

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



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

People’s Republic of China (PRC) support for Iran will likely be confined to diplomatic solidarity as it aims to portray itself as an advocate of peace and stability. The PRC condemned US strikes on Iran as a violation of the UN charter and stated that the strikes exacerbated Middle Eastern tensions.[1] PRC Ambassador to the United Nations Fu Cong called for an immediate ceasefire and expressed the PRC’s willingness to work with the international community to reach a political solution to Iran’s nuclear issue.[2] PRC officials have voiced their support for Tehran in meetings with Iranian officials.[3] The PRC views direct support to the Iranian regime as a risky endeavor that is counterproductive to its goals of garnering widespread appeal in the international community.

The PRC seeks to protect its energy security and preserve the current regime, a key partner that opposes US influence and hegemony. The PRC does not publicly support Iran’s development of nuclear weapons, however.[4] The PRC would risk alienating other members of the international community, particularly those in Europe and the Persian Gulf that oppose the Iranian regime, were it to provide tangible support to Iran. The PRC is using this opportunity to portray itself as an advocate of peace and the United States as destabilizing.

The United States’ decision to militarily intervene in Iran will likely influence PRC perceptions about the United States’ willingness to involve itself in foreign conflicts under President Donald Trump. The PRC may interpret US strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities as a sign that the Trump administration may take military action under circumscribed conditions. Significant political reluctance to entangle the United States in a protracted conflict, however, could suggest to PRC leadership that the United States is less likely to come to Taiwan’s aid.

The PRC has an interest in gleaning tactical insights from the success of the US military operation, particularly regarding overcoming Iran's air defenses. US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine described on June 22 the United States' use of decoy assets to deceive Iranian sensors and facilitate the approach of fighters, which in turn neutralized surface-to-air threats.[5] The survivability of the PRC's air defense systems against US assets is critically important to achieve an air advantage in a Taiwan Strait conflict with the United States.

Taiwan's unprecedented mass recall movement has overwhelmingly favored the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and could lead to the DPP regaining control of the legislature within four months. All 15 recall petitions against DPP legislators have now failed, while 31 petitions to recall KMT legislators met the signature threshold and were submitted to the Central Election Commission (CEC).[6] Taiwan's CEC scheduled recall elections against 24 Kuomintang (KMT) legislators for July 26.[7] DPP minority leader Ker Chien-ming and DPP-aligned civic groups initiated the mass recalls against KMT legislators in January in response to the KMT and its ally, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), passing record-high cuts and freezes to the national budget, including defense spending. The KMT and TPP jointly have a majority in the Legislative Yuan (LY).

The KMT, despite its historically deep local and institutional roots, has been unable to mobilize supporters for its own retaliatory recall campaigns against the DPP. New Taipei authorities charged 31 individuals on June 24 with forging recall petition signatures against three DPP lawmakers, the latest of many signature fraud cases against local KMT party officials over the past few months.[8] Taiwanese polling organization My Formosa found in May 2025 that the KMT had the lowest favorability of the three major parties: 26.2 percent approval and 57.3 percent disapproval. The DPP had the highest favorability with 42.4 percent approval and 45.2 percent disapproval, by contrast.[9]

Each recalled legislator must vacate his or her seat immediately. The district will then hold a special election within three months to fill the vacancy. The DPP can gain a majority in the LY within the next four months if it flips at least six seats through the recalls and subsequent special elections. It could also gain a majority before the special elections are held if at least twelve KMT legislators are recalled, reducing the KMT's presence in the LY without immediately increasing the DPP's. A DPP majority gained in this way may be quickly reversed if the DPP fails to win at least six of the special elections, however. The DPP would very likely pass special budgets for defense spending and reverse some of the opposition's reforms from last year, if it gains a majority.

The DPP will face major challenges in flipping the necessary six seats, despite its outsize success so far. Recalling an official requires a majority vote equivalent to at least 25 percent of the total eligible voters. This is a much higher bar than the threshold that successful recall campaigns have had to clear so far. The DPP will likely have to defeat KMT candidates in special elections to fill the vacant seats, which may be difficult given that all the contested districts elected KMT legislators less than two years ago.

PRC state news agency Xinhua and state-owned tabloid *Global Times* both ran articles on June 24 about a rally in Taipei against DPP-backed recall efforts, which they framed as efforts by the DPP to monopolize power and suppress dissent.[10] The rally was organized by leftist and pro-unification parties in Taiwan, including the Labor Party, fringe political parties that have never held seats in the national government. The articles said the rallies were organized by "civic groups" representing "all walks of life" in Taiwan. The PRC amplifies small Beijing-friendly organizations in Taiwan to create the

false impression that large portions of Taiwanese society support Taiwan’s “reunification” with the PRC and oppose DPP “separatism.” The rally was likely very small, as there was no mention of it in Taiwanese mainstream media, including pro-KMT outlets.

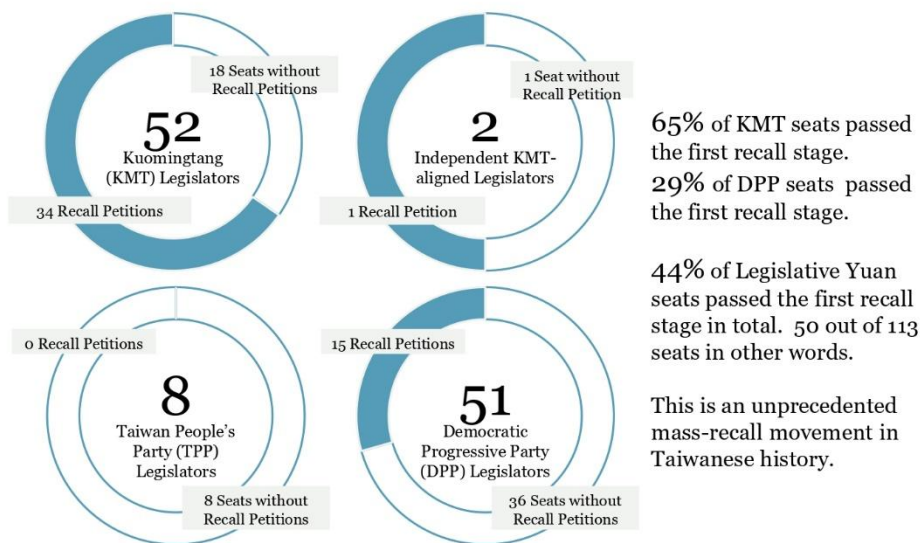
ISW ★ STUDY OF WAR Taiwanese Legislative Yuan Recalls By the Numbers AEI

The second stage of all of Taiwan’s national legislature mass-recalls recently concluded. Here is a breakdown of what happened and dates to watch out for.

First Recall Stage

Filed petitions must gather signatures from at least 1% of eligible voters in their respective districts to proceed to second stage.

Recall Petitions that Passed Stage 1 by Party



Many members of Taiwan’s 113-seat Legislative Yuan are facing recall petitions. Civic groups aligned with the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) launched mass recalls against legislators of the opposition Kuomintang (KMT), which leads the majority coalition in the LY, after it passed highly controversial bills including record budget cuts. The KMT and KMT-aligned groups launched retaliatory recall petitions against the DPP, but these petitions gained far fewer signatures than the ones against the KMT.

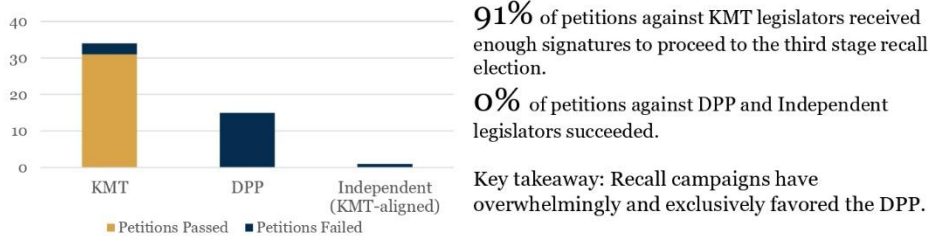
Sources: Taiwan Central Election Commission; CDOT-ISW China-Taiwan Weekly Updates.



The second stage of all of Taiwan's national legislature mass recalls recently concluded. Here is a breakdown of what happened and dates to watch out for.

Second Recall Stage: Signature-Gathering for Recall Petitions

Requires signatures from at least 10% of eligible voters in their respective districts within 60 days.



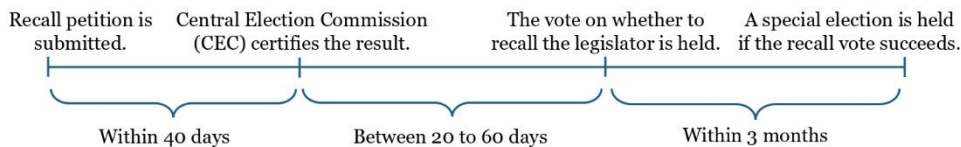
Taiwanese Legislative Recalls Summarized:

31 KMT seats are up for recall elections.	0 DPP seats are up for recall elections.	12 successful recalls will immediately give the DPP the legislative majority.	6 flipped seats in special elections will give the DPP the legislative majority.
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Third Recall Stage: Recall Elections

Requires a simple majority vote exceeding 25% of the constituency's eligible voters to recall officials.

Recall elections for 24 KMT legislators will occur July 26. The remaining 7 recall elections have yet to be scheduled. Legislators immediately vacate their seats upon a successful recall vote (Article 91).



Sources: Taiwan Central Election Commission; Taiwan Ministry of Justice; CDOT-ISW China-Taiwan Weekly Updates.

Key Takeaways

- **PRC:** The PRC condemned US attacks on Iran but is unlikely to provide tangible support to Tehran. The PRC will likely closely observe US military actions in Iran and the Trump administration's willingness to enter foreign conflicts.
- **Taiwan:** The ruling Democratic People's Party (DPP) could regain control of the legislature within four months. The opposition Kuomintang (KMT) has been overwhelmingly disfavored by the mass recall movement, possibly indicating that their popular support is declining.

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan

Taiwan is investigating a KMT legislator for receiving campaign funding from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and leaking information to the PRC's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO). A retired lieutenant colonel was similarly sentenced for receiving CCP bribes to recruit military personnel to spy for the CCP. The Taiwan High Prosecutors Office and Taipei District Prosecutors Office are investigating Hsinchu City Legislator Cheng Cheng-chien for accepting PRC funding for his campaign and leaking confidential information to the TAO.[11] The whistleblower claims to be Cheng's aide and alleges Cheng violated the National Security Act by messaging with the TAO over WeChat, a messaging app, and sending government files.[12] Cheng has denied both allegations.[13] Cheng is also being investigated for violating the Anti-Corruption Act for embezzlement of public funds and using the Legislative Yuan's official cars for personal errands, among other reasons.[14] Sentences under Taiwan's National Security Act are relatively short compared to other countries, typically between three and 10 years.[15]

The Taiwan High Court sentenced Lieutenant Colonel Kung Fan-chia to five years and four months of prison on June 24 for recruiting members of the military to act as CCP spies.[16] The CCP paid Kung to arrange meetings between CCP officials and active-duty or retired military personnel outside of Taiwan to support CCP military intelligence efforts.[17] He was convicted for violating the Anti-Corruption Act and National Security Act, both of which Legislator Cheng is also charged with.

Taiwanese prosecutors have investigated multiple cases within the last year where the CCP has attempted to influence Taiwan's political parties. Taipei prosecutors indicted two Chinese hometown association heads in November 2024 for organizing a trip to the PRC's Anhui Province with CCP funding for 24 KMT local-level officials less than three months before Taiwan's 2024 elections.[18] Taiwanese prosecutors have now investigated multiple cases within the last year where the CCP has attempted to influence Taiwan's political parties. Taipei prosecutors indicted two Chinese hometown association heads in November 2024 for organizing a CCP-funded trip to Anhui Province in the PRC for 24 KMT local-level officials less than three months before Taiwan's 2024 elections.[19]

The CCP has also targeted other Taiwanese political parties. The Taiwanese Minister of the Interior requested in January 2025 that the Constitutional Court disband the China Unification Promotion Party (CUPP) for its ties to the CPP and links to organized crime.[20] Three members of CUPP were sentenced in March 2025 to between half a year and a year in prison for recruiting members of the Taiwanese military to spy for the PRC.[21] The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) expelled four staffers from the party in April 2025, including a former aide to the then-Foreign Affairs Minister Joseph Wu.

China

The PRC criticized the military transits of a UK warship and a Japanese warship through the Taiwan Strait with standard rhetoric that such actions are "provocative." UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy said that the United Kingdom will conduct more such transits to assert freedom of navigation.[22] The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) destroyer *Takanami* transited the Taiwan Strait on June 12, marking the third Taiwan Strait transit by

the JMSDF (the previous ones were in September 2024 and February 2025).[23] The UK coastal patrol ship *HMS Spey* transited the Taiwan Strait on June 18, marking the first time the UK Navy has transited the strait in four years.[24] These transits aim to assert freedom of navigation rights in international waters. The PRC, however, considers the Taiwan Strait to be under its jurisdiction. The Japanese transit follows the recent *Shandong* and *Liaoning* aircraft carrier transits near Japan, during which a PRC fighter jet conducted dangerous maneuvers near a Japanese patrol aircraft.[25]

People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command Navy spokesperson Senior Colonel Liu Runke criticized the United Kingdom for the warship transit, saying it "harmed peace and stability." [26] The UK Office in Taiwan cited past precedent in transiting the strait in its defense, and the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued public support for the transit.[27]

The PRC sent 74 warplanes towards Taiwan in a 24-hour window between June 19 and 20, with 61 crossing the median line.[28] A Bloomberg reporter asked PRC Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun at the daily press conference if the large number of PLA aircraft crossing the median line in the Taiwan Strait was due to the transits. Guo did not directly answer the question and instead stated that the PRC respects the lawful rights of countries to navigate the strait but "firmly opposes" actions like "the pretext of freedom of navigation" which threaten PRC sovereignty.[29]

The PRC Embassy in Israel announced on June 19 that it would evacuate Taiwanese citizens who hold a Taiwanese Compatriot Pass or a PRC national identification.[30] **Beijing seeks to incentivize Taiwanese citizens to apply for PRC-issued identity documents and portrays itself as a better protector of Taiwanese people abroad than Taiwan's government.** The Taiwan Compatriot Pass is a legal document that the PRC issues to Taiwanese citizens and acts as a passport and a five-year visa to enter and exit the country.[31]

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) criticized the announcement and warned that the PRC was using evacuation aid to portray itself as the "protector of Taiwanese people." [32] PRC Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Spokesperson Zhu Fenglian rejected the MAC's accusation and claimed that "compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are all Chinese." [33] Zhu cited past PRC assistance to Taiwanese in legal disputes, economic and criminal cases, and evacuations from conflicts and natural disasters, and stated that the PRC will continue assisting Chinese citizens, including "Taiwan compatriots," during overseas evacuations.[34] Zhu also announced in a separate statement on June 25 that the PRC would waive the NT\$1500 application fee for the Taiwan Compatriot Certificate for first-time Taiwanese visitors to the PRC from July 2025 through the end of 2027.[35] The MAC warned Taiwanese citizens against applying, citing risks of legal opacity and detention in the PRC.[36]

The PRC may have introduced this documentation requirement to incentivize Taiwanese to acquire PRC ID cards, thereby encouraging cross-Strait integration and reinforcing Beijing's sovereignty claim over Taiwan. This is a departure from past PRC evacuation offers, such as after Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, when the PRC offered aid to "Taiwan compatriots" but did not mention the same documentation conditions in public statements.[37] This tactic fits into the PRC's broader strategy of incremental legal and political absorption of Taiwan and undermines Taiwan's de facto sovereignty by eroding its exclusive jurisdiction over its citizens and portraying Taipei as incapable of protecting them during crises.

Northeast Asia

Japan

PRC state media criticized the United States-Japan-Philippines combined maritime law enforcement exercises for “hyping up the China threat.” The Japanese Coast Guard hosted its US and Philippine counterparts for the second trilateral coast guard exercise beginning on June 16.[38] The coast guards conducted search and rescue drills following a simulated collision. The Philippine Coast Guard ship, the *BRP Teresa Magbanua*, participated in the exercise. The *BRP Teresa Magbanua* was involved in a confrontation with the China Coast Guard (CCG) near Sabina Shoal, a disputed South China Sea feature, in August 2024.[39] The *BRP Teresa Magbanua* was repeatedly rammed by the CCG and eventually forced to leave Sabina Shoal for the safety of its crew. The selection of the *BRP Teresa Magbanua* to participate in this exercise could have been intended to send a message to the PRC that allied cooperation would reduce the efficacy of such coercive measures in the future. The trilateral exercise occurred a day after a bilateral exercise between the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force and the Philippine Navy in the West Philippine Sea.[40]

The PRC government has not responded to the exercise at the time of writing, but the PRC state-owned tabloid *Global Times* commented that the exercise reflected Japan’s increasing role as an “organizer” of efforts intended to restrict the PRC under the US Indo-Pacific strategy.[41] The article further claimed that by providing weapons and equipment to the Philippines, Japan seeks to “incite the Philippines to stir up trouble in the South China Sea to divert China’s attention” from the Senkaku Islands.[42]

North Korea

North Korea issued a belated response to the Israel-Iran conflict on June 19 and strongly condemned the United States and Israel for their airstrikes on Iran. An unnamed North Korean foreign ministry official called Israel’s strikes a “hideous act” of aggression, an “illegal and reckless act of state terrorism,” and an “unpardonable crime against humanity.”[43] The official said that “Israel, supported and patronized by the US and the West, is a cancer-like entity for the peace in the Middle East and a chief culprit of destroying global peace and security.”[44] The official also criticized the United States and Western powers for “fanning the flames of war by questioning the legitimate exercise of Iran’s sovereign rights and right to self-defense.”[45] North Korea also issued a strong but comparatively less harsh criticism of the June 22 US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites on June 23. An unnamed spokesperson said the attack “seriously violates the UN Charter” and “grossly tramples on the territorial integrity and security interests of a sovereign state.” The spokesperson said that the current situation in the Middle East is “the inevitable product of Israel’s recklessness in expanding its unilateral interests through constant war and territorial expansion, and the Western liberal order that has tolerated and encouraged it.”[46] North Korea’s relatively muted criticism of the United States may stem from an effort to align its rhetoric with Russia and the PRC, which put out similar statements.[47] North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met with Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu two days before North Korea issued its criticism of Israel. North Korea has also tended to avoid publicly criticizing the Trump administration since it took office this year.[48]

North Korea likely views the strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities with great concern in light of its own nuclear weapons program, which the United States has long sought to eliminate. It may fear the United States launching similar strikes against North Korea's nuclear facilities, or the United States enabling South Korean operations against the North Korean nuclear program. North Korea possesses an estimated 50 nuclear warheads and has plausible (though uncertain) second-strike capabilities, however, which give it a measure of nuclear deterrence that Iran does not have.[49] North Korea also shares Iran's opposition to the United States, Israel, and the Western-led international order. It has sold Iran military equipment ranging from small arms to missile systems, in violation of sanctions, and provided some equipment and even tunnel-construction services to Iranian proxies Hamas and Hezbollah, though likely more for economic gain than for ideological reasons.[50]

South Korea

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung continues to signal a willingness for deeper engagement with North Korea through his selection of pro-engagement cabinet officials and official statements. Lee has not made any significant policy changes that would alter inter-Korean relations, however. Lee announced the nominees for nine ministerial positions on June 23. Lee's nominees for Unification Minister, Defense Minister, and Foreign Minister have all supported greater engagement and cooperation with North Korea.[51] The South Korean legislature must approve Lee's nominees before they assume office, but their selection is in line with Lee's approach to inter-Korean relations since taking office. Lee promised to reduce tensions with North Korea when campaigning, but provided no substantial proposals that would radically alter South Korean policy. Lee's selection of pro-engagement officials for North Korea-facing positions and bans on disseminating propaganda across the North Korean border signal an intention to move towards engagement, but without a comprehensive North Korea strategy, it remains to be seen whether these decisions will amount to significant change.

The South Korean military has continued to hold military exercises along the North Korean border.[52] The exercises continue despite Lee's campaign promises to reinstate the 2018 inter-Korean Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA), which would prohibit military exercises from occurring in border areas. Lee has taken no steps to reinstate the CMA since taking office. North Korea decided to halt its broadcasts across the border but has not commented on Lee's promises to increase inter-Korean engagement. It is unlikely that North Korea would be in favor of greater cooperation and dialogue with South Korea without the reduction of the United States military presence within South Korea, which would be a significant change for Indo-Pacific security.

Southeast Asia

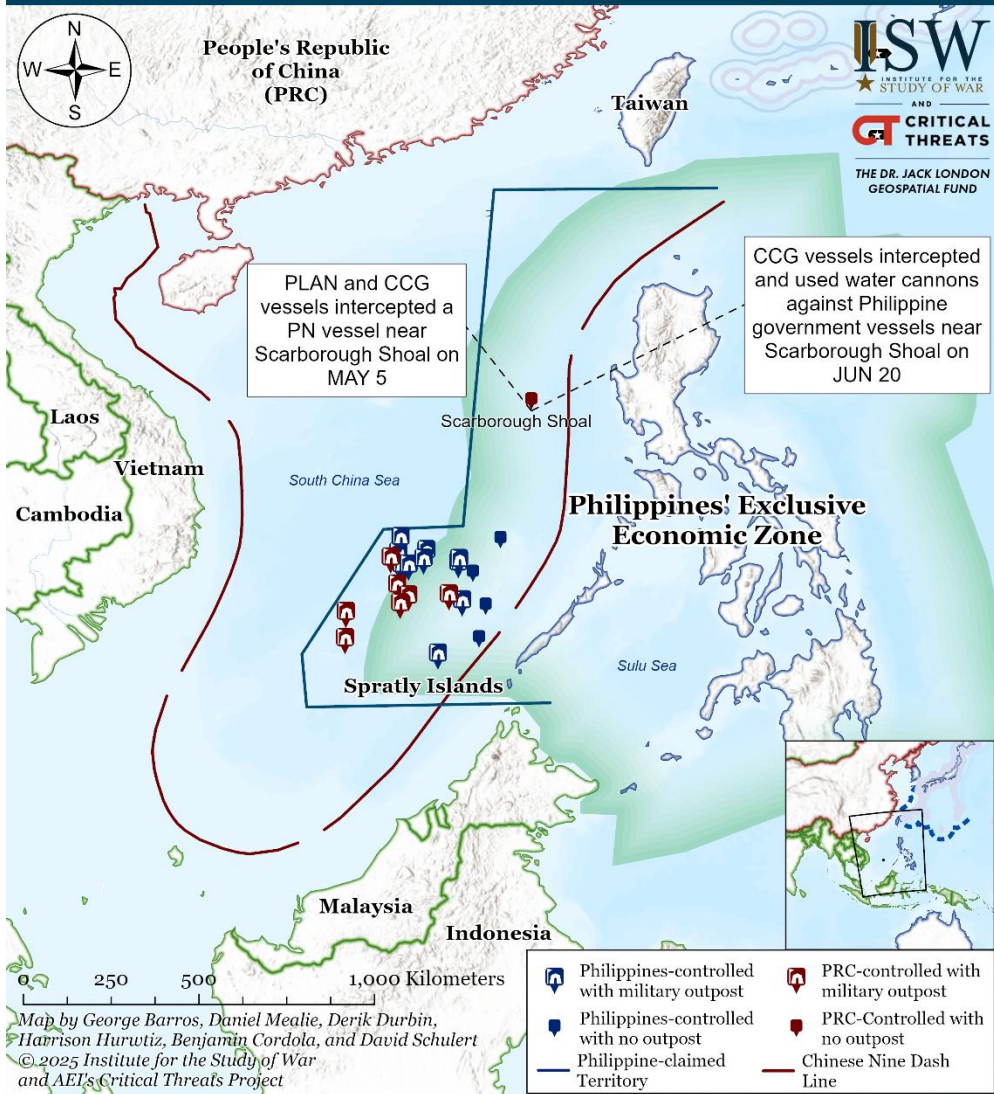
Philippines

China Coast Guard (CCG) vessels attempted to block a Philippine resupply mission on June 20 near Scarborough Shoal. CCG interference with such missions is a main feature of the PRC's attempt to occupy the shoal and force out the existing Philippine presence in the area. Four vessels from the Philippine Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources sailed near Scarborough Shoal to resupply fishermen in the area.[53] CCG vessels approached two of the ships, the *BRP Datu Taradapit* and the *BRP Datu Tamblot*, and attacked them

with water cannons. A CCG ship also maneuvered to block the path of the *BRP Datu Taradapit*.^[54] CCG Spokesperson Liu Dejun accused the Philippines of “intrud[ing]” into the waters surrounding the atoll, which the PRC claims as its territory, and of violating “China’s sovereignty and international law.”^[55] This incident represents a continuation of aggressive PRC actions around Scarborough Shoal since 2012. CCG vessels have used dangerous maneuvers and water cannon attacks to damage and intimidate Philippine ships as the PRC seeks to force out Philippine fishermen, government vessels, and aircraft operating in the surrounding waters and airspace. Maritime security researcher Ray Powell assessed that the PRC maritime militia and CCG presence around Scarborough Shoal has increased significantly since 2024, and Philippine government vessels are now largely unable to reach the atoll due to PRC ships blocking their route.^[56]

Scarborough Shoal is an uninhabited atoll that the Philippines, PRC, and ROC all claim. The PRC seized the shoal from the Philippines in 2012 by surrounding it with coast guard vessels to block Philippine entry. The Philippines has attempted to reassert control over Scarborough Shoal by conducting air and sea patrols in the area as well as using government ships to resupply Philippine fishermen who maintain a consistent presence in the area.

PRC and Philippine Naval Confrontations May and June 2025



Oceania

CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping met with New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon following New Zealand's decision to cut funding to the Cook Islands over its deal with the PRC. PRC involvement in the Cook Islands expands its economic access to a Five Eyes partner state. The Cook Islands are in a free association with New Zealand, which is the Cook Islands' largest funder.[57] News of a deal between the PRC and the Cook Islands emerged in February 2025, with New Zealand expressing concerns that the Cook Islands had not adequately disclosed the deal according to the terms of the compact of free association.[58] Luxon announced while in Shanghai that New Zealand would suspend NZ\$10 million worth of aid, part of a NZ\$200 million package to be distributed to the Cook Islands over the past three years.[59] Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown

told parliament that the funding was “not halted” but “paused” on June 19.[60] Xi stated that the PRC and New Zealand have “no historical grievances or fundamental conflicts of interest,” and PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Guo Jiakun said that the PRC-Cook Islands cooperation “does not target any third party and should not be interfered with.”[61]

ISW previously assessed that the PRC likely plans to mine critical minerals in the Cook Islands seabed, which contains nodules of cobalt and nickel.[62] New Zealand is a member of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network; Five Eyes allies have previously expressed concerns about New Zealand’s ties to the PRC.[63] New Zealand Security Intelligence Service Director-General Andrew Hampton said in March 2025 that his agency would heighten its scrutiny of the Cook Islands following the islands’ deal with the PRC.[64]

Russia

Groups affiliated with the PRC are reportedly conducting a hacking campaign against Russian government entities and businesses to acquire Russian military secrets. The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on June 19, citing cybersecurity experts, that several groups believed to have PRC backing have conducted cyberattacks seeking information about Russian nuclear submarines, drone warfare and software, satellite communications, radar, and electronic warfare (EW).[65] The NYT reported that PRC-backed hacker groups increased their attacks against Russian entities following Russia’s February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine and that the PRC seeks to learn from Russia’s military experience against Western weapons in the war. The NYT previously reported that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) has been concerned that the PRC would exploit Russia’s focus on Ukraine to increase intelligence operations to acquire Russian military secrets and that the FSB created a new counterintelligence program as a result.[66]

The PRC has previously taken efforts to learn from Russia’s war in Ukraine, including by sending People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officers near the frontlines to observe operational lessons. PRC military thinkers have previously noted the cost-effectiveness of using drones to destroy high-value targets based on their observations from the war. The lessons that the PRC draws from the war will likely inform its doctrine and strategy, especially in an invasion of Taiwan scenario.[67]

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