



LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH SERVICE QUICK NOTES

Second Regular Session, 19th Congress

Public Hearing of the Committee on Foreign Relations

Chairperson: Sen. Imee R. Marcos

25 June 2024, Tuesday, 9:00 a.m., Recto Room, Senate

- Re: I. The Alleged Anti-Vaccine Propaganda by the Military of the United States of America During the COVID-19 Pandemic;**
II. The Ayungin Shoal Incident that Took Place on 17 June 2024 which Resulted in Injuries to Philippine Navy Personnel; and
III. Other Matters

Background

I. The Alleged Anti-Vaccine Propaganda by the Military of the United States of America During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- According to Reuters, the US military, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, launched a clandestine programme to discredit China's Sinovac inoculation in the Philippines. The investigation found that the U.S. military aimed to sow doubt about the safety and efficacy of vaccines and other life-saving aid supplied by China.¹
- The anti-vaccine propaganda was US' payback for China's effort to blame the US for the pandemic, according to the report.²
- The propaganda was, based on the report, done through fake internet accounts. It further stated that at least 300 accounts on X (formerly Twitter) were created in the spring of 2020 using the hashtag #Chinaangvirus, the Tagalog for "China is the virus."³
- China's embassy in the Philippines accused the U.S. military of "hypocrisy, malign intention and double standards," in response to the report.⁴

II. The Ayungin Shoal Incident that Resulted in Injuries to Philippine Navy Personnel

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-covid-propaganda/>

² <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-covid-propaganda/>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-covid-propaganda/>

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-accuses-us-malign-intention-discredit-its-covid-vaccines-2024-06->

- On 17 June 2024, the China Coast Guard (CCG) used physical attacks and violence to prevent the Armed Forces of the Philippines's (AFP) rotation and resupply mission to *BRP Sierra Madre* in Ayungin Shoal.⁵
- The Philippines said that CCG personnel boarded its boats and allegedly damaged the communications and navigational equipment and took seven firearms. One Filipino personnel reportedly got injured and lost a finger. The *ML Lapulapu* was reportedly rammed and did not proceed with its intended mission.⁶
- Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin said the incident was not yet considered an "armed attack," adding that the Ayungin Shoal incident may have only just been a "misunderstanding or accident."⁷

Possible Points for Discussion

I. The Alleged Anti-Vaccine Propaganda by the US Military during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- What are the empirical evidence/findings and statistics on the number of Filipinos inoculated with China's Sinovac vis-a-vis vaccines from other countries? Did the anti-vaccine propaganda affect the number of Filipinos who preferred the vaccine from other countries over China's Sinovac? In general, did the propaganda affect the number of Filipinos who refused to be vaccinated with any brand of vaccine against COVID-19?
- The geopolitical situation at the time the anti-vaccine propaganda was launched, and the awareness of the concerned Philippine government authorities of the alleged misinformation campaign on the vaccines and other supplies provided by China.
- Assuming that there was anti-vaccine propaganda launched by the US military against China, are there international law/s violated, especially if the allegations by the US military are found to be unsubstantiated by evidence?
- What were the effects, if any, of the alleged misinformation campaign on the Philippines' national security and public health?
- Under the circumstance, what are the legal remedies available to the Philippines under international law/s?

II. The Ayungin Shoal Incident that Took Place on 17 June 2024 which Resulted in Injuries to Philippine Navy Personnel

- What are the "other" available peaceful means that the Philippine government may employ to maintain its sovereignty in the disputed areas of the West Philippine Sea?
- What are the alternative operational strategies for rotation and reprovisioning missions?

⁵ Also known as Second Thomas Shoal and Bajo de Masinloc

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ <https://www.inquirer.net/406996/chinas-actions-in-ayungin-shoal-not-yet-considered-an-armed-attack-palace/>

- What acts will qualify as “armed attacks” that will justify retaliatory and/or defensive actions?
- As a precautionary measure, when is it proper and justifiable to invoke the Mutual Defense Treaty with the other contracting States?
- The real question is: Which country is the true target of aggression? Is Taiwan a factor, given China's explicit interest in reclaiming it? If the geopolitical situation were a chess game between the US and China, is the Philippines a poisoned pawn or a gambit?

General Point for Discussion

- Potential impact of the two issues on the geo-economic scene⁸ and the brewing conflict between US and China.

⁸ the combination of economic and geographic factors relating to international trade. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/geo-economics>