

# The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



**Authors: Matthew Sperzel, Daniel Shats, Alison O’Neil, Karina Wugang, and Alfred Han of the Institute for the Study of War;**

**Alexis Turek, Yeji Chung, and Alex Chou of the American Enterprise Institute**

**Editors: Dan Blumenthal and Nicholas Carl 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.*

**A senior Taiwanese official expressed concern that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) could use its influence over the Taiwanese entertainment sector to shape public opinion.**

Taiwanese Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Minister Chiu Chui-cheng said on May 26 that PRC-based social media applications, such as Douyin and RedNote, could unduly promote Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-aligned narratives.<sup>[1]</sup> Chiu warned that the PRC could control these applications as a United Front tool to subtly embed pro-unification sentiments in content. The United Front is a whole-of-government and -society effort to advance CCP 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 that Taiwan is a part of that China.

Chiu referenced recent comments from PRC scholar and Fudan University’s Institute of Chinese Studies Director Zhang Weiwei, who said that the popularity of such social media applications in Taiwan could enable the PRC to influence Taiwanese opinions, particularly the identity of young people.<sup>[2]</sup> A November 2024 poll by the Taiwan Information Environment Research Center showed that Taiwanese TikTok users were considerably more likely to have a positive view of the PRC and agree with certain CCP-aligned narratives regarding Taiwan and its relations with the United States compared with non-users.<sup>[3]</sup>

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) China Affairs Department warned in a Facebook post on May 28 that the PRC is focusing on the entertainment sector to advance its information warfare.<sup>[4]</sup> Unnamed Taiwanese national security officials told the media on May 29 that the PRC is propagating new narratives related to an ongoing information operation that aims to undermine Taiwanese

confidence in the United States to come to its defense and reduce support for resistance to unification.[5] The officials highlighted that certain Taiwanese celebrities have begun adopting these narratives.

The Taiwanese Mainland Affairs Council is currently investigating 20 Taiwanese celebrities for cooperating with the PRC to disseminate content that aims to damage national morale.[6] Multiple Taiwanese celebrities have simultaneously republished PRC propaganda or content that aligns with PRC narratives regarding Taiwan's political status and national identity. Some of these instances have coincided with major PRC blockade exercises around Taiwan, during which the PRC intensifies its anti-Taiwanese sovereignty messaging. Some Taiwanese internet celebrities have called attention to CCP efforts to recruit them to facilitate United Front work since June 2024.[7] Coopting Taiwanese pop culture figures and exploiting social media likely aims to shape perceptions primarily in the younger generation, who the PRC views as a crucial demographic to cultivate Chinese identity.[8]

**The PRC sent lower-level delegates than usual to the Shangri-La Dialogue, which may reflect the PRC's aversion to perceived hostile international engagements that discredit its narratives.** The PRC kept a low profile at the annual security forum in Singapore — refraining from sending high-level officials and limiting participation in panels, unlike in past years. This is the first time in five years that the PRC did not send its defense minister.[9][10] Members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) National Defense University, headed by Rear Admiral Hu Gangfeng, attended instead, and they did not hold any press briefings or bilateral engagements and seldom engaged with other delegations.[11]

US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth highlighted the imminent threat that the PRC poses to regional security during his speech at the forum.[12] The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense downplayed the US portrayal of the PRC as an aggressor and framed the United States as the true provocateur.[13] Representatives from multiple countries likewise voiced concern about destabilizing PRC actions, including Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro and Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles.[14]

Defense Secretary Hegseth's pledge to prioritize deterrence against Beijing underscored the forum's focus on the PRC as the most salient threat to Indo-Pacific security.[15] Hegseth reiterated the importance of cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners and pledged consequences if the PRC tried to "conquer" Taiwan.[16] Major news outlets reported on May 30—the first day of the forum—that US President Donald Trump plans to increase arms sales to Taiwan beyond the amount approved in his first term.[17] Trump approved approximately 18.3 billion US dollars of weapons during his first term, significantly more than the 8.4 billion US dollars approved under the Joe Biden administration.[18]

The PRC's low profile at the forum publicly signaled that it attaches less importance to the event, possibly to deprive it of legitimacy and avoid the awkward situation of receiving blame by attendees. The PRC prefers to participate in self-led international security forums in which it can more easily control narratives and does not risk international embarrassment for its aggressive military posturing.

### Key Takeaways

- **Taiwan:** A senior Taiwanese official expressed concern that the PRC could use its influence over the Taiwanese entertainment sector to shape public opinion. The official highlighted the risk that the PRC could use social media services to promote pro-CCP and pro-unification narratives.
- **PRC:** The PRC sent a lower-level delegation than usual to the Shangri-La Dialogue, which may reflect the PRC's aversion to perceived hostile international engagements that risk contradicting its narratives. The PRC prefers self-led forums where it can more easily control the discussion and tone.

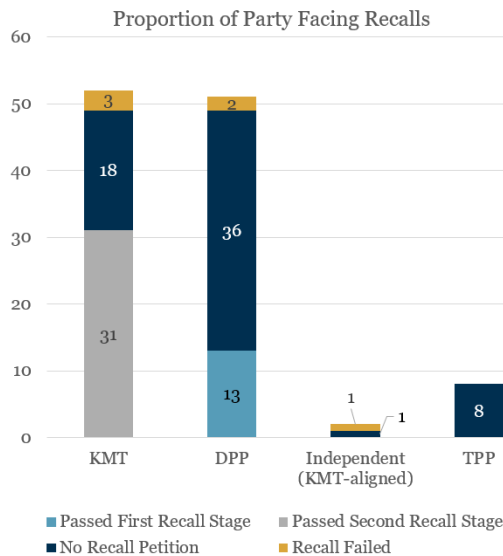
### Cross-Strait

### Relations

#### *Taiwan*

**Petitions to recall two Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators failed. Taiwan's mass recall movement has overwhelmingly favored the DPP over the opposition Kuomintang (KMT).** Recall petitions against both the DPP's indigenous legislators, who represent special indigenous constituencies rather than geographic districts, failed to meet the second-stage signature threshold by the deadline on May 31.<sup>[19]</sup> Thirteen recall petitions against DPP legislators are still collecting signatures in the second stage of the recall process, with deadlines throughout June. No petitions against DPP legislators have yet cleared the threshold needed to trigger a recall election, while petitions against 31 KMT legislators have passed the second stage and were submitted to the Central Election Commission for validation.

Pro-DPP newspaper *Taipei Times* reported on June 1 that an unnamed source within the KMT said that none of the KMT-backed recall petitions against DPP legislators are expected to succeed.<sup>[20]</sup> Such an outcome would leave the KMT completely on the defensive in recall elections against 31 out of its 52 legislators, while the DPP's 51 seats would be secured. The KMT-led opposition holds a majority in the Legislative Yuan (LY). The DPP needs to recall at least six KMT legislators and win the snap elections to replace them in order to gain a majority in the LY. A DPP-controlled LY would undo major government budget cuts passed by the opposition, including major cuts to defense, and align Taiwan's legislature with President William Lai Ching-te's defense-oriented agenda.



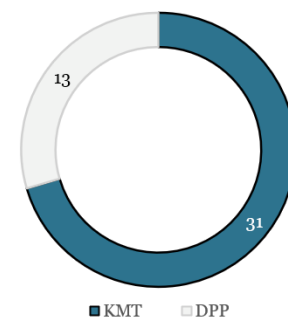
Sources: Taiwan Central Election Commission; Taiwan News; Liberty Times

Many members of Taiwan's 113-seat Legislative Yuan are facing recall petitions. These efforts primarily target members of the Kuomintang (KMT) party, which is the opposition party controlling the legislature. The KMT passed a series of highly controversial bills such as record budget cuts. KMT and KMT-aligned politicians have launched a retaliatory recall movement against the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), but these petitions have gained far fewer signatures than the ones against the KMT.

Criteria for each recall process stage:

- 1) Signatures from at least one percent of eligible voters in their respective districts.
- 2) Signatures from at least 10 percent of eligible voters in the targeted legislators' district within 60 days to trigger a recall election.
- 3) A recall vote is held within 20-60 days of the petition's approval. A special election to fill the vacancy will occur within three months of a successful recall.

Active Recall Petitions by Party  
(As of June 3, 2025)

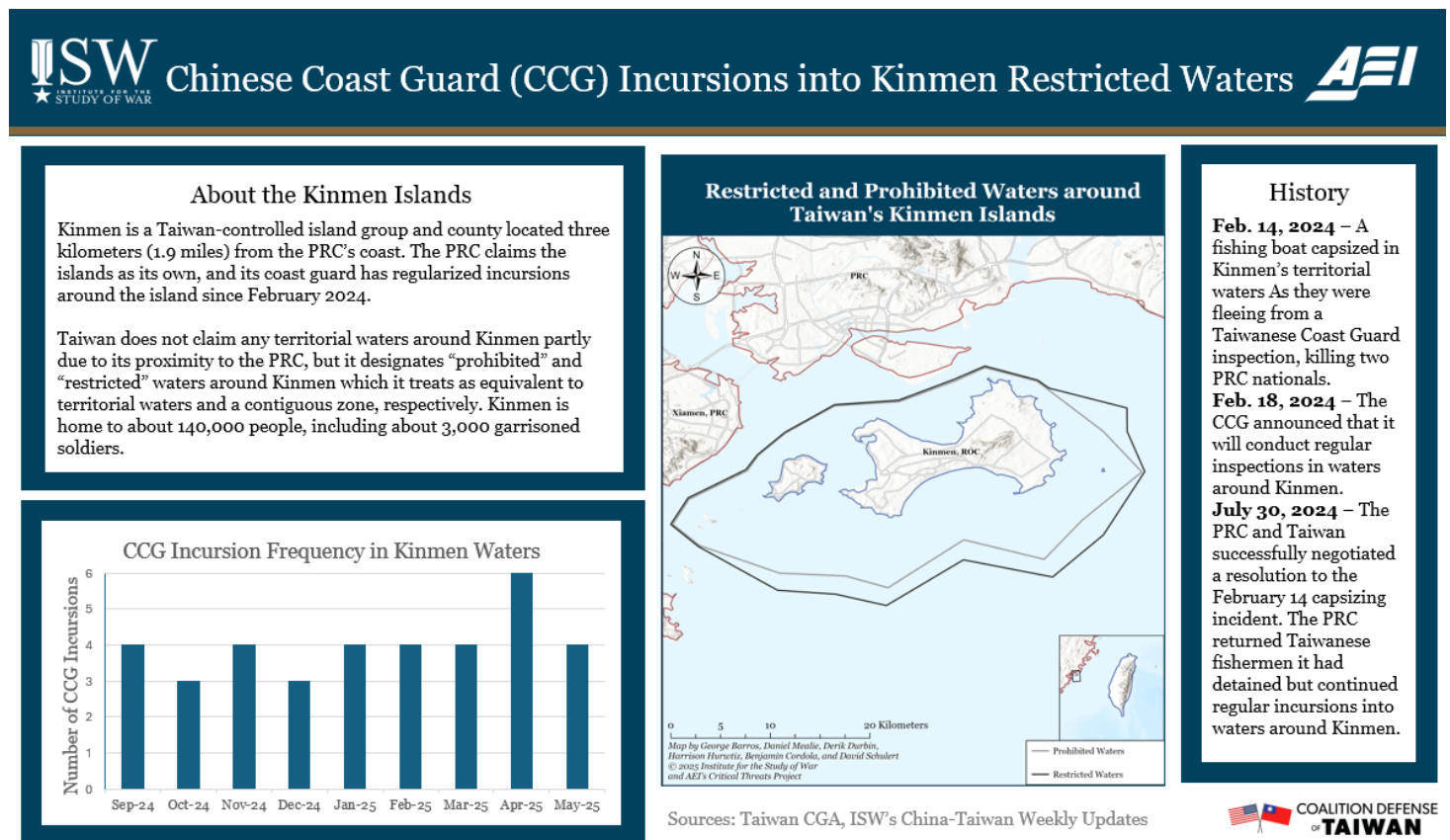


**Taiwanese counterintelligence operations highlight the PRC's extensive efforts to recruit military personnel for espionage.** Taiwan's High Court sentenced two brothers and eight active-duty service members to prison on May 28 for providing military intelligence to the PRC.<sup>[21]</sup> The two brothers, surnamed Hsu, established front companies in the PRC for collecting military intelligence at the behest of a PRC handler in 2022. The Hsu brothers recruited 13 other people to lure active-duty military personnel with financial inducements. The active-duty personnel belonged to the army, navy, air force, and coast guard, and ranged in rank from enlisted soldiers to captain.

A January 12 report by Taiwan's National Security Bureau (NSB) highlighted the primary infiltration channels in Taiwanese society that the PRC exploits to recruit financially vulnerable military personnel as agents and build spy networks with money.<sup>[22]</sup> Taiwanese President Lai called attention to PRC efforts to recruit Taiwanese military personnel as spies during a March 13 speech that outlined measures to resist malign PRC influence.<sup>[23]</sup> Taiwan has prosecuted an increasing number of individuals for spying for the PRC in the past four years, rising from 16 in 2021 to 64 in 2024. Retired and active-duty military personnel accounted for a combined two-thirds of those prosecuted in 2024, highlighting the PRC's emphasis on infiltrating the Taiwanese military to gather intelligence and undermine the government. The rising number of prosecutions indicates increasing PRC espionage efforts against Taiwan or stronger counterintelligence efforts by Taiwan. The latest prosecutions follow alarming revelations in April of extensive PRC spying by Taiwanese staffers in the employ of high-level cabinet members and the office of the president.<sup>[24]</sup>

**The China Coast Guard (CCG) conducted four incursions into Kinmen’s restricted waters in May 2025, continuing PRC efforts to normalize such incursions.** The incursions occurred on May 15, 16, 27, and 28.[25] The PRC typically sends four CCG ships to simultaneously enter Kinmen’s restricted waters for approximately two hours during each incursion. These efforts are part of the PRC effort to reduce Taiwan’s threat awareness and expend Taiwanese resources. The Taiwan Coast Guard Association (CGA) has reported a total of 74 incursions since these incursions began in February 2024. ISW was able to track each reported incursion dating back to September 2024—the publicly available data prior to then is incomplete and thus excluded from the graph below.

CCG intrusions into the waters south of Kinmen resemble a rehearsal for an operation to cut Kinmen off from resupply or intervention by sea, which would require PRC ships to position themselves to the south of the island. The CCG performing simultaneous entries into the restricted waters around Kinmen provides the CCG with experience in choreographing the initial actions that would be required for a blockade to isolate Kinmen. The CCG likely aims to desensitize Taiwan and its partners to such intrusions, which could help cultivate surprise in an actual blockade scenario.



**China Coast Guard (CCG) ships patrolled within Taiwan’s restricted waters around Pratas Island at least three times in May. CCG patrols around Pratas and incursions into Pratas waters since February may indicate a new area of focus in the PRC’s erosion of Taiwanese sovereignty around its territory.** Pratas Island, also known as Dongsha or Tung Sha Island, is part of a Taiwanese-administered atoll in the northern South China Sea. It has an airfield and

a coast guard outpost but no permanent population and maintains “prohibited” and “restricted” waters that are equivalent to territorial waters and a contiguous zone, respectively. The ship-tracking software Starboard showed that a CCG ship sailed halfway around Pratas on May 1 and returned to fully circle the island on May 28, both times sailing within the island’s restricted waters. The May 28 incursion coincided with one of the incursions around Kinmen. A different CCG ship briefly sailed just within the edge of the restricted waters boundary on May 13. Taiwan’s Coast Guard Administration (CGA) previously reported that the CCG entered Pratas waters in February and March 2025, while attempting to block the CGA from expelling a large fleet of PRC fishing boats that were illegally fishing there. CCG ships stayed in the area after the fishing boats left and continued occasional incursions into Pratas restricted waters.[26]

The CCG may be increasing patrols around Pratas to contest Taiwan’s control of the waters around the island, drain Taiwan’s resources, and set conditions for a possible future “quarantine” of the island, similar to its activities around Kinmen. CCG incursions into Pratas waters between February and May 2025 have already surpassed the total known incursions in those waters in all of 2024, according to data from Starboard. CCG sailing patterns show a tacit acknowledgment of but deliberate disregard for the boundaries of Taiwan’s restricted waters around Pratas, similar to the behavior of CCG ships that have patrolled in restricted waters around Kinmen since February 2024. CCG patrols into Taiwan-administered waters aim to legitimize PRC law enforcement jurisdiction and erode Taiwanese control over the waters. The large PRC fishing fleet that Taiwan expelled from Pratas in March plausibly acted as a deliberate pretext for CCG intervention: the boats all sailed to Pratas around the same time from different parts of the PRC. The PRC state social media account Yuyuan Tiantian, which is affiliated with state broadcaster CCTV, quoted an anonymous “insider” in May 2024 who suggested that the “Kinmen model” of normalizing law enforcement patrols ostensibly to protect PRC fishermen could be used to expand PRC maritime control around other Taiwanese outlying islands or even across the entire Taiwan Strait.[27] Pratas Island may be the next target of this pattern of coercion.

# CCG Ships Patrol in Restricted Waters around Pratas Island, May 2025



1 May and 13 May: CCG ships patrol within Pratas restricted waters.

28 May: CCG ship circles Pratas Island entirely within restricted waters.

**Pratas Island  
(ROC)**

South China Sea

0 25 50 Kilometers

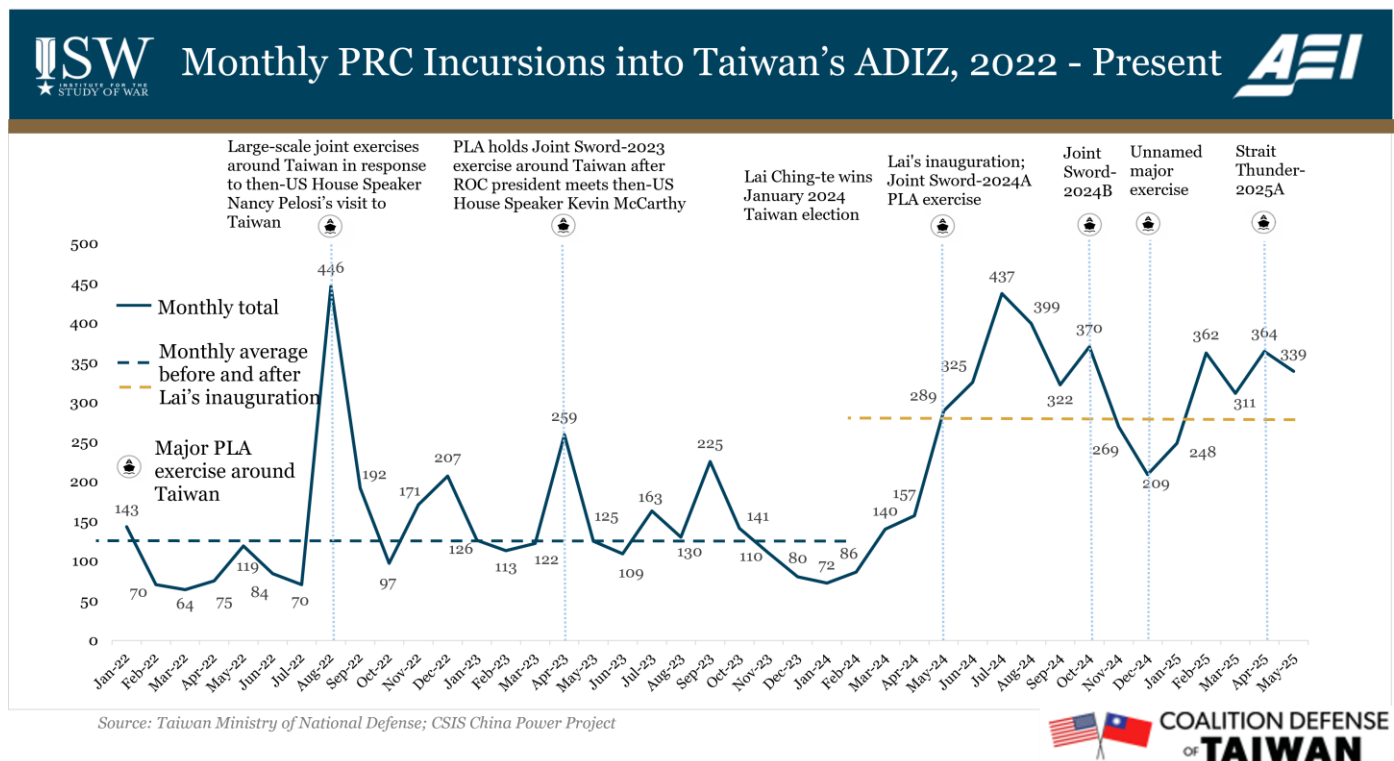
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie,  
Derik Durbin, Harrison Hurwitz, and Benjamin Cordola  
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**PLA aircraft incursions into Taiwan's de-facto Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) sustained a high frequency in May. The PRC has normalized a higher frequency of ADIZ incursions since Taiwan President William Lai Ching-te's inauguration to degrade Taiwan's threat awareness and response threshold.** Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) reported a total of 339 PLA sorties that crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and entered Taiwan's ADIZ in May. PLA incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ averaged 304 per month since Lai's inauguration in May 2024, more than double the average in the previous two years.[28]

The PRC has normalized a heightened level of military activity around Taiwan to erode Taiwan's threat awareness and to signal its strong opposition to Lai. Beijing considers Lai a dangerous separatist and has launched several major military exercises around Taiwan that it signaled were in response to "separatist" rhetoric or policy by Lai. ADIZ incursions spiked during these exercises but notably remained high even in months without major exercises. The normalization of more frequent ADIZ incursions by PLA aircraft raises the threshold of coercive activity that would trigger a Taiwanese response, making it more difficult for Taiwan to detect and respond to a real threat in time. Taiwan must put personnel on standby to respond to ADIZ incursions, which strains resources and exhausts personnel.



## China

**The PRC revealed for the first time that Admiral Miao Hua — the top political commissar of the Central Military Commission (CMC) — is under suspicion of legal violations. Miao was suspended from his role in the CMC in November for “serious violations of**



**discipline,” but this is the first indication that he may be in legal trouble.** Miao was the director of the CMC’s Political Work Department, making him the top-ranking official in charge of ensuring adherence to CCP ideology within the PLA. The CMC suspended him from his role in November 2024 for “serious violations of discipline,” and the National People’s Congress (NPC) later removed him as a deputy in March 2025. NPC deputies have special protections, so Miao’s expulsion exposed him to arrest and criminal prosecution.<sup>[29]</sup> PRC media recently reported that a statement from the NPC dated May 15 said Miao’s expulsion was due to “suspected serious violations of discipline and the law,” the first official acknowledgement that Miao may have broken the law.<sup>[30]</sup> The website of the PRC Ministry of National Defense quietly removed Miao’s name from the list of CMC members.<sup>[31]</sup>

The punitive measures against Miao Hua are emblematic of CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping’s continued mistrust of PLA leadership as the PLA approaches key modernization deadlines. Miao is one of the highest-ranking military officials to be placed under investigation or punished in the past two years as part of Xi’s anti-corruption campaign. The top official to purportedly fall victim to this campaign was General He Weidong — the second-ranked vice-chair of the CMC — who has not been seen in public since reports emerged that he was arrested in late March.<sup>[32]</sup> PLA Eastern Theater Command (ETC) Commander Lin Xiangyang has also been absent from public events since around the same time. PRC officials and state media have not announced investigations or punishments against either man and have not commented on their whereabouts. Other military officials purged since 2023 include two former defense ministers and a former PLA Rocket Force Commander. The CCP’s purges of top military leaders, whether for genuine corruption or for ideological disagreements, show a lack of trust that could be a limiting factor on Beijing’s willingness to pursue military action against Taiwan.

**The PRC’s establishment of an international mediation body is likely motivated by its efforts to boost its legitimacy as a mediator of global conflicts.** The founding member states are almost what the PRC categorizes as “Global South” countries, which will likely fuel PRC claims that it represents the interests of the disenfranchised countries under the current US-led world order. The International Organization for Mediation (IOMed) is a Hong Kong-based intergovernmental legal organization with the stated mission of “resolving international disputes through mediation” in accordance with the UN charter.<sup>[33]</sup> Thirty-three states signed the Convention establishing IOMed on May 30.<sup>[34]</sup> The signatories are mostly from Africa, Latin America, and Asia, with the only exceptions being Belarus and Serbia. No European Union or G7 states signed onto the convention. The PRC’s leadership of IOMed supports its diplomatic and rhetorical efforts to burnish a reputation as a leader in global security.

The PRC has worked to generate support for itself as a leader in global security through its promotion of alternative multilateral organizations, such as the expanded BRICS forum and the “Friends of Peace” platform, which has the stated purpose of expanding dialogue and helping Global South countries resolve the war in Ukraine. The PRC’s efforts depend on denigrating the US-led world order as hegemonic, exploitative, and neglectful of most countries. The PRC’s efforts benefit from the contraction of the United States’ foreign policy and its retreat from global commitments.

*South Korea*

**South Korea's newly elected President Lee Jae-myung, of the Democratic Party (DP), signaled that he may balance between maintaining a strong US–Japan–South Korea alliance with warmer relations with the PRC and North Korea.** Lee won decisively with 49.42 percentage points, more than an eight-point lead over Kim Moon-soo of the People Power Party (PPP).[35] Lee was inaugurated on June 4. He signaled a “pragmatic” foreign policy in his inauguration speech, stating that “we will strengthen South Korea-United States-Japan cooperation based on a solid Korea-US alliance” in addition to opening “channels of communication and pursue dialogue and cooperation with the North.”[36] Lee said that he wants to ease military tensions with North Korea, restore inter-Korean relations, and make “tangible progress toward denuclearization and a peaceful regime.”[37] Lee also stated during his campaign that there is no need to remain “unnecessarily hostile” toward the PRC and Russia.[38]

Lee remains cautious in responding to Washington's growing calls for greater strategic flexibility of US Forces Korea (USFK) to counter the PRC in a potential Taiwan conflict. Lee stated on May 29 that he would think about whether South Korea would come to Taiwan's aid against a PRC invasion “when aliens invade Earth,” exhibiting an inclination to maintain ambiguity in South Korea's position.[39] Lee may seek to strengthen South Korea's indigenous deterrence, transfer wartime operational control from the United States to South Korea, and upgrade South Korea's missile defense system, aligning with the Trump administration's push for allies to take on more of their own defense.[40]

*Oceania*

**The PRC hosted the China–Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting for the first time, part of a charm offensive to increase PRC influence in the South Pacific.**[41] Representatives from Kiribati, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Niue, Tonga, and Federated States of Micronesia, along with PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi attended the meeting in Xiamen.[42] PRC state news agency Xinhua reported that the participating parties reached nine broad consensus, such as strengthening cooperative measures such as the Belt and Road Initiative and reaffirming mutual respect and cooperation in their strategic partnerships.[43]

The PRC uses investment and cooperation deals as tools of influence in the Pacific, using aid to induce Pacific countries to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the PRC and pursue policies more amenable to Beijing's interests. Nauru broke ties with Taiwan and recognized the PRC in 2024, shortly after Taiwan's election. The Solomon Islands and Kiribati likewise switched their diplomatic relations to the PRC in 2019.[44] Only three Pacific Island countries — Palau, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands

— still recognize Taiwan.[45] PRC efforts to induce changes in diplomatic recognition align with the PRC’s broader push to create the impression of global consensus on the “Taiwan question.”

PRC activities in the Pacific have drawn criticism and accusations of coercion related to Taiwan. The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC) accused the PRC of pressuring Solomon Islands Rural Development Minister Daniel Waneoroa to leave the organization on May 8.[46] Palau has also accused the PRC of trespassing in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and of “weaponizing tourism” against it, in part due to Palau’s stance on Taiwan.[47] A Palau-based group, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, likewise highlighted CCP-linked gang activity as a source of organized crime in Palau.[48] These activities likely reflect wide-ranging PRC efforts to induce and coerce adoption of its stance on Taiwan.

PRC investment in the Pacific also allows the PRC to improve its geostrategic position relative to the United States. The PRC launched an initiative on May 27 to revive a WWII-era airfield on the Woleai atoll in the Federated States of Micronesia.[49] Woleai is approximately 400 miles south of Guam. Micronesia is one of three Pacific Island states that have signed a Compact of Free Association (COFA) agreement with the United States, under which the United States provides defense and economic assistance to signatories.[50] Micronesia’s engagement with the PRC, despite being a signatory to COFA, could indicate that US influence in the Pacific Islands is being eroded by PRC economic and diplomatic engagement.



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