

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



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June 6, 2024

Data Cutoff: June 5 at Noon 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 is exerting greater pressure on Taiwan across domains following the inauguration of President Lai Ching-te in May**
- **Two People’s Liberation Army naval ships entered Taiwan’s restricted waters near Kinmen Island on May 29, a move that signals escalating PRC efforts to assert control over the waters**
- **The PRC suspended tariff exemptions on 134 Taiwanese goods included in the Cross-strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement.**
- **PRC Defense Minister Dong Jun and a Ministry of National Defense (MoD) spokesperson expressed opposition to “rampant” US freedom of navigation activities and criticized them as illegitimate.**
- **The PRC MFA condemned the trilateral United States-Japan-South Korea defense ministers meeting as provocatively targeting the PRC.**
- **The PRC framed the Philippines as provoking regional instability at the Shangri-La Dialogue as part of an effort to justify PRC coercion targeting the Philippines in the South China Sea.**
- **PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokeswoman Mao Ning announced China will not attend the upcoming Russia-Ukraine War peace summit in Switzerland from June 15-16.**

- **The People's Republic of China seeks to diversify its energy supply chains through negotiations with Russia on the proposed Power of Siberia 2 pipeline and diplomatic outreach to Middle Eastern states.**

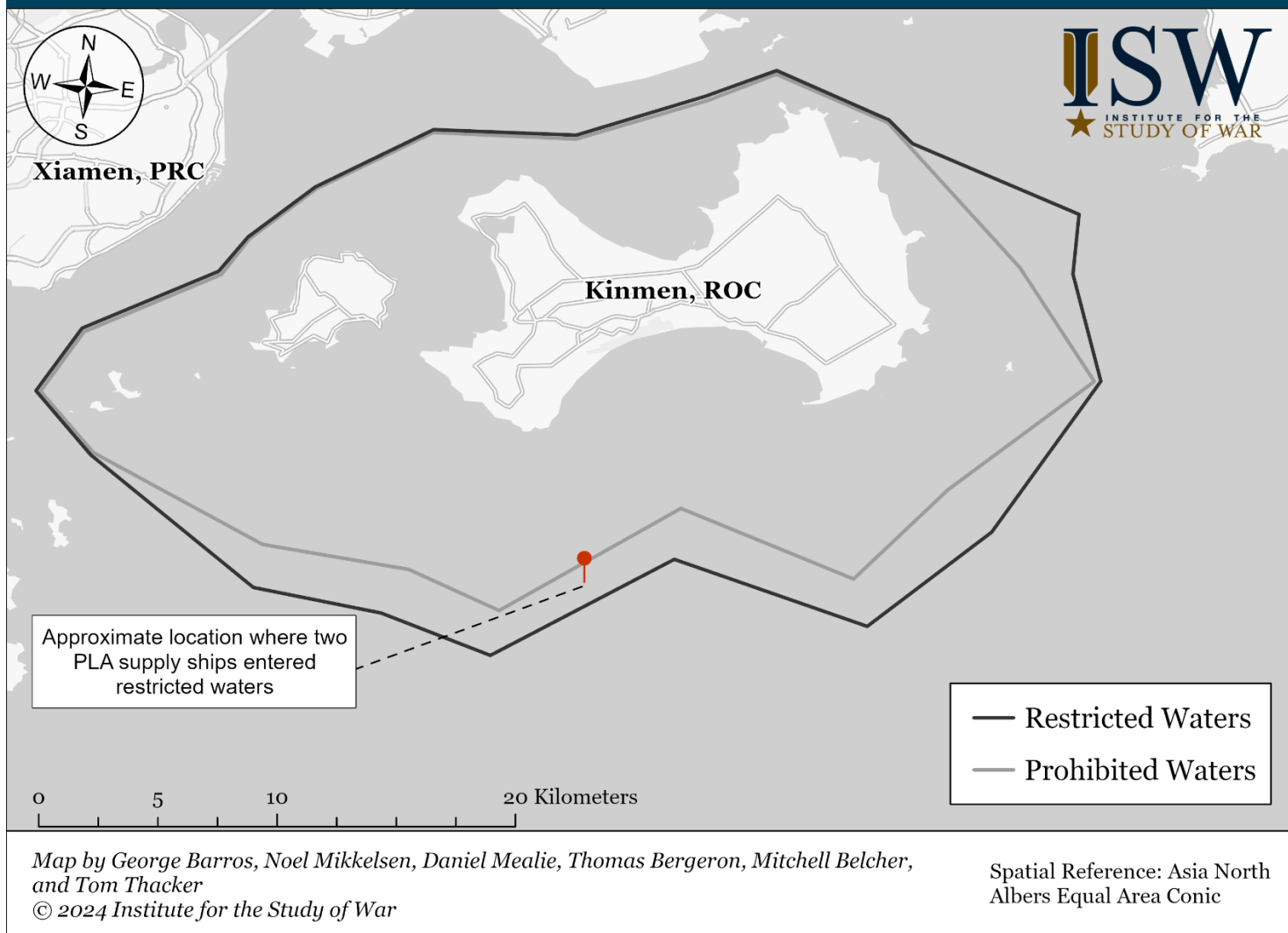
Taiwan

The PRC is exerting greater pressure on Taiwan across domains following the inauguration of President Lai Ching-te in May. PRC officials signaled after Taiwan’s presidential election in January that it views the incoming DPP administration as hostile separatists who instigate cross-strait tensions. The PRC escalated its military and economic lines of coercion against Taiwan after Lai’s inauguration on May 20. PRC officials have maintained fierce rhetoric accusing Lai and the DPP of antagonism to justify the PRC’s actions since the inauguration.

Two People’s Liberation Army (PLA) ships entered Taiwan’s restricted waters near Kinmen Island on May 29, a move that signals escalating PRC efforts to assert control over the waters.^[1] Kinmen is a Taiwan-controlled island with a large military garrison roughly 3 kilometers from the coast of the PRC. The incursion follows months of Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) ships violating Taiwan’s restricted and prohibited waters around its outer islands, which is aimed at eroding Taiwan’s sovereignty over waters where it holds jurisdiction. Taiwan does not formally claim any territorial waters around Kinmen partly due to its proximity to the PRC, but it designates “prohibited” and “restricted” waters around Kinmen, which it treats as equivalent to “territorial waters” and a “contiguous zone,” respectively. The PRC has normalized the presence of CCG ships in Kinmen’s restricted and prohibited waters since February, increasing both the frequency of incursions and the number of ships. PRC presence in Taiwan-controlled waters around Kinmen peaked in May before President Lai Ching-te’s inauguration, when five CCG ships conducted drills with seven official PRC ships near the island.^[2]

Taiwanese security analysts such as Institute for National Defense and Security Research Director Szu Tzu-yan noted the structure of the ships indicated that they were landing craft.^[3] Taiwanese media outlet *China Times* cited unnamed military officials who stated that this was the first time in ten years that a PLA ship entered Kinmen’s restricted waters.^[4] One retired general noted the significance of the event as a gray zone operation and distinguished it from occasional instances in which PRC ships cut corners through Kinmen’s restricted waters to save time.^[5] The PRC’s deployment of PLA ships in Taiwan-controlled waters represents a tangible manifestation of recent PRC pressure against Taiwan. The incident follows large-scale PLA exercises that encircled Taiwan from May 23–24 after Lai’s inauguration on May 20. Ministry of Defense spokesperson Wu Qian stated that the exercises were aimed at combating the arrogance of "Taiwan independence" and deterring external interference and intervention. Wu stated that the exercises were “completely reasonable, legal, justified, and necessary.”^[6] CCG ships concurrently entered Taiwan-controlled waters around two islands in the Matsu archipelago.

PLA Violations of Kinmen's Restricted Waters (May 29, 2024)



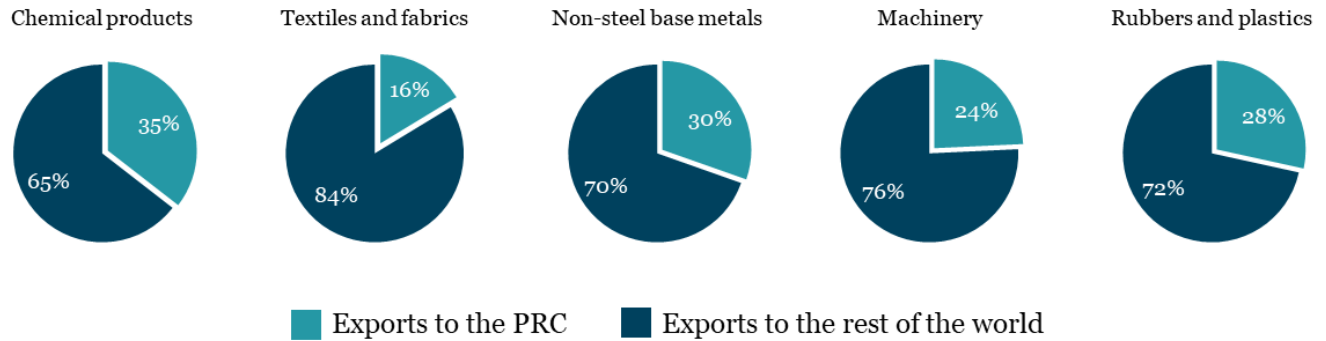
The PRC suspended tariff exemptions on 134 Taiwanese goods included in the Cross-strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA).^[7] The goods are primarily chemical products, industrial metals, machinery, rubbers, and plastics. Taiwanese exports to the PRC constitute a large share of the total in these categories.^[8] This is the PRC's second suspension of ECFA tariff exemptions on similar products since December 21, just weeks before Taiwan's presidential elections. At that time, the PRC targeted 12 hydrocarbon and petrochemical products.^[9]

The PRC implements trade restrictions in a coercive or punitive manner to weaken political support for the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which it regards as a threat due to the DPP's proactive resistance to PRC efforts to undermine Taiwan's sovereignty. The PRC adopted bans on Taiwanese fish and pomelo imports as a form of economic punishment after then-US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi arrived in Taiwan in August 2022.^[10] The PRC also makes economic concessions to increase political support for the opposition Kuomintang (KMT), which it favors due to the KMT's willingness to pursue closer cross-strait relations. The PRC Deputy Director of the General Administration of Customs Zhao Zenglian announced on April 28 during a meeting with KMT Caucus Whip Fu Kun-chi that the PRC would lift its ban on Taiwanese pomelos and fish imports.^[11] PRC state media highlighted Fu's acceptance of the 1992 Consensus in his meeting with Zhao. The PRC established the 1992 Consensus as a pre-condition for cross-strait cooperation. It states that both sides agree there is only one China, and that Taiwan is part of the only China.

Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) spokesperson Chen Binhua framed the measures as necessary retaliation in response to Taiwan's alleged "unilateral adoption of discriminatory trade restrictions" on more than 2,500 products from the PRC.^[12] The CCP's blaming Taiwan for the deterioration of trade relations is consistent with its efforts to style itself as the party pursuing economic cooperation that is beneficial for both sides of the strait. Chen highlighted a series of cross-strait economic initiatives that the PRC is pursuing during a TAO press conference on May 29. Chen framed the initiatives as successful modes to attract people from Taiwan to the mainland despite recent cross-strait tensions, which it claims are a product of the DPP government's destructive cross-strait policies.^[13]

The PRC also uses economic coercion to achieve Taiwan's diplomatic isolation. The PRC rejected imports of Guatemalan coffee and macadamia nuts in May to punish Guatemala for maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan.^[14] Guatemala is one of twelve states that have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesman Wang Wenbin criticized Guatemalan Foreign Minister Carlos Martínez for attending ROC President Lai Ching-te's inauguration on May 20.

Taiwanese exports by sector



This graphic shows the share of ROC exports that go to the PRC by sector. The selected sectors classify most of the 134 goods that are subject to tariffs under the PRC’s new restrictions.

Source: ROC Ministry of Finance
 *Data from January-April 2024

[15]

PRC Defense Minister Dong Jun threatened Taiwanese “separatists” and their foreign supporters in his speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. Dong gave a speech on “China’s Approach to Global Security” at the dialogue on June 2 in which he claimed Taiwan’s DPP administration was “pursuing separation in an incremental way” and had recently made “fanatical statements that show their betrayal of the Chinese nation and their ancestors.” Dong also accused “some external interfering forces” of using a “salami-slicing strategy” to hollow out the One China Principle through arms sales and Taiwan-related legislation. He was most likely referring to the United States. He said these forces’ attempts to “embolden Taiwan independence separatists” are “dragging Taiwan into a dangerous situation.” Dong said that the PRC is still committed to peaceful reunification, but that this prospect is being eroded by “separatists” and foreign forces. He stressed that “whoever dares to split Taiwan from China will be crushed to pieces and invite their own destruction.”^[16] Dong’s rhetoric regarding Taiwan mirrors persistent and aggressive diatribes against the DPP and “Taiwan separatists” from PRC officials since Lai’s inauguration.^[17] PRC messaging seeks to justify the PRC’s actions amid increasing pressure to shape the narrative of cross-strait relations.

The ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mainland Affairs Council condemned Dong’s comments on Taiwan. They accused the PRC of violating the UN Charter’s provision against the use or threats of force and of increasing risks to Asia-Pacific peace and security.^[18]

China

PRC Defense Minister Dong Jun and a Ministry of National Defense (MoD) spokesperson expressed opposition to “rampant” US freedom of navigation activities and criticized them as illegitimate. MND spokesperson Col. Wu Qian said on May 30 that the PRC the US notion of “freedom of navigation” is a “false proposition.” Wu claimed the South China Sea is one of the freest and safest waterways in the world and that the PRC has always respected freedom of navigation and overflight under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). He said that “navigation cannot be ‘rampant’ and freedom cannot be ‘reckless,’” however. He said the PRC opposes “rampant freedom” and accused the United States of using freedom of navigation as an excuse to interfere in regional affairs, maintain US hegemony, and undermine other countries’ sovereignty.[19]

Defense Minister Dong Jun claimed in the question-and-answer session following his June 2 speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue that “some countries” that have not signed UNCLOS are using freedom-of-navigation operations (FONOPs) to enter the territorial sea of other countries. He was referring to the United States conducting FONOPs through waters around the Paracel Islands and other PRC-claimed islands which the PRC considers to be its territorial waters. Dong compared this practice to “driving through others’ houses” instead of driving on the main road. He claimed that “we [countries of the Asia-Pacific region] are all victims of these kinds of operations” and denied that they should be considered “freedom of navigation.”[20]

The PRC most recently accused the United States of illegally intruding into its territorial waters during a US FONOP in waters around the Paracel Islands on May 10. The PRC claims straight archipelagic baselines around the Paracel Islands, which means it considers all the water between the islands as its territorial waters. The PRC also requires foreign ships to get permission or provide advance notification when they sail through its territorial waters. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) does not permit countries to restrict “innocent passage” through their territorial waters, however. “Innocent passage” is uninterrupted transit through the waters without other activities such as fishing, research, intelligence collection, or military activities. UNCLOS also only permits designated archipelagic states to draw straight-baseline claims around their islands. Non-archipelagic states, such as the PRC, can only claim waters up to 12 nautical miles from their shores as their territorial sea.[21]

PRC Defense Minister Dong Jun met with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on May 31 on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. This was the first in-person meeting between US and PRC defense ministers since 2022. MoD spokesperson Wu Qian described the meeting as “positive, practical, and constructive.”[22] A US readout said that Austin emphasized the importance of maintaining open lines of military-to-military communication, expressed concern about recent PLA

activity around Taiwan, discussed the PRC's support for Russia's defense industrial base, and expressed concerns about recent provocations from North Korea including direct contributions to Russia's war in Ukraine.[23] Dong said the purpose of military-to-military communication is to enhance understanding, eliminate misunderstandings, and accumulate mutual trust. He expressed hope that the United States will be "consistent in words and deeds" and explore a "correct way" for the two sides to get along in line with common interests. Dong emphasized the PRC's bottom line on Taiwan and Second Thomas Shoal. The PRC readout did not mention the other issues that Austin brought up.[24] PRC media reported that Dong also expressed strong opposition to the US deployment of intermediate-range missiles to the Philippines during an exercise, though the official readout did not mention this issue.[25] MoD spokesperson Wu said on May 30 that the missile deployment "brought huge risks of war to the region." [26]

PRC Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu met US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell in Washington, DC on May 30. Ma expressed a range of PRC grievances with the United States on Taiwan, the South China Sea, economic issues, and Ukraine. The US readout said the "candid and constructive" meeting was part of an effort to maintain open lines of communication to manage bilateral competition. Campbell raised US concerns about the PRC's "destabilizing actions" in the Taiwan Strait, East China Sea, and South China Sea, as well as PRC support for Russia's defense industrial base.[27] Ma agreed to maintain high-level exchanges but said "the practice of the United States seeking dialogue and cooperation while undermining China's interests is not feasible and cannot be done." He said the PRC will never agree to contain, suppress, and deprive the PRC of its legitimate right to development. Ma called Taiwan the "insurmountable red line" in US-PRC relations and urged the United States to abide by the one-China principle if it wanted to maintain cross-strait peace. Ma also urged the United States to stop "politicizing" economic issues, stop "instigating and supporting infringement and provocation" in the South China Sea, and stop "smearing and pressuring China" on the Ukraine war.[28]

The Ma-Campbell meeting came one day after Campbell briefed NATO partners and framed China's material assistance to Russia as "already having chosen a side." Campbell said that PRC economic support for Russia is a "sustained, comprehensive effort that is backed up by the leadership in China" to support Russia "to the hilt" and allow Russia to "reconstitute elements of their military force," including long-range missiles, artillery, UAVs, battlefield awareness, and other capabilities.[29] The United States has accused the PRC of supplying Russia with dual-use components including machine tools and nitrocellulose, which is used in propellants.[30] The PRC has officially presented itself as neutral on the war in Ukraine and framed its economic support of Russia as "normal trade relations." It has largely adopted Russian framing of the war including portraying US aid to Ukraine as "adding fuel to the fire," however.[31]

Japan and South Korea

The PRC MFA condemned the trilateral United States-Japan-South Korea defense ministers meeting as provocatively targeting the PRC. The United States, Japanese, and South Korean ministers committed to trilateral cooperation to create a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. They also condemned North Korean missile launches and regional provocations.[32] PRC MFA Spokeswoman Mao Ning accused the United States of instigating confrontation in the region. She stated the PRC aimed for the maintenance of peace on the Korean peninsula but declined to condemn North Korean provocations.[33]

Philippines

The PRC framed the Philippines as provoking regional instability at the Shangri-La Dialogue as part of an effort to justify PRC coercion targeting the Philippines in the South China Sea. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr stated during his May 31 keynote address that the Philippines was on the front line to assert the integrity of UNCLOS against “assertive actors who aim to propagate excessive and baseless claims through force, intimidation, and deception.”[34] The PRC MFA stated in response that the Philippines was fully responsible for the escalation in the South China Sea. The PRC MFA also rejected the 2016 UNCLOS Arbitration Tribunal ruling that rejected the legitimacy of PRC claims to territory inside of the nine-dash line and land reclamation activities.[35] PRC Minister of National Defense Dong Jun claimed in his June 2 speech that “a certain country [Philippines], emboldened by outside powers [United States], has broken bilateral agreements and its own promises, made premeditated provocations and created false scenarios to mislead the public.”[36]

The PRC is conducting a campaign to enforce its territorial claims over disputed maritime features in the South China Sea. The PRC deployed research vessels and divers to the Sabina Shoal in early May, potentially as part of a campaign to prevent the Philippines from defending its claim to the Second Thomas Shoal. This is a change from April when the PRC deployed the Chinese Coast Guard to block Philippine ships from reaching Second Thomas Shoal and did not conduct efforts to reclaim Sabina Shoal.[37] The PRC also conducted its largest-ever blockade at Scarborough in an attempt to block a fleet of Philippine civilian ships from resupplying fishermen near Scarborough Shoal.[38] The Chinese Coast Guard also released new law enforcement procedures on May 15, which it could use to justify the arrest and detainment of non-PRC nationals and vessels, such as Philippine resupply ships or Filipino fishermen, within the boundaries of PRC territorial claims.[39]

Oceania

Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr. accused the PRC of conducting a cyberattack that stole 20,000 government documents, including military information related to the United States and Japan. The documents appeared on the dark web in early April. These documents included the location of a U.S. radar installation in Palau, crew lists of Japanese Navy ships that visited Palau, and unspecified details about Palau’s diplomatic relationship with Taiwan.[40] President Whipps emphasized the strength of Palau’s relationship with Taiwan in response to the hack.[41] The Republic of China condemned the cyberattack and began working with Palau to strengthen cybersecurity against “authoritarian infiltration.”[42] The PRC MFA denied responsibility for the attack and accused Palau of lacking evidence for their conclusion.[43]

Europe

The PRC Ministry of State Security (MSS) claimed to have uncovered two spies working for the British intelligence agency MI6. The MSS said one of the spies surnamed Wang studied abroad in the UK in 2015, where MI6 bribed him. He induced his wife, Zhou, to become a spy as well, according to the MSS.[44] The MSS accusation comes as two employees of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office will go to trial on espionage charges in the United Kingdom.[45]

The PRC United Front Work Department provided financial support to the Dutch political party NL Plan, which is participating in the European Parliamentary elections from June 6–9. The United Front Work Department is a CCP organization that blends influence activities and intelligence operations to shape a target’s political environment and policies to the CCP’s benefit.[46] NL Plan received 42,000 euros (45,643 USD) from organizations affiliated with the United Front, such as the Chinese Council for Peaceful National Reunification in the Netherlands.[47]

United Front-supported parties, such as NL Plan, sitting in the European Parliament could aid the PRC in blocking EU actions, such as sanctions against the PRC. Prominent NL Plan member Dong Lili stated that “whether you are inside or outside of China, we should all put our energy into making our motherland stronger.”[48] The European Parliament endorses the EU’s annual budget as well as international agreements.[49]

PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokeswoman Mao Ning announced China will not attend the upcoming Russia-Ukraine War peace summit in Switzerland from June 15–16 due to the absence of Russia.^[50] PRC MFA Spokeswoman Mao Ning stated that China does not believe the summit will meet China's three proposals.^[51] China's stated requirements for an international peace summit are recognition by both Russia and Ukraine, equal participation by all parties, and fair discussion of all peace plans.^[52] Mao instead said China would continue to promote dialogue and lasting peace in "its own way" and that China's position of non-attendance is "fair and just, not directed at any party, and certainly not at this summit."^[53]

PRC President Xi Jinping met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron, and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in April and May. All three European leaders urged Xi to pressure Russia to end its war against Ukraine.^[54] The PRC's decision not to attend the upcoming peace summit signifies the failure of these efforts so far to convince Xi to use his leverage over Russia to this end.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) seeks to diversify its energy supply chains through negotiations with Russia on the proposed Power of Siberia 2 (PS-2) pipeline and diplomatic outreach to Middle Eastern states. The *Financial Times (FT)* reported on June 2 that three unspecified sources familiar with the matter stated that the PRC and Russia are in stalled negotiations regarding the PS-2 gas pipeline. The PRC wants to pay prices near Russia's subsidized domestic gas prices and to commit only to buying a small part of the pipeline's planned capacity.^[55] Russia seeks higher prices to make up for lost LNG exports to the EU following a unified EU drive to move away from Russian energy products. The EU is on track to import roughly 82 percent less LNG from Russia in 2024 than in pre-war 2021.^[56] The PRC is simultaneously pursuing greater access to oil and natural gas resources in the Middle East, such as through the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF) on May 30. PRC diplomatic efforts with the UAE and Iraq at the CASCF included discussions about expanding cooperation and Chinese investment in the oil and natural gas industries.^[57]

The PRC seeks to diversify its energy supply chains to meet increasing domestic demand beyond 2030. Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy stated that the PRC will mostly or entirely be able to meet its projected increased demand for imported gas with existing supply contracts until 2030, but that the PRC's demand for imported gas will exceed the capacity of its existing contracts by roughly 150 billion cubic meters, 50% of China's predicted imports of 300 billion cubic meters by 2040.^[58] The PRC's state-owned China National Petroleum Company projected China's total natural gas demand

would sit at roughly 605.9 billion cubic meters with domestic Chinese production fulfilling the additional 300 billion cubic meters required.[59]

The European Union is finalizing a sanctions package against Russia, which may grant leverage to the PRC in its negotiations over the PS-2 pipeline. European Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson stated on June 3 that the EU aims to finalize its 14th sanctions package against Russia in June. This will be the first sanctions package to target the Russian liquid natural gas (LNG) trade.[60] This would provide the PRC with greater economic leverage over the Russian energy market as Russia would have fewer avenues to sell over 18 billion cubic meters of LNG to the EU, as it did in 2023, after the sanctions.[61]

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