

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



China-Taiwan Weekly Update, November 6, 2024

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Data Cutoff: November 6, 2024

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 hosting of the 5th Cross-strait Media Summit in Beijing from October 31 to November 1 contributes to its efforts to cultivate a favorable information landscape in Taiwan.**
- **TAO Spokesperson Zhu Fenglian announced new steps to develop Fujian province as a center for cross-strait integration on October 30 that likely aim to foster Taiwan’s economic dependence on the mainland and build political support for cross-strait integration.**
- **The China Coast Guard entered Taiwan’s restricted waters around Kinmen three separate times from October 28–30.[1] Normalizing CCG incursions between Kinmen and the main island of Taiwan enhances the PRC’s preparedness to initiate a future blockade or quarantine of the islands.**
- **PRC hackers directly targeted US presidential candidates and other major political figures in an extensive cyber espionage campaign.**
- **The PLA aircraft carriers *Liaoning* and *Shandong* conducted joint military exercises for the first time in the South China Sea.**

Cross-Strait Relations

The PRC’s hosting of the 5th Cross-strait Media Summit in Beijing from October 31 to November 1 contributes to its efforts to cultivate a favorable information landscape in

Taiwan.^[2] Director of the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Song Tao urged media personnel on both sides of the strait to instill a common Chinese national identity in Taiwan, promote Cross-strait media exchanges, and advance the “reunification of the motherland.”^[3] Standing Committee member of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee Yang Jinbai stated that members of the media on both sides of the strait should disseminate the concept of “one family across the strait,” a common CCP political platitude meant to reinforce the notion that Taiwan is a part of China.^[4] Vice Chairman of the Taiwanese media conglomerate Want Want Group Chou Hsi-wei attended the summit and echoed the view that both sides of the strait are Chinese, and encouraged media personnel in Taiwan and the PRC to reject narratives about the PRC from the United States, Western countries, and “Taiwan independence forces.”^[5] Statements from an influential Taiwanese media executive that align with Beijing’s narrative of cross-strait relations and Taiwan’s political status benefit the PRC’s efforts to shape public perceptions.

The *Financial Times* reported in July 2019 that editorial managers at Want Want Group-owned media outlets receive daily editorial oversight directly from the PRC’s TAO, which dictates content relating to Cross-strait relations and the PRC.^[6] Want Want Group later sued the *Financial Times* reporter who wrote the article for defamation, but withdrew the case in March 2021.^[7] The TAO is a primary United Front organization that is responsible for carrying out the PRC’s Cross-strait policy. The United Front is a whole-of-government and society effort to advance the CCP’s ideology and interests by co-opting non-government segments of Chinese society. United Front activities against Taiwan aim to inculcate in the Taiwanese public CCP notions that the PRC is the only legitimate government of China and Taiwan is a part of that China.

The PRC has actively attempted to extend its influence throughout Taiwanese media in recent months. The ROC National Security Bureau (NSB), Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau (MIJB), and other government agencies launched an investigation in July into claims that a reporter from the PRC’s state-run media outlet Xinhua was illegally working on the production of a Taiwanese political talk show. The investigation was in response to a June 25 Liberty Times report that Xinhua reporter Zhao Bo participated in the program’s discussions to determine topic selection and script production at the request of the Taiwan Affairs Office, citing an anonymous journalist.^[8] The source stated that the CCP bargained for Xinhua’s involvement in exchange for supporting the company’s commercial interests in the mainland.^[9] The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) stated that the report was well-founded and verified and that the PRC reporter arrived in Taiwan in February 2024 and left in May.^[10] MAC stated the investigating agencies would not make the conclusions of the investigation public, but that it would provide the relevant information to prosecutors.^[11]

The PRC is also attempting to influence figures outside of the mainstream media. Several Taiwanese YouTubers called attention to CCP efforts to recruit them to facilitate United Front work in June 2024. The celebrities claimed that the CCP is spending considerable resources to lure Taiwanese internet celebrities to influence Taiwanese politics.^[12] The CCP also approached several internet celebrities and artists with contracts to join new political parties, which would express support for by holding shows and events that promoted CCP-aligned narratives of cross-strait relations.^[13]

TAO Spokesperson Zhu Fenglian announced new steps to develop Fujian province as a center for cross-strait integration on October 30 that likely aim to foster Taiwan's economic dependence on the mainland and build political support for cross-strait integration.^[14] The policy measures include steps to relax Taiwanese businesses' mainland market access, establish a Fuzhou-Matsu "industrial cooperation park," and build a Pingtan cross-strait common market pilot zone. Pingtan is a PRC island roughly 20 miles from Taiwan's Matsu Islands. The measures are part of a sweeping initiative that the PRC announced in September 2023 to transform Fujian into a "demonstration zone" for cross-strait integration, which entails incentives to strengthen people-to-people and economic exchanges, infrastructure to facilitate trade, and policies to enhance cross-strait permeability.^[15] The PRC has already released 45 policy measures under the program in three batches.

Earlier policy measures received wide support from target audiences in Taiwan, including the "Fuzhou-Matsu City Pass," a 300 RMB (approximately 42 USD) benefits card that facilitates the travel and settlement of Matsu residents in Fujian's capital city of Fuzhou. Many of the PRC's integration initiatives target Taiwan's outer islands, which are more inclined to buy in to such projects due to their relatively undiversified economies and politics that favor cooperation with the PRC. The purpose of intertwining the local economies and increased cross-strait interaction is to positively affect the livelihoods of residents in Taiwan's outer islands and make decoupling a politically unpopular policy.

Xi Jinping urged greater effort to develop Fujian as the driver of cross-strait integration during a tour of the province that began on October 15.^[16] Xi visited various institutions and locales during his tour, including free trade pilot zones, schools, rural areas, and cultural sites. Xi's tour came a day after the PRC staged Joint Sword 2024B military exercises around Taiwan that simulated a blockade. The TAO's announcement of the new steps was a response to a press conference inquiry about how the government planned to implement Xi's calls for Fujian's further cross-strait integration. Xi's presence in Fujian immediately after military exercises aimed at Taiwan and immediately prior to the announcement of new cross-strait integration measures signals the extent of his control over cross-strait policies, both coercive and persuasive. Xi's appeals to positively develop cross-strait integration likely aimed to portray the PRC as an advocate for peaceful relations instead of an aggressor in the aftermath of the military exercises. Official readouts of Xi's tour in Fujian made no mention of Joint Sword 2024B.

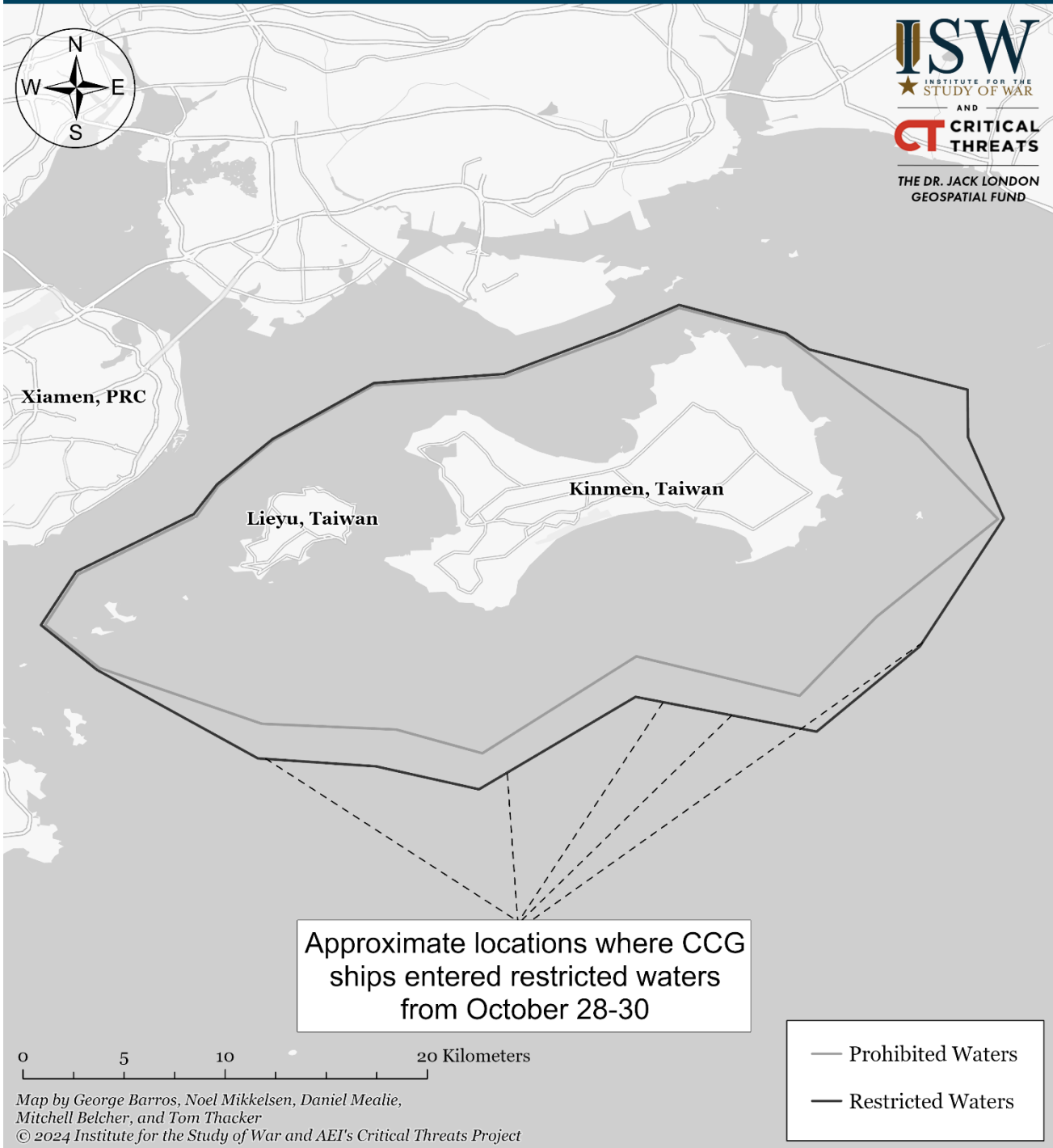
An order of US-made drones signals Taiwan's increasing interest in asymmetric defense as the ROC seeks to upgrade its UAV capabilities. Taiwanese news reported on October 29 that Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense "signed a 'letter of offer and acceptance' late last month, the step before signed contracts that specify quantities, dollar values and delivery dates."^[17] US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) had confirmed in June it would sell drones to the ROC in an order worth \$360 million.^[18] Taiwan's order will include 720 Switchblade missiles and up to 291 Altius 600M loitering munitions.^[19]

The ROC's order from Anduril and Aerovironment is consistent with joint US-ROC efforts to bolster drone capabilities in recent months. Top Indo-Pacific commander Admiral Samuel Paparo announced in June 2024 that he wanted to turn Taiwan into an "unmanned hellscape" of drones should the PRC

attack.[20] Since then, ROC efforts to develop its drone warfare capabilities have included hosting a multi-day visit to Taipei by representatives of 26 US drone companies along with Department of Defense and Department of Commerce officials.[21]

An ISW report noted the key role that drones have played in Ukrainian defense and could likewise play in the defense of Taiwan. Drones with limited ranges can operate effectively from Pacific islands belonging to Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan. This range of operations encompasses the Taiwan Strait and could reach the PRC's coast.[22] Even so, as ISW's report notes, preemptive drone purchases are not a panacea because of the rapid development of drone and counter-drone technologies: "The requirement to be able to field millions of drones is a requirement to be able to produce millions of drones rapidly, not to have them warehoused in advance." [23] ROC Defense Minister Wellington Koo has likewise noted that Taiwan will make efforts to acquire drones from multiple sources, as production is currently too low to support the "hellscape" concept.[24] The latest order of US drone systems will supplement Taiwan's existing ones, but Taipei will likely maintain efforts to boost its domestic production capacity. Even as Taiwan finalizes drone orders from abroad, it is ramping up efforts to boost production by building a UAV production line in Minxiong.[25]

Chinese Coast Guard Violations of Kinmen's Restricted Waters (October 28-30)



The China Coast Guard (CCG) entered Taiwan’s restricted waters around Kinmen three separate times from October 28–30.[26] Normalizing CCG incursions between Kinmen and the main island of Taiwan enhances the PRC’s preparedness to initiate a future blockade or quarantine of the islands. Kinmen is a group of Taiwan-controlled islands with a large military garrison roughly 3 kilometers from the coast of the PRC. Each instance over the three days involved four CCG ships in different locations to the south of Kinmen. The incursion on October 30 marked the 49th instance of CCG ships entering waters under Taiwan’s jurisdiction around Kinmen this year.[27] The PRC has normalized CCG patrols to erode Taiwan’s control over the waters since February.

The PRC would need to surround the island to cut it off from resupply or intervention by sea in an operation to take control of the island. The location of the CCG ships’ points of entry into restricted waters is conducive to such a course of action. The CCG’s tactic of performing simultaneous entries into the restricted waters around Kinmen in different locations by multiple ships provides the CCG with experience in choreographing the initial actions that a real blockade operation would entail to seal Kinmen off from the Taiwan Strait. Conducting the incursions also enables the PRC to gauge the Taiwanese coast guard’s response and the resources that it can deploy challenge the stronger CCG. The high frequency of CCG incursions risks desensitizing Taiwan and its partners to them, which could grant the CCG an advantage in solidifying a blockade or quarantine if the PRC feigned the CCG activity as routine harassment of the Kinmen coast guard.

The PLA maintained a high number of incursions into Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in October, consistent with the new normal it established since ROC President Lai Ching-te’s inauguration. Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) reported that PLA aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and entered Taiwan’s ADIZ 370 times in October.[28] The PRC increased ADIZ incursions significantly after Lai’s inauguration in May, with over 300 incursions in May and every month since. The only time ADIZ incursions exceeded 300 in one month prior to 2024 was the record 446 incursions in August 2022, which coincided with a massive spike in PLA activity around Taiwan following then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan. A large portion of the total in October came from the 111 incursions on October 14 as part of the PRC’s Joint Sword 2024B exercise around Taiwan. ADIZ incursion numbers do not include aerial activity around the Taiwanese archipelagos of Kinmen and Matsu, which are west of the median line in the Taiwan Strait.

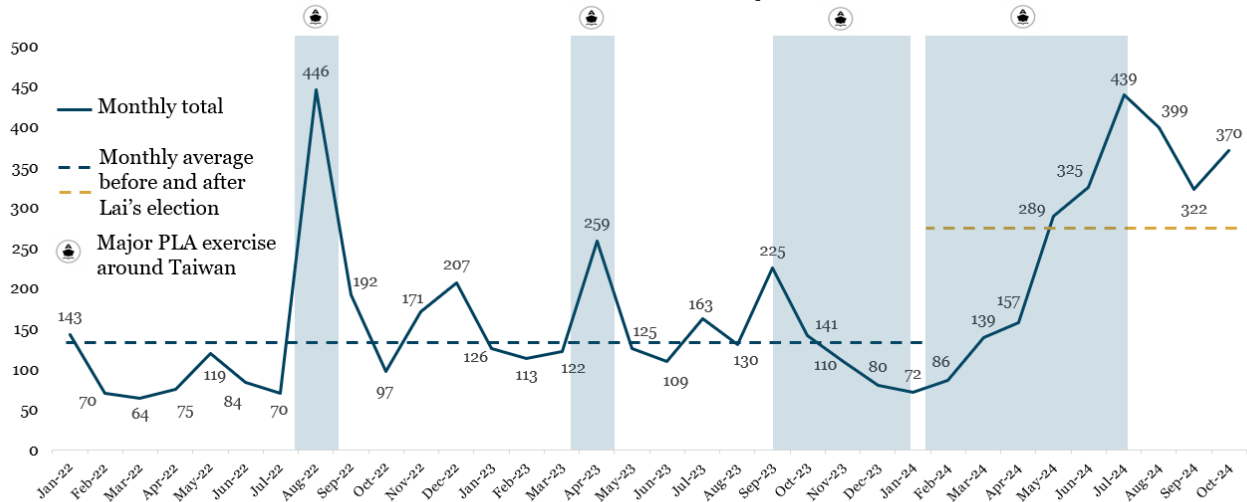
The PRC has normalized a much higher volume of ADIZ incursions against Taiwan than in previous years as part of an intensified PRC pressure campaign against the new administration of Lai Ching-te, whom the PRC considers a dangerous separatist. The high frequency of ADIZ incursions drains Taiwan’s resources, exhausts military personnel, and degrades Taiwan’s threat awareness. Taiwan does not scramble aircraft in response to all PRC ADIZ incursions, but it does put military personnel on standby to respond quickly if needed.

AUG 22: PLA holds a massive joint exercise around Taiwan in response to then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan

APR 23: PLA holds the Joint Sword 2023 exercise around Taiwan after the ROC president meets with then-US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy

OCT 23 – JAN 24 ADIZ incursions decline ahead of Taiwan's presidential election

FEB – Present: PLA ADIZ incursions rise after Lai Ching-te wins Taiwan's 2024 election



Source: Taiwan Ministry of National Defense; CSIS China Power Project

China

PRC hackers directly targeted US presidential candidates and other major political figures in an extensive cyber espionage campaign. The threat actor targeted the phone numbers belonging to nearly 100 known individuals, including former President Donald Trump, members of his family, his running mate JD Vance, members of the Harris campaign, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.[29] Investigators are calling this unprecedented campaign Salt Typhoon, following the Microsoft naming convention for cyber threat actors attributed to the PRC.[30] US investigators have not yet uncovered the extent of data the hackers managed to exfiltrate, but believe the threat actors to have tapped into audio calls and collected unencrypted messages, according to unnamed sources involved in the investigation that spoke to the *Washington Post*, including a Trump campaign advisor.[31] This kind of data in the hands of PRC officials could provide them invaluable insight on who US officials communicated with and the content of their conversations.[32] PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian denied China's involvement on October 28, claimed that that the US was deliberately misattributing the operation for politically motivated reasons, and made general counter accusations about American hacking.[33]

The FBI and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) had been investigating Salt Typhoon since at least September 2024 for its infiltration into major US telecommunications infrastructure providers including Verizon, Lumen, and AT&T – which ISW has previously reported on.[34] US investigators did not discover until recently that Salt Typhoon had pursued specific phone numbers of major officials and potentially achieved persistence on their devices, however.[35] US intelligence officials believe the PRC to be relatively indifferent to the outcome of the presidential race

compared to other US adversaries but highly interested in shaping the outcome of down-ballot races based on candidates' stances on specific issues like Taiwan.[36]

The phone tapping operation of presidential campaigns mark a significant escalation in a year where the PRC has already conducted highly intrusive campaigns against infrastructure belonging to the US and its partners. US and foreign partner cybersecurity and intelligence agencies stated on February 7 that Volt Typhoon, another PRC state-sponsored cyber threat actor, infiltrated critical infrastructure organizations in the continental United States and US territories. They assessed with high confidence that Volt Typhoon's goal was to develop the capability to disrupt key operational technology functions in the event of a conflict with the United States.[37] The Salt Typhoon revelations follow a September 18 cybersecurity advisory from the US and UK that revealed an extensive botnet under the control of PRC state-sponsored cyber threat actor Flax Typhoon. The botnet infected over 260,000 small office/home office (SOHO) routers and internet-linked devices worldwide, almost half of which were in the US.[38] Canada's Communications Security Establishment (CSE) also released a report on October 30th detailing PRC infiltration into at least 20 government agencies.[39] The PRC may assess that difficulty of symmetrical retaliation for transgressions in cyberspace provide it little incentive to refrain from conducting such espionage operations.

The US Department of State and Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on 398 entities and individuals on October 30 for assisting Russia in circumventing sanctions as it wages war against Ukraine, including 13 PRC companies.[40] ISW detailed in May 2024 Russia's heavy reliance on PRC-provided machine tools and microelectronics for maintaining its defense industrial production.[41] This is reflected in the types of sanctions on the PRC companies, which sold over US\$150 million of products to Russia since January 2023.[42] About \$50 million worth of equipment came from the mainland PRC, including \$33 million worth of Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine tools. Other products sold from the PRC include thermal imaging scopes, video surveillance items, and electronic components. About \$100 million worth of products sold to Russia were high-performance electronic components from Hong Kong.[43] Among those electronic components are semiconductors, capacitors, circuit boards and sensors.

Hong Kong has emerged as a hub for PRC companies to circumvent sanctions on Iran, Russia, and North Korea since the PRC moved to strengthen political control over the territory in 2019.[44] Five of the thirteen PRC companies that the United States added to its sanctions list were Hong Kong-based companies. Hong Kong-based companies and individuals account for a significant portion of PRC entities that are subject to sanctions for supporting US adversaries' military activities.[45] Hong Kong's lenient regulatory environment facilitates relatively easy concealment of corporate ownership and the rapid creation and dissolution of shell companies.

The PLA aircraft carriers *Liaoning* and *Shandong* conducted joint military exercises for the first time in the South China Sea. PRC Ministry of Defense (MOD) Spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang stated during a press conference on October 31 that the two-carrier exercise was part of the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) annual training plan and aimed at improving the carrier strike groups' systematic combat strength.[46] Exercise footage released by the PLA Navy shows the following: 3 Type 55 destroyers, 3 Type 52D destroyers, 3 Type 54A frigates, and 2 901 fleet supply ships along with 12 J-15 carrier-borne jets.[47] Zhang did not provide the specific dates on which the exercises

occurred. Satellite imagery showed that the *Liaoning* and *Shandong* were docked at the same port in Hainan on October 8.[48] The *Liaoning* participated in Joint Sword 2024B exercises around Taiwan on October 14 and traveled back into the South China Sea before returning northward to its home port in Qingdao on October 22.[49] A PLAN WeChat post stated that the *Liaoning*'s far-seas combat mission spanned the Mid-Autumn Festival (September 17), PRC National Day (October 1), and other festivals.[50] The post stated that the dual aircraft carrier drills with the *Shandong* took place in late October, indicating that the exercises occurred after the Joint Sword 2024 exercises.

The dual carrier drills demonstrate the growing role of the PRC's aircraft carriers in projecting naval power in the Indo-Pacific. Exercises involving two aircraft carriers and their accompanying vessels highlight the PRC's capability to conduct complicated operations with precise coordination.

Northeast Asia

North

Korea

The PRC expressed concern over North Korean nuclear tests on October 31. North Korea launched an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on October 30 into the sea west of Okushiri Island in what Japan announced was its longest-flying missile test yet.[51] PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian responded to a question for comment on the missile test and reports of North Korean soldiers in Russia, by stating that “China is concerned about the development of the situation on the Peninsula.”[52] Lin also said that the PRC “believe(s) that maintaining peace and stability on the Peninsula and promoting the political settlement of the Peninsula issue are in the common interests of all parties.”[53] North Korea fired more a barrage of short-range ICBMs on November 5, which landed in the waters between Japan and the Korean Peninsula.[54] The PRC had not commented on the latest launch at the time of writing.

Lin's October 31 statement on the North Korean nuclear tests is consistent with previous PRC statements to North Korean military provocations, which advocate for stability while refraining from public condemnation of its only treaty ally. PRC Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Zhang Jun stated in 2023 that the PRC is “committed to the denuclearization of the peninsula, the peace and stability on the peninsula, and the political settlement of the issue through dialogue.”[55] As a recent ISW report noted, the PRC-North Korea relationship is “fraught with mistrust.” [56]—A rare North Korean official criticism of PRC in 2017 for attempting to rein in its weapons program indicates that the matter is a point of tension in the relationship, even as North Korea remains economically dependent on the PRC.[57]

The PRC may have used a January meeting to warn North Korea against nuclear testing. PRC Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong and North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Pak Myong Ho met on January 26 to discuss “issues of mutual interest and concern” in the international space.[58] The meeting took place around the time North Korean leader Kim Jong-un had begun to shift to a more aggressive footing against South Korea, testing a new intermediate-range missile and launching artillery shells into water near South Korean islands in early January.[59] This timing of the meeting supports the possibility that Sun could have pressed Pak for peace on the peninsula. The talks may have made an impact on North Korean thinking; test launches dropped from over 30 in 2023 to 7 in 2024.

Southeast Asia

The Philippines

The Philippine military began two weeks of exercises that will include rehearsing the seizure of an island in the South China Sea.^[60] Philippine Army Colonel Michael Logico announced on November 4 that the exercises would include live-fire drills and beach landing drills with artillery and assault rifles.^[61] Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief General Romeo Brawner Jr. stated that these exercises are for comprehensively responding to threats against Philippine maritime rights and sovereignty and are not directed at any particular country.^[62] The PRC and the Philippines have engaged in periodic confrontations over disputed features in the South China Sea for decades. The frequency and intensity of such confrontations increased in the past year as the CCG and PRC maritime militia vessels take a greater role in thwarting the Philippines' access to the West Philippine Sea. The Philippines has responded to this increase in tensions by holding several multilateral and unilateral military exercises throughout the South China Sea. The PRC has not yet responded to the announcement of the upcoming exercises but has criticized previous Philippine military exercises in the South China Sea, particularly those involving the United States.^[63] When asked, Col. Logico stated that the PRC is likely to monitor the exercises, but unlikely to act against the Philippines. The Philippines military has previously simulated retaking an island with assistance from Australia and the United States.^[64] It is unclear whether these forthcoming island seizure exercises will resemble previous joint measures. The exercises signal the Philippines' defiance of the PRC's aggressive tactics in the South China Sea and demonstrate its willingness to defend its territorial claims.

Vietnam

The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry issued a protest against the PRC's illegal detention of its fishermen and vessels in the Paracel Islands and demanded their immediate release. According to a PRC-based think tank, the South China Sea Probing Initiative (SCSPI), the Vietnamese fishermen have been detained for six months for illegal fishing activities.^[65] PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Lin Jian said in a November 1 press briefing that Vietnam was at fault for the situation and urged Vietnamese authorities to "raise the awareness of its fishermen" to ensure that they were not acting illegally in PRC territory.^[66] Ownership of the Paracels is disputed, with the PRC, Taiwan, and Vietnam all holding competing claims over the islands. The Paracels are under de facto control of the PRC and are administered as part of Hainan province.^[67]

In September 2024 another altercation between Vietnamese fishermen and PRC law enforcement occurred near the Paracel Islands.^[68] Vietnamese sources reported that PRC ships chased the fishermen, intercepted the ship, and attacked the fishermen with iron pipes. The PRC MFA released a statement saying that PRC authorities were dispatched to respond to illegal Vietnamese fishing activities.^[69] Following this altercation, a series of meetings were held between Vietnamese President To Lam and PRC Premier Li Qiang in Hanoi. The October 12-14 meetings resulted in a series of bilateral agreements expanding cooperation on agriculture, manufacturing, and infrastructure and a joint statement agreeing to increase bilateral military exchanges and patrols.^[70] The two also discussed developments in the South China Sea, promising to peacefully manage disagreements and avoid further escalation.^[71] It is unknown whether the detained Vietnamese fishermen were discussed during the

course of these meetings, but this ongoing point of contention illustrates the unresolved tensions between Vietnam and the PRC.

Oceania

The Palauan election on November 5th will be consequential to US-PRC influence in the Pacific Islands. Palau's position as the anchor of the second island chain in the Pacific and the closest Freely Associated State with the US to the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea makes it one of the most strategically significant of the United States' small allies in the Pacific.[72] Palau's status as a Freely Associated State refers to its Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the United States, which grants the United States military permission to operate in Palau in return for the United States providing financial support and assuming responsibility for national defense. The United States and Palau renewed their COFA in May 2023 for USD\$889 million in aid to Palau over the next 20 years, and Congress approved it in March 2024.[73] Palau is one of 12 countries that currently recognize Taiwan, and one of only three Pacific Island countries to do so, alongside the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, which are the two other Freely Associated States.

Roughly 16,000 registered voters are expected to cast ballots for incumbent President Surangel Whipps Jr. and former President Thomas Remengesau Jr.[74] Vote tallies at the time of writing are strongly in favor of Whipps, with 3161 votes to Remengesau's 2262 votes. Absentee ballots will not be tabulated for another seven days, however.[75] Some locals are concerned the US military presence will make Palau a target if war breaks out, which has made US military presence a political issue.[76] The PRC has been applying pressure on Palau to rescind its recognition of Taiwan, according to Whipps.[77]

The extent to which Palau will embrace cooperation with the US military is dependent on the next administration even though neither candidate has signaled a major change in Palau's stance on bilateral relations. Whipps is a fierce critic of PRC interference in the Pacific Islands and has openly welcomed the US military.[78] He has accused the PRC of exerting political pressure on Palau through tourism restrictions, acquiring of Palauan media outlets, bribery of local officials, and hacking government institutions to steal information.[79] Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement that China's interference in Palau is tantamount to intimidation, inducement, and economic coercion.[80] Whipps wrote in a letter to then-US Defense Secretary Mark Esper in 2020 that "Palau's request to the US military remains simple – build joint-use facilities, then come and use them regularly." [81] Whipps has also suggested that the United States should equip Palau with Patriot missiles.[82] Whipps' family business Surangel & Sons has partnered with the US military in 37 defense contracts, although Whipps himself has not worked for the company since taking office in 2021.[83] By contrast, former President Remengesau has been president for 16 of Palau's 30 years as an independent state and has aimed to reduce Palau's reliance on US aid, which accounts for over 10% of the island's GDP. [84] Remengesau has implemented ambitious environmental policies and has expressed willingness to cooperate with the PRC on environmental and economic matters.[85]

Palau's election will indicate the strength of its opposition to rising Chinese influence. Several Pacific Island nations have rescinded their recognition of Taiwan in the last 5 years under pressure from the PRC. The Solomon Islands and Kiribati switched recognition to the PRC in 2019 and Nauru in January 2024, immediately after Taiwan's election.[86] Tuvalu reaffirmed its recognition of Taiwan after the re-election of its incumbent president in February, but faced challenges from an opposition that

supported reviewing the country's diplomatic ties with Taiwan.[87] As ISW noted in the October 30 China-Taiwan Weekly Update, the PRC has been actively increasing outreach to the Pacific Islands through diplomatic and economic exchanges such as the BRI, and its military interest in the region is evident with a PRC warship's first known port visit to Vanuatu on October 21.[88] While both candidates officially support maintaining ties with Taiwan, the extent to which their administrations would resist PRC influence and accept US military presence is consequential for US-PRC competition in the Asia-Pacific.

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[1] <https://www.cga.gov.tw/GipOpen/wSite/ct?xItem=162766&ctNode=8195&mp=9996/https://def.ltn.com.tw/article/breakingnews/4844824>

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