

# Philippine “Chinese spy” allegations surge as Marcos signals reset with Beijing

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29 March 2026

In the first days of March 2026, the Philippine National Security Council (NSC) announced it had uncovered and dismantled a Chinese espionage network operating inside government agencies. The online news outlet *Rappler* simultaneously published a three-part investigative series claiming Filipino civil servants had been recruited to pass military secrets to Chinese handlers. The Philippine military amplified the claims. Senator Risa Hontiveros of the Akbayan party demanded new surveillance powers and the suspension of visa-free entry for Chinese nationals.

The announcement and escalating allegations against and attacks on China for “spying” come as the Ferdinand Marcos Jr administration confronts an immense economic and social crisis caused by the spike in prices and curtailed supply of oil as a result of Washington’s war on Iran. There are strong indications that Marcos is looking to distance the Philippines from the United States and improve relations with China.

Theresa Lazaro, head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, announced that the Philippines was planning on conducting joint patrols of the South China Sea with China. A leading Marcos ally, Senator Erwin Tulfo, head of the Foreign Relations committee, called for the re-examination and possible scrapping of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that allows the basing of US forces in the country and the deployment of US missile systems targeting China. On March 24, Marcos told *Bloomberg* that there would be a “reset” of relations between Manila and Beijing, and called for joint oil and gas exploration in the South China Sea.

Opposing this reset are many of the top brass of the Philippine military and the pseudo-left party Akbayan, which out of its merger with the elite Liberal Party, has become the most vocal proponent of Washington’s war drive against China in the Philippines.

It is in this context that the espionage campaign—whose immediate origins lie in a March 4 NSC press release and a *Rappler* series sourced entirely from military officials—must be understood.

The *Rappler* series centers on three Filipino government workers, identified only as “Lawrence,” “Harley,” and “Allison,” who allegedly passed military information to foreign handlers. All three are anonymous. All three are held under military supervision and cooperating with security authorities. None have been charged.

“Lawrence,” the only subject to speak on camera, stated that his

handler was known only by the alias “Scott Chan”—a name supplied by Lawrence alone, with no documentary corroboration. The NSC declared the handlers to be “Chinese nationals” while simultaneously stating it could not “discuss identities, methods, or timelines” on national security grounds.

The most operationally serious charge is that one of the three uncharged anonymous subjects passed resupply mission schedules to handlers in August 2024, enabling China to intercept Philippine vessels at Ayungin Shoal. But the accusation crumbles on examination.

The disputed shoal is the site of the Philippines resupply missions to a handful of Marines stationed aboard the BRP Sierra Madre which was scuttled there. The Philippines and China concluded a provisional arrangement the previous month, announced publicly in July 2024, under which China’s Foreign Ministry stated explicitly that Manila would notify Beijing in advance before each resupply mission so that the two countries could avoid future confrontations. The idea that China needed spies to inform them of these resupply missions makes no sense. These were disclosed events per the diplomatic framework both governments had just negotiated. The *Rappler* series made no mention of this.

The identification of this alleged operation as a Chinese government intelligence program rests on the NSC’s assertion that anonymous informants transmitted documents to un-named Chinese nationals. This is not merely flimsy: it is unsubstantiated allegations piled upon baseless claims.

The March 2026 allegations are the latest in a sustained cycle that has been running since 2024, each episode following the same template: an announcement by security officials, media amplification, and charges that fail to materialize.

In January 2025, the NBI arrested Chinese software engineer Deng Yuanqing, who had lived in the Philippines for over a decade, was married to a Filipino, and was conducting road surveys for a self-driving vehicle technology company. The NBI claimed his mapping equipment was espionage hardware and alleged he had graduated from a PLA university—a claim contradicted by his actual diploma. No conviction has followed.

Before that, the Senate held months of hearings alleging that Alice Guo, the dismissed mayor of a small town in Tarlac province was a Chinese intelligence asset. She had been implicated in a forced labor operation run from a government-licensed offshore gambling hub. The foundational evidence was the testimony of

She Zhijiang, a Cambodian-Chinese gambling tycoon imprisoned in Thailand on his own criminal charges, who claimed in a documentary film that he and Guo were both Chinese agents.

Guo subsequently became unreachable after being transferred to another facility. She was convicted in November 2025—not of espionage, but of human trafficking. The Chinese Embassy in Manila, noting the record, called the repeated allegations “malicious slanders” and observed that “several cases loudly portrayed as Chinese espionage have quietly unraveled.”

No political force has exploited these allegations more systematically than Akbayan and its most prominent figure, Senator Hontiveros. The pseudo-left Akbayan has become the most energetic promoter of the US military alliance in the Philippine legislature, and the espionage campaign has been its primary instrument.

In August 2025, Akbayan launched what it called the “Silent Infiltration” campaign, alleging Chinese penetration through donated CCTV cameras; school computers; Confucius Institutes—which teach Mandarin and aspects of Chinese culture at select Philippine universities; coast guard volunteers; and attempts to influence the 2028 presidential election. By January 2026 it was calling for the suspension of visa-free entry for all Chinese nationals and the closure of Confucius Institutes. The logic of the campaign is that every Chinese person, every Chinese institution, every Chinese donation is a potential weapon of subversion.

Akbayan’s racist nationalism has a history. The suspicion of Chinese Filipinos is not new—it was given modern legal form by American colonialism, which extended the Chinese Exclusion Act to the Philippines in 1898, the very first piece of American civil legislation applied to the colony, and used nationality law to keep Chinese Filipinos in legal limbo for decades. The Chinese community in the Philippines traces its presence to the sixteenth century; Manila’s Chinatown, Binondo, was established in 1594. The inhabitants were subjected to repeated pogroms under Spanish rule, and were systematically discriminated against under the laws drawn up for the Philippines by the Americans. Akbayan’s campaign treats this centuries-rooted community as a fifth column.

The NSC, which declared the March spy ring a “clear and present danger,” is headed by National Security Adviser Eduardo Año—a career military intelligence general, former AFP Chief of Staff, and former Interior Secretary under Rodrigo Duterte, whose entire institutional formation lies in the US security relationship. It is his NSC that produced the press release. It is military spokespeople aligned with the US Indo-Pacific Command who have sustained the campaign in the weeks since. *Rappler*, which published the series, has publicly acknowledged receiving funding from USAID-funded media programs and the US-based National Endowment for Democracy.

There is a long history of espionage conducted against the Philippines, including the rigging of elections, the subversion of democracy, and sabotaging of popular sovereignty—but it was waged not by China but by the United States.

CIA officer Edward Lansdale arrived in the Philippines in 1950, ran psychological warfare against the Hukbalahap peasant insurgency, managed the 1953 presidential election—writing Ramon Magsaysay’s campaign speeches, funding his campaign

through CIA channels, and running a smear operation against Magsaysay’s rival. Philippine presidents were funded by the CIA; cabinet ministers and members of Congress were paid CIA assets. The Philippines served as the training laboratory for counterinsurgency methods exported across Asia and Latin America; the techniques developed there were carried to South Vietnam and to the Bay of Pigs in Cuba. Clark Air Base and Subic Bay were the platforms from which the United States bombed Cambodia and Vietnam.

The operations have never stopped. US Marine Corps MQ-9A Reaper drones now fly continuous surveillance missions over the South China Sea from Basa Air Base in Pampanga—an EDCA site—providing real-time intelligence on Chinese vessels to US Indo-Pacific Command. A permanent US special forces task force, Task Force Ayungin, is embedded in Philippine maritime operations. The intermediate-range Typhon missile system, capable of striking the Chinese mainland, has been deployed to Philippine soil.

Washington, in a secret psychological warfare campaign documented by *Reuters* in 2024, operated hundreds of fake social media accounts in Tagalog and other Philippine languages to sabotage the Chinese-manufactured Sinovac vaccine—distributing fabricated claims that it was “rat poison”—during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are no Chinese drones flying from Philippine bases. There are no Chinese special forces embedded in Philippine commands. There are no Chinese missiles aimed at Washington on Philippine territory. China has never rigged a Philippine election, bought off a candidate, or flown bombing missions from its shores.

The scurrilous campaign against Chinese nationals and Chinese Filipinos waged by Akbayan and the Philippine military serve to buttress the violently tottering framework of the US empire in the Philippines, but it does more than this. In the context of explosive social unrest, Akbayan is bringing back into circulation the age-old racist scapegoating of the Chinese. They are employing the language of the pogrom.



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