

# The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



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*The China–Taiwan Weekly Update is a joint product from the Institute for the Study of War and the American Enterprise Institute. The update supports the ISW–AEI Coalition Defense of Taiwan project, which assesses Chinese campaigns against Taiwan, examines alternative strategies for the United States and its allies to deter the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) aggression, and—if necessary—defeat the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). The update focuses on the Chinese Communist Party’s paths to controlling Taiwan and cross–Taiwan Strait developments.*

## **Key Takeaways**

- **The People’s Republic of China (PRC) flew 32 military aircraft over the Taiwan Strait median line while ROC President Lai Ching-te was in Kinmen County to commemorate the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. The PRC possibly used the flights to signal its opposition to Lai attending the commemoration ceremony.**
- **The PRC signaled its interest in permitting Fujian residents to resume tourism to Kinmen County while meeting with KMT officials. Restoring tourism to Kinmen after negotiation with the KMT would advance the PRC’s goals of economic integration and engendering support in Taiwan for KMT policies.**
- **PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan for a round of strategic talks in Beijing to help stabilize the bilateral relationship. The PRC did not signal any policy change on issues of US concern but agreed to future military talks and a call between heads of state Xi Jinping and Joe Biden.**
- **The PRC deployed Chinese Coast Guard, PLA Navy, and Maritime Militia vessels to Sabina Shoal as part of an effort to block resupply missions and dislodge the Philippine Coast Guard’s long-term presence at the shoal.**
- **A PLA reconnaissance plane breached Japanese airspace for the first time on August 26. The PRC released a statement calling the violation accidental and “extremely regrettable.”**

- **The PRC conducted military drills along the PRC-Myanmar border likely to deter further escalation of fighting between the military junta and rebels along the border and spillover into its southwestern territory.**

## Cross-Strait Relations

### *Taiwan*

**The People's Republic of China (PRC) flew 32 military aircraft over the Taiwan Strait median line while ROC President Lai Ching-te was in Kinmen County to commemorate the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. The PRC possibly used the flights to signal its opposition to Lai attending the commemoration ceremony.** Kinmen is a group of Taiwan-controlled islands with a large military garrison roughly 3 kilometers from the coast of the PRC. Lai gave a speech in Kinmen County on August 23 during a commemoration ceremony on the 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958, when the PRC unleashed a heavy artillery barrage against Kinmen. The PRC flew 32 aircraft across the median line for two consecutive days from August 22-23, marking the largest number of PLA aircraft median line crossings in August.[1] The PRC also flew two military drones around Taiwan on August 23. The PRC has used similar flights to signal its disapproval of political developments that express or support Taiwan's sovereignty, including PLA sorties into Taiwan's de facto Air Defense Identification Zone.

Four China Coast Guard (CCG) ships also sailed into Kinmen's restricted waters on August 21, marking the second incursion into Kinmen's waters that week.[2] Kinmen has been a focus of cross-strait tension since February when the China Coast Guard (CCG) and other official vessels began aggressively asserting their presence in waters under Taiwan's jurisdiction. The timing of the incursions suggests a connection between the CCG activities and Lai's visit.

The PRC Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) criticized ROC President Lai Ching-te on August 23 for highlighting the growing threat that the PRC poses to Taiwan. TAO spokesperson Zhu Fenglian called Lai's separatist policies the biggest threat to peace in the Taiwan Strait and ridiculed the Lai administration's portrayal of the PRC as a threat as an exaggeration.[3] Zhu accused Lai of militarism and wasting the money of Taiwanese citizens with weapons purchases. Zhu stated that "Taiwan independence" and peace in the Strait are incompatible. The PRC's criticism aims to portray the Lai administration's policies as responsible for escalating cross-strait tensions and shift blame to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) for the PRC's aggression.

**The PRC signaled its interest in permitting Fujian residents to resume tourism to Kinmen County while meeting with KMT officials. Restoring tourism to Kinmen after negotiation with the KMT would advance the PRC's goals of economic integration and engendering support in Taiwan for KMT policies.** Director of the Taiwan Affairs Office Song Tao met with Kinmen County Council Chairman Hung Yun-tien and Kinmen's representative in the LY Jessica Chen Yu-jen on August 22 in Beijing to discuss strengthening exchanges between the mainland and Kinmen County. The discussions focused on the possibility of resuming tourism to Kinmen by Fujian residents, which Chen has outspokenly advocated for.[4] The PRC suspended individual tourism to Taiwan in 2019, citing poor cross-strait relations.[5] It then suspended group tours to Taiwan in 2020 during the pandemic and maintained the restrictions on Taiwan despite resuming group travel to

more than 70 countries in August 2023.[6] The PRC recently resumed tourism to the Matsu Islands, another Taiwan-controlled territory close to the mainland, indicating a willingness to meet the demand for economic engagement in Taiwan's economically vulnerable outlying islands. The TAO noted in the readout from Song's meeting with Chen that Kinmen's tourism sector and the wider economy have suffered from the suspension of tourism.[7] The readout stated that Kinmen would benefit from "integrated development" that restoring tourism would bring.

The engagement with Kinmen KMT officials is consistent with the CCP's efforts to legitimize the KMT as a good-faith partner that is capable of stabilizing cross-strait relations to the benefit of the citizens of Taiwan. The PRC has a track record of making conciliatory gestures in cross-strait relations after meetings with KMT officials. The PRC announced its decision to resume tourism for Fujian residents to Matsu while receiving a KMT Caucus Whip Fu Kun-chi's delegation in April.[8] The PRC severed contact with the governing Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 2016 for its alleged separatist policies.

**Taiwan's Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau (MJIB) is investigating former PC manufacturing executive Chen Yu for potentially poaching IT workers to work for a joint venture with a PRC state-owned enterprise (SOE).** MJIB has evidence that Chen offered high salaries to more than 100 computer engineers, designers, and technicians from his former employer Shuttle Inc. to work for Uniwill, a gaming laptop company that Chen co-owns and operates with PRC SOE Tsinghua Tongfang Co.[9] Tsinghua Tongfang is a large technology company involved in the production of goods whose applications span security, military industry, internet applications, digital TV operations, LED, and system integration.[10] Tsinghua Tongfang is also a supplier of military end-use products to the People's Liberation Army (PLA), including wireless communications, satellite navigation equipment, information security software, and electronic countermeasure equipment.[11]

China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC) became the controlling shareholder of Tsinghua Tongfang Co. in 2019.[12] CNNC is a state-owned and managed enterprise that oversees the PRC's civilian and military nuclear programs.[13] CNNC is "a leading element of national strategic nuclear forces and nuclear energy development" and "undertakes missions to ensure national security and facilitate domestic economic development," according to its mission statement.[14]

The Taipei District Prosecutor's Office stated that Chen circumvented the law that requires PRC investments and companies to apply for approval with the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Poaching Taiwanese talent to help PRC SOEs research and develop products from Tsinghua Tongfang undermines Taiwan's security, according to the prosecutors. If found guilty, Chen's activities would constitute a violation of the Cross-strait Act, which regulates exchanges between the PRC and ROC to uphold national security.

**The Taiwan High Prosecutor's Office Kaohsiung Division charged three members of Taiwan's Chinese Unification Promotion Party for acting as agents of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).**[15] The Prosecutor's Office found evidence that Taiwanese businessman Wen Long acted on behalf of the United Front Work Department to recruit two retired ROC military officers to provide the CCP with intelligence on Taiwan's military and advance United Front causes in Taiwan.[16] Prosecutors claim that Wen persuaded the retired military officers to develop networks to recruit other military personnel and join the Chinese Unification Promotion Party. The Chinese

Unification Promotion Party is a minor far-right that does not have any representation in the government or legislature.

The United Front is a whole-of-government and society effort to advance the CCP's ideology and interests. United Front work is pervasive throughout the CCP's political strategy. Overt United Front work entails public alliance building and soft power initiatives to win the hearts and minds of Chinese-ethnic people and encourage ideological alignment between the CCP and the rest of society.[17] United Front work can also support covert and clandestine activities, such as infiltration, manipulation, co-optation, and intelligence gathering on target groups.[18] In June, a series of Taiwanese YouTubers and online celebrities confessed that the CCP contacted them and published contract letters that outlined goals to influence Taiwanese politics[19]. YouTuber Ba Jiong revealed that the contract he received discussed a plan to establish a "Taiwan Support Party" that artists and celebrities would join as honorary members to shape the future of PRC-Taiwan relations.[20] The terms stated that the CCP would invest millions of dollars to enable Taiwanese artists to put on shows and events that promoted CCP-aligned narratives of cross-strait relations. The contract encouraged Taiwanese artists with verified accounts to publish open invitations to the Taiwan Support Party.

## *China*

**PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan for a round of strategic talks in Beijing to help stabilize the bilateral relationship. The PRC did not signal any policy change on issues of US concern but agreed to future military talks and a call between heads of state Xi Jinping and Joe Biden.** This was Sullivan and Wang's fifth meeting and Sullivan's first trip to the PRC under the Joe Biden administration. The two sides agreed to plan a leader-level call "in the coming weeks," a theater commander telephone call "in the near future," and a second round of US-PRC talks on artificial intelligence "in due course." A US readout said the two discussed a wide range of issues including the implementation of commitments on counternarcotics, military-to-military-communications, and AI safety that US President Joe Biden and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping agreed to during their meeting in San Francisco in November 2023. Sullivan raised continued concerns about the PRC's unfair trade policies and "non-market economic practices." He also raised US concerns about tensions in the Taiwan Strait, the PRC's support for Russia's defense industrial base, and the PRC's "destabilizing actions" against lawful Philippine maritime operations in the South China Sea.[21]

According to a PRC readout of the meeting, Wang Yi said that peaceful and smooth US-PRC relations required mutual respect, abiding by the three US-PRC joint communiques, and establishing a "correct understanding" of the PRC's development priorities. Wang claimed that Taiwan belongs to China and urged the United States not to support "Taiwan independence," which he called the biggest threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Wang also said the United States should stop "suppressing China" in trade, science, and technology, and stop using "overcapacity" as an excuse to engage in protectionism. He said the United States must not use bilateral treaties to undermine the PRC's "sovereignty and territorial integrity" in the South China Sea and must not condone the Philippines' "infringing actions." He claimed the PRC has always been committed to promoting peace, dialogue, and a political solution to the "Ukrainian crisis" and said the United States should not "abuse illegal

unilateral sanctions.”[22] The two also discussed shared concerns about North Korea, Myanmar, and the Middle East.

This is the first time since 2016 that a US National Security Advisor has visited the PRC. Wang and Sullivan have met before on several occasions, however, including three “secret” meetings in Vienna, Malta, and Bangkok since May 2023. Financial Times reported that the low-profile meetings were part of a “strategic channel” that US President Joe Biden and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping agreed to establish when they met in Bali, Indonesia for the G20 summit in November 2022. The strategic channel held its first meeting in Vienna months after the US military shot down a PRC spy balloon that flew over the United States in February 2024.[23]

Sullivan met with CMC Vice Chair Zhang Youxia, the PRC’s highest-ranked uniformed officer, on August 29. Sullivan and Zhang agreed to continue military-to-military communication.[24] A PRC readout said Zhang stressed that the “Taiwan issue” is an “insurmountable red line” in US-PRC relations. He said the PLA has a mission to oppose “independence” and promote “reunification.” He demanded that the United States stop “military collusion” with Taiwan, stop arming Taiwan, and stop “spreading false narratives” involving Taiwan.[25]

Sullivan also had a surprise meeting with CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping on August 29. A US readout said the two discussed many of the same issues as in the Sullivan-Wang meeting but did not offer much detail.[26] A PRC readout largely focused on Xi’s comments about the US-PRC relationship in general and struck a conciliatory tone, with little mention of specific issues. Xi said the United States and PRC must clearly answer the question of whether they are rivals or partners, presenting this as a binary choice. He said he hoped the United States would “work in the same direction as China” and view the PRC’s development in a “positive and rational light.”[27]

**The United States placed sanctions and trade restrictions on hundreds of PRC companies for ties to the Russian military.** The United States State Department imposed sanctions on August 23 on more than 400 PRC entities and individuals for their support for Russia’s defense industrial base and war efforts in Ukraine.[28] PRC companies shipping microelectronics and machine tools were of particular concern in this round of sanctions. The State Department previously warned Beijing against supporting the Russian military and taking actions that could assist Russia in averting Western sanctions. That same day the United States Treasury Department reported that it has been targeting transnational networks assisting with the procurement of ammunition and other essential equipment for the Russian military.[29] Additionally, 42 PRC entities were added to the United States Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Industry and Security Entity List on August 23.[30] The Entity List compiles individuals, companies, and organizations that pose a national security risk to the United States. Entities on this list are subject to trade restrictions for certain technologies and goods.[31]

The PRC Ministry of Commerce released a statement on August 25 opposing US sanctions. The Ministry accused the United States of disrupting international trade and preventing normal economic exchanges.[32] The PRC stated that it would take steps to safeguard the rights of its companies operating internationally. PRC special envoy for Eurasian affairs Li Hui also commented on the sanctions saying that “a particular country” was attempting to place blame on countries with economic ties to Russia for extending the war in Ukraine.[33] Li’s statement drew a clear distinction between PRC

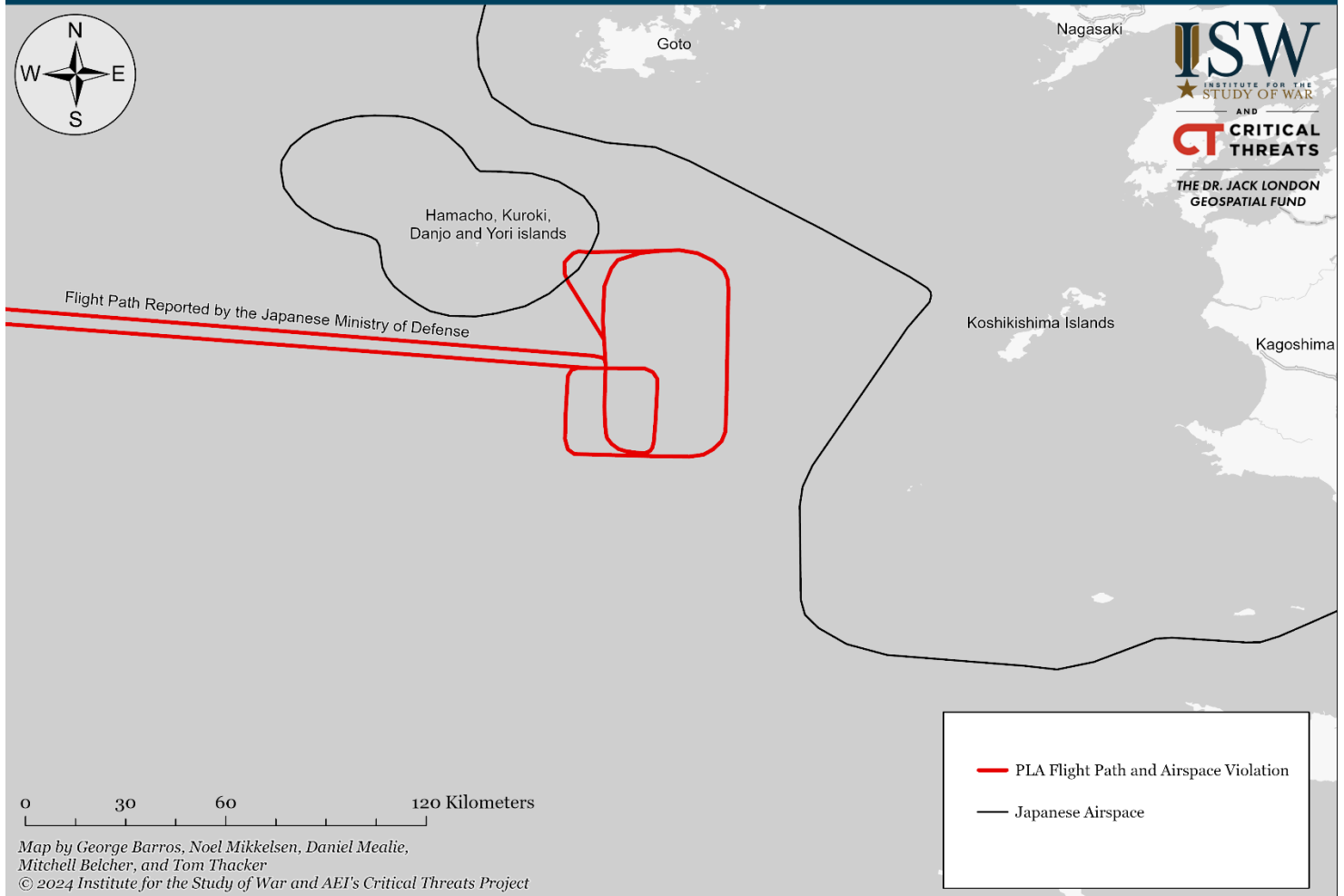
efforts promoting peace in Ukraine and the United States's efforts to sow division in the international community.

## Northeast Asia

### *Japan*

**A PLA reconnaissance plane breached Japanese airspace for the first time on August 26. The PRC released a statement calling the violation accidental and “extremely regrettable.”** The Y-9 reconnaissance plane flew over Japan's Danjo Islands west of Kyushu.[34] The Japanese defense ministry scrambled jets in response and issued a strong protest against Beijing. Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Masataka Okano summoned a senior Chinese official from the embassy in Tokyo to lodge a complaint against the violation and prevent this action from occurring again. The Japanese Defense Ministry released a map of the Y-9's flight path and reported that the aircraft remained in Japanese territorial airspace for about two minutes.[35] This is the first confirmed instance of a PLA military aircraft entering Japanese territorial airspace. The Japanese Self-Defense Force scrambled jets 479 times in response to sightings of Chinese aircraft in international airspace around Japan last year.[36] Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian stated in a regular press conference that the event was “extremely regrettable” and that the PLA had not intended to intrude into Japanese airspace.[37] Apologies for PLA actions are relatively uncommon. This indicates that the violation is likely a genuine mistake or miscalculation by the PLA, and not indicative of a shift in PLA behavior towards Japan.

# PLA Flight Path in Japanese Airspace August 26 2024



## Southeast Asia

### *Philippines*

**The PRC deployed Chinese Coast Guard, PLA Navy, and Maritime Militia vessels to Sabina Shoal as part of an effort to block resupply missions and dislodge the Philippine Coast Guard's (PCG) long-term presence at the shoal.** Philippines NTF-WPS spokesperson Jay Tarriela said that eight PRC vessels engaged in “aggressive and dangerous maneuvers” around the Philippine BFAR vessel *BRP Datu Sanday* as it traveled between Half-Moon Shoal and Sabina Shoal to resupply Philippine fishermen with fuel, food, and medical supplies on August 25. Tarriela said that CCG vessels encircled and rammed the *Datu Sanday*, blasted horns, and deployed water cannons against the BFAR ship until the ship's engine failed and it was forced to end the resupply mission.[38] The CCG and PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) accused the Philippine ship of

intruding into PRC waters near Sabina Shoal and deliberately colliding with a CCG vessel.[39] PRC state media Global Times cited Ding Duo, the deputy director of the Institute of Maritime Law and Policy at the PRC's state-funded National Institute for South China Sea Studies, who claimed that the Philippine ship was trying to supply the *BRP Teresa Magbanua*, the Philippine Coast Guard's (PCG's) largest vessel, which has been anchored at Sabina Shoal since April.[40] The CCG also claimed to have rescued Philippine personnel who fell overboard during the confrontation, a claim that Tarriela denied as "groundless" misinformation.[41]

Tarriela said that the PRC deployed 40 vessels on August 26, the following day, to block the PCG vessels *BRP Cabra* and *BRP Cape Engaño* from delivering food and supplies to Philippine personnel aboard the *Teresa Magbanua* at Sabina Shoal. The PRC vessels included six CCG ships, three PLAN ships, and 31 maritime militia vessels that swarmed waters near the shoal and successfully obstructed the resupply mission.[42] The Philippines originally dispatched the *Teresa Magbanua* on a long-term deployment at Sabina Shoal in response to what it claimed was evidence of early-stage PRC island reclamation activities at the shoal.[43] CCG ships also rammed and damaged the *BRP Cape Engaño* and another PCG ship, the *BRP Bagacay*, near Sabina Shoal on August 19.[44]

Sabina Shoal is about 110 nautical miles north of the Philippine island of Palawan and serves as the main staging ground for Philippine supply missions to nearby Second Thomas Shoal, which is 35 nautical miles to its west, and other places in the South China Sea. Half-Moon Shoal is located approximately 60 nautical miles north of Palawan.[45] The Philippines has de facto control of Sabina, Half-Moon, and Second Thomas Shoals including a grounded warship on Second Thomas Shoal that serves as a Philippine military outpost. All three features are within the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone. The PRC also claims these features, however, as it does with the rest of the Spratly Islands archipelago.

**The PRC is drawing parallels between the PCG presence at Sabina Shoal and the "illegally grounded" Philippine warship at Second Thomas Shoal to justify its aggressive actions against the Philippines.** The Philippines deliberately grounded its warship *BRP Sierra Madre* on Second Thomas Shoal in 1999 and has used the ship as a military outpost on the shoal since then. MFA spokesperson Lin Jian said on August 26 that the Philippines' long-term stationing of the *Teresa Magbanua* at Sabina Shoal and its resupply missions to the ship "seriously violated" PRC sovereignty and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.[46] PRC state-owned media Global Times repeatedly referred to the *Teresa Magbanua* as a "quasi-grounded" ship. It cited the South China Sea expert Ding Duo who speculated that the Philippines may try to air-drop supplies to the ship as it has done at Second Thomas Shoal, now that the PRC blocked three subsequent resupply missions on August 19, 25, and 26.[47] The Philippines successfully used a helicopter to resupply its ship on August 29.[48]

Philippine and PRC officials negotiated a provisional agreement on July 21 to allow for resupply missions to the *Sierra Madre*. The current status of this agreement is unclear. The Philippines carried out a resupply mission of the *Sierra Madre* on July 27. Nearby PRC vessels did not interfere.[49] Philippine Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Maria Theresa Lazaro said Manila would review the agreement after PRC aircraft fired flares near a Philippine military plane over Scarborough Shoal on August 8.[50] The PRC has repeatedly objected to Philippine supply missions to the *Sierra*



*Madre*, especially shipments of construction equipment that the Philippines could use to reinforce the dilapidated warship.

**The PRC fired flares at a Philippine government plane that flew over Subi Reef and Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea.** Subi Reef is a disputed territory in the Spratly Islands that the PRC has occupied since 1988 but the Philippines, Vietnam, and Taiwan also claim. The PRC artificially expanded Subi Reef through island reclamation and built a military base there beginning in 2014.[51] The Philippines released a video showing that the PRC fired flares from the island as a Philippines Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) plane flew in the island's airspace on August 22. Spokesperson for the Philippines National Task Force on the West Philippine Sea Jay Tarriela said that the BFAR plane was conducting a patrol jointly with the Philippine Coast Guard to monitor and intercept poachers encroaching on the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Tarriela said that PLA aircraft fired flares in the path of the same BFAR plane on August 19 when the plane flew over PRC-occupied Scarborough Shoal.[52] PLA aircraft also fired flares in the path of a Philippine Air Force light transport plane over Scarborough Shoal on August 8, the first aerial confrontation between the two countries since bilateral tensions started rising in the South China Sea in 2023.[53]

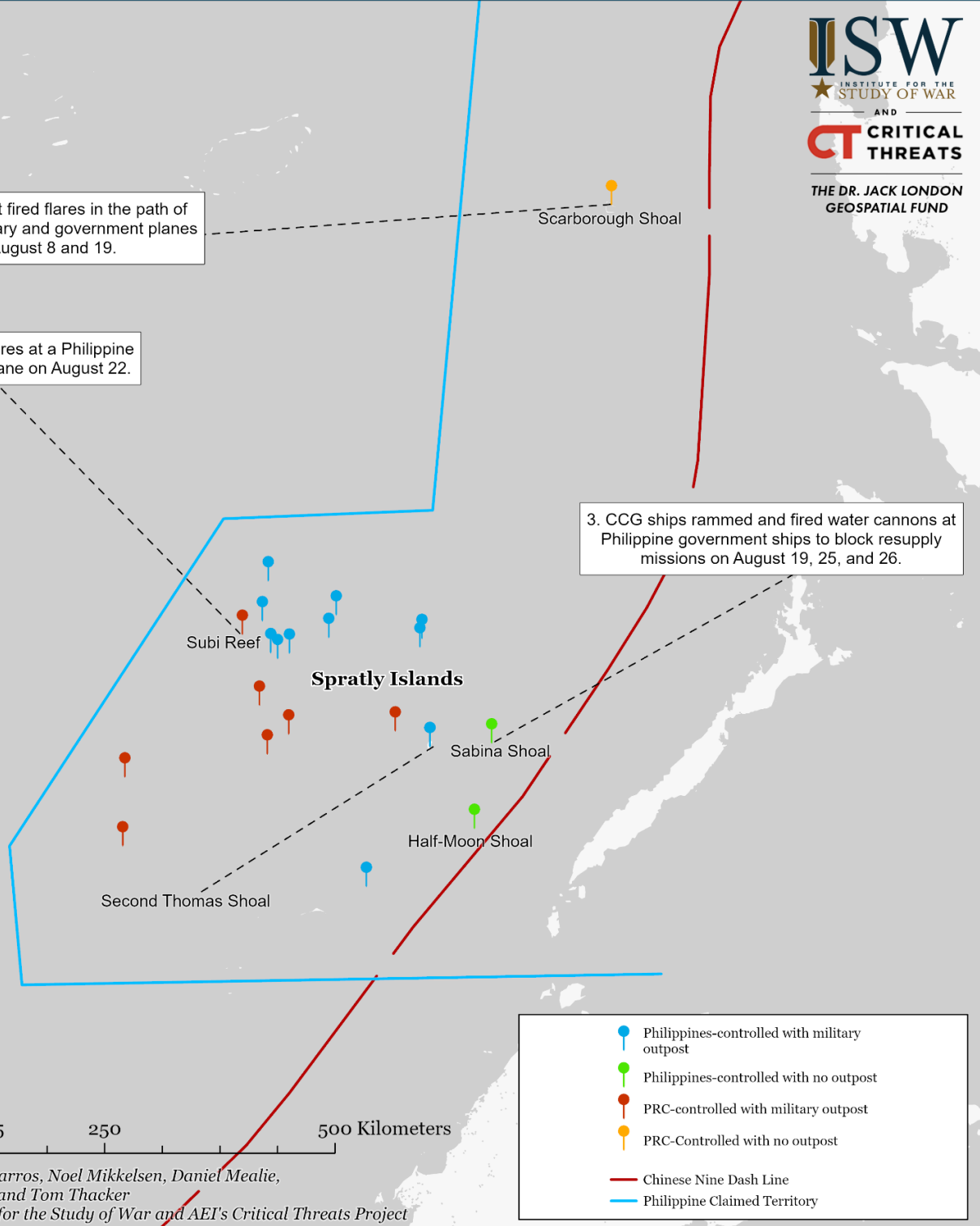
# PRC actions against the Philippines in the South China Sea, August 2024



1. PLA aircraft fired flares in the path of Philippine military and government planes on August 8 and 19.

2. PRC fired flares at a Philippine government plane on August 22.

3. CCG ships rammed and fired water cannons at Philippine government ships to block resupply missions on August 19, 25, and 26.



0 125 250 500 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, and Tom Thacker  
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## *Myanmar*

**The PRC conducted military drills along the PRC-Myanmar border likely to deter further escalation of fighting between the military junta and rebels along the border and spillover into its southwestern territory.** Myanmar's northern Shan state, which borders the PRC, has seen an increase in fighting since last October. Earlier this month rebel armies captured the towns of Lashio and Mogok, which were home to a major junta military headquarters and the center of Myanmar's gem-mining industry, respectively.[54] The PLA Southern Theater Command announced 3-day live-fire military drills near the PRC-Myanmar border in the vicinity of the cities of Ruili and Zhenkang in the PRC's southwestern Yunnan province. [55] The PLA statement said the drills included armed patrols along the border and air-to-ground joint patrols. The Southern Theater Command said that these drills are focused on maintaining stability within the border areas.

The PRC has allied itself with Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC) since it took power in a 2021 coup. The SAC has encouraged continued PRC investment in several economic projects including maintaining natural gas pipelines, constructing ports, and mining rare earth minerals. The PRC's economic investments in Myanmar and worries about its border security have resulted in a number of PRC-led peace efforts between the SAC and rebel armies. Previous peace efforts have been ineffective, resulting in continued fighting along the PRC border. Shelling from across the Myanmar border since the start of the fighting wounded five PRC citizens in January.[56] The PRC recently opened fire into Myanmar following SAC airstrikes as a warning to military forces along their border.[57] The PRC has made it clear that regardless of its alignment with the SAC, any fighting that threatens to extend into its territory will be met with a response.

## Russia

**The PRC is trying to generate support in the Global South for its Ukraine war peace plan, likely to ensure Russia's participation in the next round of peace talks.** The PRC Special Representative for Eurasian Affairs Li Hui promoted the PRC-Brazil "Six-point Consensus" to deescalate the war in Ukraine on August 27 after a round of shuttle diplomacy to Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia. Li has traveled to the "important members of the Global South" since July 28 to generate support for the PRC's efforts to mediate the war and promote peace talks. Li stated during a briefing that all three countries agree to the PRC's conditions for a peace summit, which includes Russia's participation.[58] He implied that Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia would support Russia's participation by emphasizing that all three "have maintained communication with both Russia and Ukraine and stay committed to a political settlement to the crisis through dialogue and negotiation." [59]

Li also criticized Western countries' continuous loosening of conditions for providing weapons to Ukraine for intensifying the conflict.[60]

Readouts from Li's meetings in all three countries stated that the host country appreciated the PRC's role in mediating the crisis.[61] The PRC's peace plans, including its joint statement with Brazil and a 12-point plan from February 2023, have failed to gain traction with Ukraine, the United States, and most European countries, despite claims from the PRC to the contrary.

Li's trip came after statements on June 21 from Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Deputy Head of the Office of the President Igor Zhovkva that Ukraine is interested in having a "Global South" country host a second peace summit, which Ukraine aims to hold before the end of the year.[62] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy repeated Ukraine's interest in hosting the next peace summit in a Global South country during an interview on August 25.[63] Zelenskyy also stated on July 15 that Russian representatives should be present at the next peace summit.[64] The PRC did not attend the first peace summit that took place in Switzerland from June 15-16 in protest of Russia's exclusion.[65]

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