

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



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July 3, 2024

Data Cutoff: July 3 at 9am ET

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 PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office downplayed the risk that the PRC will prosecute ordinary Taiwanese citizens after the PRC released legal guidelines that threaten advocates of Taiwanese independence with criminal penalties up to the death penalty.**
- **Chinese Coast Guard ships boarded a Taiwanese fishing boat for illegally fishing in PRC waters and escorted it to a naval port in Fujian province on July 2.**
- **PRC officials and media framed the ongoing RIMPAC exercises as provoking “bloc confrontation” in the Asia-Pacific and attempting to intimidate the PRC in support of Taiwan.**
- **The Philippines stated that the PRC interfered in the rescue of Philippine fishermen whose boat exploded near Scarborough Shoal. The PRC framed the role of the CCG positively to portray itself as the legitimate authority in the waters near the shoal.**
- **The PRC accused the Philippines of “undermining peace and stability” by resupplying a Philippine Coast Guard vessel “illegally stationed” on Sabina Shoal.**

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan

The PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) downplayed the risk that the PRC will prosecute ordinary Taiwanese citizens after the PRC released legal guidelines that threaten advocates of Taiwanese independence with criminal penalties up to the death

penalty. TAO Spokesperson Zhu Fenglian claimed that the guidelines only target “Taiwanese independence diehards” who engage in “separatist activities.” The guidelines outline the actions subject to criminal prosecution under the criminal code. They state that “Taiwan independence”-related activities punishable under Article 103 include:

- Forming a “Taiwan independence” organization or program;
- Directing people to carry out activities that “split the country or undermine national unity;”
- Attempting to change the “legal status of Taiwan as a part of China” by law;
- Attempting to create “two Chinas” or “one China, one Taiwan” in the international community by promoting Taiwan’s membership in international organizations that require statehood or by engaging in official exchanges or military contacts with other countries; and
- Using one’s official position to “wantonly distort or falsify the fact that Taiwan is a part of China” in education, culture, history, media, etc., or to “suppress” political parties, groups, or individuals that support peaceful cross-strait relations and “national reunification.”[1]

Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) raised the travel warning severity for the PRC on June 27 in response to the legal guidelines, citing increased detention and interrogation of Taiwanese citizens under the PRC’s progressively strict national security laws in recent years. The MAC urged Taiwanese citizens to avoid travel to the mainland unless necessary.[2]

Zhu accused the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government of “political manipulation” in response to the travel warning and claimed that the DPP was inciting confrontation to obstruct cross-strait exchanges.[3] Zhu encouraged Taiwanese people to participate in cross-strait exchanges and stated that there was no reason to worry when traveling to the mainland. The PRC’s accusations against the DPP serve to portray it as the instigator of cross-strait tensions while minimizing the severity of the legal guidelines, which threaten punishment up to the death penalty.

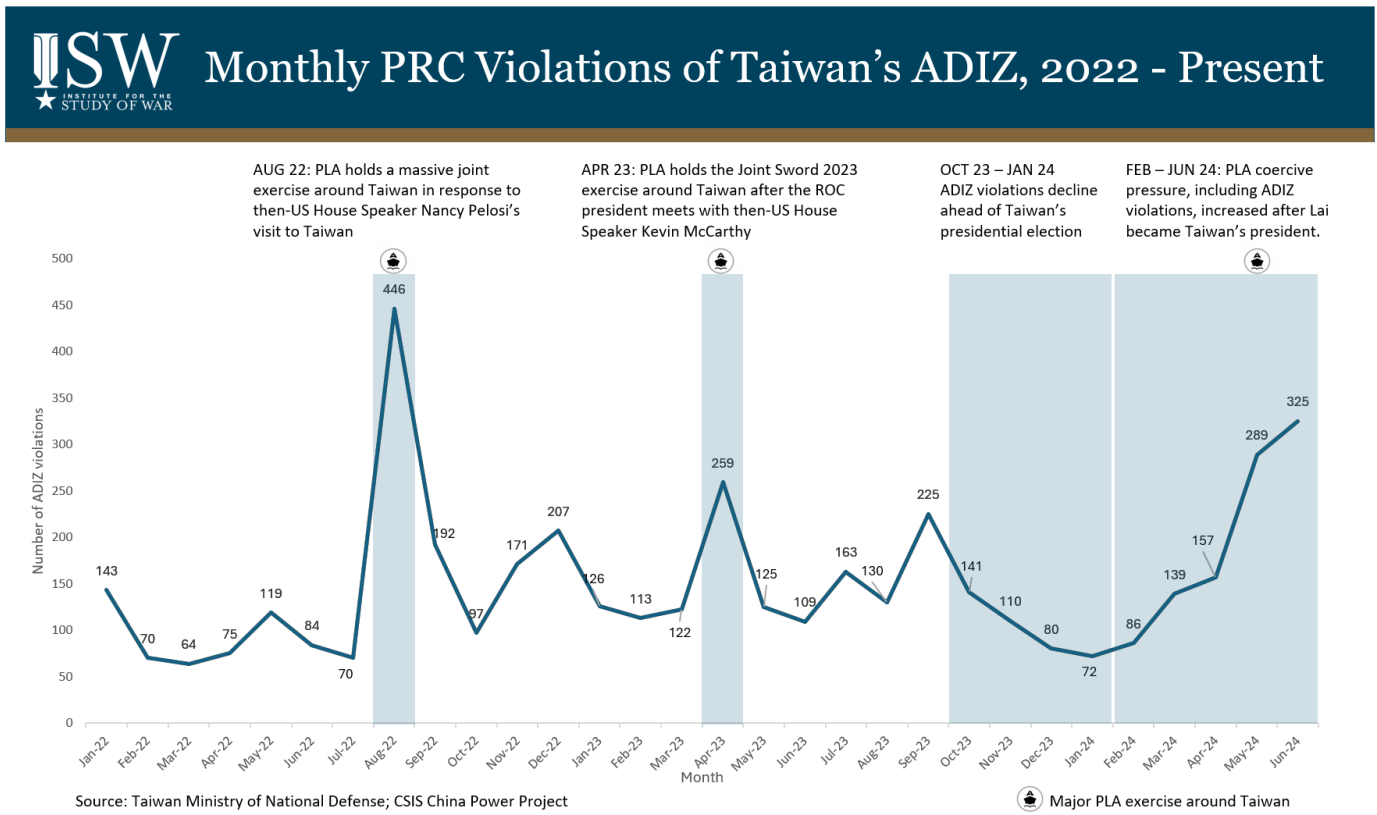
DPP spokesperson Justin Wu Cheng claimed on July 1 that there is a real risk for Taiwanese citizens to travel to the PRC because of the PRC’s history of weaponizing the law and arbitrarily detaining Taiwanese nationals. He cited the examples of Lee Meng-chu and Yang Chi-yuan, two Taiwanese citizens who were arrested “without reason” in the PRC on political grounds.[4]

PRC authorities arrested Lee in Shenzhen in August 2019 for taking pictures of police officers and withheld information about his detainment for weeks. The PRC labeled Lee an “independence activist” for his position as chairman of the Taiwan-United Nations Alliance (TAIUNA) and forced him to publicly confess his support for Hong Kong “thugs,” referring to pro-democracy protesters.[5] The PRC imprisoned him for one year and ten months for alleged spying for foreign countries on behalf of Taiwan. The PRC allowed him to return to Taiwan in July 2023.

PRC authorities detained Yang in August 2022, during then-Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, and held him without trial for eight months. The PRC charged Yang with “promoting Taiwan’s independence and accession to the United Nations” and convicted him of secessionism, marking the first case of the PRC prosecution for such an offense.[6] Yang remains imprisoned in the PRC.

PLA aircraft violated Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) at least 325 times in June, the highest monthly total since August 2022. The June total is the second-highest monthly total on record and 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. There were 289 violations in May, of which 82 (28 percent) occurred on May 23 and 24 during the PRC’s Joint Sword 2024A exercise around Taiwan.[7] 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.



Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) ships boarded a Taiwanese fishing boat for illegally fishing in PRC waters and escorted it to a naval port in Fujian province on July 2.[8] The Taiwanese fishing boat was within PRC territorial waters 11.5 nautical miles from the PRC coast when the CCG ships confronted it. It was also near the Taiwanese island of Kinmen, though not within Taiwan-controlled waters.[9] CCG spokesperson Liu Dejun said the fishing boat was suspected of illegally fishing

in a prohibited area in violation of a summer fishing moratorium and was using equipment that did not comply with regulations.^[10]

Two Taiwanese Coast Guard Administration (CGA) ships deployed to the scene of the arrest to rescue the fishermen and engaged in a standoff with four CCG ships who intercepted the pursuit and broadcast warnings not to interfere.^[11] The Taiwanese Coast Guard stated that it halted the pursuit to avoid escalation of the situation. A CGA spokesperson called on the PRC to release the fishing boat and to avoid politicizing the issue.^[12] Taiwanese media claimed that the site of the confrontation was an established location for Taiwanese fishermen to catch squid and the incident represented the violation of a years-long tacit understanding.^[13] Taiwanese media stated that there were other Taiwanese fishing vessels in the vicinity, which other CCG ships monitored during the confrontation.^[14]

The PRC and Taiwan have detained or expelled each other's fishing boats for illegal fishing in their respective waters in the past.^[15] The PRC has increased its patrols and law enforcement since February 2024 around Kinmen and some of Taiwan's other outlying islands, however, in response to an incident in which two PRC fishermen died in a boat accident while fleeing a CGA pursuit in Kinmen's prohibited waters. The PRC has made increasingly frequent incursions into Taiwan-controlled waters around Taiwan's outer islands since February, primarily with CCG patrols but also including at least two PLA naval vessels.^[16] The CCG boarded a Taiwanese sightseeing ship sailing around Kinmen on February 19 when it briefly strayed off course into PRC waters.^[17] The PRC has detained one Taiwanese fisherman for over three months since March 18 after his boat ran out of fuel and drifted into PRC waters and the PRC discovered he was a soldier in the Kinmen Defense Command.^[18]

China

PRC state media publicized a message of countering corruption and ensuring the military's political loyalty to the CCP days after the CCP expelled two former defense ministers for corruption. The PRC announced corruption investigations against former Ministers of Defense Wei Fenghe and Li Shangfu and expelled both men from the CCP on June 27. The state news agency Xinhua announced that both men had "seriously violated political discipline," failed in their political responsibilities, used their positions to benefit themselves, and accepted gifts and large amounts of money for favors. It also said that Wei had "seriously polluted the political ecology of the troops" and Li had "seriously polluted the political ecology of the equipment field."^[19] The PLA's official newspaper *PLA Daily* published an editorial on July 1, three days after the announcements about the former defense ministers, that called for the PLA to "adhere to the Party's absolute leadership over the military" under Chairman Xi Jinping, continue to deepen political training, and eradicate the "soil and conditions for the breeding of corruption."^[20]

Xi has pursued an extensive anti-corruption campaign in the military and government since he took power in 2013. Anti-corruption purges in the PLA in recent years have particularly focused on the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) and equipment procurement. Many of the nine senior generals the PRC purged during the past year were also from the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF). Wei and Li are the latest purges in this trend.

Before becoming Ministers of Defense, Wei was the first commander of the PLARF, created in 2016 from the former Second Artillery Corps, while Li was the head of the PLA procurement department. Bloomberg reported in January 2024 that US intelligence assessments that graft in the PLA hindered military effectiveness and was a reason behind the PLARF purges, including a case in which investigators discovered some missiles that were filled with water instead of fuel.[21]

CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping portrayed the PRC as a force for global peace and justice on the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are a set of principles dating back to the 1954 Sino-Indian Agreement that Xi said have since formed the “bedrock” of the PRC’s international relations. They are:

1. Mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity;
2. Mutual non-aggression;
3. Non-interference in each other's internal affairs;
4. Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit; and
5. Peaceful coexistence.[22]

Xi delivered a speech to an audience including representatives and former leaders from over 100 countries in which he pledged that “China's door to opening up will only open wider and wider” and that the PRC’s “determination to pursue a path of peaceful development will not change.” Xi framed the PRC’s vision to build a “community with a shared future for mankind” as the most effective way to “sustain, promote, and upgrade” the Five Principles in the “new circumstances.” He called on the Global South to work together and take the lead in building the “community with a shared future for mankind.”[23] Attendees of the event jointly issued a Beijing Declaration that said the Global South is a “key force in advocating and practicing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.” The declaration said the Five Principles are a “correction to imperialist, colonialist, and hegemonic systems” built on protecting the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries.[24]

The PRC is using the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to persuade countries of the Global South to unite behind a Beijing-led international order. It contrasts these principles of non-interference and mutual respect for sovereignty with the colonialist past and what it calls the “hegemonic” policies of countries in the Western-led international order.

PRC officials and media framed the ongoing RIMPAC exercises as provoking “bloc confrontation” in the Asia-Pacific and attempting to intimidate the PRC in support of Taiwan. The biennial Ring of the Pacific (RIMPAC) multinational maritime exercise began on June 27 near Hawaii. Over 25,000 personnel from approximately 29 countries will participate in the exercise until August 1. The exercise will feature “experimentation” with new capabilities to sink the USS

Tarawa, an 820-foot-long, 40,000-ton decommissioned amphibious assault ship.[25] PRC Ministry of National Defense (MOD) spokesperson Senior Colonel Wu Qian responded to media reports that the sinking of the Tarawa is preparation for an attack on PLA amphibious assault ships in case of war in the Taiwan Strait by accusing the United States of using the exercise to “frighten” the PLA, which Wu said was an “impossible task.” Wu stressed that solving the “Taiwan issue” is an internal matter for the PRC that will not allow external interference.[26]

State media outlet Global Times cited PRC military expert Fu Qianshao who said that there were “obvious” signs that RIMPAC exercise targets the PRC because there are few countries in the Asia-Pacific region that operate amphibious assault ships and are not US allies. Fu said using the USS Tarawa as a target can also be practice for sinking an aircraft carrier.[27] State media Xinhua published commentary by another military expert named Zhang Junshe who wrote that the true purpose of the exercise is for the United States to “coerce” other countries into joining its “small circle” and provoke “camp confrontation” against the PRC. He claimed that aside from a handful of countries such as Japan, Australia, and Canada that are willing to act as “thugs” of the United States, most participating countries do not want to be involved in a US-PRC confrontation and are participating because they do not wish to offend the United States.[28]

RIMPAC is the world’s largest naval exercise. It began in 1971 with participation from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and has since grown to include 29 participating nations in 2024. The United States invited the PRC to participate in RIMPAC in 2014 and 2016 but stopped inviting it ever since due to Beijing’s construction of military bases on disputed territory in the South China Sea.[29] The PRC views RIMPAC as part of a broader US-led effort to build a multinational coalition to “contain” the PRC in the Asia-Pacific region.

Southeast Asia

Philippines

PRC and Philippine officials held their ninth round of talks under the Bilateral Consultation Mechanism (BCM) on the South China Sea. Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Undersecretary Maria Theresa Lazaro and PRC Vice Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong met in Manila on July 2 for talks about the PRC-Philippine disputes in the South China Sea. Both sides described the talks as “frank and constructive.” The Philippine readout said both sides saw the need to rebuild trust and confidence and affirmed their commitment to de-escalate tensions. Lazaro told Chen that the Philippines will be “relentless in protecting its interests and upholding its sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction in the West Philippine Sea.”[30] The PRC readout said the PRC reiterated its sovereignty over the Spratly Islands including the Second Thomas Shoal and urged the Philippines to stop its “maritime infringement and provocative acts.”[31] The Philippines and PRC also signed the Arrangement on Improving Philippines-China Maritime Communication Mechanisms and agreed to discuss how to operationalize this mechanism.[32]

The Philippines stated that the PRC interfered in the rescue of Philippine fishermen whose boat exploded near Scarborough Shoal. Two Philippine fishermen were severely injured on June 29 when the engine on their fishing boat exploded and nearly sank the boat around 17 nautical miles southwest of Scarborough Shoal. Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) spokesperson Rear Admiral Armando Balilo said CCG and PLA Navy vessels shadowed a PCG ship that sailed to respond but ceased their “harassment” when the Filipino crew informed them of the explosion. Balilo said the CCG ship launched two rigid-hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) and offered help to the half-submerged fishing boat.[33] PCG spokesperson for the West Philippine Sea Jay Tarriela claimed on June 30 that the CCG deployed its RHIBs to “hinder and obstruct” the PCG’s rescue operation, however. He claimed the PCG managed to outmaneuver the CCG boats to rescue the Filipino fishermen and tow their damaged boat.[34]

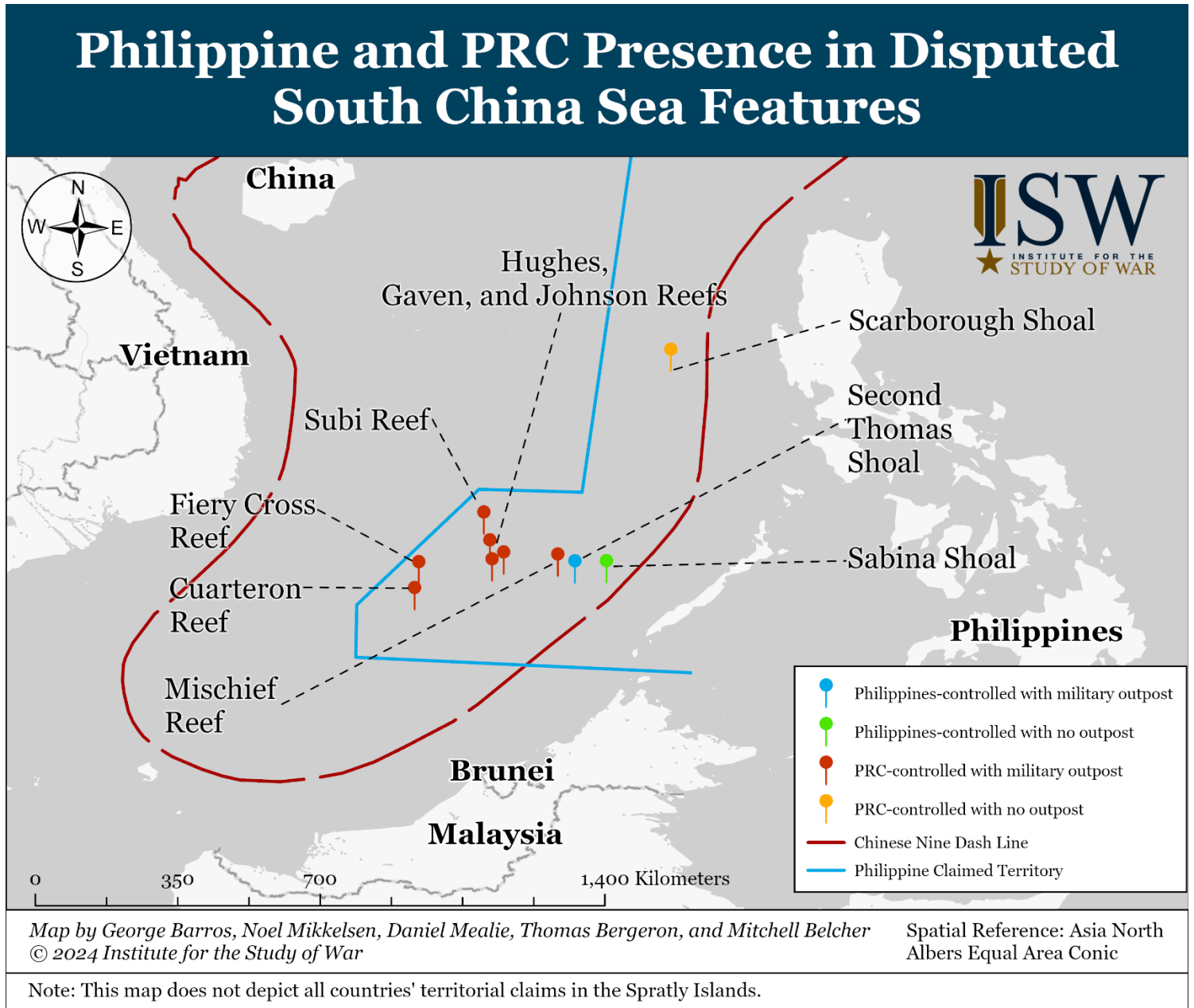
The PRC framed the role of the CCG positively to portray itself as the legitimate authority in the waters near the shoal. PRC state media Global Times later released a video showing personnel in the CCG boats tossing life jackets and lifebuoys to a person in the water. The video included an audio clip it claimed was the PCG thanking the CCG for its cooperation.[35] Some of the rescued fishermen told Philippine media that the CCG did nothing to help except to throw life vests at them, which was not useful because the fishermen were already transferring to the PCG ship at the time.[36]

Scarborough Shoal is a disputed territory in the South China Sea that the PRC and Philippines both claim. The PRC seized control of the shoal from the Philippines in 2012 and maintains a Coast Guard presence in the nearby waters, though it has not built infrastructure on the shoal itself.

The PRC accused the Philippines of “undermining peace and stability” by resupplying a PCG vessel “illegally stationed” on Sabina Shoal. CCG spokesperson Liu Dejun claimed the CCG “followed and monitored” three PCG ships that the Philippines sent to Sabina Shoal to transfer personnel and materials to a PCG ship stationed at Sabina Shoal.[37] The PCG ship at Sabina Shoal is the BRP *Teresa Magbanua*, the PCG’s largest and most advanced ship.[38] PRC state media Global Times published an article on July 2 with photos that appear to show the Philippines transporting cement to the *Teresa Magbanua* in addition to fuel and living supplies. It cited Yang Xiao, deputy director of the Institute of Maritime Strategy Studies under the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), who claimed the Philippines’ actions around Sabina Shoal indicate that Manila is planning to build a permanent maritime base there for operations in other parts of the South China Sea including resupply missions to the nearby Second Thomas Shoal. CICIR is an arm of the PRC’s Ministry of State Security. Yang accused the Philippines of trying to replicate the 1999 grounding of the Philippine warship BRP *Sierra Madre*, which the Philippines now uses as its outpost on Second Thomas Shoal. He claimed the Philippines’ actions are a “strategic blunder” that will trigger the PRC to increase its maritime law enforcement presence near the shoal.[39] Philippine Navy spokesperson for the West Philippine Sea Rear Admiral Roy Vincent Trinidad did not confirm or deny the Global Times’ allegations during a July 2 press conference and said that “these are actions the Philippines will pursue if and when necessary.”[40]

The Philippines accused the PRC in May of preparing for island reclamation at Sabina Shoal by dumping crushed coral there. It deployed the *Teresa Magbanua* to the shoal on May 12 to monitor PRC activity there.[41] The Philippines and the PRC both claim Sabina Shoal as their territory, although the

shoal is located well within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone and the Philippines has de facto control of it. Sabina Shoal is roughly 37 miles east of Second Thomas Shoal and is the staging point for Philippine resupply missions to Second Thomas Shoal. A PRC-controlled Sabina Shoal would extend the PRC's territorial claims in the South China Sea, improve the PRC's ability to assert its claim over the Second Thomas Shoal, and enhance the difficulty of Philippine resupply missions to the *Sierra Madre*.



Europe

The PRC denounced the inclusion of PRC companies in the EU's Russia-targeted sanctions as "having no basis in international law." The European Union issued its 14th round

of sanctions on Russia on June 24. The list of sanctioned entities included 19 PRC-based companies that the EU accused of supporting Russia’s military-industrial complex in the war in Ukraine.[42] The PRC Ministry of Commerce claimed on June 26 that these “unilateral sanctions” and application of “long-arm jurisdiction” had no international legal basis, were not authorized by the UN Security Council, and go against agreements reached by PRC and EU leaders.[43] The PRC has repeatedly denied that it provides material support to Russia’s war effort and has accused Western countries of unfairly targeting its “normal trade relations” with Russia. The PRC has also frequently expressed opposition to unilateral sanctions in general, claiming they are illegal.[44]



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