

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 PLA significantly increased its daily incursions into Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone in July to expand the PRC’s coercive pressure on the ROC as “punishment” for the election of ROC President Lai Ching-te.**
- **The PRC is using cross-strait events such as the Cross-Strait Youth Summit to legitimize the Kuomintang as a negotiating partner on behalf of Taiwan and promote its pro-unification message.**
- **The PRC framed collaboration between NATO and Indo-Pacific states as a threat to regional security.**
- **CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping welcomed Belarus to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and advocated for Turkey to join the organization. Xi seeks to use the SCO to legitimize PRC-led institutions and undermine Western-led security frameworks.**
- **The PRC’s cyber defense agency issued disinformation about the US Intelligence Community and denied that the Volt Typhoon cyber threat actor is a PRC state-sponsored group.**
- **The CCG anchored its largest ship in the Philippines’ Exclusive Economic Zone as an intimidation tactic following reports of Philippine Coast Guard base construction in Sabina Shoal.**

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan

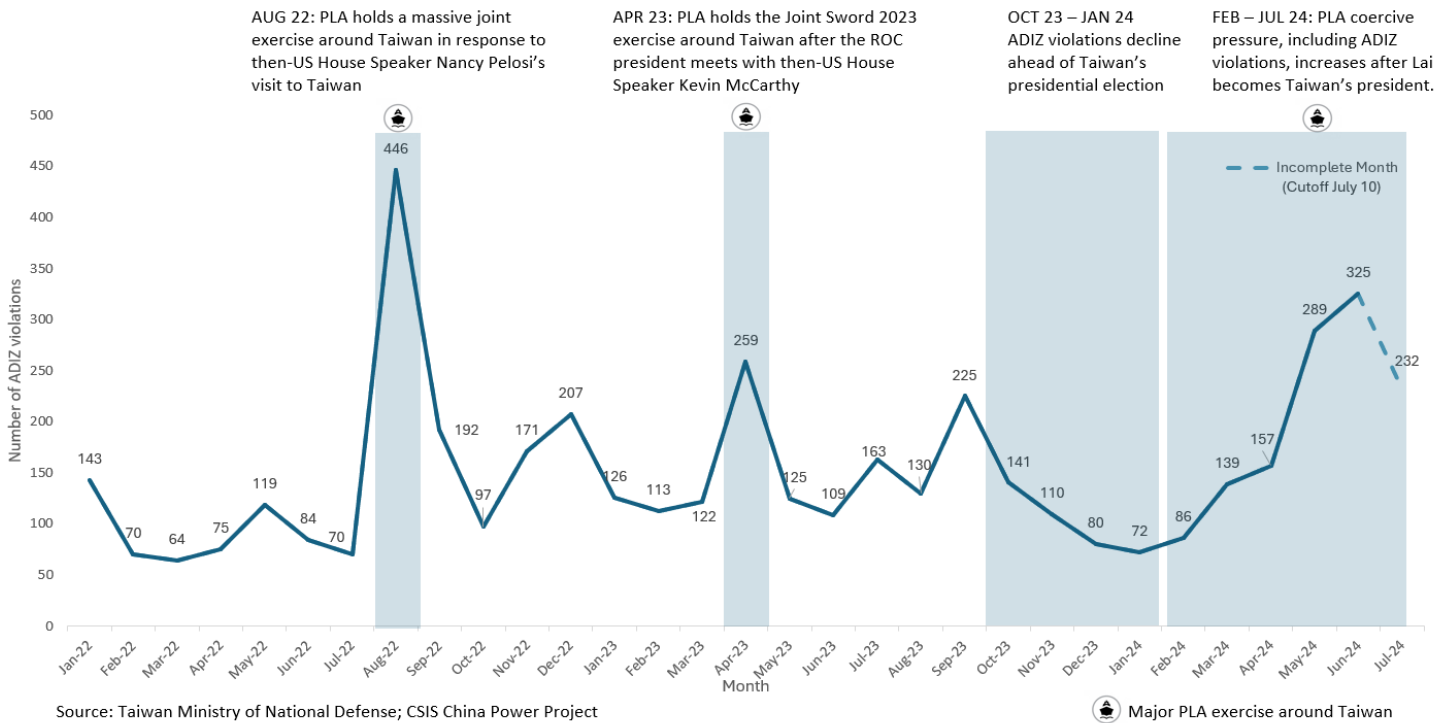
The PLA significantly increased its daily incursions into Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in July to expand the PRC’s coercive pressure on the ROC as “punishment” for the election of ROC President Lai Ching-te. Taiwan’s Ministry of National

Defense (MND) reported 232 ADIZ violations by PLA aircraft in the first ten days of July, more than the totals for most months on record. This included 56 violations on July 10, which is tied with October 4, 2021, as the highest daily total on record.[1] 36 of the aircraft involved in the July 10 incursions flew through the southern and southeastern part of the ADIZ on their way to the Western Pacific for air-sea joint training exercises with the Shandong aircraft carrier and other PLA Navy vessels.[2]

The high number of ADIZ violations in July is part of a trend of increased ADIZ violations after Lai Ching-te took office as president of Taiwan on May 20. There were at least 325 PLA violations of Taiwan’s ADIZ in June and 289 in May, the second and third-highest monthly totals on record, respectively. The June total is the highest for any month without a large-scale PLA exercise. The record for most ADIZ violations in one month was 446 in August 2022, when the PRC responded to then-US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan with record-scale military exercises around Taiwan.[3] The number of ADIZ violations that Taiwan’s MND reports does not include PRC vessels and aircraft around Taiwan’s outlying islands such as the Kinmen and Matsu archipelagos.

The heightened number of violations reflects an intensified PRC pressure campaign against Taiwan under the new administration of Lai Ching-te, whom the PRC considers a dangerous separatist. The high frequency of ADIZ violations drains Taiwan’s resources, exhausts military personnel, and degrades Taiwan’s threat awareness. Taiwan does not scramble aircraft in response to all PRC ADIZ violations, but it does put military personnel on standby to respond quickly if needed.

ISW INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR
Monthly PRC Violations of Taiwan’s ADIZ, 2022 - Present



A PLA drone flew near an airport on Taiwan's Matsu Islands and disrupted two flights. The ROC Army Matsu Defense Command detected a PRC military drone hovering 5 nautical miles from Matsu's Nangan Airport on July 2. The command notified the airport control tower, which alerted nearby aircraft and had two flights to delay their landing at the airport. The drone remained in the area for 20 minutes before leaving.[4] It did not enter the airspace above Matsu's restricted or prohibited waters.[5] This is the first reported instance of a PLA drone approaching Taiwan's outlying islands outside of a military exercise.

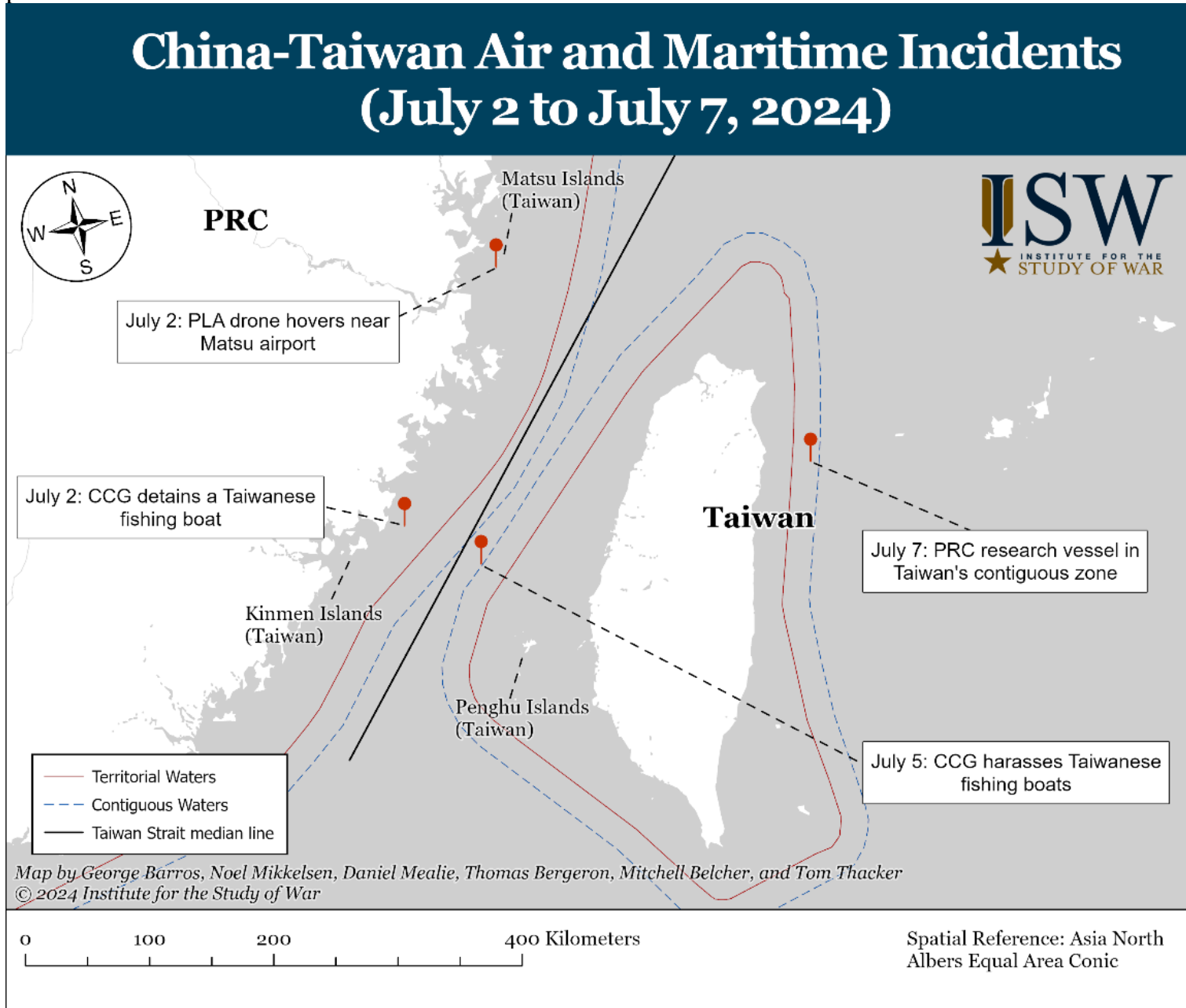
A Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) ship tried to expel Taiwanese fishing boats fishing near the Penghu Islands and east of the median line of the Taiwan Strait. A Taiwanese Coast Guard Administration (CGA) ship patrolling the median line of the Taiwan Strait on July 5 discovered a CCG ship 3.5 miles east of the median line trying to expel Taiwanese fishing boats there. The CCG ship was 30 miles northwest of Mudou Island, part of Taiwan's Penghu archipelago, and within Taiwan's claimed Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). It was not in the PRC's territorial waters or contiguous zone. Taiwan's CGA ship cut between the CCG and fishing boats and broadcast for the CCG to leave and stop interfering with Taiwanese boats.[6] The PRC claims Taiwan as its territory and considers the entire Taiwan Strait to be part of the PRC's EEZ.

The PRC is increasing the frequency, scope, and aggressiveness of its "law enforcement" patrols around Taiwan as part of a pressure campaign against ROC President Lai and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration.[7] The CCG began conducting patrols around Taiwan's outlying Kinmen archipelago, including into Kinmen's restricted and prohibited waters, after two PRC fishermen died while fleeing a CGA pursuit in Kinmen waters in February 2024. It boarded and detained a Taiwanese fishing boat for illegally fishing in PRC waters near Kinmen on July 2, the first such detainment in 17 years, and continues to hold the crew as of July 9.[8] The PRC has detained since March an ROC soldier of the Kinmen Defense Command whose fishing boat drifted into PRC waters.[9] CCG operations in Taiwan-controlled waters and EEZ serve to enhance the PRC's claims and erode Taiwan's control over those waters and territories.

The ROC CGA expelled a PRC research vessel that entered "restricted or prohibited waters" off Taiwan's east coast. The PRC scientific research vessel *Tan Kah Kee*, also known as the *Jia Geng*, sailed in waters near Taiwan's Yilan County on July 7. At one point the vessel came within 20 nautical miles of Taiwan's coast, which is within Taiwan's contiguous zone. A CGA vessel expelled it from the area. *Tan Kah Kee* is a 3,600-ton research vessel owned by the PRC's Xiamen University's Marine Operations. It is equipped with acoustic sensors, weather radars, and submarine drones it can launch to map the ocean floor.[10] Taiwan's National Security Bureau Director Tsai Ming-yen said the vessel did not cast any underwater equipment and was mainly there to collect hydrological data.[11] A Financial Times report from February 2024 noted that some such research vessels have ties to the PLA, however, and that the data they collect including meteorological data have military applications.[12] Taiwan will conduct its annual Han Kuang military exercises in July, including sensitive weapons tests and drills in Yilan County.[13]

The February 2024 Financial Times report found that PRC research vessels sailed into or along Taiwan's eastern contiguous zone nine times between September 2023 and February 2024, an increase from previous years.[14] The incursion by the *Tan Kah Kee* into Taiwan's contiguous waters is the first such incursion that ISW has noted since February. In addition to collecting data, the PRC may use ostensibly non-military and scientific vessels around Taiwan in tandem with near-daily air and naval

violations of Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) and increasing CCG patrols near Taiwan’s outlying islands to wear down Taiwan’s threat awareness and resources, forcing it to be selective in which perceived incursions it chooses to respond to. Blurring the lines between military and civilian activities also has the effect of making it more difficult for Taiwan to determine which activities are potential threats.



A Taiwanese government investigation found that three Taiwanese military facilities had installed banned PRC-made devices including routers. Taiwan People’s Party (TPP) Legislative Caucus Chair Huang Kuo-chang is leading an investigation into the Taiwanese military’s use of PRC technologies. The Ministry of National Defense’s (MND) Armaments Bureau confirmed on July 4 that it had found two Huawei routers and a PRC-manufactured Advantech data reader installed at the army’s Hungchailin Camp. It also found 128 PRC-made inverters at solar installations at the

Hungchailin base, the Pinghai Navy Base, and Tri-Service General Hospital's Songshan Branch. Taiwan had banned the installation of these PRC-made devices at military facilities due to security concerns. The MND Armaments Bureau said it ordered the Taiwanese contractors who illegally installed these devices to remove the devices and would investigate them for breach of contract. Huang claimed in a press conference that the DPP administration had allowed its green energy initiative in the military to become a "fifth column for Beijing," alluding to fears that the PRC could use the banned telecommunications devices to spy on Taiwanese bases.[15] Huang also accused Taiwan's National Defense University of using PRC-made routers and computers and concealing this fact from the MND, which did not find PRC-made devices at the university. The MND also said on July 10 that it was investigating the military's use of PRC-made dashcams and had already removed over 800 such dashcams from military vehicles. KMT legislator Hsu Chiao-hsin said Taiwan had blacklisted the vendor who won the army contract for the dashcams in 2021, on the same day the military placed its order.[16]

The PRC is using cross-strait events such as the Cross-Strait Youth Summit to legitimize the Kuomintang (KMT) as a negotiating partner on behalf of Taiwan and promote its pro-unification message. The CCP kicked off the Cross-Strait Youth Summit in Beijing on July 3 and the Cross-Strait Youth Development Forum in Hangzhou and other cities on July 6. The forums are annual events that the PRC's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) and other agencies host to promote youth exchanges between the PRC and Taiwan and promote a message of cross-strait unity. KMT Vice Chairman Sean Lien Sheng-wen attended the Cross Strait Youth Summit and gave a speech in which he encouraged young people on both sides to connect in person and said the KMT hopes both sides of the strait can shelve their disputes and seek common ground.[17] Lien also told cross-strait media that any action that does not contribute to cross-strait exchanges and a friendly atmosphere is unnecessary. His comment referred to Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council's (MAC) decision to upgrade its travel warning to the PRC after the PRC issued legal guidelines promising harsh punishments for "Taiwan independence diehards." [18] Former KMT Chair and Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou also spoke at the summit via video conference and urged young people to work together to "create a bright future for the Chinese nation." About 600 people attended the forum including TAO Director Song Tao, who gave the opening speech.[19]

Song Tao also attended the opening of the Cross-Strait Youth Development Forum on July 6 together with former KMT Chair and current chair of the China Cyan Geese Peace Education Foundation Hung Hsiu-chu. Around 800 people attended in total.[20] Song met with Hung on July 8 in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. According to a PRC readout, Song and Hung both expressed the need to jointly oppose Taiwan's independence and promote national reunification and rejuvenation.[21]

The CCP invites KMT figures such as Lien, Hung, and Ma to participate in cross-strait events and negotiations as part of an effort to legitimize the KMT as an interlocutor on behalf of Taiwan in contrast to the DPP. The PRC cut off official exchanges with Taiwan after Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP became president of Taiwan in 2016. CCP officials have repeatedly met with KMT officials and invited them to PRC-hosted events during this time. Sean Lien and fellow KMT vice chairman Andrew Hsia are frequent participants in such meetings. The CCP insists that all cross-strait negotiations must be on the mutual basis of the "1992 consensus," which Ma and the KMT recognize but Tsai and the DPP do not. The 1992 Consensus is an alleged verbal agreement between semi-official representatives of the PRC and the then KMT-ruled ROC following negotiations in 1992. It states that both sides agree there is only

one China and that Taiwan is part of China. The CCP interprets this “one China” to be the People’s Republic of China, however, while the KMT interprets it to be the Republic of China.

China

The PRC framed collaboration between NATO and Indo-Pacific states as a threat to regional security. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson Lin Jian criticized NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg’s pledge on July 9 to expand NATO cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. Most of the leaders of these Indo-Pacific states are attending the NATO summit from July 9-11. The exception is Australia, which sent Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles.[22] Lin accused NATO of “expanding its power across its boundaries, provoking confrontation, and engaging in hegemony and bullying.”[23] Lin stated that NATO’s strengthening of security ties with countries surrounding the PRC amounted to implementing the US “Indo-Pacific Strategy” and has undermined peace in the region.

Lin condemned the NATO summit declaration that held the PRC responsible for enabling Russia’s war against Ukraine.[24] Lin blamed the US for using NATO to spread false information and undermine PRC-EU relations. Lin claimed that the PRC’s “constructive role on the Ukrainian issue is widely recognized by the international community.” The PRC began military exercises with Belarus near the Polish border during the NATO summit.[25]

The PRC is also frustrated with the strengthening of defense cooperation between US allies in the Indo-Pacific. Lin criticized the signing of a Reciprocal Access Agreement between the Philippines and Japan that permits the temporary stationing of troops in each other’s territory for exercises and patrols. Lin stated that such cooperation instigated a “new Cold War” and highlighted Japan’s militaristic history.[26] Japan finalized a Reciprocal Access Agreement with Australia in August 2023.[27] The PRC’s dissatisfaction with security cooperation is based on the perception that collaboration between liberal democracies in the region has the potential to mount stronger resistance to PRC efforts to advance certain interests which it relies on maintaining a dominant military presence for, such as enforcing territorial claims over Taiwan and the South China Sea.

CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping welcomed Belarus to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Xi seeks to use the SCO to legitimize PRC-led institutions and undermine Western-led security frameworks. The SCO is a Eurasia-focused multilateral security forum established by the PRC and Russia in 2001. Belarus joined the SCO at the organization’s 2024 regional security forum on July 4 and is the first new member state since the SCO admitted Iran in 2023.[28] Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Turkey sought full membership in the SCO after a meeting with Xi on the sidelines of the summit. Erdoğan first expressed interest in Turkey joining the SCO in 2022.[29] Turkey would be the first NATO member to join the organization.

Xi called on member states to pursue change in an increasingly unstable world and strengthen ties with each other, especially security cooperation and exchanges that enhance mutual trust.[30] Xi’s appeal reflects the PRC’s goal to present the SCO as a viable alternative to the Western-led security architecture and highlight the need to pursue other security arrangements as the existing one fails to prevent instability. Xi’s comments reflect the PRC’s goal to build solid ties between the member states and bolster the SCO as a long-lasting alternative to the Western-led security architecture. Strong participation in PRC-led institutions is beneficial to the PRC’s ability to pursue its interests freely. Xi has used his platform at past SCO summits to advance PRC goals, including playing up the threat of

terrorism in Xinjiang, advocating for Central Asian states' participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, and "opposing interference in the internal affairs of other countries," a phrase which PRC officials usually use in reference to Taiwan.^[31]

Xi met separately with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during the week of the SCO summit. PRC readouts of the meetings highlighted alignment between Xi and the leaders of both countries on the war in Ukraine.^[32] Orbán later praised the PRC as a "key power" in promoting peace in Ukraine and stated that "China has a peace plan. America has a war policy." The PRC released a vague 12-point peace plan in February 2023 that advocated for a political settlement to the war in Ukraine.^[33] Ukraine and Western allies regarded it as a non-starter due to its failure to demand Russia's withdrawal from occupied territory. The PRC's publicization of meetings with the two leaders seeks to play up divisions among NATO members and show that there is no uniform policy on Ukraine. Praise from Orbán also helps the PRC to rebuke NATO's accusations of the PRC's responsibility for the crisis as Russia's enabler.

The PRC's cyber defense agency issued disinformation about the US Intelligence Community and denied that the Volt Typhoon cyber threat actor is a PRC state-sponsored group. The PRC's National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center (CVERC) published a report on July 8 that responds to US and Five Eyes accusations of PRC state-sponsored hacking. The report alleges that the cyber threat actor Volt Typhoon is not a PRC state-sponsored group. It also claims that the US and FVEY assessments are sensationalist lies that US intelligence agencies fabricated to demonize the PRC and earn more funding from Congress. State media outlet Xinhua highlighted the US intelligence community's motivation to enhance its surveillance powers.^[34]

CVERC published the report in both Chinese and English, which is unusual for the agency's announcements. CVERC's release of an English version suggests the target audience includes the international community, as the PRC attempts to rebuff US and Five Eyes allegations of PRC misconduct in cyberspace. The PRC issued the report on the same day that the United States, Five Eyes partners, Germany, South Korea, and Japan published a joint advisory about malicious cyber operations of Advanced Persistent Threat 40 (APT40). The joint advisory includes the assessment that APT40 is affiliated with the PRC's Ministry of State Security (MSS), marking the first such attribution by Australia, Japan, and South Korea.^[35]

The CVERC report is the second part of a series first published on April 15 that followed US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) advisories about Volt Typhoon in February and March.^[36] The PRC's accusation that the US advisories are disinformation is consistent with previous instances of flipping the narrative when its state-sponsored malign cyber activities become public. For example, MFA spokesperson Lin Jian responded to US and Five Eyes partner accusations about the PRC's election-related hacking by citing PRC threat intelligence reports that supposedly exposed US-based APTs including several US intelligence agencies.^[37] The PRC uses blame shifting to divert public attention from PRC malicious cyber activities and crowd the information space with narratives that target the United States and US allies.

Southeast Asia

Philippines

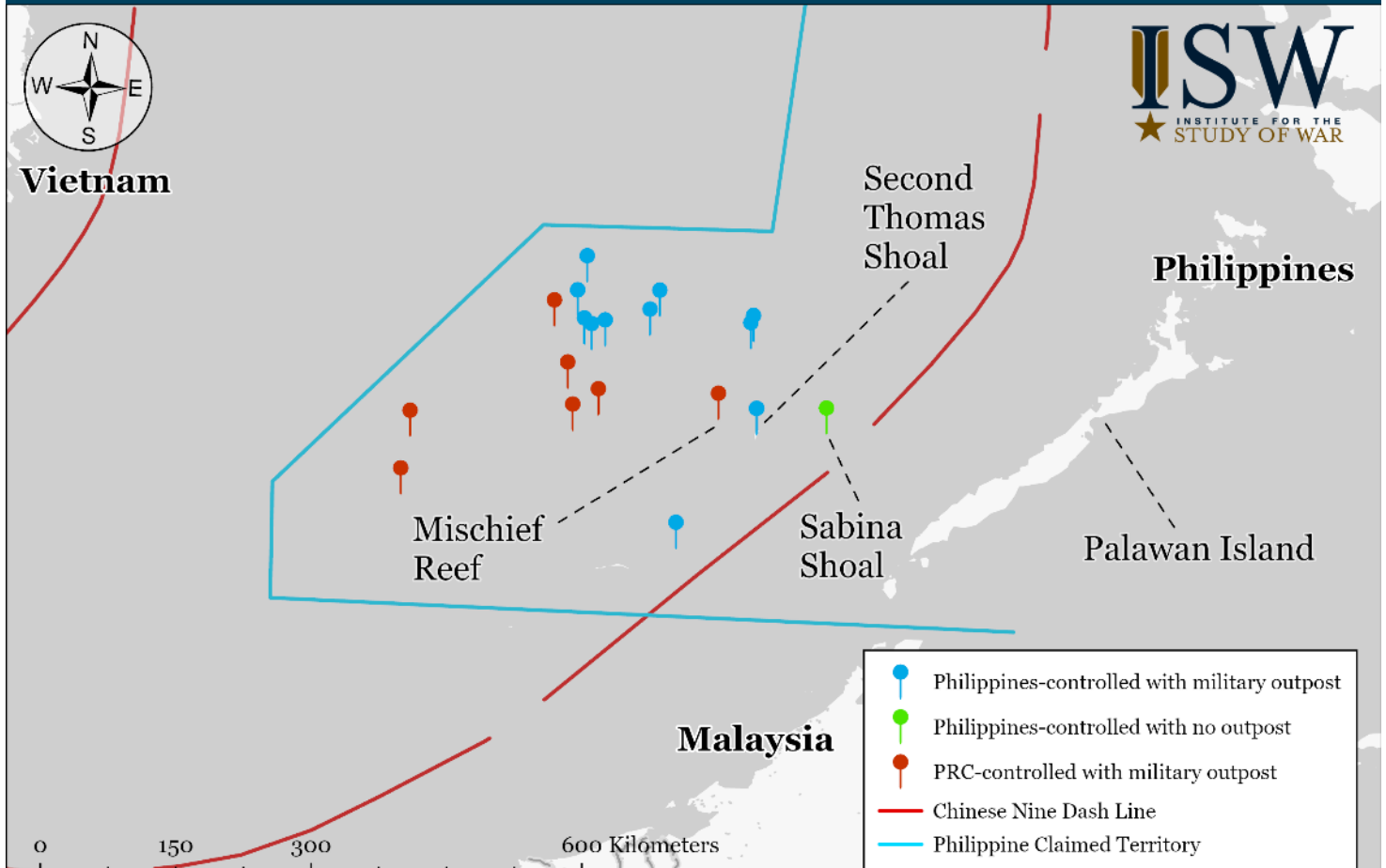
The China Coast Guard (CCG) anchored its largest ship in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near Sabina Shoal. The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported that the CCG's largest vessel, the CCG-5901, entered the Philippines' EEZ on July 2. The CCG-5901 traveled through the Second Thomas Shoal and Panganiban Reef to its destination in the Sabina Shoal, where it has been anchored since July 3.[38] The PCG released a statement on July 6 accusing the PRC of attempted intimidation.[39] PRC MFA spokesperson Lin Jian responded that the CCG was operating within PRC sovereign territory per international law.[40] Lin did not comment on whether the CCG's actions were in response to territorial disputes in Sabina Shoal.

Yang Xiao of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), an arm of the Ministry of State Security, previously accused the PCG of attempting to build a permanent maritime base in Sabina Shoal. Yang stated that such behaviors would lead the PRC to increase its law enforcement presence around Sabina Shoal.[41] The anchoring of the CCG-5901 in Sabina Shoal serves the dual purpose of intimidating the PCG and acting on earlier CCG threats of increasing their law enforcement presence in the disputed territory. With the CCG-5901 anchored in Sabina Shoal, the PCG is unlikely to continue building a maritime base. Preventing the construction of a base in Sabina Shoal is in the best interest of the PRC, as a PCG base will allow the Philippines to enhance resupply capabilities to the Second Thomas Shoal and *Sierra Madre*.

The PRC released a report accusing the Philippines of causing environmental harm to coral reefs in Second Thomas Shoal. The PRC Ministry of Natural Resources released a report accusing the Philippines of causing "serious damage" to the coral reef ecosystem around Second Thomas Shoal.[42] The Ministry states that this damage is caused by the "illegal" beaching of the Philippine warships, including the BRP *Sierra Madre*. The *Sierra Madre* was grounded by Manila in 1999 to defend and enhance its territorial claims.[43] The report calls on the Philippines to remove its warships and halt further damage to underwater ecosystems. The Philippine task force on the South China Sea rejected the PRC's accusation, instead placing the blame for any ecological damage on PRC actions. The task force called for an independent, third-party investigation into ecological damage in the South China Sea and its causes. PRC MFA spokesperson Lin Jian responded to the Philippines' accusation on July 10.[44] Lin rejected the idea that the PRC caused any damage to coral reefs in the Second Thomas Shoal, and contrasted the damaged Second Thomas Shoal with the well-maintained and PRC-held Scarborough Shoal, reiterating the threat to coral reef ecosystems posed by the Philippines' military activities.[45]

The PRC and Philippines have competing claims over the Second Thomas Shoal along with other regions of the South China Sea. If the Philippines were to remove the *Sierra Madre* it would improve the PRC's ability to assert its claim over the Second Thomas Shoal. Preventing damage to marine environments is a stated component of CCG responsibilities and could serve as a justification for increased CCG presence in the Second Thomas Shoal and surrounding areas.[46]

Philippine and PRC Presence in the Spratly Islands



Map by George Barros, Noel Mikkelsen, Daniel Mealie, Thomas Bergeron, Mitchell Belcher, and Tom Thacker © 2024 Institute for the Study of War Spatial Reference: Asia North Albers Equal Area Conic

Note: This map does not depict all countries' territorial claims in the Spratly Islands.



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