

ISS GLOBAL / TWO INCIDENTS / PHYSICAL AND VISUAL EVIDENCE



Submersible Drone Incidents

Masbate recovery and the Novorossiysk attack claim

REPORTING / REVIEW WINDOW

ISSUE DATE

Philippines and Black Sea / research cutoff 5 October 2026, 13:21
BST

2026-10-05

A recovered underwater vehicle in the Philippines and a claimed wartime strike in the Black Sea expose different evidential challenges. This investigation follows the incidents, their physical or visual evidence, official responses and unresolved findings.

Case A: the Masbate vehicle recovered on 30 December 2024, with two police-released photographs of the reported exhibit. ^{[1][6]}

Case B: the 15 December 2025 Novorossiysk attack claim, with competing Ukrainian and Russian accounts. ^{[7][9]}

Principal assessment: recovery is better established than operator identity in the first case; the attack attempt is better established than damage severity in the second. Neither a photograph nor a government statement settles every part of the evidence chain.

Fresh analysis of dated historical incidents. Includes two geographic maps, an incident chronology, exhibit imagery, source contradictions and a numbered source register.

Recovery and attack: two different cases

CASE / EVENT DATE	ESTABLISHED PUBLIC RECORD	UNRESOLVED QUESTION
A / 30 December 2024 San Pascual, Philippines	Fisherfolk recovered a submersible vehicle. AFP confirmed subsequent Navy custody. ^[1]	Operator, mission authorization and collected data.
B / 15 December 2025 Novorossiysk, Russia	SBU claimed a Sub Sea Baby attack. Russian fleet acknowledged an attempted underwater-vehicle attack but denied damage. ^{[7][9]}	Actual submarine damage and the attacking vehicle's configuration.

Dated sequence

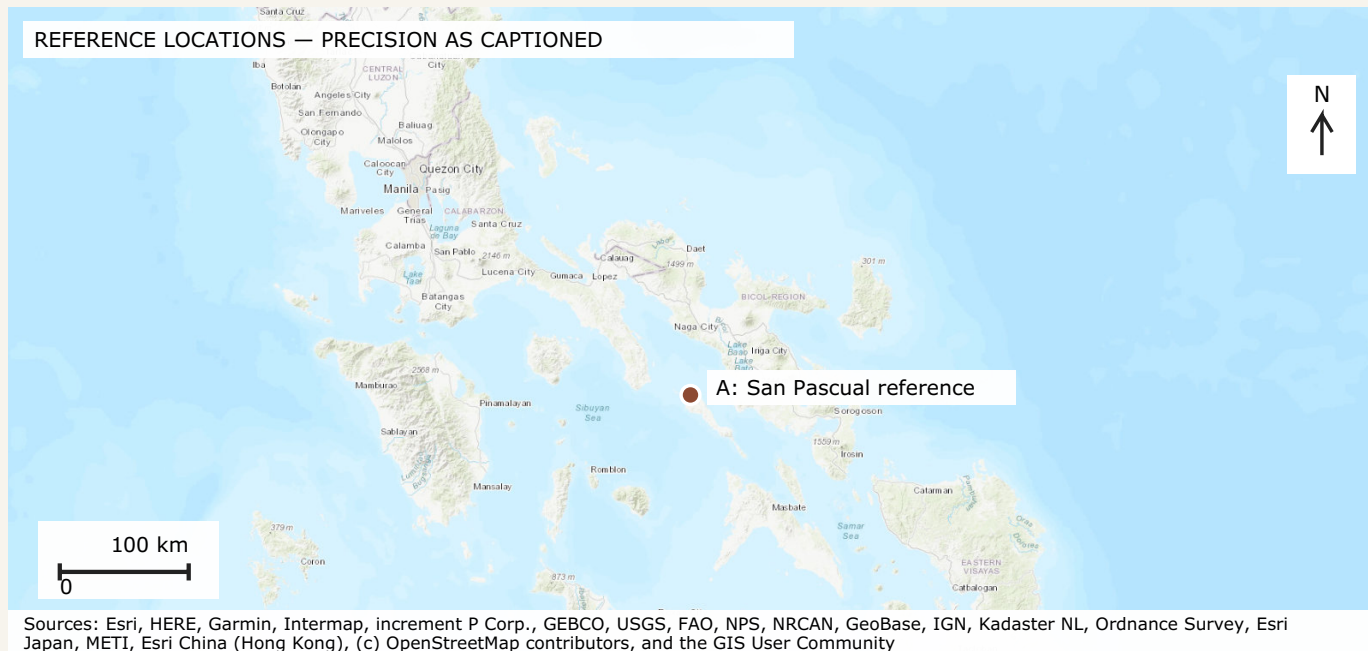
DATE	DEVELOPMENT
2-7 January 2025	Masbate recovery reported; national-security concern raised; Navy proposed further examination. ^{[1][2][3]}
15-16 January 2025	Senate hearing and police assessment that the Masbate device was Chinese-made. ^{[4][14]}
28 January 2025	Navy discussion of bathymetric data concerned a different drone recovered near Calayan. ^[5]
15-16 December 2025	Ukrainian claim, Russian denial and independently geolocated incident footage. ^{[7][8][9]}
20 January 2026	Later reporting described a submarine remaining at the same berth in satellite imagery. ^[10]

Scope: two selected cases from the Philippines and Black Sea, researched afresh on 5 October 2026. Event dates are historical and explicit. This is an incident investigation, not a claim that either event occurred this week. Selection favours traceable official statements, a meaningful dispute and incident-associated imagery.

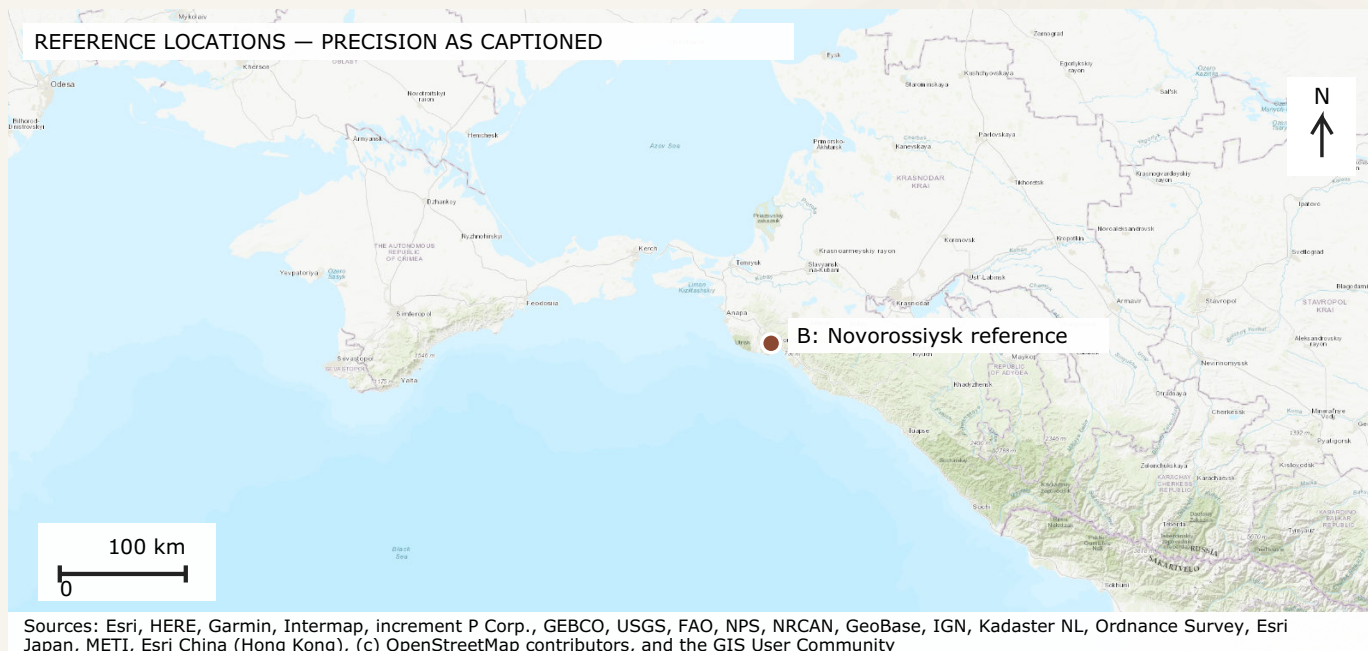
The cases are not linked operationally. They illustrate different evidence problems: a recovered object with uncertain operator, and a claimed attack with uncertain damage. No global incident-frequency estimate is inferred from this sample.

02 / GEOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

The two incident localities



A. San Pascual on Burias Island, Masbate province. Marker: 13.1267 N, 122.9821 E, municipality reference. Reports place recovery in local waters; this is not a precise recovery coordinate. ^{[1][11]}



B. Novorossiysk, Russia. Marker: 44.73188 N, 37.76176 E, city reference. Reuters verified the released footage's port location; this marker does not identify a berth or impact point. ^{[8][12]}

Esri World Topographic Map exports, acquired 5 October 2026. WGS84 input / EPSG:3857 display; north, full credits and independently checked 100 km scales shown. Crimea is internationally recognised as Ukrainian territory; provider boundary rendering does not express a sovereignty judgement. ^[13]

Masbate: what is actually established

The official recovery account places the discovery at approximately 06:00 on 30 December 2024 in the waters of Barangay Iniwaran, San Pascual. Fisherfolk passed the object to police; AFP publicly confirmed Navy custody on 2 January. This establishes the reported handover sequence, not a complete evidential chain of custody. ^[1]

Attribution changed as the inquiry developed

On 3 January, the National Security Council said Chinese origin was not yet definitively established. At the 15 January Senate hearing, the PNP Maritime Group described the object as Chinese-made, according to the Philippine Star. These are dated stages of the investigation: manufacture, ownership and the operator responsible for a particular mission remain separate questions. ^{[2][4]}

The Senate’s own hearing caption described a possible Sea Wing identification. A resemblance or a marking cannot substitute for a manufacturer record or device examination. This report uses the reported marking HY-119 as an exhibit identifier, not a verified model designation. ^{[6][14]}

Function and launch method

The Navy publicly raised a possible surface-ship launch and anticipated a six-to-eight-week inquiry. That was a hypothesis and projected timescale. It is not proof of a launch vessel, route or completed investigation. ^[3]

QUESTION	ASSESSMENT
Was an object recovered?	Strongly supported by official custody reporting and police-released photographs.
Was it Chinese-made?	A later police assessment says so; the underlying technical examination is not supplied in the reviewed reporting. ^[4]
Who operated it?	Not established by the reviewed sources.
Did it collect military intelligence?	Possible dual-use capability does not prove a particular mission or retrieved dataset.
Was it an explosive device?	No evidence reviewed establishes an explosive payload.

Consequence: the recovery prompted a parliamentary inquiry and a technical investigation. Its intelligence value lies in the physical exhibit and associated records; geopolitical inference alone cannot settle its provenance. ^[14]

04 / CASE A: DRONE IMAGERY

The recovered Masbate vehicle



A1. Police-released photograph associated with the Masbate recovery; PNP Kasurog Bicol / PRO-5, reproduced by Naval News on 3 January 2025. Exact capture time unavailable. Full published frame resized and compressed. ^[6]



A2. Inspection view of the same reported exhibit, credited to PNP Kasurog Bicol by Naval News. The yellow body, fins, long wrapped appendage and tyre support are visible. Publication: 3 January 2025; exact capture time unavailable. ^[6]

Image observations: the photographs show a physical vehicle and its handling context. They do not reveal a readable mission log, operator identity, internal payload or the location where it entered the water. Similar colours and outlines are not sufficient to assign a mission.

PNP-released handouts reproduced in limited form for incident reporting and visual criticism, with attribution. No blanket commercial image licence or forensic authentication is asserted. Original published framing is retained; no generated enhancement or technical cutaway is substituted.

Novorossiysk: event versus outcome

On 15 December 2025, the SBU announced that Sub Sea Baby underwater drones had struck a Project 636.3 Kilo-class submarine at Novorossiysk. It attributed the operation jointly to its military counterintelligence directorate and the Ukrainian Navy, and claimed critical damage that put the submarine out of action. ^[7]

Reuters examined the released footage and confirmed the port location by comparing its layout and piers. Its article describes an explosion at a pier near moored vessels. Location verification supports where the footage was recorded; it does not establish the internal condition of a submarine. ^[8]

Russian response

Black Sea Fleet spokesperson Alexei Rulev said an attempted attack using an underwater uncrewed vehicle had failed and that vessels and crews were unharmed. Interfax’s Russian-language report therefore disputes the claimed result while acknowledging an attempted underwater-vehicle operation. ^[9]

EVIDENCE LEVEL	WHAT CAN BE SAID
Event location	Novorossiysk port is supported by Reuters’ geolocation of the footage. ^[8]
Attacking system	Sub Sea Baby is the Ukrainian identification. Russia’s response refers to an underwater uncrewed vehicle. ^{[7][9]}
Visible event	Reuters describes an explosion in the released footage; it does not establish the attacking vehicle’s configuration. ^[8]
Submarine damage	Ukraine claimed disabling damage; Russia denied damage. No inspection report was obtained.
Historic first	A Ukrainian claim; not independently established here as a universal historical fact.

ISS Global assessment

The attack attempt has a stronger evidential basis than a definitive claim that the submarine was destroyed. The public accounts converge on an attempted underwater operation, but diverge on effectiveness. There is no basis here to specify guidance, explosive quantity, launch point or penetration method.

Later reporting

On 20 January 2026, Euromaidan Press reported that satellite imagery shared by Mark Krutov showed a submarine remaining at the same berth. ^[10] The raw sequence was not independently audited here. Non-movement at observed times does not establish internal damage, continuous immobility or operational status in October 2026.

Different objects, different proof requirements

INVESTIGATIVE ELEMENT	MASBATE RECOVERY	NOVOROSSIYSK ATTEMPT
Physical vehicle	Photographed recovered exhibit	Attacking craft not resolved in reviewed imagery
Custody	Reported fisherfolk-police-Navy sequence	No public recovered-vehicle custody record reviewed
Attribution	Police assessment of Chinese manufacture; operator unresolved	Ukraine claims operation; Russia acknowledges attempt
Outcome	Recovery and inquiry supported	Damage assessment disputed
Key missing record	Technical report tying the exhibit to operator and mission	Independent damage inspection and authenticated vehicle evidence

A specific source trap

PNA’s 28 January article discusses bathymetric data from a drone recovered off Calayan, but its illustration is captioned as the Masbate drone. The Calayan data finding cannot be transferred to Masbate merely because the photograph appears above that article. ^[5]

What these cases imply

Underwater incidents can expose very different parts of the evidence chain. A recovered body may be observable while its tasking remains unknown. An attack may be visible while the vehicle and damage mechanism remain hidden. Analytical confidence should follow each proposition, not attach to the entire story as a single score.

Dfuze relevance

Keep distinct records for each incident, object, image, statement, locality and finding. Preserve the source’s date and confidence. Connect a photograph to its documented exhibit rather than every story that reuses it; record rival outcome claims without merging them into a proven result. These are investigative information requirements, not claims about an organisation’s product use.

Method and limits

Research cutoff: 5 October 2026, 13:21 BST. Event window: 30 December 2024 to 15 December 2025, with selected follow-up through 20 January 2026. Ukrainian and Russian originals were read and translated; English and bilingual Philippine accounts were reviewed. Access limitations appear in the register. No classified data, scene visit or independent forensic examination was available.

SOURCE REGISTER

Sources 01–05

Source families and access limits are recorded below. Repetition of a statement is not independent proof.

-
- 01 Submersible drone recovered off Masbate now in Navy custody
Philippine News Agency / Priam Nepomuceno · 2 January 2025, 14:34
Family: AFP statement / Philippine government news agency · Accessed 5 October 2026. Article text read through web retrieval. Direct download redirected; no direct-page capture relied upon.
<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1240888>
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- 02 Origin of recovered drone off Masbate involves national security
Philippine News Agency · 3 January 2025; updated 19:13
Family: National Security Council statement · Accessed 5 October 2026. Indexed article text read; direct retrieval blocked. Early uncertainty is dated, not presented as the latest finding.
<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1240980>
-
- 03 PH Navy: Drone found off Masbate possibly launched by surface ship
Philippine News Agency · 7 January 2025; updated 15:55
Family: Philippine Navy statement · Accessed 5 October 2026. Indexed text and caption read; direct retrieval blocked. Possible launch method and projected examination time are not final findings.
<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1241180>
-
- 04 Submersible drone found in Masbate came from China
The Philippine Star / Marc Jayson Cayabyab · 16 January 2025, 00:00
Family: PNP Maritime Group / Senate hearing · Accessed 5 October 2026. Indexed article text read; direct retrieval unavailable. Records police assessment of manufacture, not operator identification.
<https://qa.philstar.com/nation/2025/01/16/2414495/submersible-drone-found-masbate-came-china/amp>
-
- 05 Drone recovered off Calayan Island contains bathymetric data
Philippine News Agency / Priam Nepomuceno · 28 January 2025, 15:14
Family: Philippine Navy forensic-account statement · Accessed 5 October 2026. Indexed article text and caption read. Body concerns Calayan; accompanying photo is captioned Masbate. These are not the same recovered object.
<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1242810>
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SOURCE REGISTER

Sources 06–10

Source families and access limits are recorded below. Repetition of a statement is not independent proof.

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- 06 **Armed Forces of the Philippines Investigate Chinese Submarine Drone**
Naval News / Jeffrey Maitem · 3 January 2025
Family: PNP/AFP accounts; PNP-released imagery · Accessed 5 October 2026. Full text and image files read. Police photo credits checked; generic Sea Wing cutaway omitted. Platform-specific claims not treated as a forensic identification.
<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2025/01/armed-forces-of-the-philippines-investigate-chinese-submarine-drone/>
-
- 07 **SBU vrazyla pidvodnyi choven RF u Novorosiisku [SBU struck a Russian submarine in Novorossiysk]**
Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) · 15 December 2025, 16:50
Family: Ukrainian operational claimant · Accessed 5 October 2026. Ukrainian original read and translated. Official claim; full download blocked. Website states CC BY 4.0.
<https://ssu.gov.ua/novyny/sbu-vrazyla-pidvodnyi-choven-rf-u-novorosiisku-video>
-
- 08 **Ukraine says underwater drones hit submarine, but Moscow denies damage**
Reuters / Yuliia Dysa and Tom Balmforth · 15 December 2025; updated 17:19, site timezone unspecified
Family: Independent reporting / both belligerents · Accessed 5 October 2026. Full syndicated article read. Reuters explicitly verified video location; that does not equal verification of damage severity.
<https://www.investing.com/news/world-news/ukraine-hits-russian-submarine-in-first-underwater-drone-attack-4408936>
-
- 09 **V Chernomorskom flote zayavili... [Black Sea Fleet says attack failed to achieve its aims]**
Interfax · 15 December 2025, 22:26
Family: Russian Black Sea Fleet statement · Accessed 5 October 2026. Russian original read and translated. Named spokesperson acknowledges an attempted underwater-vehicle attack while denying damage.
<https://www.interfax.ru/russia/1063449>
-
- 10 **Satellite images show Russian sub still has not moved a month after Ukrainian drone strike**
Euromaidan Press / Benjamin Murdoch · 20 January 2026
Family: Secondary report of Mark Krutov / Planet imagery · Accessed 5 October 2026. Article read. Only the attributed report of non-movement is used; raw satellite series and technical damage not independently verified.
<https://euromaidanpress.com/2026/01/20/russian-sub-hasnt-moved-since-ukrainian-drone-strike/>
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SOURCE REGISTER

Sources 11–14

Source families and access limits are recorded below. Repetition of a statement is not independent proof.

-
- 11 **San Pascual, Province of Masbate**
PhilAtlas · Undated geographic profile
Family: Geographic reference · Accessed 5 October 2026. Coordinates and island context read. Municipality reference, not recovery position.
<https://www.philatlas.com/luzon/r05/masbate/san-pascual.html>
-
- 12 **Novorossiysk geographic coordinates**
Geodatos · Undated geographic profile
Family: Geographic reference · Accessed 5 October 2026. City coordinate read and geography cross-checked with basemap. Not the attack point.
<https://www.geodatos.net/en/coordinates/russia/novorossiysk>
-
- 13 **Terms of use for static maps**
Esri · Current terms accessed 5 October 2026
Family: Basemap provider · Accessed 5 October 2026. Static report use and full provider attribution retained; current export records saved.
<https://doc.arcgis.com/en/arcgis-online/reference/static-maps.htm>
-
- 14 **Questions surrounding the drone**
Senate of the Philippines · 15 January 2025
Family: Official Senate hearing caption · Accessed 5 October 2026. Indexed official caption read. Confirms hearing and describes a possible Sea Wing identity; not a definitive technical report.
https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/photo_release/2025/0115_03.asp
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