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September 22, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

In light of recent reports that People's Republic of China (PRC) maritime forces water cannoned and collided with Philippine government ships around Scarborough Shoal, we urge the Department of State to support its Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) in future budget requests. Given INL's key role in empowering the Philippines to counter the PRC's aggressive and destabilizing actions in the South China Sea, this support is imperative from both a national security and diplomatic perspective.<sup>1</sup> Although Congress has yet to set FY26 funding levels, the Department's FY26 Budget Request would have nearly zeroed out INL funding, gutting key programs that strengthen the capacity of Philippine justice and law enforcement agencies to secure Manila's South China Sea territory against PRC activities that violate international law.<sup>2</sup> We therefore seek to bring your attention to the importance of this program and urge you to include robust funding for INL in future budget requests.

In recent years, Beijing has significantly escalated its aggressive activities in the South China Sea, including its efforts to unlawfully assert control over much of the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The PRC's coast guard and maritime militia regularly attack or physically coerce Philippine vessels in waters a landmark international court ruling determined Beijing had "no legal basis" to claim, including through dangerous tactics like ramming, lasing, water cannon blasting, and even boarding and outright seizure of Philippine property.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Beijing regularly violates international law by deploying its maritime forces to

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<sup>1</sup> Cash, Joe. "China fires water cannon at Philippine ships in South China Sea." Reuters. 16 Sep. 2025, [China fires water cannon at Philippine ships in South China Sea | Reuters](#)

<sup>2</sup> "Congressional Budget Justification Fiscal Year 2026." U.S. Department of State. May 2025, [FY 2026 Congressional Budget Justification](#)

<sup>3</sup> "Press Release: The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of the Philippines v. The People's Republic of China)." Permanent Court of Arbitration. 12 July 2016, [PH-CN-20160712-Press-Release-No-11-English.pdf](#)

patrol the Philippines' EEZ and allowing PRC fishermen and energy companies to extract natural resources within Manila's sovereign waters.

Beijing's actions have only grown more threatening over the last several months, reflecting the immediacy of this threat. On August 11, a destroyer from the People's Liberation Army Navy came dangerously close to ramming a Philippine Coast Guard ship and potentially causing injuries or worse to its crew, which could have forced Manila to invoke its 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) with the United States. Following this incident, Beijing for nearly the first time in a year deployed high numbers of coast guard and militia forces to Second Thomas Shoal—the maritime feature around which Beijing almost escalated to lethal force last June.<sup>4</sup>

The PRC on September 10 also announced plans to construct a “national nature reserve” at the contested Scarborough Shoal, likely as pretext to more permanently occupy and control the maritime feature in Manila's exclusive economic zone that Beijing seized in 2012.<sup>5</sup> On September 16, Beijing's maritime forces water cannoned and collided with Philippine government ships attempting to resupply Philippine fishermen at Scarborough, highlighting the immediacy of the PRC's aggressive behavior at this strategic flashpoint.<sup>6</sup>

The PRC's growing aggression against the Philippines has rightly led multiple U.S. administrations to affirm that the MDT applies to Philippine territory in the South China Sea—a status which Washington previously had not clarified. This July, Defense Secretary Hegseth stated that the United States armed forces “are and will be ready and resolute, and will support the Philippines' efforts to modernize its Armed Forces and collective defense.”<sup>7</sup> A readout following your meeting with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. in July stated that you “reaffirmed [the United States' and the Philippines'] shared commitment to deterrence and reinforcing freedoms of navigation and overflight in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific.”<sup>8</sup>

INL support is critical for strengthening the ability of the United States and the Philippines to jointly achieve these goals. The State Department's FY26 Budget Request would have cut the budget of International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE)—which is the account that funds INL—by more than 90 percent, imperiling INL's capacity building efforts with the Philippines. According to the document, the State Department is requesting \$125m for INCLE efforts—a fraction of the \$1.285b appropriated for FY25. Needless to say, this would devastate INL's capacity building programs, reducing Manila's ability to counter China in the South China Sea.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gomez, Jim. “Filipino forces on alert after China deploys coast guard ships closer to disputed shoal.” AP. 21 August 2025, [Filipino forces on alert after China deploys coast guard ships closer to disputed shoal | AP News](#)

<sup>5</sup> Lariosa, Aaron-Matthew. “Philippines Rejects Chinese Scarborough Shoal Nature Reserve Claim.” USNI. 15 September 2025, [“Philippines Rejects Chinese Scarborough Shoal Nature Reserve Claim - USNI News”](#)

<sup>6</sup> Cash, Joe. “China fires water cannon at Philippine ships in South China Sea.” Reuters. 16 Sep. 2025, [China fires water cannon at Philippine ships in South China Sea | Reuters](#)

<sup>7</sup> Aguinaldo, Sandra. “US supports PH military modernization efforts.” GMA News. 22 July 2025, [US supports PH military modernization efforts | GMA News Online](#)

<sup>8</sup> “Secretary Rubio's Meeting with Philippine President Marcos, Jr.” U.S. Department of State. 21 July, 2025, [Secretary Rubio's Meeting with Philippine President Marcos, Jr. - United States Department of State](#)

<sup>9</sup> “Congressional Budget Justification Fiscal Year 2026.” U.S. Department of State. May 2025, [FY 2026 Congressional Budget Justification](#)

One illustrative example of a program potentially jeopardized by your proposed cuts is INL's maritime law enforcement capacity building program with Manila. This program equips Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) personnel with technical expertise, funds infrastructure projects at PCG facilities, and supports the maritime domain awareness of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to counter illegal, unreported, and unregulated PRC fishing. This, of course, enhances Manila's capacity to operate in and respond to China's presence in Philippine waters.<sup>10</sup> Underscoring INL's impact, a senior PCG Commodore stated that "U.S. expertise, resources, and guidance are invaluable in ensuring that we are better equipped to address maritime threats. Together, we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that our maritime sovereignty remains a zone of peace, safety, and prosperity for all."<sup>11</sup>

We were extremely concerned to learn that your budget request did not adequately resource INL. As this letter evidences, one source of our concern is the bureau's importance in building the Philippines' maritime capacity to the benefit of our national security. Thankfully, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs rejected your budget proposal and instead raised INL's budget in its markup bill.<sup>12</sup> It is imperative that future budget requests continue INL programs that support the Philippines' maritime law enforcement capacity, as undermining such programs would threaten our national security interests.

Strengthening the capacity of the Philippines to push back against the PRC's unlawful and aggressive activities in the South China Sea is not just common sense. It is a critical component of U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific that has been sustained across multiple Administrations. It is essential that INL funding for the Philippines be preserved in future budget requests.

As such, we request answers to the following questions by October 10, 2025:

1. What are the State Department's plans regarding the continuation of INL funding for the Philippines' capacity-building efforts for law enforcement and other operations in the South China Sea?
2. Does the Administration expect that any planned cuts to INL funding will impact these programs?
3. What support does the State Department need from Congress to ensure Philippine capacity-building efforts proceed at a pace needed to effectively counter Beijing's unlawful and threatening actions in the South China Sea?

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<sup>10</sup> "Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: Philippines Summary." U.S. Department of State. [Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: Philippines Summary - United States Department of State](#)

<sup>11</sup> "U.S., Philippines Hold Multinational Training Event to Strengthen Maritime Security." U.S. Embassy in the Philippines. 27 January, 2025, [U.S., Philippines Hold Multinational Training Event to Strengthen Maritime Security - U.S. Embassy in the Philippines](#)

<sup>12</sup> "Committee Approves FY26 National Security, Department of State Appropriations Act." U.S. House Committee on Appropriations - Republicans. 23 July, 2025, [Committee Approves FY26 National Security, Department of State Appropriations Act | House Committee on Appropriations - Republicans](#)

4. How does the State Department plan to work with other U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, such as Japan and Australia, to strengthen multilateral support for the Philippines and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea?

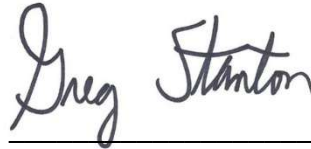
Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



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Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Ranking Member  
House Select Committee on the CCP



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Greg Stanton  
Member of Congress



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Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress