

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



China-Taiwan Weekly Update, September 27, 2024

Authors: Matthew Sperzel, Daniel Shats, and Alison O’Neil of the Institute for the Study of War;

Alexis Turek of the American Enterprise Institute

Editors: [Dan Blumenthal](#) and [Frederick W. Kagan](#) of the American Enterprise Institute

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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 PRC Ministry of State Security claimed that a hacker group called Anonymous 64 is a “cyber army” affiliated with the Taiwanese military’s Information, Communications, and Electronic Force Command. Taiwan rejected the accusation.**
- **The PRC canceled tariff exemptions for 34 Taiwanese agricultural products on September 25. The PRC likely intends to undermine popular Taiwanese support for the DPP through fear of economic repercussions as a result of its cross-strait policy.**
- **The PRC condemned the latest US arms sale to Taiwan as support for Taiwan’s independence and froze the assets of nine companies in response to the sale.**
- **The PRC test-launched an intercontinental ballistic missile into the Pacific Ocean for the first time since 1980.**
- **PLA Southern Theater Commander General Wu Yanan attended the Chiefs of Defense conference in Hawaii and met with US Indo-Pacific Command chief Admiral Samuel Paparo. The PRC is increasing its emphasis on military diplomacy likely to stabilize bilateral relations in anticipation of the US administration change in 2025 and amid escalation in the South China Sea.**
- **A PLA aircraft carrier sailed through Japan’s contiguous zone for the first time. The transit may be part of a pattern of the PRC testing Japan’s military response.**

- **The Philippine Coast Guard has resumed its patrol of Sabina Shoal, fulfilling its promises to return to the disputed territory and ensure that the Shoal does not fall under PRC control. The CCG may deny Philippine resupply missions access to Sabina Shoal to compel the PCG to withdraw from the shoal.**

Taiwan

The PRC Ministry of State Security (MSS) claimed in a WeChat post that a hacker group called Anonymous 64 is a “cyber army” affiliated with Taiwan's Information, Communications, and Electronic Force Command (ICEFCOM) under the Ministry of National Defense.^[1] The post claimed that the command is responsible for carrying out cyber operations, information operations, cognitive warfare, electronic warfare, and public opinion warfare against the PRC. The MSS doxxed three members of the ROC military in its post and claimed that they are active-duty personnel of ICEFCOM. The MSS accused ICEFCOM of malicious cyber operations against the PRC that target the aerospace, defense, and energy industries to steal data and collect intelligence for the ROC government. The MSS also accused ICEFCOM of manipulating public opinion and hiring trolls to undermine the PRC's political system. ICEFCOM rejected the accusations in a statement and stated that it is responsible for information and network security for national defense.^[2]

The PRC's accusations against Taiwan are possibly a response to recent revelations about its own hacking operations. The US Department of Justice announced on September 18 a law enforcement operation that disabled botnet malware that PRC state-sponsored cyber threat actor Flax Typhoon controlled.^[3] Flax Typhoon gained notoriety for its extensive penetration of Taiwanese networks, including government agencies, educational institutions, critical manufacturing industries, and information technology companies. PRC claims that aggressors are targeting it in cyberspace usually come soon after revelations of hacking operations by PRC state-sponsored cyber threat actors.^[4] The PRC has deflected accusations of hacking with claims counter accusations against other countries, which portray it as a victim of foreign transgressions in cyberspace.^[5]

Cybersecurity researchers at Microsoft and Recorded Future's Insikt Group published threat intelligence reports in August 2023 and June that analyze Flax Typhoon's (also known as RedJuliett) cyber activity and operations.^[6] Both reports assessed that Flax Typhoon is a PRC nation-state actor that targeted Taiwanese entities for espionage purposes.^[7] Insikt Group identified threat actor IP addresses that geolocated to Fuzhou in the PRC's Fujian province across the Taiwan Strait, which is home to the PRC's Taiwan-focused non-kinetic operations center Base 311. Base 311 is responsible for the same categories of operations that the MSS accused ICEFCOM of conducting against the PRC, including cyber, electronic, and informational warfare.^[8] A cybersecurity advisory from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on September 18 stated that Flax Typhoon is the publicly traded PRC-

based company Integrity Technology Group, which the FBI claimed had links to the PRC government.[9] The FBI stated that Integrity Technology Group has operated its botnet since 2021 and it controlled and infected more than 260,000 devices worldwide, almost half of which were in the United States.[10]

The PRC canceled tariff exemptions for 34 Taiwanese agricultural products on September 25.[11] The PRC likely intends for the reinstatement of tariffs to undermine popular Taiwanese support for the DPP through fear of economic repercussions for its cross-strait policy. Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson Chen Binhua framed the measures as a necessary response to combat the separatist policies of Lai Ching-te’s administration.[12] Chen accused the Lai administration of escalating cross-strait hostility with independence policies and “unilaterally restrict[ing] the import of more than 1,000 agricultural products from the mainland.” Chen claimed that the PRC is committed to cross-strait economic integration and cares about Taiwanese farmers and fishermen. Chen urged Taiwanese farmers and fishermen to recognize the harm that the DPP government inflicts on cross-strait relations by pursuing independence.

Reinstating tariffs across a wide range of Taiwanese agricultural exports aims to generate concern among Taiwanese farmers and fishermen for their livelihoods. Explicitly blaming the measures on the Lai administration aims to direct their frustration to the DPP government and reduce political support for the party by associating its incumbency with turbulence in cross-strait relations. The PRC’s justification for reinstating the tariffs is consistent with that of past coercive economic measures.[13] On the other hand, the PRC attributes reconciliation over economic disputes to successful negotiation with the Kuomintang (KMT), which the CCP favors due to its willingness to pursue closer cross-strait relations.[14]

Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) criticized the PRC for weaponizing trade as a tool of coercion for political purposes and highlighted how fickle the PRC’s self-proclaimed “goodwill” towards Taiwan is.[15] The PRC is the largest export market for many of the affected goods. Taiwan’s Ministry of Agriculture stated that if paid, the tariffs will only raise costs by approximately USD 1 million across all 34 affected goods, however.[16]

The PRC has previously imposed trade restrictions on Taiwanese exports that disproportionately affect certain constituencies, likely to exert targeted economic pressure against certain stakeholders that collectively hold political influence.[17] The variety in the affected products, which includes a range of fruits, vegetables, and seafood, does not suggest that the measures are geographically focused. The PRC has also previously targeted broad swaths of Taiwanese goods, including reinstating tariffs on 134 different industrial goods in June after Lai’s inauguration.[18] The TAO’s appeal to Taiwanese farmers and fishermen at large, however, indicates a broader target to sway political opinion.

The PRC condemned the latest US arms sale to Taiwan as support for Taiwan's independence and froze the assets of nine companies in response to the sale. The United States approved a \$228 million arms sale for Taiwan last week. The sale is mostly for spare parts and repair packages.[19] *Taipei Times* reported on September 22 that Biden is close to approving another arms sale package worth \$567 million that the Pentagon has already approved.[20] The pending sale would be the largest to Taiwan to date and would support training and multidomain awareness, in addition to drone warfare. The PRC admonished the US not to support “Taiwan independence” and to adhere to the one-China principle.[21] The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already given an official statement condemning the sales, and the PRC will implement property freezes against nine US firms following last week's announcement of the \$228 million arms sale.[22] These military-linked companies — S3 Aerospace, Exovera, and others — will have their assets frozen in China. Further PRC responses, including but not limited to sanctions and asset freezes, could follow the reported \$567 million arms sale announcement as well.

China

The PRC test-launched an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) into the Pacific Ocean for the first time since 1980. The People's Liberation Army launched an ICBM into the Pacific Ocean on September 25. The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) claimed that the launch was part of routine training.[23] The PRC Ministry of National Defense (MOD) also stated that the training took place in accordance with international law and was not directed at any specific country.[24] PRC Ministry of National Defense spokesman Zhang Xiaogang reiterated this stance on September 26, claiming that the test launch was routine and reiterating the PRC's no-first-use policy.[25] The PRC claimed that it “informed the relevant countries” and warned the United States before the launch.[26] It also warned the Japan Coast Guard of “space debris.”[27] The PRC did not disclose the launch site or landing location, but *Newsweek* placed the likely launch site in the southern province of Hainan. The dummy warhead reportedly landed in the ocean north of Tahiti, 7400 miles away.[28]

The circumstances of the ICBM test set it apart from other routine military exercises. The PRC has not launched an ICBM into the Pacific since 1980 and usually conducts missile tests in Xinjiang or the Bohai Sea.[29][30] The PRC did not elaborate on the rationale for conducting the recent test in the Pacific or for the timing of the launch. The timing of the ICBM test aligns with the expansion of the PRC's nuclear arsenal, however. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates that the PRC's nuclear warhead arsenal grew from 410 to 500 between 2023 and 2024, making it the world's fastest-growing nuclear arsenal.[31] SIPRI's estimate of the PRC's nuclear arsenal aligns with estimates presented in the US Department of Defense's China Military Power Report in 2023. The Department of Defense assessed that the PRC could reach 1,000 warheads by 2030 and 1,500 warheads by 2035.[32] The PRC has continuously restated its no-first-use nuclear policy and attempted to cast itself as a responsible nuclear power as it expands its nuclear arsenal.[33]

PLA Southern Theater Commander General Wu Yanan attended the Chiefs of Defense (CHODs) conference in Hawaii and met with US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) chief Admiral Samuel Paparo. The PRC is increasing its emphasis on military diplomacy likely to stabilize bilateral relations in anticipation of the US administration change in 2025 and amid escalation in the South China Sea. US INDOPACOM hosted the conference from September 18–20 with participation from 28 countries and multinational organizations and a stated aim “to enhance mutual understanding, cooperation, and a consistent operational framework while underscoring international commitment to protecting shared interests across the region.”^[34] PLA Southern Theater Command chief General Wu Yanan led the PRC delegation to the conference and met with Paparo two weeks after their video call on September 10.^[35] The PRC readout noted that Wu attended the conference at the invitation of the United States and said the two sides “exchanged views candidly and in-depth on issues of common concern,” without mentioning any specific issues. The readout from the Wu-Paparo video call used similarly vague language. Both readouts also said the two sides were implementing the consensus reached by the leaders of both countries, referring to the US-PRC agreement in November 2023 to resume high-level military-to-military talks.^[36]

Official PRC government statements and state media coverage about the Paparo-Wu refrained from criticizing the United States or mentioning PRC grievances. PRC state-owned tabloid *Global Times* quoted PLA expert Zhang Junshe as saying that General Wu’s participation in CHODs “is conducive to reducing misunderstandings and misjudgments of the frontline forces at sea and in the air in the South China Sea as well as risks of maritime and aerial accident.” It cited an unspecified PRC military expert who said Wu’s visit to Hawaii “showed China’s sincerity in managing and controlling differences through talks,” and that the United States’ invitation “showed that the US does not want to have unintended military frictions with China either.” The *Global Times* reporting struck a positive tone and refrained from criticizing the United States even though the outlet is well-known for its jingoistic views.^[37]

The tone of the PRC readouts differs from many previous high-level bilateral engagements, including US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan’s meetings with PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Central Military Commission Vice Chair Zhang Youxia in late August. Wang raised a range of grievances on Taiwan, the Philippines, trade, and sanctions, while Zhang warned that the United States must not cross the PRC’s “red line” on Taiwan.^[38] A similar tone shift was evident from the readouts of the 18th US-PRC Defense Policy Coordination Talks (DPCT) in Beijing on September 15. The PRC readout simply said the two sides “exchanged in-depth views on the relationship between the Chinese and U.S. militaries, the next stage of exchanges between the two militaries, and issues of common concern,” while the US readout mentioned US concerns about several topics including PRC behavior in the South China Sea and its support for Russia’s defense industrial base.^[39] The tone and level of detail in the readout sharply contrasted with the equivalent from the 17th DPCT in January 2024, which stressed that the US side needs to take PRC concerns seriously, “demanded” the United States abide by the One China Principle and stop arming Taiwan, urged the United States to “reduce military presence and provocation in the South China Sea” and “strictly discipline troops on the ground,” and other strongly-

The different tone of the Wu-Paparo meetings and DPCT also reflects a change in how the PRC views military-to-military communication with the United States. PRC has previously used military-to-military talks as a bargaining chip to influence US behavior, most notably when it suspended such talks in August 2022 in response to then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. By contrast, PLA Lieutenant General He Lei told *Global Times* before the Beijing Xiangshan Forum on September 13 that the relationship between the PRC and US militaries is “the stabilizer and the ballast stone of bilateral ties” and that “any communication is better than no communication.” He said that defense talks are “constructive for strengthening strategic communication, avoiding miscalculations, and managing divergences and risks.”[41] MOD spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang said on September 26 that US-PRC military relations are “stabilizing,” though he urged the United States to “correct its strategic perception of China.”[42]

The high frequency of high-level defense talks in September and the PRC rhetoric surrounding them shows that the PRC likely is worried about unintentional conflict escalation with the United States, especially in the South China Sea, and wishes to prevent such escalation. The PLA Southern Theater Command is responsible for the South China Sea.

The PRC may also fear major US policy changes after the upcoming US presidential election. PRC authorities have consistently declined to comment on US elections and do not appear to have a clear preference between the two current presidential candidates, having strongly criticized the policies of both the Trump and Biden administrations toward the PRC.[43] The PRC showed anxiety about sudden US policy shifts late in the 2020 election, however. *Global Times* speculated in October 2020 that the Trump administration might try to “play the Taiwan card” as part of an “October Surprise” to boost its reelection chances.[44] Former Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley revealed that PRC military leaders were “worried about an attack” from the United States shortly before and after the US election. Milley made two phone calls to PLA General Li Zuochang, then chief of the Central Military Commission's Joint Staff Department, in the last months of the Trump administration to reassure the PRC that the United States had no plans for a surprise attack.[45]

The recent change in the PRC's engagement with US defense officials and how it frames military-to-military meetings suggests that the PRC seeks to mitigate the risks of a change in US policy. Building strong relationships with US military leaders who will remain in their current positions through the transition and into the next US administration could ensure that the PRC maintains lines of communication with the United States.

The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) called the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue a tool for the United States to “contain China and maintain US hegemony.” US President Joe Biden hosted Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Wilmington, Delaware, for a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) leaders' summit. Biden told the other leaders in comments unintentionally overheard by the press that the PRC is behaving aggressively in the South China Sea, East China Sea, and other places to "test" the United States and its partners.[46] MFA spokesperson Lin Jian dismissed US claims that the Quad does not target the PRC as a "lie with open eyes," saying that the PRC was the "first topic of the summit." Lin urged the United States to "let go of its obsession with maintaining hegemony and containing China, stop using regional countries as tools, [and] stop whitewashing the strategic intentions of various 'small circles,'" rather than "seeking selfish interests at the expense of the strategic security interests of other countries and the well-being of the people in the Asia-Pacific region." Lin criticized the Quad's announcement that it would begin coast guard cooperation including a joint coast guard mission involving all four countries in 2025. He said cooperation between countries should be "conducive to promoting regional peace, stability and prosperity, rather than forming closed and exclusive 'small circles' that undermine mutual trust and cooperation among regional countries." Lin also described the situations in the South and East China Seas as "generally stable" in response to concerns raised by Quad leaders at the summit.[47] The South China Sea has been the site of dramatic confrontations between the PRC and the Philippines over disputed territories like Sabina Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal throughout 2024, with the PRC employing aggressive means like ramming to block Philippine supply missions and force the Philippines out of disputed areas. MOD spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang defended the PRC's actions as legitimate, accused the Quad of "smearing" the PRC in its joint statement, and claimed the United States was the one guilty of "coercion and bullying" in the region due to its deployments of "offensive weapons" and joint exercises with allies in the region.[48]

PRC state media likewise portrayed the Quad as a destabilizing and hegemonic force in the region that is targeting the PRC.[49] Editorials in English-language state media *Global Times* and *China Daily* portrayed the partnership as ineffective, however. They claimed that the Quad has made little concrete progress to address "global challenges" in the last three years due to a lack of unity among the four member countries, which all have their own national interests and major trade relationships with the PRC.[50]

Northeast

Asia

Japan

A PLA aircraft carrier sailed through Japan's contiguous zone for the first time. The transit may be part of a pattern of the PRC testing Japan's military response. The PLA Navy (PLAN) aircraft carrier *Liaoning* sailed through a passage between Japan's Yonaguni and Iriomote islands on the way to carry out drills in the Western Pacific Ocean on September 18.[51] The ship and two destroyers that accompanied it passed through Japan's contiguous zone during its transit.

Japan's Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroshi Moriya said the incident was “totally unacceptable from the perspective of the security environment of Japan and the region.”^[52] PRC Ministry of National Defense (MOD) Spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang said the carrier was on its way to conduct “routine training” and that there is no need to “over-interpret” its transit.^[53]

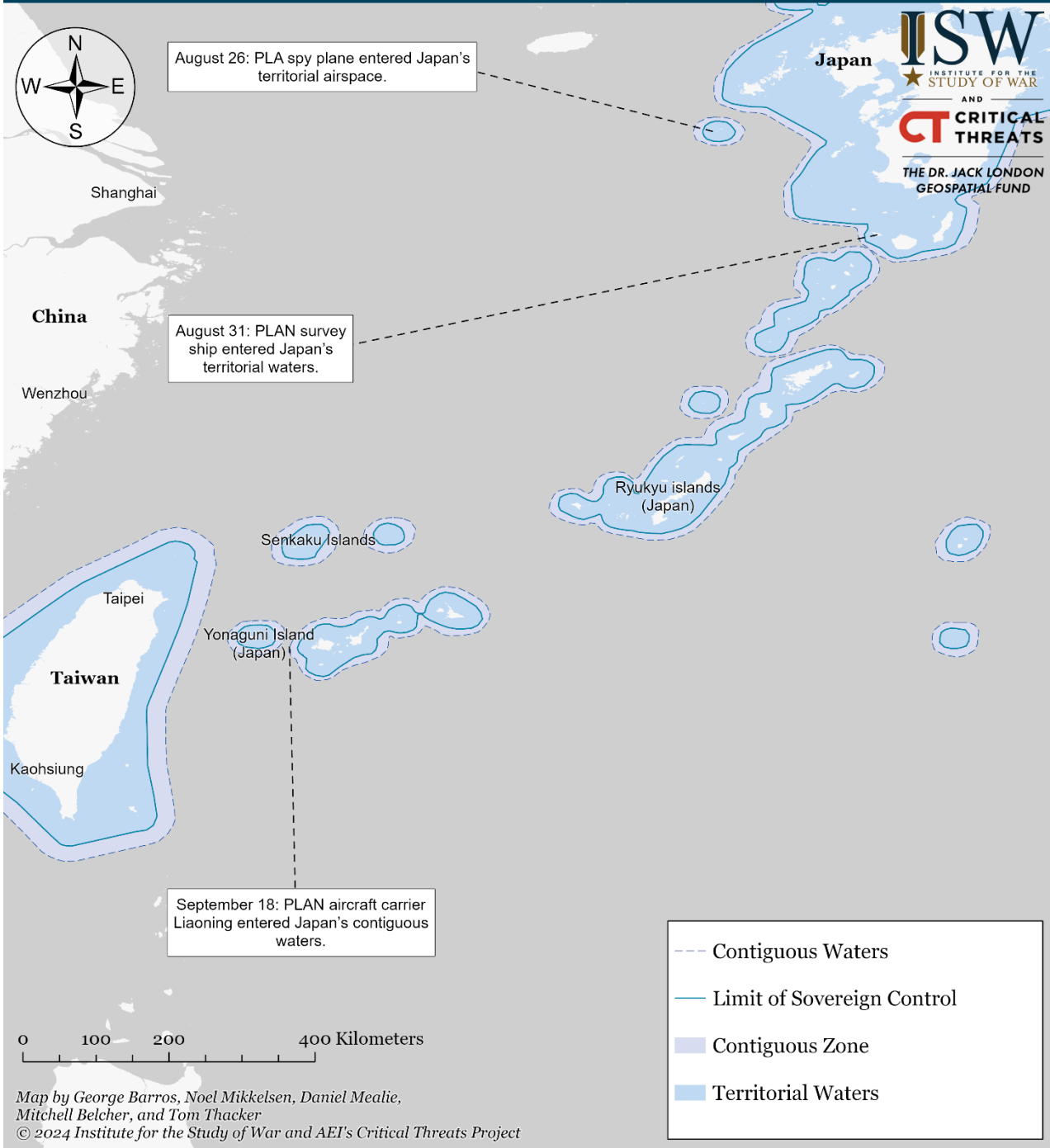
The *Liaoning*'s transit was the first time a PLA aircraft carrier sailed through the narrow passage but part of a pattern of PLAN ships increasingly sailing to the Pacific Ocean through waterways other than the Miyako Strait. The Miyako Strait is the widest waterway through Japan's Ryukyu Islands, between the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Statistics from Japan's Joint Staff show that a majority of PLA ships passed through the Miyako Strait when traveling to the Western Pacific Ocean from 2018 to 2023, but only 43 percent of them used that route in 2024. The PLAN began using the Yonaguni Channel, which is between Yonaguni and Taiwan, in 2021. The route accounted for over 26 percent of total PLAN transits from the East China Sea to the Western Pacific between January and August 2024.^[54] PRC state-owned tabloid *Global Times* cited PLA expert Fu Qianshao who said the transit demonstrated that the PLAN can break through the First Island Chain through multiple routes besides the Miyako Strait.^[55] Yonaguni and Iriomote are Japan's southwesternmost islands and the closest Japanese islands to Taiwan. The capability to sail through multiple waterways in the Ryukyu island chain could be important to the PLA's ability to land on Taiwan's east coast and disrupt Western supply lines in a potential war.

The *Liaoning*'s passage through Japan's contiguous zone may be part of a pattern of the PRC testing Japan's military response. A PLA reconnaissance aircraft briefly flew into Japan's territorial airspace on August 26 for the first time since World War II. The PRC claimed the airspace violation was a “regrettable” accident.^[56] A PLAN survey ship sailed through Japan's territorial waters off Kagoshima Prefecture on August 31 in an incident that the PRC justified as a “completely legitimate” transit under the UNCLOS provision for “innocent passage.” The transit was the tenth time in the past year that a PLAN survey ship entered Japan's territorial waters, or the 13th if including submarines and other intelligence-gathering ships.^[57] A Russian reconnaissance plane also breached Japan's territorial airspace near Hokkaido three times on September 23, a day after Russia and the PRC conducted joint naval exercises in the Sea of Japan.^[58]

A contiguous zone is a region of water between 12 and 24 nautical miles from a country's coast in which the country can conduct some law enforcement actions. A contiguous zone is not part of a country's sovereign territory under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), however, and countries cannot block the passage of foreign ships through their contiguous zone. The PRC itself has often protested the passage of foreign military vessels through waters in which it claims jurisdiction but does not have internationally recognized sovereignty, however, including the middle of the Taiwan Strait and waters between the disputed Paracel Islands. Beijing also protested an intrusion by a Japanese destroyer on July 4 that sailed into PRC territorial waters within 12 nautical miles of Zhejiang Province. Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force said on September 22 that the intrusion was a “serious error” and that it fired the naval officer responsible, but maintains that even military vessels have a right of

“innocent passage” through territorial waters of other countries.[59]

PLA Incursions Around Japan, August-September 2024



The PRC warned the United States and Japan not to proceed with a tentative US plan to deploy intermediate-range missiles to Japan for the first time. US Secretary of the Army

Christine Wormuth stated on September 4 that the United States is interested in seeing the Multi-Domain Task Force operate in Japan through exercises. The Multi-Domain Task Force is a new US Army unit that hosts the mid-range Typhon missile system. Wormuth said the United States is especially interested in being able to move equipment and soldiers to Japan's southwest Ryukyu Islands, which are located very close to Taiwan.[60] MFA spokesperson Lin Jian said on September 18 that the United States is promoting the deployment of weapons including intermediate-range missiles in the Asia-Pacific region to seek "absolute military superiority." He claimed the deployment would intensify regional arms races and tensions and threaten regional peace. He urged the United States to abandon the deployment plan and advised Japan to "be aware of the real intentions of the United States." [61] MOD spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang made similar comments and warned Japan "not to invite wolves into the house or cater to the United States, otherwise it will only push itself into danger." [62]

The PRC is likely worried that a US deployment of missiles near PRC territory through exercises will become a permanent deployment. The PRC repeatedly protested the deployment of the Typhon missile system to the Philippines for training exercises, using similar rhetoric. Philippine officials initially said the missiles were part of a temporary training program and would be removed in September, but later said on September 20 that there is no timeline to remove the missiles.[63] Wormuth said the missile system's monthslong deployment to the Philippines would be a model for future deployments. The Typhon system can launch the Tomahawk cruise missile, which can strike targets more than 1,600 km away, and the Standard Missile-6 multipurpose interceptor, which has a range of up to 370 km.[64] Tomahawk missiles deployed on Japan's southwest islands east of Taiwan could strike deep into PRC territory, while the short-range SM-6 missiles could hit targets throughout most of the Taiwan Strait.

Southeast

Asia

Philippines

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has resumed its patrol of Sabina Shoal, fulfilling its promises to return to the disputed territory and ensure that the shoal does not fall under PRC control. The CCG may deny Philippine resupply missions access to Sabina Shoal to compel the PCG to withdraw from the shoal. On September 22 the PCG deployed an unnamed vessel to Sabina Shoal to replace the recently withdrawn BRP *Teresa Magbanua*. [65] The PCG withdrew the BRP *Teresa Magbanua* from Sabina Shoal on September 15, citing medical concerns, a lack of essential supplies, and incoming bad weather. [66] The BRP *Teresa Magbanua* had been deployed to Sabina Shoal for five months, during which the CCG harassed the PCG vessel and blocked resupply missions from delivering supplies to Coast Guard personnel aboard. While some media outlets interpreted the PCG's withdrawal from Sabina Shoal as a sign of their acquiescence to PRC demands, the PCG maintained that their decision to withdraw was neither a sign of them ceding territory to the PRC nor an indication of a diplomatic agreement being signed between the two states. [67] PRC MOD spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang addressed the situation in Sabina Shoal in a September 26 press

conference, saying that the withdrawal of PCG vessels from the Shoal is the only way to restore peace and stability to the disputed waters.[68] The PRC asserted its sovereignty over Sabina Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal and emphasized that the PRC will counter any infringement into PRC territory to protect its maritime rights.

The PRC has maintained a significant and sustained presence at Sabina Shoal.[69] These ships included CCG ships, PLA Navy warships, and Chinese maritime militia vessels. The highest number of PRC vessels were reported in Sabina Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal, where the grounded BRP *Sierra Madre* is located.

Russia

PRC-Russia Joint Exercises 2018

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**Locations are approximate*

Source: CSIS China Power Project, PRC MOD

The PRC and Russia launched the second phase of the PRC-led joint naval exercises “Northern Interaction 2024” in Vladivostok on September 21.[70] The exercises will take

place in the Sea of Japan and will involve air defense and anti-submarine drills, according to the Russian state-owned news outlet RIA Novosti.[71] The second phase of Northern Interaction 2024 was the latest in a spate of PRC-Russia joint exercises that started on September 10. The PRC and Russia completed the first phase of the joint military exercises on September 15, before initiating other drills as part of the large-scale Russian-led Ocean 2024 military exercises in the Pacific and Arctic Oceans on September 16.[72]

The PRC and Russia are conducting increasingly frequent joint military exercises in recent years and expanding the scope of their cooperation. The two countries have now held joint exercises in at least five different parts of the world since July, including naval exercises in the South China Sea, Gulf of Finland, Sea of Japan, Sea of Okhotsk, and Northern Pacific.[73] PRC and Russian bombers entered the US air defense identification zone near Alaska for the first time together on July 24.[74] PRC and Russian naval vessels sailed together in the United States' EEZ in international waters near Alaska in September 2022 and August 2023.[75] PRC naval ships and Russian naval ships sailed separately into the United States' EEZ near Alaska on July 10 and September 16, respectively.[76]

The PRC and Russia are also increasing coast guard cooperation. The PRC announced on September 13 that PRC and Russian coast guard fleets will conduct joint patrols in the Northern Pacific, which lasted from September 16–20.[77] PRC state media claimed that the joint patrols aim to improve coordination and organization between the two countries and enhance their ability to “jointly respond to various maritime security threats.”[78] The China Coast Guard (CCG) and Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) first announced a memorandum of understanding regarding coast guard cooperation in April 2023 to strengthen maritime law enforcement.[79]

Middle

East

The PRC voiced concerns about Lebanon's sovereignty in response to the escalation of the war in the Middle East. PRC MFA spokesperson Lin Jian said the PRC is “highly concerned” about the detonation of Hezbollah communication equipment and said the PRC opposes any infringements on Lebanon's sovereignty and security. He expressed concern that the incidents may escalate regional tensions and called on “all parties concerned” to maintain peace and stability in the Middle East.[80] The MFA avoids making similar statements on sovereignty when attacks occur in Israel, typically urging general de-escalation and advocating for a two-state solution.[81]

Taiwanese news reported PRC “cognitive warfare” and a “smear campaign” against Taiwan in connection with the pager explosions that occurred in Lebanon last week. US media reported that the

Taiwanese firm Gold Apollo produced the pagers.[82] Gold Apollo denied producing the pagers and said that the firm that manufactured these pagers, the Budapest-based company BAC Consulting KFT, had been licensing its brand.[83] Gold Apollo released a statement saying that the company only provided brand trademark authorization for BAC to sell the products in certain regions. Gold Apollo stated that it was involved neither in the design nor the production of the pagers. Taiwan’s Ministry of Economic Affairs also gave a statement on the event, saying that Gold Apollo had no records of exporting directly to Lebanon in recent years and that Taiwanese-made products would not explode. The ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs also gave a statement on the pagers, saying that “from 2022 to August 2024, the company exported 260,000 sets of pagers, mainly to European and American countries, and there were no explosions in related products reported by the media.”[84]

Taiwan’s Central News Agency (CNA) cited unnamed officials who reported that national security investigations blamed Beijing for cognitive operations attempting to pin the blame for the pager explosions on Taiwan. CNA cited rumors on Chinese social media networks that Israel and Taiwan had colluded and that “although no Chinese official media has yet directly intervened, these accounts participating in the smear campaign have long been publishing posts to cooperate with the Chinese government’s anti-Western and anti-democracy and touting China’s characteristics.”[85] The PRC declined to comment on accusations of Taiwanese involvement.[86]

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[1] <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/u/YOStOoFOZxaHQodOVuDhA>

[2] <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/Publish.aspx?p=83476&title=%e5%9c%8b%e9%98%b2%e6%b6%88%e6%81%af&SelectStyle=%e6%96%b0%e8%81%9e%e7%a8%bf>

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