

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



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The China–Taiwan Weekly Update is a joint product from the Institute for the Study of War and the American Enterprise Institute. The update supports the ISW–AEI Coalition Defense of Taiwan project, which assesses Chinese campaigns against Taiwan, examines alternative strategies for the United States and its allies to deter the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) aggression, and—if necessary—defeat the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). The update focuses on the Chinese Communist Party’s paths to controlling Taiwan and cross–Taiwan Strait developments.

Key Takeaways

- **The People’s Republic of China (PRC) announced that it will lift restrictions on PRC tourism to Kinmen and Taiwanese pomelo imports, likely to economically reward Kuomintang-leaning regions and legitimize the Kuomintang as a negotiating partner on behalf of Taiwan.**
- **The PRC maintained a high number of air incursions of Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone in August.**
- **Network analysis firm Graphika identified PRC state-operated accounts on Twitter and TikTok that posed as Americans to undermine US political institutions and stability ahead of the 2024 US presidential elections. PRC information operation narratives have evolved to focus on sowing political division and undermining faith in the US electoral process.**
- **PRC state broadcaster CCTV ran a segment on August 27 that publicized a People’s Liberation Army air defense exercise to counter enemy drone swarms. The PLA’s focus on countering drone swarms is likely a reaction to Taiwan’s evolving defense strategy that emphasizes asymmetric defense.**
- **The China Coast Guard rammed a Philippine Coast Guard vessel near Sabina Shoal as part of its broader intimidation efforts to decrease the Philippine presence in the South China Sea. This is the third time that the CCG rammed a PCG ship near the Shoal during the last two weeks.**

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan

The PRC announced that it will lift restrictions on PRC tourism to Kinmen and Taiwanese pomelo imports, likely to economically reward Kuomintang (KMT)-leaning regions and legitimize the KMT as a negotiating partner on behalf of Taiwan. The PRC Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced on August 30 that it would allow residents of Fujian Province to resume travel to Kinmen “in the near future.” The ministry said it was lifting the ban at the request of a visiting delegation from Kinmen.[1] A Kinmen delegation led by KMT legislator Jessica Chen Yu-jen met with PRC Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Director Song Tao in Beijing on August 22 and requested that the PRC lift the travel ban for Kinmen. Kinmen is a Taiwanese island group located two miles from the coast of Fujian. The PRC suspended independent travel to Taiwan in August 2019, citing poor cross-strait relations, and banned group travel to Taiwan in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.[2] Chen said 800,000 tourists from the PRC visited Kinmen annually prior to the ban, bringing in US\$199.9 million each year.[3]

TAO spokesperson Chen Binhua announced on September 2 that the PRC would lift its ban on imports of Taiwanese Wendan pomelos that come from orchards and packaging plants registered with the PRC. He made the announcement two weeks before the Mid-Autumn Festival, a Chinese cultural holiday during which pomelo is traditionally eaten.[4] The PRC banned Taiwanese pomelo imports in August 2022 following then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan but claimed that the ban was motivated by biosecurity concerns. Chen directly credited Taiwan’s KMT legislative caucus leader Fu Kun-chi and his district, Hualien County, for expressing their “strong desire” to resume pomelo imports and organizing the industry to “make rectifications.” Hualien is a major producer of pomelo in Taiwan and contains most of Taiwan’s pomelo plants that are registered with the PRC.[5] Fu led a KMT delegation to the PRC in late April, meeting with high-level PRC TAO, United Front, customs, and travel officials. The meetings resulted in announcements that the PRC would lift bans on imports of Taiwanese food products including pomelos and resume Fujian tourism to Taiwan’s outlying Matsu Islands.[6] The first PRC tour group arrived in Matsu on August 9.[7]

The PRC likely lifted these import and travel bans to legitimize KMT officials as negotiating partners on behalf of Taiwan and to economically benefit KMT-leaning constituencies. Hualien, Kinmen, and Matsu are all solidly pan-Blue (KMT-leaning) regions. TAO spokesperson Chen commented when announcing the lifting of the pomelo import ban that “as long as we adhere to the ‘1992 Consensus’ and oppose ‘Taiwan independence,’ the two sides of the Taiwan Strait are one family, and family matters can be discussed and resolved easily.”[8]

TAO Director Song Tao met with KMT Vice Chair Andrew Hsia on August 28 and stated that the CCP was willing to work with the KMT on the common political basis of the 1992 Consensus and opposing Taiwanese independence. Hsia stated that the KMT was also willing to cooperate on the same political basis and that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to the “Chinese nation.”[9] Hsia was in Lushan, PRC for the 19th Jiangxi-Taiwan Economic, Trade and Cultural Cooperation and Exchange Conference.[10] It is unclear whether Hsia’s visit resulted in any concrete agreements.

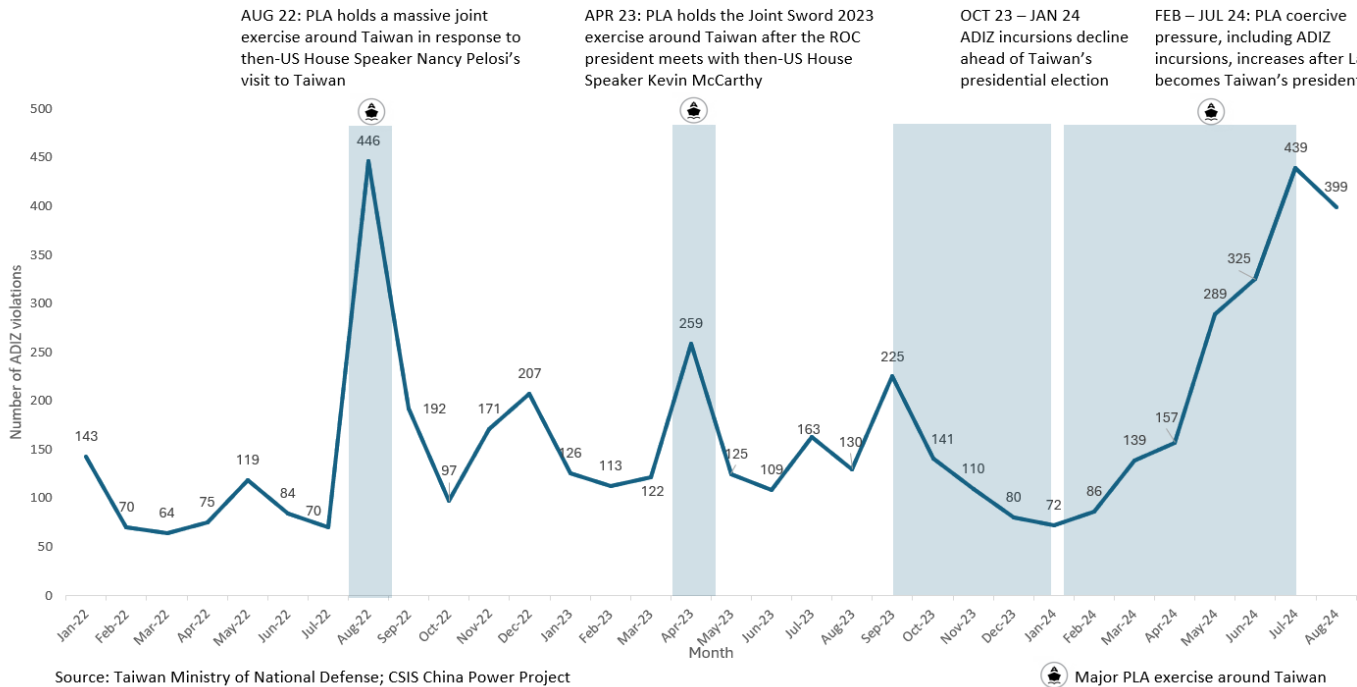
The 1992 Consensus is an alleged verbal agreement between semi-official representatives of the PRC and the then KMT-ruled ROC following negotiations in 1992. It states that both sides agree there is only

one China, and that Taiwan is part of China. The CCP interprets this “one China” as the People’s Republic of China, while the KMT interprets it as the Republic of China. Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) does not recognize the 1992 Consensus and considers the ROC and PRC to be mutually non-subordinate. The PRC suspended exchanges with Taiwan’s government in 2016 after the election of DPP president Tsai Ing-wen. It insists that the 1992 Consensus must be the common political basis for all cross-Strait negotiations.

The PLA carried out amphibious landing drills with dual-use roll-on/roll-off (ro-ro) ships off the coast of Fujian Province. Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) said it detected PLA combat aircraft, helicopters, drones, amphibious ships, and ro-ro freighters loaded with ground troops carrying out "joint landing exercises" around Dacheng Bay in the PRC’s Fujian Province, which is directly across the Taiwan Strait from Taiwan.[11] The PRC did not announce the drills. The PLA has conducted amphibious landing drills in the same area in 2023 and in previous years, often around September.[12] The PRC has also previously conducted training with ro-ro boats to carry troops and vehicles.[13] Ro-ro boats are cargo vessels with ramps that can be used to drive vehicles onto and off the ship instead of loading them with cranes. The PLA currently lacks sufficient sealift capability to execute a full-scale invasion of Taiwan and is working to integrate commercial ro-ro ships into its operations to fill this gap.[14]

The PRC maintained a high number of air incursions of Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in August. Taiwan’s MND reported that PLA aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and entered Taiwan’s ADIZ a total of 399 times in August, including at least one incursion every day of the month. This is the third highest monthly total on record, surpassed only by 446 incursions in August 2022 and 439 incursions in July 2024. The high number of incursions in August 2022 coincided with a massive spike in PLA activity around Taiwan following then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan. The PLA incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ in 2024 did not spike but instead rapidly climbed month-on-month from January to July, following Lai Ching-te’s victory in Taiwan’s January 2024 presidential election. Lai took office in May.[15] The ADIZ incursion numbers do not include aerial activity around Kinmen and Matsu, which are west of the median line.

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 violations drains Taiwan’s resources, exhausts military personnel, and degrades Taiwan’s threat awareness. Taiwan does not scramble aircraft in response to all PRC ADIZ violations, but it does put military personnel on standby to respond quickly if needed.



Taiwan's Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau (MJIB) accused eight PRC companies of "illegally poaching" talent and trade secrets from Taiwan's computer chip industry. A joint investigation by the prosecutors' offices of Hsinchu, Taipei, and New Taipei found that the PRC companies hid their backgrounds to poach Taiwanese semiconductor engineers and other high-tech personnel to acquire high-end technologies. The MJIB also suspects that companies stole trade secrets. It said that these illegal practices "seriously affect the competitiveness of Taiwan's high-tech industry." The accused companies are iCommsemi, Shanghai New Vision Microelectronics Co, NJAVC, Emotibot Technologies Ltd, Tongfang Co, ACTT, Naura Technology Group Co. and Hestia Power Inc.[16]

Tongfang is a large technology company that makes civilian electronics and supplies military end-use products to the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The products that it provides to the PLA include wireless communications, satellite navigation equipment, information security software, and electronic countermeasure equipment. Tongfang is a subsidiary of China National Nuclear Corp (CNNC), a state-run enterprise that oversees military nuclear programs, information technology, and energy and environmental projects.[17] MJIB found that Tongfang set up a Taiwanese company to recruit nearly 100 people while hiding its source of funding. Naura is a supplier for the PRC's biggest chipmaker, the partially state-owned Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp (SMIC). MJIB found that Naura illegally recruited engineers who worked on chip-related equipment. It found that Hestia Power set up shell companies to move capital to Taiwan with funding from the PRC Ministry of Finance's China Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund and the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Fund. MJIB found that ACTT, a supplier of integrated circuit patents and product design,

tried to cover up its illegal business in Taiwan by telling staff to register their health insurance at other places.[18]

Taiwan is a high-tech power that produces around 90% of the world's most advanced semiconductors, microchips that are used in computers, cell phones, cars, and many other commercial and military technologies. Taiwan's globally dominant semiconductor industry is sometimes referred to as its "Silicon Shield" because the world's reliance on Taiwanese semiconductors incentivizes other countries to defend Taiwan.[19] The PRC has invested billions of dollars to build its own semiconductor industry. It set up the third phase of the China Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund in May with a registered capital of 344 billion yuan (US\$47.5 billion). The PRC seeks to reduce Taiwan's competitive advantage and make the PRC more self-sufficient in advanced technologies.[20] Taiwan previously accused PRC companies of illegally poaching to acquire semiconductors and other advanced technology from Taiwan in May 2024, 2022, and other years.[21]

China

Network analysis and social media intelligence firm Graphika identified PRC state-operated accounts on Twitter and TikTok that posed as Americans to undermine US political institutions and stability ahead of the 2024 US presidential elections.[22] Spamouflage is a PRC state-sponsored information operation that operates on over 50 social media platforms.[23] Graphika reported that Spamouflage has become more aggressive in its efforts to spread divisive narratives and is seeding content to denigrate both Democratic and Republican candidates, including President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, and former President Donald Trump. The 15 Twitter accounts and 1 TikTok account identified in the report use a range of personas to impersonate US voters and AI-generated audio, video, and images are increasingly present in Spamouflage content.

Spamouflage narratives have evolved over time to focus on sowing political division and undermining faith in the US electoral process. Analysis from Graphika and ASPI in 2020 showed that criticism of US policies and response to crises were dominant themes in Spamouflage content, including the United States' response to the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the PRC's, police brutality and the government's handling of protests, and US foreign policy.[24] Research from the Microsoft Threat Analysis Center that identified and analyzed over 2,000 assessed Spamouflage Twitter and YouTube accounts over 11 months in 2021 showed that most of the accounts were created during the six-month period from September 2020 to March 2021, peaking in November.[25] The surge in accounts created during the US election season indicates that Spamouflage operators were directing content at the US public.

Graphika reported that Spamouflage began to explicitly engage with election-related topics before the 2022 US midterm elections. In 2023, Spamouflage content started directly criticizing US election candidates, sowing doubt in the legitimacy of the US electoral process, and propagating divisive narratives about polarizing political and social issues. Spamouflage's evolving focus is consistent with findings from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), a UK-based research nonprofit. ISD reported in February that suspected Spamouflage accounts focused on creating a sense of dismay in the United States by portraying the election as a high-stakes showdown and symbol of a divided United States. Themes at this time also included doubt over election integrity, social problems, and direct criticisms of President Biden.[26] ISD and Graphika, both identified inauthentic accounts posing as American

conservatives and Trump supporters.[27] Graphika noted, however, that the content is more representative of efforts to exacerbate social divisions and portray the United States as a country in decline.[28]

A *Washington Post* investigation revealed that PRC diplomats and pro-PRC diaspora groups in the United States coordinated and participated in violent actions against anti-Xi Jinping protesters during his visit in November. Pro-CCP rival protesters violently assaulted Chinese anti-CCP protesters during demonstrations from November 15-17 as CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping visited San Francisco to participate in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. The pro-CCP protesters instigated violence against anti-Xi protesters, including attacks with flagpoles, chemical sprays, and physical assaults, as documented in verified videos. PRC diplomats from the Los Angeles and San Francisco consulates were present among the pro-CCP protesters.

The Washington Post obtained WeChat messages that show that the Los Angeles PRC Consulate paid for the hotels and meals of counter-protesters as an incentive to participate in the demonstrations. *The Washington Post* reported that PRC diplomats hired at least 60 private security guards to “protect” the pro-CCP diaspora groups that gathered to welcome Xi Jinping, according to seven individuals involved in the arrangement. At least 35 pro-CCP diaspora groups from various states—including New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington—mobilized for the protests. *Washington Post* stated that a number of the participating pro-CCP diaspora groups have links to the PRC’s United Front Work Department, which aims to co-opt civilian Chinese groups to align with CCP interests.

This is not the first instance of PRC officials’ involvement in the violent suppression of dissident protesters. The PRC Manchester Consul General Zheng Xiyuan and consulate staff were recorded in October 2022 dragging a Hong Kong pro-democracy protester inside the consulate grounds and beating him.[29] Six PRC diplomats, including Zheng, left the UK after they were wanted for questioning by the police for their involvement in the incident.[30]

The PRC is involved in a range of unauthorized transnational repression activities throughout the world. The Spain-based human rights NGO Safeguard Defenders investigated in 2022 over a hundred alleged overseas police stations in countries across the world, which operate under the guise of providing consular services such as renewing passports and driver’s licenses.[31] The stations intimidate and coerce dissidents to return to the PRC as part of a Ministry of Public Security (MPS)-run repatriation campaign. One of the organizers of the pro-CCP demonstrations in San Francisco is the self-described “backbone” of an overseas consular assistance volunteers program that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established in 2013.[32]

The US Department of Justice (DOJ) indicted two PRC nationals in April 2023 on charges of acting as agents of the PRC for operating a “secret police station” on behalf of the PRC Ministry of Public Security (MPS) that conducted monitoring and intimidation of Chinese dissidents living in the United States.[33] The DOJ also indicted 40 MPS officers for using inauthentic social media accounts to harass PRC dissidents living in the US.[34] DOJ also charged the officers with attempting to recruit US nationals who were sympathetic to CCP narratives as “unwitting” agents of the PRC.

New York authorities arrested former New York Governor Kathy Hochul's aide Linda Sun and her husband Chris Su on federal charges of acting as unregistered foreign agents for the PRC. The DOJ-issued indictment alleges that Sun “used her position of influence among

executives to covertly promote PRC and CCP agendas.” Sun’s activities extended to preventing meetings with Taiwanese government representatives; changing high-level New York State officers’ messaging regarding issues of importance to the PRC and the CCP, including eliminating references to Taiwan and Uyghurs from state communications; and obtaining official New York State proclamations for PRC government representatives without proper authorization.[35] The indictment states that Sun actively concealed that she took actions at the direction of the PRC. Sun and Su also allegedly laundered millions of dollars for the PRC and used the monetary benefits of this scheme to buy luxury vehicles and property in New York, according to the IRS.

Governor Hochul stated that her office fired Sun as soon as it had discovered her misconduct.[36] Sun served for 15 months in Hochul’s administration as her deputy chief of staff and had worked for the NY governor’s office for years prior under Governor Andrew Cuomo as a liaison to the Asian-American community and deputy chief diversity officer.[37] *The New York Times* cited anonymous NY lawmakers who stated that Cuomo’s office was sensitive to Taiwan issues during Sun’s time there, including expressing resistance to pro-Taiwan resolutions in the State Legislature.[38]

Hochul called for the expulsion of the New York PRC consul general in response to Sun’s alleged activities.[39] US Department of State spokesperson Matthew Miller stated on September 4 that the consul general had already “rotated out” of his position at the end of August.[40]

The PRC Ministry of Defense (MOD) accused the United States of threatening global nuclear stability by expanding its arsenal and signing nuclear submarine deals with the UK and Australia. The PRC aims to weaken US credibility on nuclear and non-proliferation issues. US President Joe Biden approved a nuclear weapons strategy in March that reoriented the focus of US nuclear deterrence to the PRC’s expansion of its nuclear arsenal and ordered US forces to prepare for coordinated nuclear confrontations with the PRC, Russia, and North Korea. A US official further said that the United States may expand its nuclear arsenal after the US-Russia New START arms control treaty expires in 2026.[41] MOD spokesperson Wu Qian responded to these developments by criticizing the United States for “using the non-existent ‘China nuclear threat theory’ as an excuse to expand its nuclear arsenal and shirk its nuclear disarmament responsibilities.” He claimed that the PRC “firmly pursues a nuclear strategy of self-defense” and maintains its nuclear forces at the “minimum level required for national security.” He urged the United States to “substantially reduce its nuclear arsenal” and to stop engaging in “nuclear sharing,” “extended deterrence,” and “nuclear alliances.”[42]

Wu also claimed that an Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) deal to sell nuclear-powered submarines to Australia “seriously undermined the international nuclear non-proliferation system, seriously stimulated the nuclear arms race, and seriously endangered regional peace and stability.” He said the agreement allowed the nuclear-armed United States and United Kingdom to transfer nuclear reactors and highly enriched uranium to a non-nuclear state, Australia.[43] The PRC made the same criticisms of the AUKUS deal before and raised them at the International Atomic Energy Agency in May.[44]

PRC state broadcaster CCTV ran a segment on August 27 that publicized a People’s Liberation Army (PLA) air defense exercise to counter enemy drone swarms.[45] The PLA’s focus on countering drone swarms is likely a reaction to Taiwan and the United States’ defense strategies that emphasizes asymmetric defense. The CCTV report stated that the group’s first round of anti-aircraft artillery only achieved 40 percent damage against a drone swarm.

A representative from the PLA Ground Force's 77th Group Army Duan Xiaolong stated that hitting the drones was challenging due to their small size, speed, and ability to change flight trajectories, which made it easy for gunners to lose the targets.[46] Another representative, Cui Yang, acknowledged the problems and stated that the unit would focus on practicing and improving air defense capabilities.[47]

The PRC recognizes the challenges that drone swarms would pose in the event of an amphibious invasion of Taiwan. A 2023 article from a PRC military periodical explored the lessons that military strategists gleaned from observing both Russia and Ukraine's successful use of kamikaze drones.[48] The analysis highlights the effectiveness of low-cost drones in destroying high-value targets. The article points out that the PRC must be wary of these drones entering Taiwan, which it can employ against a potential PRC landing force.

Taiwan's asymmetric defense strategy, formally known as the Overall Defense Concept (ODC), aims to maximize the military's lethality under resource constraints to compensate for the disparity in military power with the PRC. The ODC focuses in part on exploiting "a large number of small things," according to former ROC Chief of General Staff and ODC architect Lee His-min.[49] The PLA air defense training follows a June announcement by the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense to procure 1,000 AI-enabled drones and the development of a US Department of Defense initiative that aims to field large drone swarms.[50]

The PRC is taking note of the United States' development of its own asymmetric capabilities. TAO spokesperson Zhu Fenglian warned the United States on June 26 against sending "dangerous signals" that expose its intention to "destroy Taiwan to safeguard its own interests." [51] Zhu's comments were a response to Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral Samuel Paparo's statements in a June interview that spoke of a defense concept called "Hellscape," which would deploy a high volume of unmanned systems to the Taiwan Strait and disrupt an amphibious invasion.[52] Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks announced in August 2023 the Replicator Initiative, which aims to develop the United States' capability to field large drone swarms to counter the PRC's numerical advantage in military assets.[53] Hicks called for the United States to leverage platforms that are "small, smart, cheap, and many" against the PRC's overwhelming mass. The program will likely be a keystone of the Hellscape defense strategy.

Southeast Asia

Philippines

The China Coast Guard (CCG) rammed a Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) vessel near Sabina Shoal as part of its broader intimidation efforts to decrease the Philippine presence in the South China Sea. This is the third time that the CCG rammed a PCG ship near the Shoal during the last two weeks. A CCG ship rammed the PCG *BRP Theresa Magbanua* near Sabina Shoal on August 31.[54] Commodore Jay Tarriela accused the CCG of deliberately colliding with the anchored PCG ship and emphasized that there was no provocation from the PCG.[55] CCG spokesperson Liu Dejun accused the PCG of intentionally ramming the CCG vessel and accused the Philippines of illegally anchoring in PRC territory.[56] This incident follows the previous deliberate CCG ramming of a PCG vessel near Sabina Shoal on August 19 and 25.[57] The PRC deployed 40 vessels on August 26 to block PCG vessels from delivering necessary supplies to PCG personnel aboard the *BRP Theresa Magbanua*, which has been anchored in Sabina Shoal since

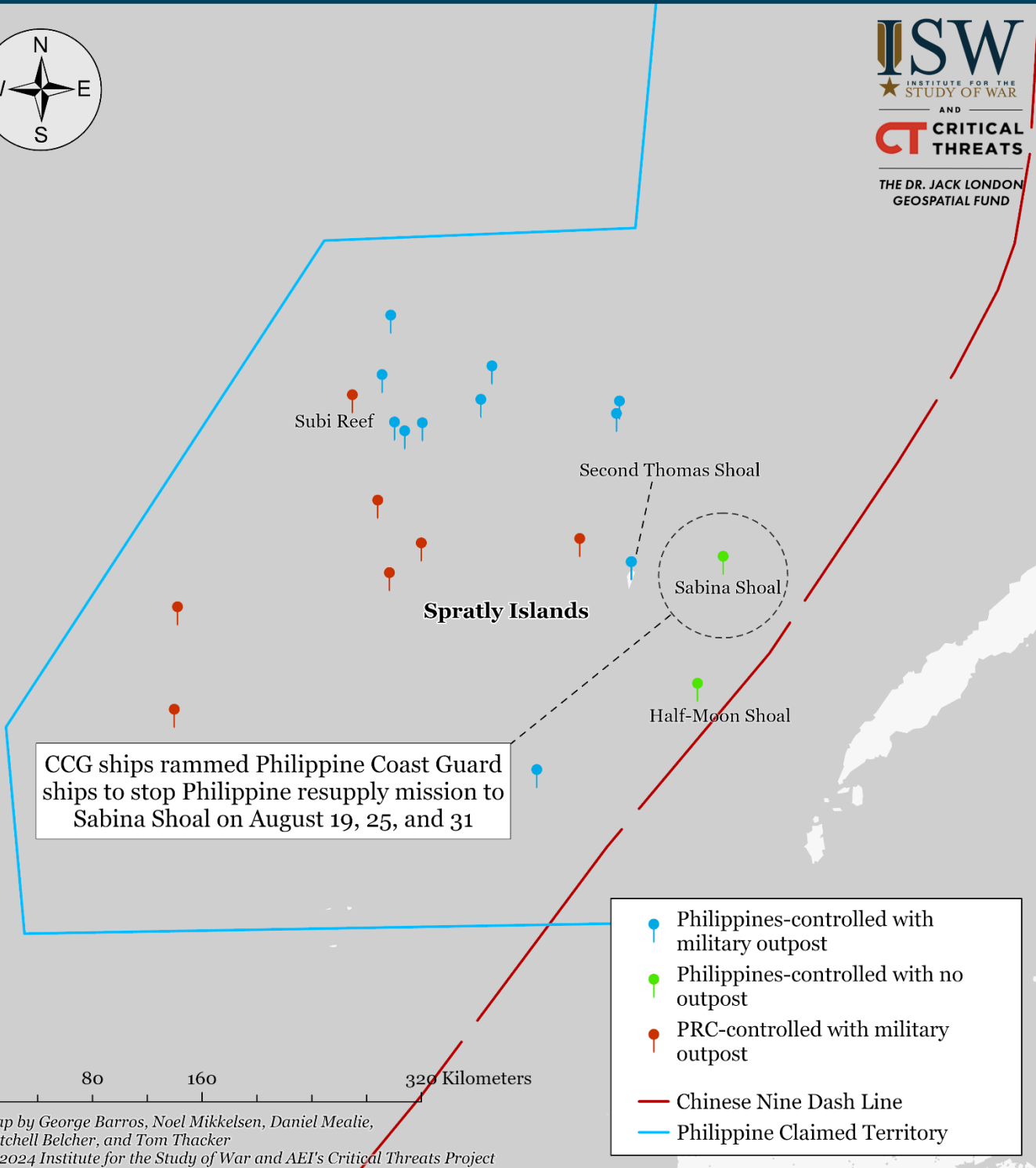
April.[58] The Philippine military has reported a significant increase in the number of PRC ships around Sabina Shoal. Philippine Navy spokesperson Admiral Roy Vincent Trinidad reported that from August 27 to September 2 the Philippine Navy saw 203 PRC vessels in the West Philippine Sea, a 24% increase over the past two weeks.[59] 71 of the PRC vessels were monitored at Sabina Shoal. The PRC vessels were comprised of 53 maritime militia boats, nine PLAN ships, and nine CCG ships.[60]

Sabina Shoal is about 110 nautical miles north of the Philippine island of Palawan. It serves as the main staging ground for supply missions to Second Thomas Shoal, where the *BRP Sierra Madre* has been intentionally grounded since 1999. The PRC and the Philippines have both accused one another of attempting to assert control over Sabina Shoal. The PCG has committed to maintaining a presence at the Shoal to monitor PRC land reclamation and artificial island building attempts.[61] A PRC-controlled Sabina Shoal would improve the PRC's ability to assert its claim over the Second Thomas Shoal. Controlling the Shoal would also enable the PRC to more easily intercept Philippine vessels attempting to access or establish a presence around other disputed features in the South China Sea.

The PRC's presence near Sabina Shoal could continue to make Philippine resupply missions dangerous, making it more difficult for the Philippines to maintain a permanent presence in the Sabina and Second Thomas Shoals. CCG ramming has thus far not coerced the PCG into leaving the Shoals, despite the damages inflicted on PCG ships. The PRC could continue to normalize these ramming incidents around the Sabina Shoal and other disputed features and escalate matters further if they believe it is necessary to protect their territorial claims. Continued CCG escalation could result in the PCG asking for help from the United States.

US Indo-Pacific Command chief Admiral Samuel Paparo has suggested providing escorts to Philippine ships completing resupply missions and stated that the United States would come to the aid of its ally if the Philippines invoked the Mutual Defense Treaty.[62] Armed Forces of the Philippines chief General Romero Brawner Jr. told Paparo that the Philippines could still defend itself against the PRC, but would ask for assistance from the United States if it decided that United States assistance was necessary. The PRC has condemned previous joint US-Philippine activities in the South China Sea, and a more significant United States presence in the South China Sea could elicit a stronger response from the PRC.

PRC actions against the Philippines near the Spratly Islands, August 2024



Cambodia

The PRC will gift Cambodia two Type 056A missile corvettes possibly/likely in exchange for access to the Ream naval base in Sihanoukville. The PRC has trained Cambodia in the operation of the ships and will soon give the Cambodian Navy two new warships, the Type 056A missile corvettes 630 and 631.[63] This comes as the PRC has outfitted the naval base with a new pier. Around 100 Chinese workers have been preparing the base for transfer to Cambodian control likely in September, according to Radio Free Asia.[64] Cambodian personnel have been barred from accessing the new part of the base.[65] Cambodia's constitution forbids the construction of foreign military bases on its soil, but Cambodia can circumvent this by merely giving the PLA preferred or exclusive access to the base. Only PLAN vessels have been able to use the port's new pier. Cambodia rerouted two Japanese destroyers to Sihanoukville's other port in February; more recently, it rerouted an Australian frigate to the same place. PRC corvettes, on the other hand, docked at the pier in December and have been there "on and off." [66] These corvettes are the same type that the PRC will transfer to Cambodia.

The PRC's military diplomacy in Cambodia supports its efforts to grow PRC economic and diplomatic influence in Southeast Asia, as well as its efforts to expand its naval power projection. The PRC likely deems a naval port in Cambodia a strategic interest because it could provide a more forward position near the Malacca Strait, a critical energy chokepoint through which most of the PRC's overseas oil imports must pass.[67] Cambodia is also one of the PRC's major economic partners. The PRC has constructed airports, roads, hotels, and other properties in the country. The PRC's interests in Cambodia reflect its interests in Southeast Asia more broadly: expansion of economic interests tied to geopolitical goals.

Oceania

The Pacific Islands Forum removed an affirmation of Taiwan's "development partner" status in its joint communique following backlash from the PRC. It did not bar Taiwan's participation in the forum despite PRC pressure, however. The annual Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) took place in Nuku'alofa, Tonga from August 26-30. The PIF released a joint statement on its website after the forum that "reaffirmed the 1992 Leaders decision on relations with Taiwan/Republic of China," which gave Taiwan "development partner" status in the forum. The development partner status is equivalent to a limited observer role in other organizations. Taiwan is the only country that holds development partner status with the forum. Nikkei Asia reported that PRC special envoy to the Pacific Qian Bo was visibly angry about the communique and confronted PIF Secretary-General Baron Waqa, calling the statement "unacceptable." Qian then told reporters that "Taiwan is part of China. Taiwan is not a dialogue partner of PIF, so China has the representation on behalf of the whole of China, including Taiwan and the mainland." He claimed that the statement "must be a mistake," as 15 of the 18 PIF members "have categorically stated they abide by the 'One-China' principle." [68] PIF members Palau, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The PIF removed the communique from its website the same evening and posted a new version on August 31 that omitted the reference to Taiwan. A forum spokesperson denied that the forum had bowed to PRC pressure and said the draft that mentioned Taiwan was uploaded by mistake. The spokesperson said "PIF would never have taken down the document if the leaders had agreed to it," suggesting that some PIF members did not agree to the language about Taiwan.[69]

The PIF did not remove Taiwan’s participation in the forum, however, despite Australian media reporting that the PRC pressured the Solomon Islands to put forth a motion to strip Taiwan of its “development partner” status. The Solomon Islands has been one of the PRC’s closest partners among the Pacific Islands since it broke ties with Taiwan in 2019 and recognized the PRC. It will host the next PIF in 2025.[70] The PRC often pressures countries to bar or restrict Taiwan’s participation in international organizations to reduce Taiwan’s international status and voice. Taiwan signed a three-year financial cooperation agreement with the PIF Secretariat after the forum ended, indicating its continued involvement.[71]

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