taipei ultimately did not detect any such activity. Taiwan deployed naval ships and aircraft to waters near the drill zone to monitor the situation throughout the day. Taiwan condemned the actions as a provocation and a threat to regional security as well as commercial activity



Read the full article at: [Council on Foreign Relations](#).

## Navigating the Risks of China's Dual-Use Shipyards

*In this article, published in Center for Strategic and International Studies, it is claimed that:*

China has emerged as the undisputed leader of the global shipbuilding industry. Over 300 shipyards dot China's seaboard, churning out more than half of the world's commercial vessels each year. These shipyards build the merchant ships that power global trade, but many are also charged with building China's rapidly expanding navy.

Many of the shipyards that support China's commercial production also produce warships for the Chinese navy. The ability to leverage dual-use technologies, infrastructure, and materials for both commercial and naval shipbuilding.

In peacetime, orders for merchant ships sustain demand that keeps dual-use production lines humming, and during



## Inside China's Grey Zone Strategy

*In this article, published in the Centre for Integrated and Holistic Studies (CIHS), it is claimed that:*

In recent years, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has demonstrated a distinct flair for "grey zone" strategies—actions that straddle the threshold between open conflict and the calm of peacetime. This approach is not entirely new; historical powers have long tested their adversaries with salami-slicing tactics, never crossing the bright red line that might spark a full-scale clash.

In South China Sea, these grey zone tactics unfold with laser-focused intent. Watching the PLA Navy's manoeuvres or the maritime militia's presence can, at times, feel like staring at a chessboard whose pieces inch forward one measured square at a time. When disputes arise, the CCP often deploys fishing fleets that function like unofficial patrols, creating friction against neighbours like Vietnam or the Philippines.



Read the full article at [CIHS](#).



Refer to the study related to this topic at: [Global Taiwan Institute](#)



economic downturns naval ship orders can help offset downswings in commercial markets. In wartime, commercial production lines can be converted to naval production, rapidly scaling up the ability to churn out and repair warships.

This is, in part, the logic behind China's "military-civil fusion" (MCF, 军民融合) strategy, which aims to eliminate barriers between the commercial and defense sectors. As part of this MCF strategy, many Chinese shipyards have intentionally blurred the lines between military and commercial activity.

Read the full article at [CSIS](#).



# Middle East



Photo from Shutterstock dabatase

## The New Syria and Its Obligations Under the Chemical Weapons Convention

*In this article, published in Lieber Institute West Point, it is claimed that:*

On December 8, 2024, after weeks of hostilities, rebel groups led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) captured the capital city of Damascus and took control over the Syrian State. This historic development attracted worldwide attention and crystalized after the sudden exile of Bashar al-Assad to Moscow, marking the fall of the infamous Assad dynasty that ruled Syria for over than half a century.

This turn of events ushered in a new chapter for Syria after an atrocious 13-year period of civil war that left Syrians facing devastation, displacement, and despair. Finally, after years of turmoil including the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime against its own nationals, Syrians are presented with a new national path of stability, or at least the promise of one. This hope, however, is not without concerns. This post addresses two such concerns: the ability of the new State apparatus to exercise effective control over the entire territory of Syria; and the fate of chemical weapons in Syria and the factories that produced them.



Read the full article at Lieber [Institute West point](#)

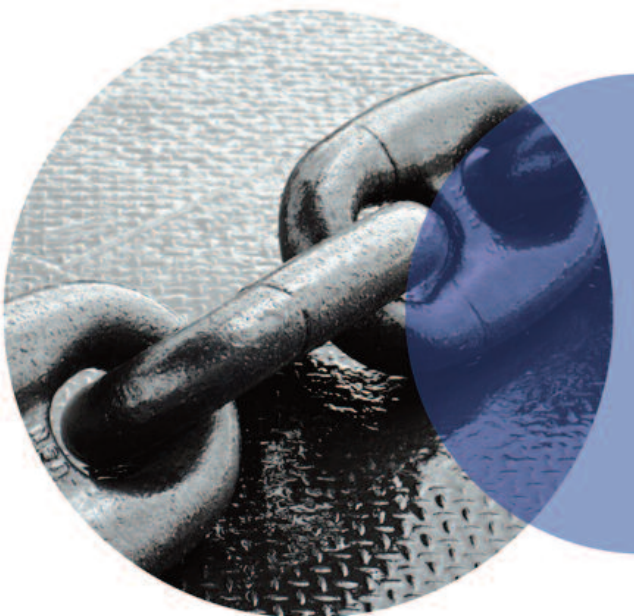


## Further Reading

Photo from Hybrid CoE

Hybrid CoE Research Report 14

### Protecting maritime infrastructure from hybrid threats: legal options



Hybrid CoE

Aurel Sari – March 2025

## Protecting Maritime Infrastructure from Hybrid Threats: Legal Options

*In this research report, published in Hybrid CoE, it is claimed that:*

Maritime infrastructure supports a range of essential services. The critical contribution made by maritime assets across the EU and NATO has heightened concerns over their vulnerability to sabotage and other deliberate attacks, including those forming part of a hybrid campaign. The report distinguishes between five categories of assets and suggests that addressing maritime hybrid threats requires a multifaceted approach involving three complementary lines of effort: maintaining situational awareness, taking operational action, and increasing resilience.

The law of the sea establishes jurisdictional zones that delineate the rights and responsibilities of coastal and other states. The report shows that these rules confer broad authorities on coastal states to maintain situational awareness of maritime hybrid threats. However, the legal framework is less robust when it comes to taking operational action. This is because the zonal logic of the law of the sea does not sit well with the character and vulnerabilities of certain categories of maritime infrastructure. The report suggests that significant gaps exist in the legal protection of submarine communication cables in particular, before discussing the impact of the rules governing the use of force.

Read the full article at [Hybrid CoE](#)



# NATO ACO Office of Legal Affairs

## OLA

The NATO Allied Command Operations (ACO) Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) advises SACEUR, who is responsible for all Alliance military operations, in their mission to preserve the peace, security and territorial integrity of NATO member nations in its area of responsibility. The Office provides legal advice and support to SACEUR's Command Group and all SHAPE staff branches, as well as guidance and support to the legal advisors in subordinate headquarters and formations.

Since its creation in 1951, ACO OLA has seen a large expansion in the quantity and diversity of its workload. Traditionally organized into three branches (International, Operational and Legal Management), it has been supplemented in recent years by the Strategic Enabling Agreements Team (SEAT, former RAIO), the Legal Advisors Worktop Functional Area System (e-LAWFAS) team and the cross-branch, interdisciplinary Legal Operations Team.

Headed by its Director, Mr. Andrés Muñoz Mosquera, the ACO Office of Legal Affairs consists of a diverse group of permanent, temporary and embedded personnel (licensed lawyers, legal advisors, paralegals, and other specialists) from twelve different nations in a mixture of military and civilian roles. Its members bring forward vast legal experience in the practice of common and civil law in permissive and non-permissive environments.

The Office leads and conducts its mission with the inestimable support of the more than 30 legal offices of the subordinate commands in the NATO Command Structure (JFC Brunssum, JFC Naples, AIRCOM, LANDCOM, MARCOM, NCISG and SJLSG) as well as those in the NATO Force Structure and other Forces, Structures and Assets made available to NATO and placed under SACEUR's command.

We are a diverse team united in our enthusiasm for solving seemingly intractable problems and providing expert legal advice in the uniquely fascinating organization that is SHAPE and its subordinate commands (ACO).

The Office thanks all those who work on a daily basis with the NATO ACO legal team and wants to further extend its gratitude to all those who have served SHAPE since 1950. ■

*Andrés B. Muñoz Mosquera*  
NATO ACO Office of Legal Affairs Director

# For prior issues of the Legal Vigilance Bulletin, visit e-LAWFAS, your 4<sup>th</sup> Pillar Collaborative Tool

@ <https://lawfas.hq.nato.int>



**Mr. DA SILVA MIGUEL, José Maria**  
Administrator and Tech Support  
#254-6354 – +32 (0) 65 44 63 54  
+32 (0) 491 726 800  
[jose.dasilvamiguel@shape.nato.int](mailto:jose.dasilvamiguel@shape.nato.int)  
[jmsmiguel@gmail.com](mailto:jmsmiguel@gmail.com)

**Mr. MONTES TOSCANO, Borja**  
Content Manager  
#254-7599 – +32 (0) 65 44 75 99  
+32 (0) 492 213 513  
[borja.montestosciano@shape.nato.int](mailto:borja.montestosciano@shape.nato.int)

NATO ACO Office of Legal Affairs  
Bldg 101 – Room K207  
B-7010 – SHAPE Belgium

© e-LAWFAS – established in 2020

#WEARENATO