

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 aggression, and—if necessary—defeat the People’s Liberation Army. The update focuses on the Chinese Communist Party’s paths to controlling Taiwan and cross–Taiwan Strait developments.

An assessment about the implications of KMT campaign signature fraud cases was revised to better reflect ISW’s analytical scope and standards. We apologize for the shortcoming.

CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping paid an official visit to Moscow for the annual Russian Victory Day and used the opportunity to highlight the strategic partnership between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Russia. Victory Day marks the anniversary of the Soviet Union defeating Nazi Germany in World War II and often involves a grandiose military parade in Moscow. Xi published an article in Russian state media on the day of his visit, celebrating the historic relationship between the PRC and the Soviet Union.^[1] In the article, Xi called for further cooperation to defend the post-World War II order and against “hegemony” and “unilateralism”—implicit references to the United States. Xi repeated narratives that support the PRC claim of sovereignty over Taiwan and lauded Russian support for PRC control of Taiwan. The Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized Xi for distorting reality in his article.^[2]

The PRC and Russia issued joint statements on May 8 and 9 that further emphasized their strategic alignment.^[3] The statements criticized US security policy in Europe and the Indo-Pacific as well as the US use of sanctions and tariffs. The statements also called for further PRC–Russia cooperation to upend the US-led global order and conduct combined military exercises.

One of the statements illustrated how the PRC and Russia are supporting one another’s expansionism and global influence. The statement reiterated Russian support for PRC control of Taiwan. ^[4] The statement likewise called for addressing the “root causes” of the Russia–Ukraine war and further repeated Kremlin rhetoric regarding the war. The statement also urged other countries to “abandon the

policy of unilateral coercive measures and forceful pressure” against North Korea, likely referring to international sanctions on the country. The PRC and Russia both consider North Korea a strategic partner in their quests to upend the US-led global order.

Senior North Korean military officers attended the Victory Day parade and showcased North Korean military cooperation with Russia in its war against Ukraine.^[5] Putin shook hands with five North Korean officers during the event. *NK News* identified three of the officers as the Korean People’s Army (KPA) General Staff deputy chief — who oversees North Korean special operations forces (SOF) — the Reconnaissance General Bureau (RGB) director, and another official.^[6] Russian Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov said the North Korean officers are “commanders who coordinate the participation of Korean servicemen in the operation to liberate the Kursk region.”^[7] The KPA General Staff deputy chief, Kim Yong Bok, has appeared leading SOF elements in military drills and parades since 2014, with the most recent appearance in March 2024.^[8] Kim Yong Bok visited Russia to oversee the SOF unit deployed to Kursk Oblast in October 2024, coinciding with Ukraine confirming that North Korean troops were there.^[9] The United States, United Kingdom, and European Union have sanctioned Kim Yong Bok for supporting Russia’s war effort.^[10] The presence of North Korean officers came after North Korea and Russia acknowledged North Korean troop deployments in Russian operations for the first time.^[11] North Korean participation in the parade underscores its growing military cooperation with Russia and signals an effort to develop an anti-United States bloc alongside the PRC and Russia.

Workers’ Party of Korea General Secretary Kim Jong Un visited the Russian embassy in Pyongyang with his daughter, Kim Ju Ae, on May 10 and delivered a speech to commemorate Victory Day.^[12] Kim’s speech aimed to legitimize North Korean military assistance to Russia based on the June 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty. Kim described Ukraine as a neo-Nazi force that inherited the “inhumane genes” of Nazi Germany through its violation of Russian sovereignty. North Korea also equated Ukraine with Nazism on April 28, when it acknowledged troop deployment to Russia as part of “liberation operations” against “neo-Nazi” Ukrainian forces.^[13]

The PRC published a white paper that further codified its comprehensive approach to national security. The PRC assesses its national security based on economic and technological development, social stability, global governance, and other factors that go beyond traditional security affairs. The white paper discussed these factors in the context of national security and the “new era”, which Xi Jinping asserts began around 2017 and marks the evolution of the PRC from a developing power to a global one. The white paper framed a comprehensive approach to national security as necessary to counter an increasingly hostile global environment, wherein parties are cooperating to undermine, contain, and divide the PRC. The paper called for expanding PRC leadership in international security initiatives and mechanisms, such as the PRC-proposed Global Security Initiative, in accordance with its comprehensive approach to national security. The paper illustrates how the PRC seeks to move to the center of the world stage and reshape global governance in ways that align more closely with PRC interests and principles.

The white paper identifies political stability and the preservation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the foundations of national security. The paper frames political upheaval as a significant threat that could derail the continued ascent of the PRC and jeopardize the attainment of its strategic interests. The paper emphasizes the need for resistance to liberalism and “westernization” in order to preserve the CCP ideology and national unity.

Key Takeaways

- **Russia:** CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping paid an official visit to Moscow for the annual Russian Victory Day and used the opportunity to highlight the PRC-Russia strategic partnership. The visit illustrated how the PRC and Russia are supporting one another’s expansionism and opposition to the United States.
- **Russia:** Senior North Korean military officers attended the Victory Day parade, highlighting the growing military relationship between North Korea and Russia. These officers had prominent roles in the deployment of North Korean soldiers for combat operations in Kursk Oblast.
- **PRC:** The PRC published a white paper that further codified its comprehensive approach to national security. The paper identified political stability and the preservation of the CCP in particular as the foundations of national security.

Cross-Strait

Relations

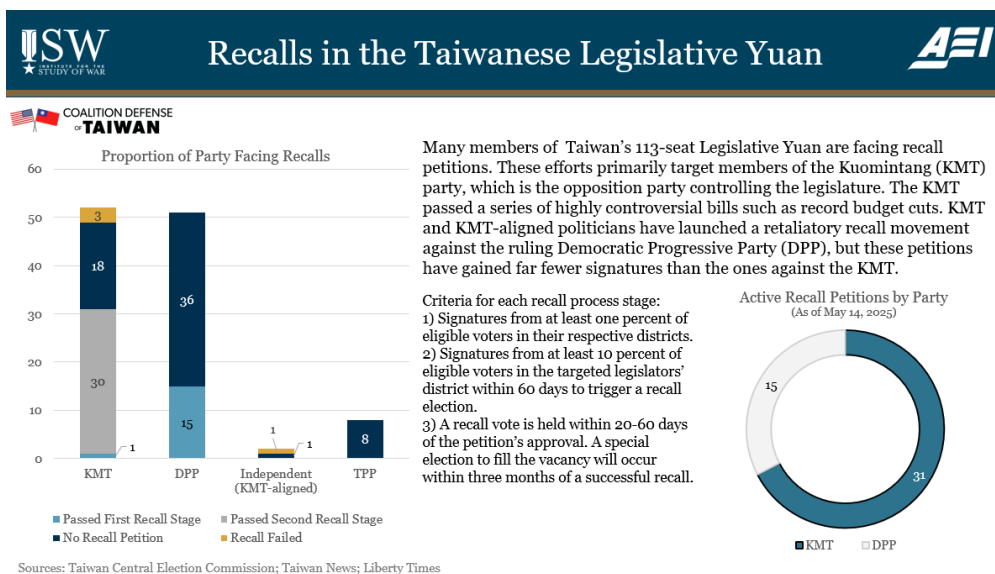
Taiwan

Recall petitions against 30 KMT legislators have acquired enough signatures to pass the second stage of the recall process, pending verification by the Central Election Commission (CEC). Some KMT members are facing criminal investigations on suspicion of forging signatures for recall campaigns against the DPP, suggesting that the KMT is struggling to mobilize supporters for its own recall efforts against the DPP. The Tainan District Prosecutors’ Office charged 11 suspects for recall petition fraud, nine of whom were high-level KMT party officials, and searched the KMT Tainan office.[14] Prosecutors found 3,163 fraudulent signatures across 2 DPP legislator recall petitions: 1,934 for Lin Chun-hsien and 1,679 for Wang Ting-yu.[15] Those indicted are accused of forging signatures from the KMT party member list to obtain enough signatures for a recall in exchange for financial compensation from the KMT branch director and director general.[16] An additional 37 individuals associated with the case will have deferred prosecution and may be fined.[17] These individuals include KMT staffers and their friends and family.

Eleven Pingtung County KMT officials were called for questioning on May 14 over 1,521 invalid recall signatures against DPP Indigenous Legislator Saidhai Tahovecah, and eight locations were raided in New Taipei, Taichung, Hualien, and Pingtung.[18] The KMT members included the chief secretary of the local KMT office and an aide to the KMT Legislator Lu Hsien-yi. They are also accused of forging signatures of KMT party member lists. KMT lawmaker Hsu Yu-chen had previously called the Taiwan CEC’s referral of petition fraud to prosecutors “unfair” and cited how fraudulent signatures were reported after voting ended in the past; CEC Chairman Lee Chin-yung refuted Hsu, stating the current

situation is incomparable and that the KMT is engaging in “organized, systemic criminal behavior.”^[19] The KMT has struggled to amass signatures to meet recall process thresholds in spite of its deep institutional influence in both local and national politics. The CEC referred 19 recall petitions targeting the DPP to prosecutors in response to suspicions of fraud in April 2025, and similar investigations are underway in other cities — Taipei, New Taipei, Keelung, Taichung, and Kaohsiung.^[20]

The second-stage deadline for recall petition signatures to trigger recall elections has passed for most opposition legislators. Thirty KMT recall petitions have been submitted to the CEC for verification that the second-stage signature threshold has been met.^[21] Four petitions, three for KMT legislators and one from the KMT-aligned independent, have failed due to insufficient signatures during the 60-day period. KMT Legislator Lin Pei-hsiang of Keelung is the only pending recall petition with a deadline of May 23.^[22] DPP recall petitions were initiated later than those against the KMT, so their second-stage deadlines are between May 31 and June 24. The DPP only needs to flip six seats in the Legislative Yuan (LY) to regain the majority, so the 30 opposition-KMT legislators facing recall votes upon CEC verification present a potential for control of the LY to flip in the coming months. Many of the recall votes will occur in KMT strongholds, which will make flipping the legislative seats more difficult for the DPP.



The PRC may view Taiwan’s political acrimony as an opportunity to further “Green Terror” narratives linking Taiwanese President William Lai Ching-te to “authoritarianism.” KMT Chairman Eric Chu compared President Lai’s DPP to fascist Germany to connect Lai with Nazism.^[23] Chu’s comments echo PRC information operations framing Lai’s anti-espionage efforts and related policies as “authoritarian.” Chu’s rhetoric aligns with KMT “Green Terror” narratives referencing Taiwan’s “White Terror” authoritarian period, as well as similar narratives propagated by the PRC. KMT efforts to amplify PRC narratives could reflect KMT and PRC intent to frame PRC interventions as justified and, like Russia and the PRC’s fight against fascism, historically inevitable.

China

The United States and PRC have agreed to a 90-day pause on reciprocal tariffs effective May 14. PRC rhetoric has portrayed itself as victorious in the trade war, as the United States has failed to exact any trade policy commitments beyond the mutual removal of reciprocal tariff measures. US and PRC officials, led by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and PRC Vice-Premier He Lifeng, met in Geneva and announced a trade deal on May 11, stating that both parties will reduce tariff rates by 115 percent.[24] The United States will still retain the initial 20 percent tariff for the PRC's failure to control the fentanyl trade, the 10 percent blanket tariff against all trading partners, and the closure of the *de minimis* loophole. The PRC will retain its agricultural tariffs from February and March and a 10 percent flat tariff but will remove nontariff countermeasures.[25] The United States had a 145 percent tariff increase against the PRC under the Trump administration prior to this agreement. The tariffs were meant to punish currency manipulation, reduce the trade deficit, combat the flow of fentanyl, and protect domestic American industry. The PRC has taken the hardest stance against the United States' tariffs among all American trade partners and engaged in a tit-for-tat tariff increase to 125 percent at its peak. The 90-day pause has no guarantees requiring the PRC to act against currency manipulation or trade imbalances, indicating a failure of American tariff pressure to exact any concrete concessions and does not necessarily indicate a long-term agreement will be reached.[26]

The spokesperson for the PRC Ministry of Commerce blamed the United States for the trade war as it called for America to “fully rectify its erroneous practice of imposing unilateral tariffs.”[27] The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs released an English-language propaganda video on April 29 criticizing American tariff policy and stating the PRC will never back down.[28] The video stated “the US will keep flip-flopping and playing hardball but China will stand firm.” The PRC is therefore interpreting the trade deal as a capitulation of American tariff policy.[29]

Northeast

Asia

North Korea

North Korea tested short-range ballistic missiles and simulated potential nuclear attack on the United States and South Korea, likely to signal its growing nuclear capabilities to the United States and Russia. North Korean state media announced Kim Jong Un's visit to a launch test of nuclear capable short-range tactical ballistic missile (SRBM) and a 600mm multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) on May 8. Kim emphasized the importance of strengthening the credibility of tactical nuclear weapons systems and maintaining full combat readiness of North Korean nuclear forces. He also justified North Korea's development of nuclear capabilities by blaming the United States and its allies for escalating tensions in the region.[30]

North Korea has publicly revealed facilities and exercises showing the progress of its nuclear weapons system development roughly every month in 2025.[31] This trend likely reflects North Korea's increasing confidence in its nuclear capabilities. North Korean missile enhancements could be sold to Russia, enhancing Russian capabilities in Ukraine and providing an economic opportunity for North Korea.[32]

Kim Jong Un inspected an artillery shell factory and ordered increased production of the shells on May 7.[33] The shells are likely intended to be provided to Russia for the war in Ukraine. Kim praised the facilities' modernization and increased shell production capacity, with their shell output having increased to four times the average annual level and nearly twice the peak-year level. Kim ordered the production of even more shells to bolster artillery forces and enhance the army's combat efficiency. Kim also urged the factory to focus on developing and producing "more intelligent, high-speed, precision and multifunctional machine-building equipment" to further enhance the munitions industry.

North Korea has supplied millions of artillery shells to support Russia in its war effort. Reuters reported that North Korea delivered nearly 16,000 containers of munitions to Russia via ships and trains.[34] Kim Jong Un's recent call to ramp up shell production indicates a normalization of these arms transfers and serves as a public declaration of North Korea's active support for Russia in the Ukraine conflict.

South Korea

Leading South Korean presidential candidate Lee Jae-myung from the Democratic Party (DP) has advocated for cooperation with the PRC and Russia, while maintaining an alliance with the United States. Lee leads opinion polls at 51 percent, ahead of Kim Moon-soo from the People Power Party (PPP) at 13 percent and Lee Jun-seok of the Reform Party (RP) at nine percent as of May 14.[35] Former Acting President Han Duck-soo withdrew from the race on May 11 after Kim secured the final nomination as the presidential candidate from the PPP.[36] Lee Jae-myung emphasized the need for a balanced diplomatic approach, saying that South Korea should "maintain good relations not only with the United States, but also with China and Russia," during a campaign rally speech on May 13. Lee also said that it is not in South Korea's interest to interfere in cross-Straits issues. Lee described his approach as "pragmatic diplomacy" focused on national interest over ideological alignment, which he also advocated for during his 2022 presidential bid. His conservative rivals criticized this stance. PPP candidate Kim Moon-soo said a pro-PRC and anti-United States foreign policy is "unacceptable," adding that any cooperation with the PRC must be grounded in the strength of the United States-South Korea alliance.[37] RP candidate Lee Jun-seok accused Lee Jae-myung of being ideologically consumed by the "China Dream," and saying that Lee would avoid offending the PRC even at the expense of South Korean security in a May 13 social media post.[38]

Lee Jae-myung's campaign of "pragmatic diplomacy" signals that South Korea may move away from alliances based on ideological alignment to partnerships grounded in national interest, which is a direction that the PRC would likely welcome. The PRC remains South Korea's largest trade and export

partner as of 2024 and has eased import controls on South Korean goods ahead of the presidential election.[39] Lee has adopted a balanced tone of maintaining positive relations with both countries to win moderate voters amid growing anti-PRC sentiment in South Korea.[40] Lee may pivot toward closer ties with the PRC if he calculates that stronger economic gains can be achieved through such a relationship, once elected. The PRC will likely increase its economic incentives and diplomatic engagement to build favorable ties with a potentially PRC-friendly administration under Lee.

People’s Liberation Army (PLA) intelligence services conducted espionage activities in South Korea targeting South Korean and US military forces. This is the first confirmed case of PRC espionage activity in South Korea since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992. The Korean military police confirmed that a PRC national arrested in Jeju in March 2025 was an agent affiliated with an intelligence agency under the PLA Joint Staff Department. The individual is suspected of recruiting an active-duty South Korean soldier to leak sensitive information, including US-ROK joint military exercise plans.[41] South Korean media outlet *KBS* reported that the espionage activities were conducted by at least 10 individuals, both PRC and South Korean nationals. They reportedly tried to steal sensitive information related to the South Korean Armed Forces and US forces in South Korea (USFK) a total of 20 times. The stolen intelligence included USFK’s operational and joint military exercise plans. The South Korean military authorities also revealed that the PRC agent engaged in information operations in Taiwan against anti-PRC organizations and Taiwan Independence separatists.[42] The agent further inquired about South Korean guidelines for nuclear operations and materials related to advanced weapons shared with the US and Japan in December 2024, amid the South Korean leadership vacuum.[43]

This is the third known case of a PRC national engaging in intelligence-gathering activities in South Korea in 2025. The PRC’s overt use of civilians for intelligence collection is becoming increasingly aggressive especially amid the Presidential vacancy.[44] South Korea stands on the frontline of the PRC’s regional expansion efforts and could be vulnerable to PRC influence operations due to its geographic proximity.

South Korea’s current espionage law cannot punish the PRC agent, however. The current law only punishes espionage linked to the ‘enemy state’, which refers to North Korea. Spies with ties to other states can only be charged with other military related laws, not for espionage activities.[45] The South Korean National Assembly has discussed amending the law, but it has not yet progressed due to strong disagreements between DP and PPP lawmakers.[46]

Southeast Asia

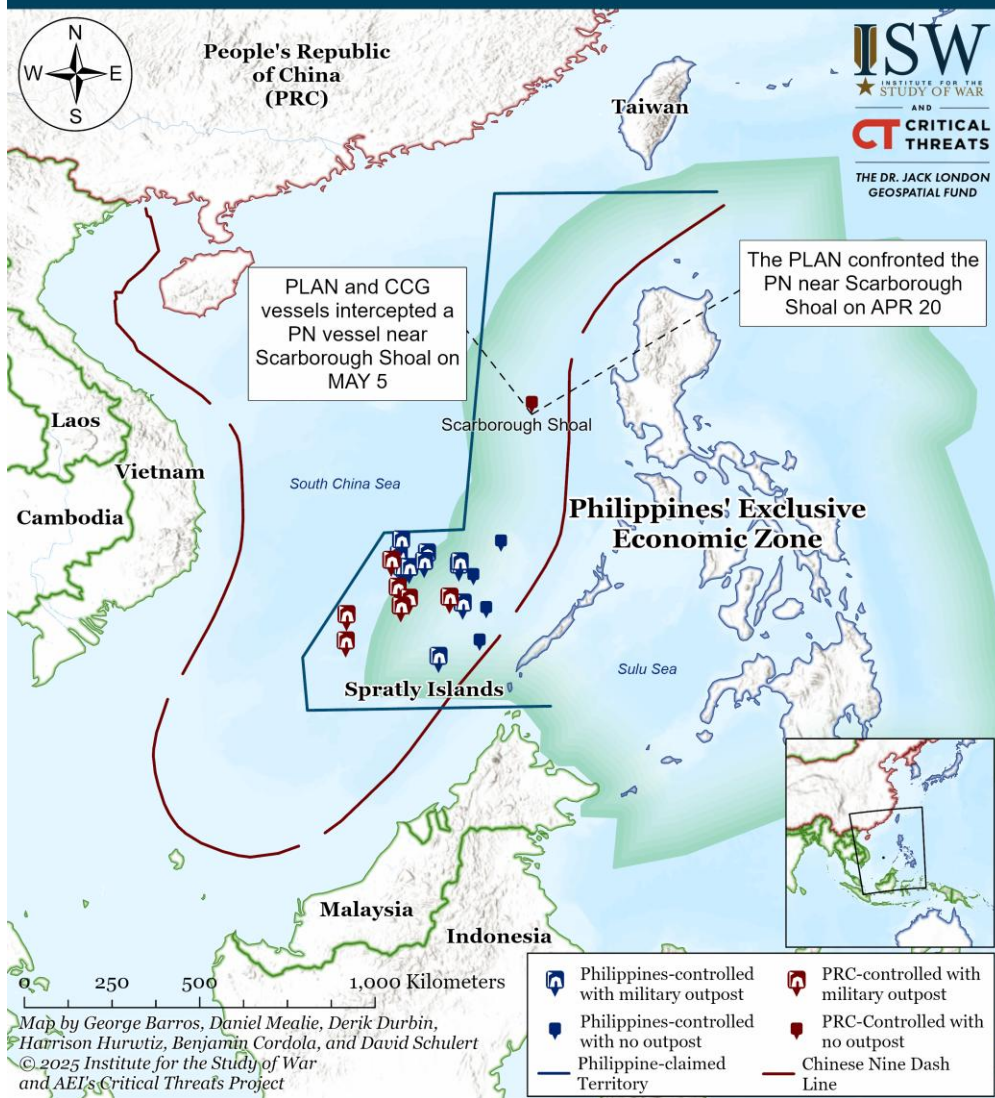
Philippines

The Philippine Navy and PLA Navy have confronted each other twice in Scarborough Shoal in recent weeks, marking an escalation from standard Coast Guard confrontations between the two countries. The Armed Forces of the Philippines reported that two PLA Navy frigates and a China Coast Guard (CCG) cutter intercepted the BRP *Emilio Jacinto* approximately 12 nautical miles from Scarborough Shoal.[47] The PLA Southern Theater Command (STC) stated that the

BRP *Emilio Jacinto* was expelled from PRC-claimed waters for violating PRC sovereignty.[48] The PLA used similar rhetoric for an incident on April 20, when the PLA warned off a Philippine Navy vessel near the Scarborough Shoal and urged the Philippines to halt its “provocative” actions.[49] PLA STC Spokesperson Zhao Zhiwei stated after this incident that STC troops would continue to defend PRC sovereignty within the South China Sea, a likely indication that the presence of PLA Naval vessels will become more common in disputed waters.

Confrontations between PRC and Philippine ships in the South China Sea occur regularly, most commonly involving Coast Guard vessels from the two countries. The Philippines has long preferred to confront PRC forces with only Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) vessels to avoid escalation, with the Philippine Navy acting as an observer for routine missions. Tensions between the PRC and the Philippines have been relatively low compared to this time last year but could increase if naval confrontations between the two countries continue.

PRC and Philippine Naval Confrontations April and May 2025



South Asia

Pakistan's use of PRC-made military systems in combat with India provides the PRC with rare real-world data on the performance of its weapons against Western platforms and Indian tactics. US officials stated that the Pakistan Air Force used a JF-17 fighter jet co-produced by the PRC and Pakistan to shoot down an Indian Rafale jet during recent hostilities.^[50] Indian officials stated that Pakistani forces also used the Chinese-made PL-15 air-to-air missile.^[51] Pakistani authorities also released footage of the JF-17 neutralizing India's prized S-400 "Triumf" air defense system.^[52] These events may allow the PRC to collect data on radar tracking, missile guidance accuracy, electronic warfare resistance, and the survivability of its systems in contested airspace. The PRC can also evaluate Indian Air Force responses to its platforms, yielding insights into Indian tactics, command responsiveness, and countermeasure deployment.^[53]

The PRC has supplied the majority of Pakistan’s imported military equipment in recent years, including fighter jets, air defense systems, and naval vessels.[54] The widespread use of PRC systems across Pakistan’s military means the PRC could gain a broad spectrum of performance data across multiple domains. This conflict serves as an opportunity to validate its export platforms in combat and make iterative improvements based on real-world feedback.[55]

The PRC has publicly maintained a stance of neutrality regarding the recent India-Pakistan hostilities. The PRC expressed regret over India's military actions and called for both sides to exercise restraint and prioritize peace and stability.[56] The PRC’s close relationship with Pakistan and ongoing border disputes with India impugn the PRC’s claimed neutrality, however. A PRC delegation visited Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry in Islamabad to receive briefings on the situation on the morning of the hostilities, highlighting Beijing’s quiet but active interest in the conflict. [57] PRC spokesperson Lin Jian stated on May 8 that the PRC was “not familiar with the matter” when asked about Pakistan’s use of PRC-made fighter jets in the conflict.[58]

Latin America

The PRC and Latin American states agreed to enhance economic and diplomatic cooperation during a meeting of the China-Latin America and Caribbean Community (CELAC) forum. PRC rhetoric urged “multilateralism” and “Global South” solidarity, likely intended to contrast with the United States’ policy toward Latin America. Xi Jinping attended the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the China-CELAC Forum in Beijing on May 13, where he and PRC Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi urged solidarity within the “Global South” bloc against “unilateralism and protectionism.” Xi delivered a speech where he announced the provision of 66 billion yuan (9.14 billion US dollars) in credit funds to Latin America and the Caribbean and the creation of new educational and aid provision initiatives in the region.[59] Xi’s speech indirectly referenced the United States’ tariffs and the United States-China trade war, decrying “bullying and isolationism.”[60] The China-CELAC Forum followed a BRICS meeting in Brasilia, which the PRC similarly used to advance narratives on Ukraine, the Middle East, and the international order more broadly.[61]

The PRC is likely aiming to present itself as an alternative to the United States amid US tariffs, sanctions, and suggestions of military action against Latin American states. CCP media has been publishing Spanish-language news portraying the United States as a bully and referencing the United States’ past “imperialism” and “interventionism” in Latin America since President Donald Trump began his second term.[62] The PRC will likely continue its efforts to increase its influence in Latin America and the Caribbean as part of its efforts to become the leader of the “Global South.”



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