

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



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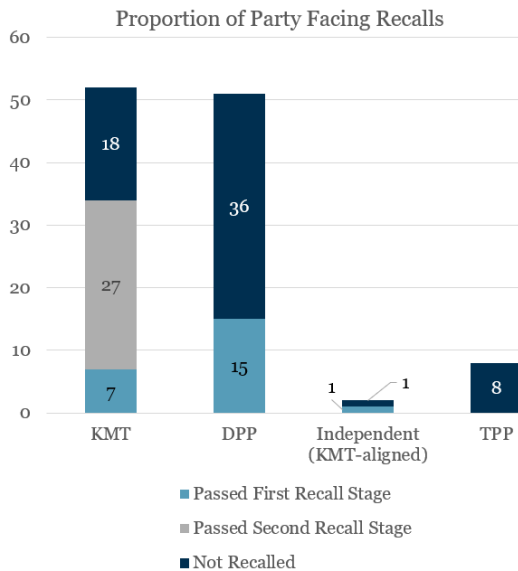
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The China–Taiwan Weekly Update is a joint product from the Institute for the Study of War and the American Enterprise Institute. The update supports the ISW–AEI Coalition Defense of Taiwan project, which assesses Chinese campaigns against Taiwan, examines 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.

Petitions to recall legislators from the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) have continued to advance in Taiwan. Around 30 KMT legislators will likely face recall votes in the coming weeks, giving the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) an opportunity to regain control of the Taiwanese legislature. Petitions to recall 27 KMT legislators have collected enough signatures to trigger recall votes and are now awaiting approval from the Central Election Commission (CEC). Another two petitions are just a few hundred signatures short of meeting the threshold as of May 8. Recall petitions need signatures from 10 percent of the voters in an electoral district to trigger a referendum to recall the representative of that district from the Legislative Yuan (LY).^[1] There are separately 15 recall petitions targeting DPP legislators, but none are currently close to getting enough signatures to trigger a recall vote.^[2]

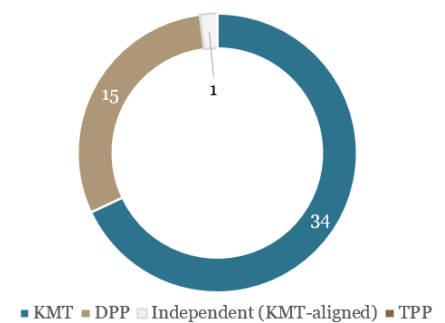
 COALITION DEFENSE
of **TAIWAN**


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 People's Party (DPP), but these petitions have gained far fewer signatures than the ones against the KMT.

Criteria for each stage to the recall process:

- 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.

Party Breakdown of Recall Petitions
(As of May 8, 2025)



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

The KMT-led opposition has had the majority of seats in the 113-member LY since the January 2024 elections. The DPP must flip six seats to claim the majority. Flipping those seats is significantly more difficult than collecting signatures from 10 percent of the voters in an electoral district. A recall vote requires a simple majority in a district (equaling at least one quarter of the total voters in the district) to support removing its legislator, at which point a special election is triggered in that district. Nevertheless, the high number of recall petitions targeting KMT legislators makes it easier for the DPP to flip at least six seats.

KMT-supported petitions to recall DPP legislators have been far less successful and encumbered by fraud. The CEC referred 19 recall petitions targeting the DPP to prosecutors in response to suspicions of fraud in April 2025. Taiwanese authorities later detained local KMT officials after confirming that some recall petitions included false signatures.[3] CEC Chairman Lee Chin-yung accused the KMT of “organized criminal activity” on May 7.[4] The struggle of the KMT to mobilize supporters may reflect weak public support, which is noteworthy given that the KMT is the founding political party in Taiwan and has the deepest local and institutional roots of any party.

DPP control of the LY would allow it to restore funding for key government programs that help Taiwan better resist aggression from the People's Republic of China (PRC). The DPP initiated the recall petition campaigns largely in response to the KMT-led opposition passing unprecedented government budget cuts and freezes, targeting the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mainland Affairs Council, Control Yuan, and other government bodies.[5] A DPP-controlled legislature could unfreeze the funding to these bodies and approve special budgets, including military procurements, until a new

budget bill is passed. Reuters reported in February 2025 that Taiwanese officials have planned to propose a special budget for a military purchase from the United States worth millions of US dollars, which would require LY approval.[6] A DPP-controlled legislature could also approve nominees to fill vacancies in the Constitutional Court, which would restore functionality to the court after months of paralysis. A renewed Constitutional Court could in turn reverse the controversial budget cuts that the KMT-led opposition passed.

The PRC may still benefit from the political discord in Taiwan. The PRC has exploited this episode to portray the DPP as an authoritarian oppressor, citing the recall petitions and arrests of KMT officials.[7] The PRC seeks to erode public support for the DPP and propagate the narrative that Taiwan cannot effectively self-govern.

The Philippines is deepening its military cooperation with other Indo-Pacific countries in response to PRC aggression. The Philippines and Japan agreed on April 29 to begin negotiations over combined exercises, intelligence-sharing, and logistical support.[8] These negotiations build upon the Reciprocal Access Agreement that the two countries reached in July 2024.[9] The agreement eliminated some restrictions on the countries cooperating in combined exercises and disaster relief operations. The Philippines and Japan have increased their military cooperation significantly in recent years, citing concerns over PRC maritime assertiveness. The Philippines and New Zealand separately signed a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA) on April 30, allowing both countries to conduct combined exercises and other cooperative military activities in one another's territory.[10] The Philippines has similar agreements with the United States and Australia and is pursuing another such agreement with France. Additionally, Philippine Navy spokesperson Rear Admiral Roy Vincent Trinidad said that the Philippine and Taiwanese navies are discussing cooperation in the Taiwan Strait in participation with other regional partners.[11] These talks follow the Philippines on April 22 easing restrictions on its officials visiting Taiwan to foster greater economic relations.[12]

The PRC has repeatedly criticized the Philippines for trying to expand its military cooperation with other countries, accusing the Philippines of acting provocatively and being a “puppet of the United States.”[13] The PRC has established a pattern of posturing aggressively in response to military cooperation between the Philippines and other countries.[14]

Key Takeaways

- **Taiwan.** Petitions to recall legislators from the opposition KMT have continued to advance. Around 30 legislators will likely face recall votes in the coming weeks, giving the ruling DPP an opportunity to regain control of the legislature. DPP control of the legislature would allow it to restore key government programs that help Taiwan better resist PRC aggression.
- **Philippines.** The Philippines is deepening its military cooperation with its neighbors in response to PRC aggression. The Philippines and Japan are discussing conducting combined

exercises, intelligence sharing, and mutual logistical support. The Philippines also signed a military cooperation deal with New Zealand and is discussing greater cooperation with Taiwan.

Taiwan

Taiwan accused the PRC of pressuring Somalia to ban Taiwanese passport-holders from entering or transiting through the country. Somalia adopted PRC rhetoric, citing the “one China principle” to justify its decision. Somalia’s civil aviation authority issued an order on April 22, which took effect on April 30, that Taiwanese passports would no longer provide valid entry, exit, or transit through Somalia. The move made Somalia one of a small handful of countries—along with Georgia, Moldova, and Venezuela—to ban Taiwanese passport-holders.^[15] Most countries do not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan but still recognize Taiwanese passports.^[16]

Somalia’s decision was motivated by its grievances over Taiwan’s relationship with Somaliland—an unrecognized self-governing breakaway region that Somalia considers to be its own territory. Taiwan opened a representative office in Somaliland in 2020, provided it with aid, including military training, and sent officials to the Somaliland presidential inauguration in December 2024. Somalia considers these interactions to be a violation of its sovereignty. It issued its travel ban five days before Taiwanese Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung was scheduled to visit Somaliland.^[17] The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commended Somalia’s commitment to the “one China principle” and stated its opposition to any official interactions between Somaliland and Taiwanese officials.^[18]

Somalia’s decision was also likely motivated by a desire to please the PRC or in response to a PRC request. Somalia cited the “one China principle” and UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 to justify its decision, both of which Beijing regularly uses in its “lawfare” to delegitimize Taiwanese sovereignty. The one China principle is the PRC stance that Taiwan is part of “one China” and that the PRC is the only legitimate representative of China. UN Resolution 2758 was the 1971 resolution that admitted the PRC into the United Nations and expelled representatives of the Republic of China (ROC). The resolution text did not mention the status of Taiwan, but the PRC regularly uses it to claim that Taiwan belongs to the PRC under international law. Taiwan’s foreign ministry condemned Somalia’s decision to restrict Taiwanese nationals’ travel “at China’s instigation” and its misinterpretation of UN Resolution 2758.^[19]

China

The PRC used the BRICS High-Level Representatives Meeting on National Security Affairs in Brazil to advance PRC narratives on Ukraine, the Middle East, and the

international order more broadly in order to create the impression of consensus despite divergent interests between BRICS member states.[20] The PRC rhetoric aims to portray the PRC as a leader of the "Global South" and a neutral party in Russia's war in Ukraine, despite PRC support to the Russian economy and defense industrial base. The BRICS bloc—Brazil, Russia, India, the PRC, and South Africa, along with new members Iran, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt—met in Brasilia on April 30.[21] PRC Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi touted BRICS countries' contributions to “mediating a ceasefire in Gaza” and “facilitating the exchange of prisoners between Russia and Ukraine.”[22] Wang called on BRICS members to adhere to the UN Charter and “universally recognized principles of international law.”[23]

This PRC participation in BRICS is meant to coalition-build and position itself as a leader of “Global South” states that seek an alternative to a US-led global order. PRC rhetoric toward the “Global South” supports its efforts to create the impression of international consensus around issues central to the PRC, including the international community’s stance on Taiwan. Wang Yi’s statement on the UN Charter followed US criticism of the PRC at the UN Security Council session in late April for misusing UN Resolution 2758 to block Taiwan’s participation in the international system.[24] The PRC readout on this most recent BRICS national security meeting also emphasized the need to oppose tariffs, a shift from previously vaguer language that emphasized multilateralism.[25]

Efforts to expand BRICS membership support the PRC's objective of creating the impression of a united global front. The delegates in Brasilia could not reach consensus on a joint statement, however, indicating that the PRC may prioritize the impression of consensus over policy agreement between member states. Ethiopia and Egypt disagreed with language on reform of the United Nations, and *Reuters* cited an unnamed source who said that the PRC advocated for the statement to take a harsher tone amid US tariffs.[26]

PRC rhetoric on Russia and the Middle East seeks to position the PRC as a neutral arbiter amid ongoing global conflicts. The PRC actively supports the economies of both Iran and Russia as each country’s largest trading partner and a purchaser of both countries’ oil amid international sanctions. The PRC likewise supplies dual-use goods that support the war efforts of both Iran and Russia, as well as North Korea. PRC narratives on its role in the international system aim to counteract impressions of PRC support to US adversaries while garnering support for issues the PRC views as central.

The PRC removed Central Military Commission (CMC) member Miao Hua as a deputy to the National People’s Congress (NPC). Admiral Miao was previously suspended from his role as director of the CMC’s Political Work Department in November 2024 as part of Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption campaign. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) suspended Miao from his role in the CMC on suspicion of unspecified “serious violations of discipline.” Miao was the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA)’s top political commissar, responsible for ensuring adherence to CCP ideology

within the military.[27] His suspension from the NPC indicates that the investigation against him is ongoing and serious; NPC delegates can only be arrested or criminally tried with the consent of the presidium of the current session of the NPC, or the NPC Standing Committee. Expelling Miao from the NPC removes these legal protections and makes it easier for authorities to arrest him.[28] The reason for the investigation against Miao is unclear but could be due to corruption or perceived ideological disloyalty.

The punitive measures against Miao Hua are emblematic of CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's continued mistrust of PLA leadership, including their ideological commitment. CMC Vice Chairman He Weidong may also have been arrested or placed under investigation in late March, according to independent reporting and evidenced by his continued and unexplained absence from public events. The CCP has investigated, removed, or otherwise punished several senior military officials since 2023, including former defense ministers Li Shangfu and Wei Fenghe, former PLA Rocket Force Commander Li Yuchao, deputy secretary of the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission Tang Yong, and possibly former director of the CMC Logistic Support Department Zhao Keshi. Some of these purges are related to corruption, particularly in military procurements. Others may be related to perceived ideological disloyalty, as Xi and the CCP leadership have stressed the importance of ideological education in the PLA and the Xi-centered "Chairman Responsibility System." There may also be an element of factional politics, as several of these officials, including Miao, He, and Zhao belong to the "Fujian Clique," one of two major groups of officials that Xi promoted to high roles after working with them earlier in his career.[29] The continued purges of top military officials indicate Xi's continued distrust of his top brass as the PLA approaches key modernization deadlines.

Northeast Asia

Japan

Japan and the PRC accused each other of airspace violations after a Japanese civilian aircraft and a China Coast Guard (CCG) helicopter entered the airspace over the disputed Senkaku Islands. The Japanese Ministry of Defense (MOD) confirmed that a CCG helicopter operated in Japanese airspace over the Senkaku Islands for approximately 15 minutes.[30] The helicopter was launched from one of the four CCG vessels that entered Japan's territorial waters around the Senkakus that day. Japan dispatched two fighter aircrafts and a Coast Guard patrol vessel to investigate and expel the CCG helicopter. Japan issued a "very severe protest" with PRC representatives in response to the CCG's activities.[31]

CCG spokesperson Liu Dejun claimed that the CCG helicopter was responding to an "illegal entrance of PRC airspace above the Diaoyu Islands" by a Japanese civilian aircraft.[32] The PRC MFA lodged protests with the Japanese government, claimed that the Japanese aircraft was operated by "Japanese right-wing extremists," and demanded that the Japanese government "understand the seriousness of the situation." [33]

This incident marked the first time that a CCG helicopter violated Japanese airspace and the fourth time that PRC government aircraft entered Japanese airspace without permission.[34] The Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea are administered by Japan but also claimed by the PRC and Taiwan. CCG vessels have been intruding the territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands almost every month since Japan nationalized the islands in September 2012.[35] CCG activities around the islands have increased in recent years to assert the PRC's sovereignty claim. CCG vessels were seen patrolling around the Senkaku Islands for 353 days in 2024, and made their longest intrusion into the islands' territorial waters in March, 2025.[36] PRC officials urged Japan to cease "illegal activities" and stressed that the CCG will continue law enforcement activities around the Senkaku Islands to protect the PRC's sovereignty and maritime rights.

North Korea

North Korea revealed a new road-mobile, nuclear-capable weapon system. North Korea has made significant strides in its nuclear development and further accelerated its military modernization in 2025. North Korean state media reported that Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) General Secretary Kim Jong Un visited a manufacturing plant producing new tanks.[37] Kim emphasized the importance of weapons modernization during the visit. Kim inspected the development of tracked transporter erector launchers (TELs) for the nuclear-capable, 600mm multiple launch rocket system, according to NK News.[38] North Korea first unveiled a TEL made from modified PRC equipment in 2012 and has since continued to develop its manufacturing capability. The North Korean military held a ceremony for the delivery of 250 TEL units in 2024.[39] This military factory, located in Kusong, is surrounded by the headquarters for the North Korean drone program and new weapons development facilities.[40] North Korea announced a five-year defense development plan in 2021 to enhance nuclear strike capabilities.[41]

North Korea has announced new developments in its nuclear weapons modernization and capabilities roughly once a month since the beginning of 2025. Kim observed a missile launch test conducted from the newly commissioned destroyer *Choe Hyon* and ordered the acceleration of naval nuclear armament for national defense on April 28 and 29.[42] North Korea publicly revealed a nuclear submarine construction site for the first time in March 2025, once again underscoring the importance of nuclear armament. The submarine is reportedly capable of equipping both nuclear-powered engines and nuclear strategic guided missiles. This marks a major development in integrating nuclear technology into North Korean military platforms.[43] North Korea's messaging and announcements of new technological developments show confidence in its nuclear capability and prioritized development of nuclear-capable systems across all services of the military.

South Korea

Democratic Party (DP) candidate Lee Jae-myung leads in polling for the presidential election set for June 3 despite legal challenges. The conservative camp struggles to form a joint bloc, making it more likely that Lee will win. The final candidates for the presidential election are (DP candidate Lee Jae-myung, People Power Party (PPP) candidate Kim Moon-soo, independent Han Duck-soo, and New Reform Party (NRP) candidate Lee Jun-seok. The South Korean

Supreme Court found DP candidate Lee guilty in an election violation case on May 1 despite a previous acquittal, but the Seoul High Court set his sentencing to after the election, allowing him to run in the presidential race.[44] A sentence exceeding a fine of 1 million KRW or approximately 717 US dollars disqualifies an individual from running for or holding office, mandating an incumbent to resign from the position.[45] At the same time, Article 84 of the South Korean Constitution protects the president from criminal prosecution while in office.[46] There is an ongoing debate over whether the term “prosecution” refers to indictment or also encompasses the trial process. The DP is fast-tracking legislation that could suspend the trial of an elected president as a result.[47] Lee saw a 4.3 percentage point decline in recent polls compared to pre-sentencing, though he remains the leading candidate.[48] Lee’s legal challenges offer the conservative camp, composed of PPP candidate Kim Moon-soo, independent Han Duck-soo, and NRP candidate Lee Jun-seok, an opportunity to shift voter sentiment in its favor. Internal divisions are undermining the conservative bloc’s ability to capitalize on DP candidate Lee’s legal controversy, however. The three candidates are struggling to merge their campaigns under a single candidate, largely due to conflicting ambitions and differing views on former President Yoon Suk-yeol’s controversial martial law declaration.[49] A failure to consolidate the campaign into a single candidate would make the PPP unlikely to defeat DP’s Lee.

The PRC likely assesses that a victory by DP candidate Lee’s presidency would be the best outcome for its economic and diplomatic interests. Lee has characterized his policy vision as “pragmatism,” emphasizing a focus on national interest over ideology and political factions. Lee blamed the PRC for the current poor relations with South Korea on April 21, however. Lee’s seemingly assertive stance on the PRC underscores his shift from traditional left-leaning policies, which are relatively PRC-friendly. This stance may reflect growing anti-PRC sentiment among South Korean voters. Lee’s foreign policy during the presidential race is likely to maintain a stance of strengthening the alliance with the United States and distancing itself from the PRC. Lee has previously argued that South Korea should avoid getting caught up in a “new Cold War” between the United States and the PRC, however, suggesting that his presidency could mark a shift away from the pro-United States positions adopted by the Yoon administration. All three candidates in the conservative bloc share the view that the PRC’s global ambitions should be contained but that it remains an important trade and regional partner to South Korea.

The PRC continues to signal its intent to strengthen diplomatic and economic relations with South Korea, trying to cultivate favorable ties ahead of the upcoming administration. The PRC approved the first commercial concert of a K-pop group since the 2017 “K-Culture Ban,” signaling its latest move to ease restrictions and improve bilateral ties with South Korea. The Cultural and Tourism Bureau of Fuzhou City approved a commercial concert of EPEX, an eight-member music group composed entirely of South Korean nationals, scheduled for May 31.[50] This would mark the first commercial concert by a K-pop group in the PRC in eight years. The Korea Entertainment Producers Association, a group of music industry producers, reportedly announced that it will hold the “Dream Concert” with around 40,000 attendees at the Sanya Sports Stadium in Hainan Province, PRC, on September 26.[51] The reports follow two performances on April 12 by South Korean musicians in the PRC, which were held as part of commemorative events rather than commercial tours.[52]

The PRC imposed a ban on the import of South Korean cultural content, restricting access to K-dramas, films, games, and K-pop performances, in retaliation for South Korea's deployment of the US-provided Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in 2017. The potential relaxation of this ban comes after CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping met with South Korean National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik on February 7 and discussed opportunities for cultural exchange.^[53] The foreign ministers of South Korea, the PRC, and Japan met in Tokyo in March 2025 and further discussed cultural exchanges.^[54]

Improved ties with South Korea would also give the PRC increased leverage in countering US-led efforts to economically restrict the PRC through its Asian neighbors, particularly amid the escalating tariff war with the United States.

CDOT-ISW assesses that the CCP holds the following leverage points over each of the South Korean presidential candidates:

Candidate (Party)	United States Policy	PRC Policy
Lee Jae-myung (Democratic Party – DP) 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Korea should form foreign policy based on national interest rather than ideological alignment • Emphasis on the ROK-U.S. alliance and trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the U.S., and Japan <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeal that strengthening the PRC-ROK-Japan alliance to counter President Trump's high tariff policy is in South Korea's national interest 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately manage relations with the PRC, Russia, and North Korea <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote bilateral exchanges in culture, trade, economy, and investment • Appeal the need to manage the stability on the Korean Peninsula together through engagement with North Korea • Strengthen PRC-ROK-Japan trilateral cooperation and drive statements supporting its "One China" policy
Han Duck-soo (Independent) 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes the ROK-U.S. alliance and trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the U.S., and Japan <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen PRC-ROK-Japan alliance to counter President Trump's high tariff policy • Frame the alliance of antagonizing PRC's relations with South Korea • Emphasize underlying conflicts in South Korea-Japan relations and use them to counter the trilateral cooperation 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views the PRC as an important regional partner but emphasizes cross-Straits stability • Expresses that the PRC needs to act based on international standards and shared values <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensify economic coercion as a tool to lead South Korea's concessions
Kim Moon-soo (People Power Party – PPP) 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes the ROK-U.S. alliance and trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the U.S., and Japan • Pledges to secure deals in shipbuilding, LNG, defense industry, semiconductors, and nuclear power <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame the alliance of antagonizing PRC's relations with South Korea • Emphasize underlying conflicts in South Korea-Japan relations and use them to counter the trilateral cooperation 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Cautiously" manage relations with the PRC" • Aligns with the "New Right" ideology, highlighted by anti-communism and pro-Japan historical view <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame Kim as a provocateur of anti-PRC sentiment that undermines economic and diplomatic cooperation with the PRC
Lee Jun-seok (New Reform Party – NRP) 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expresses concerns over President Trump's high-tariff trade policies • Advocates for strengthening ties with European nations • Emphasizes the U.S.-ROK and U.S., ROK and Japan alliances <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen PRC-ROK-Japan alliance to counter President Trump's high tariff policy • Frame the alliance of antagonizing PRC's relations with South Korea • Emphasize underlying conflicts in South Korea-Japan relations and use them to counter the trilateral cooperation 	<p>Candidate's View:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argues for the need to counter the PRC's strategy to dominate the global economy • Expresses that the PRC needs to act based on international standards and shared values <p>CCP Leverage Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote bilateral exchanges in culture, trade, economy, and investment

PLA ships entered the South Korean Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) nearly 330 times in 2024. The PRC has normalized this volume of activity over the past two years to assert its claimed EEZ boundary and expand its control in the Yellow Sea. South Korean newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* reported that 100 PLA incursions have already occurred as of April 2025, signifying a similar frequency to the previous two years. PLA ships entered South Korea's EEZ 360 times in 2023. This volume of incursions is still a significant increase compared to the 2017–2022 annual average of about 200.[55] South Korea and the PRC have overlapping EEZ claims in the Yellow Sea and agreed to establish a Provisional Measure Zone (PMZ) including the overlapping EEZ claims in 2000, banning any activities there except for fishing.[56] The PRC has constructed three installations in the Yellow Sea since 2018, however, adding friction with South Korea. The PRC blocked South Korean research vessel *Onnuri*'s investigation of one of the structures in the Provisional Measure Zone (PMZ) in February 2025.

South Korea and the PRC agreed to establish a subcommittee to discuss the issue at the 3rd South Korea-PRC maritime cooperation talks held on April 23.[57] The PRC chief delegate Hong Liang attempted to deflect South Korea's criticism of its structures by accusing South Korea of hypocrisy, due to its scientific base in Jeodo.[58] Jeodo is a submerged reef located about 149km from South Korea southernmost inhabited island and about 247km from the PRC, lying within the overlapping EEZs of the two countries.[59]

The growing conflict in the Yellow Sea in 2025 reflects the PRC's increasing aggression and expansionist ambitions. The PRC is likely broadening its regional control from the East China Sea into the Yellow Sea. Full PRC control of the Yellow Sea could function as a deterrent against the deployment of US forces in South Korea and South Korean forces to aid Taiwan in the event of a Taiwan contingency.

Southeast

Asia

Philippines

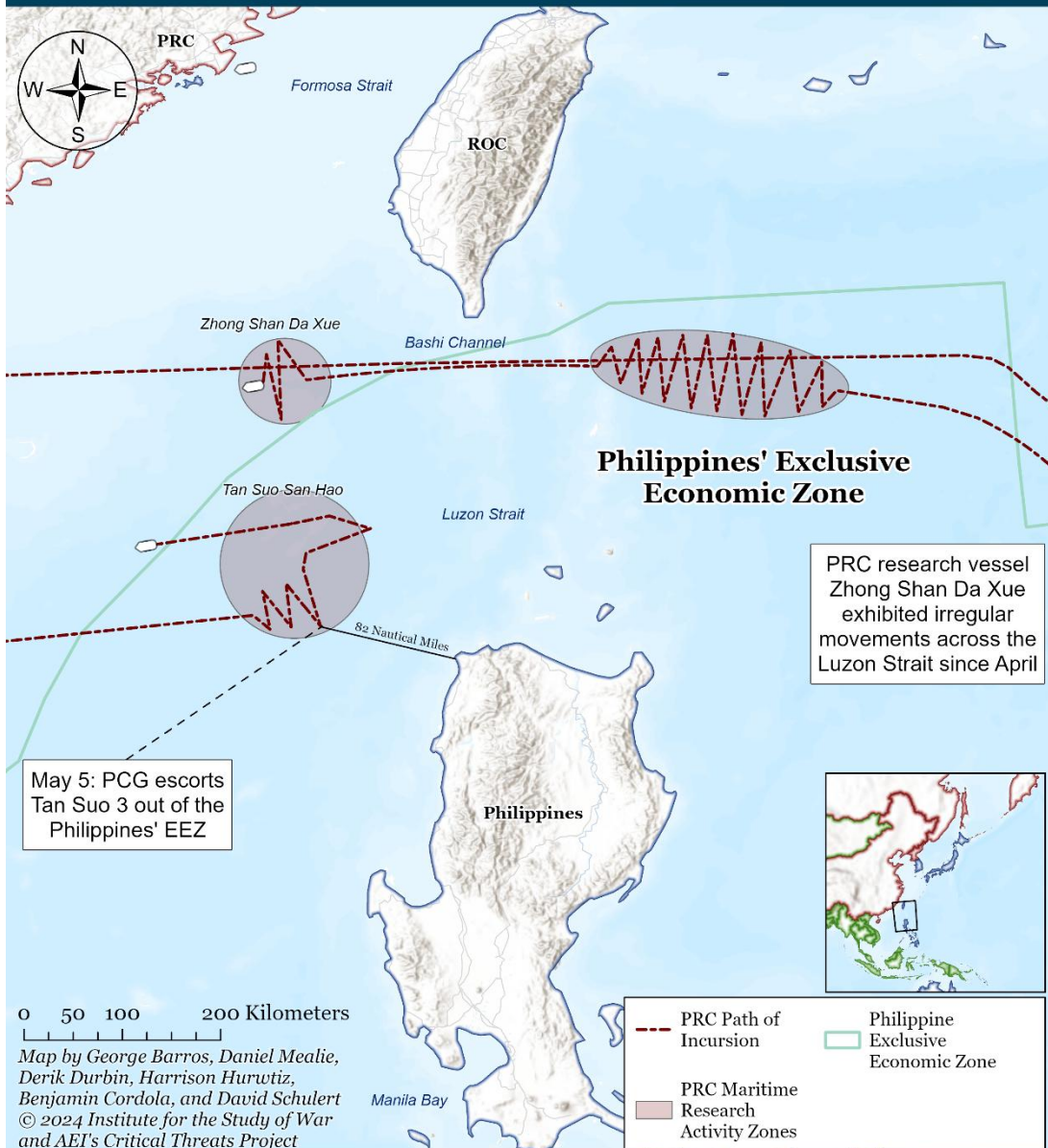
The Philippines arrested a PRC national for suspected interference in the Philippines' upcoming elections. This incident follows a spate of PRC espionage cases targeting the Philippines military and government facilities. The Philippines National Bureau of Investigations arrested the PRC national for allegedly carrying surveillance equipment near the Commission on Elections' main office.[60] The PRC national was allegedly using a device capable of mimicking cell towers and capturing messages within a 3-km radius. The Philippines will hold its midterm congressional elections on May 12. Philippine President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ordered an investigation into suspected foreign interference following a National Security Council investigation revealing PRC information operations.[61] Philippine officials have also accused the PRC Embassy in Manila of paying a local firm to operate "troll farm" disinformation campaigns on Philippine social media.[62] A Philippine Senate investigation revealed that the embassy paid "third party individuals and proxies" to amplify narratives from Beijing to influence the public and spread

divisive political discourse to influence local and national election outcomes.[63] Filipino investigators specifically blamed the PRC for spreading narratives painting the PRC in a positive light and smearing the Marcos administration, specifically for its handling of incidents in the West Philippine Sea. The PRC denied involvement in any election interference and accused Philippine politicians of “playing the China card” to boost their chances of re-election.[64]

Tensions between the PRC and the Philippines have increased under the Marcos administration. Marcos has largely abandoned his predecessor’s “pivot” toward the PRC and away from the United States as violations of Philippine sovereignty and sent ships and planes to contest PRC control over disputed territories, such as Scarborough Shoal. The Marcos administration has also worked to reduce Philippine economic reliance on the PRC and announced the termination of PRC-funded Belt and Road projects in November 2023.[65] The Marcos administration’s investigation is ongoing, so the extent of PRC interference in the 2025 elections is unknown. PRC-friendly politicians, if elected, could influence Philippine legislation and strategy to diminish the Philippines’ resistance to PRC control of the South China Sea, reduce Manila’s engagement with Taiwan, or weaken the United States-Philippine alliance. PRC election interference, or the threat thereof, could also decrease public trust in the legitimacy of the Philippine elections.

The PRC is possibly conducting bathymetric surveys in the strategically significant Luzon Strait between Taiwan and the Philippines. PRC research vessel *Tan Suo 3* conducted survey activities in the Philippines’ northern exclusive economic zone (EEZ) from April 29-May 5, southwest of the Luzon Strait. A manned deep-sea submersible was also present alongside the *Tan Suo 3*, which is its mothership. The Philippines Coast Guard (PCG) accused the PRC of conducting unlawful marine research activities in the Philippines’ EEZ, based on the vessel’s irregular movements and the presence of a rigid hull inflatable boat that appeared to retrieve equipment from the water.[66] The PCG stated that it escorted the *Tan Suo 3* out of the Philippines’ EEZ during a law enforcement operation on May 5.[67]

PRC Marine Research Vessel Activity April-May



The Luzon Strait is a strategically significant maritime chokepoint between the Philippines and Taiwan that acts as a conduit between the South China Sea and the western Pacific. PRC control of the waterway is crucial for its ability to militarily encircle Taiwan and achieve control of the sea.

A second PRC research vessel, the *Zhong Shan Da Xue*, has operated around the northwest and northeast of the Philippines since the beginning of April until the present. The vessel has navigated in irregular patterns on either side of the Luzon Strait, indicating marine research activities.[68]

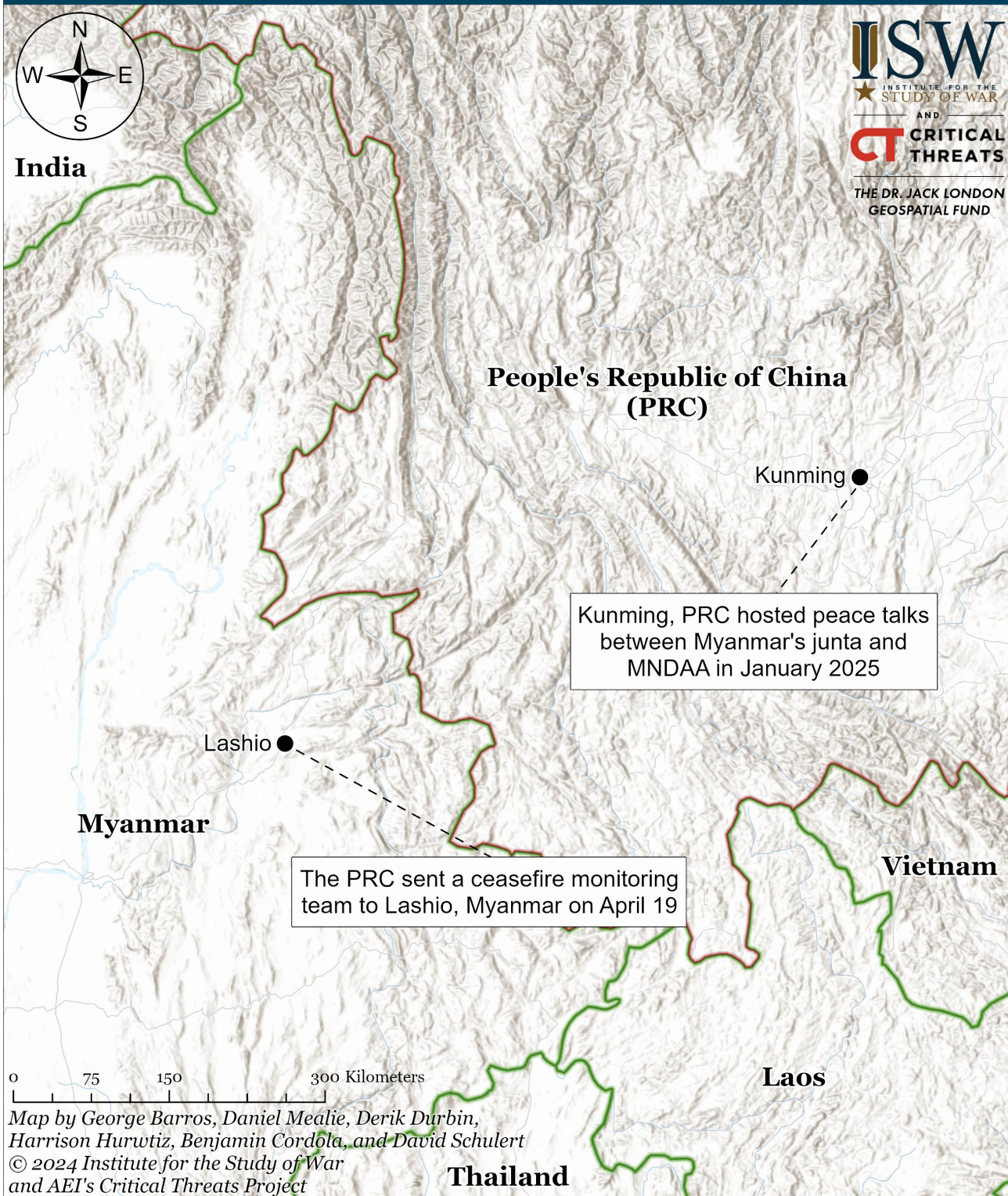
The PRC research vessels' activities possibly involved mapping the seafloor to facilitate submarine navigation. The *Zhong Shan Da Xue* and the *Tan Suo 3*'s manned submersible both have seabed topography and landform detection capabilities.[69] Submarines would likely play a significant role in maintaining a PRC blockade around Taiwan and supporting its anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) strategy by striking enemy surface and shore targets that challenge its control of the sea.

The research vessels' exploration across the Luzon Strait coincides with the United States' transfer of anti-ship missile launchers to the northern Philippine Batanes Islands, which are situated in the middle of the strait. The PRC likely perceives the placement of anti-ship weapons in the Batanes Islands as a threat to its A2/AD concept.

Myanmar

The PRC sent a ceasefire observation team to Myanmar for the first time, illustrating the PRC's increasing interest in stabilizing Myanmar to protect its economic interests amid the civil war. The PRC ceasefire monitoring team arrived in Lashio, Myanmar on April 19, following peace talks held in Kunming, PRC, in January, during which the Myanmar ruling junta and the ethnic armed group Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) signed a formal ceasefire agreement.[70] PRC MFA spokesperson Guo Jiakun said that the PRC will continue to promote the Kunming peace talks process to stop Myanmar's ongoing civil war and maintain peace and stability on the PRC-Myanmar border.[71]

PRC Involvement in Myanmar Ceasefire Deal



The ceasefire monitoring team's main task is to ensure a smooth handover of the urban areas of Lashio from ethnic rebels back to the military regime, as the PRC aims to stabilize its border with Myanmar. PRC MFA Special Envoy to Myanmar Deng Xijun is the head of the ceasefire delegation.[72] Other members of the ceasefire team remain unidentified, leaving questions about whether the delegation primarily consists of diplomats or private security professionals.

Myanmar's civil war began in February 2021 after the military junta carried out a coup d'état against the democratically elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government.[73] The PRC has maintained relationships with both Myanmar's military junta and some ethnic armed groups in Myanmar to ensure that it can cooperate with whoever is in power. The PRC has increased its support for the junta in recent months by providing military assistance, such as jets and unmanned systems, however.[74] The PRC's increasing support for the junta reflects its view that the junta is the only group currently able to provide stability to all of Myanmar, which is critical to PRC economic interests.[75]

The PRC's increased involvement in Myanmar very likely stems from its desire to protect its own border security and economic interests. The PRC has invested heavily into the Kyaukphyu deep-water port in Western Myanmar, as well as oil and gas pipelines running from that port to the PRC.[76] Myanmar provides a route for China to streamline trade and energy flows from its landlocked southwest region to the Bay of Bengal, thereby reducing reliance on the Strait of Malacca, a major chokepoint for regional trade.[77] Loss of the trade route through Myanmar as a result of the civil war not only undercuts the PRC's economic interests but also harms its ability to extend its presence into the Indian Ocean basin.[78] The PRC's efforts to negotiate and monitor a ceasefire in Myanmar signal the strategic importance that Beijing assigns to the country.

The PRC may have decided to send a ceasefire monitoring group to rebuke the junta for its shortcomings in supporting PRC interests. The junta has broken previous PRC-mediated ceasefires. It has also failed to adequately address PRC security challenges related to cyber scam centers in Myanmar.[79] The PRC's deployment of the ceasefire monitoring group may also intend to support PRC narratives portraying itself as a conflict mediator, an image it has sought to cultivate elsewhere.



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