

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.

The opposition Kuomintang (KMT) prevailed in the mass recall votes targeting its legislators on July 26. All 24 votes failed to reach the threshold needed to remove KMT legislators from office.^[1] Seven more votes targeting KMT legislators will occur on August 23. The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) would need to recall six of these seats and flip them in subsequent special elections to gain a majority in the Legislative Yuan (LY).

DPP-aligned civil society groups initiated the mass recalls in February 2025 after the KMT and other opposition lawmakers passed controversial legislation that jeopardized Taiwanese resilience against PRC aggression. The legislation included sweeping federal budget cuts and measures that have paralyzed the Constitutional Court. The DPP has framed the KMT as cooperating with the CCP and exposing Taiwan to PRC threats.^[2]

The failed recall votes likely reflect public frustration with the associated political instability—rather than a surge in support for the KMT. Taiwanese polls since the votes indicate that most people oppose the recall campaign. Only seven of the 24 failed votes met the threshold needed to be considered valid, demonstrating that the vast majority of Taiwanese voters refused to participate in the votes and that the DPP failed to mobilize supporters sufficiently.

The failed recall votes will allow the KMT to continue undermining the Executive Yuan and obstructing Lai’s agenda. KMT Chairman Eric Chu Li-lun framed the failed votes as a public rejection of “one-party dominance” and popular support for KMT oversight of the DPP.^[3] Lai has focused his agenda on strengthening Taiwanese defenses and resilience against PRC aggression and

subversion. He will struggle, however, to advance his agenda if the KMT and other opposition parties continue to counter his efforts.

The PRC has framed the failed votes as a popular rejection of the DPP and the Lai administration in order to discredit and delegitimize them. PRC officials have consistently framed the recall campaign as an indication of DPP authoritarianism and have more recently asserted that the failed votes indicate public disapproval.[4] The Taiwan Information Environment Research Center—a public opinion and misinformation research body—noted that the PRC significantly increased its public criticisms of the DPP in the runup to the recall votes.[5]

The United States has made numerous political and trade concessions to the PRC amid their bilateral talks, including denying Taiwanese President William Lai Ching-te permission to visit New York. The United States blocked Lai from visiting New York on a diplomatic trip in August 2025 after the PRC objected to the visit, according to the *Financial Times* and *Bloomberg*. [6] The sources cited concern within the Trump administration that PRC dissatisfaction would spoil ongoing US–PRC talks that aim to lay the groundwork for a summit between President Trump and Xi Jinping later this year. [7] Similar concerns were cited regarding US technology export controls, such as those on advanced chips, which were lifted in advance of the bilateral talks in Stockholm. [8]

The PRC has increasingly sought to limit Taiwanese leaders’ contact with the United States in recent years. Sitting Taiwanese presidents have visited the United States at least 17 times since 1995, including seven times during the tenure of Lai’s predecessor, President Tsai Ing-wen. The PRC has launched increasingly regular large-scale military exercises in response to US–Taiwanese contact after Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022. Lai’s first trip to the United States occurred in December 2024 during a diplomatic tour to Pacific island allies, which the PRC answered with large-scale naval and air exercises around Taiwan. [9]

The US denial of Lai’s transit through New York risks setting a negative precedent for future US and allied behavior toward Taiwan. The PRC could interpret the decision as an indication of the US’s willingness to concede on issues on which the PRC places special emphasis. This perception will likely lead the PRC to make similar demands regarding limiting contact between the United States and Taiwan in the future. The United States previously canceled Taiwanese Defense Minister Wellington Koo’s meeting with US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby in June 2025 shortly after a Trump–Xi phone call. [10] The PRC may be emboldened further by a recent US decision to ease export controls targeting the PRC. Beijing has leveraged its superior supply of rare earth minerals, on which the United States relies heavily for many advanced technology products, to extract concessions from the United States.

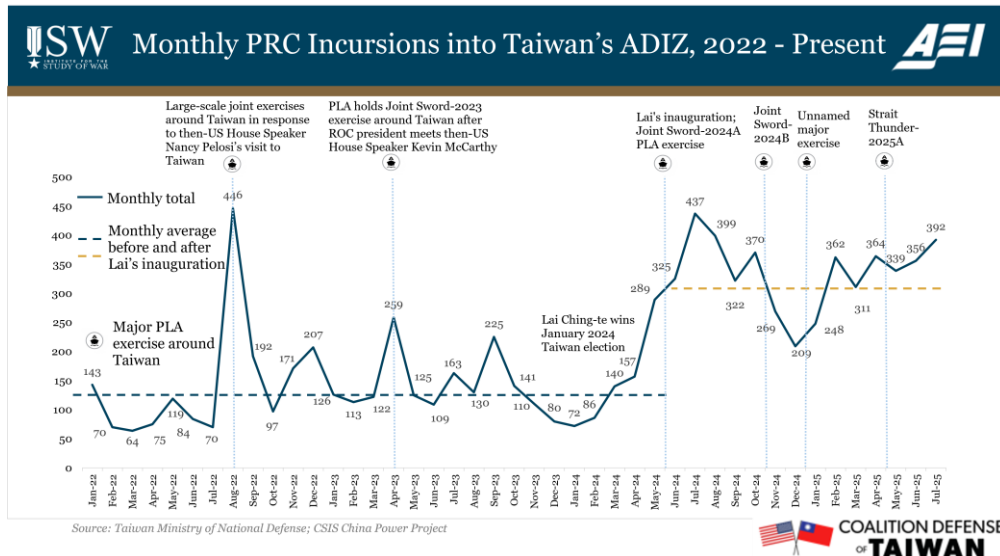
Key Takeaways

- **Taiwan:** The opposition KMT prevailed in the mass recall votes targeting its legislators. The failed recall votes likely reflect public frustration with the associated political instability—rather than a surge in support for the KMT. The failed votes will allow the KMT to continue undermining the Taiwanese Executive Yuan and President Lai’s efforts to improve Taiwanese defenses and resilience against PRC aggression and subversion.

- **PRC:** The United States has made numerous political and trade concessions to the PRC amid bilateral talks, including denying Taiwanese President Lai from visiting New York. The US rejection of Lai's requested visit risks setting a negative precedent and will likely embolden the PRC to make similar demands, limiting contact between the United States and Taiwan in the future.

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan



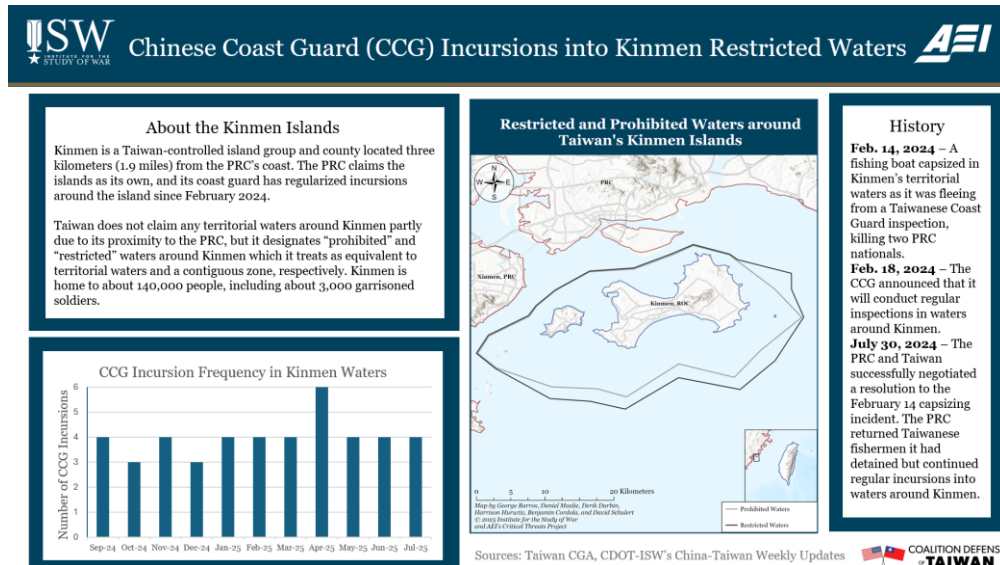
PLA aerial incursions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) reached their highest level in the past year. The PRC has normalized a higher frequency of ADIZ incursions to degrade Taiwan's threat awareness and response threshold and to probe response protocols. The PRC calibrates its military activities around Taiwan to intimidate and deter it from taking actions supportive of Taiwanese sovereignty. PLA incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ have become a near daily occurrence that often serve as a barometer for the PRC reactions to political developments regarding Taiwan. Spikes in ADIZ incursions often correspond with political events that the PRC opposes, including high-level meetings between Taiwanese and foreign officials or expressions of Taiwanese sovereignty by Taiwanese leaders.

This new normal of ADIZ incursions represents one of the many aspects of intensifying PRC coercion against Taiwan and the Lai administration. The normalization of more frequent ADIZ incursions by PLA aircraft raises the threshold of coercive activity that would trigger a Taiwanese response, making it more difficult for Taiwan to detect and respond to a real threat in time. Taiwan must put personnel on standby to respond to ADIZ incursions, which strains resources and exhausts personnel.

The China Coast Guard (CCG) conducted four known incursions into Kinmen's restricted waters in July 2025, continuing the PRC normalization of such incursions. Four CCG ships simultaneously entered Kinmen's restricted waters on July 10, 11, 29, and 30.^[11] These incursions are part of the PRC's effort to reduce Taiwan's threat awareness and readiness and test Taiwanese responses. The Taiwan Coast Guard Association (CGA) has reported a total of 81 incursions since February 2024. These incursions typically happen three to four times a month. The Coalition Defense of Taiwan (CDOT)-ISW tracked each reported incursion dating back

to September 2024—the publicly available data prior to then is incomplete and thus excluded from the graph below.

CCG East China Sea Branch spokesperson Zhu Anqing said on July 30 that these incursions were “routine law enforcement patrols” to effectively manage and control Xiamen-Kinmen waters.[12] CCG intrusions into the waters south of Kinmen resemble a rehearsal for operations to cut Kinmen off from resupply or intervention by sea, which would require PRC ships to position themselves south of the island. The CCG’s simultaneous entries into the restricted waters around Kinmen provide the CCG with experience in choreographing the initial actions that would be required for a blockade of Kinmen. The CCG likely aims to desensitize Taiwan and its partners to such intrusions, which could help cultivate surprise in an actual blockade scenario.



China

The PRC and Vietnam concluded their first combined army training exercises on July 30. The PRC and Vietnam have grown closer diplomatically, economically, and militarily since the United States recently imposed tariffs. The exercises occurred from July 21–30 and included drills focused on reconnaissance drone operations and other coordinated tactics.[13] The PRC and Vietnam have previously held combined naval and land border patrols, but this marks the first combined ground force exercise between the two states. The PRC is Vietnam’s largest trading partner, and Vietnam is the PRC’s fourth-largest trading partner and the largest PRC trading partner within ASEAN.[14] CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping visited Vietnam from April 14 to 15, shortly after the announcement of US tariffs to emphasize the importance of continued PRC–Vietnam cooperation amid US unilateralism and uncertainty.[15] Vietnam has taken steps toward greater cooperation with the PRC since then, holding two other military exercises with the PLA Navy and CCG.[16]

Closer PRC–Vietnam defense ties and the imposition of US tariffs on Vietnam risk disrupting the burgeoning US–Vietnam defense partnership. US–Vietnam military cooperation was elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2023.[17] This partnership, coupled with enhanced economic ties, marked a high point in US–Vietnam relations. US–Vietnam relations could face a significant decline in the wake of US economic policy and increased engagement from the PRC. Other ASEAN states could similarly turn toward the PRC if they perceive the United States as an

unreliable trading partner.[18]

The PRC Central Military Commission (CMC)-controlled outlet, *PLA Daily*, published a three-part series discussing how military personnel must be subordinated to the CCP.[19] This series follows the CMC issuing new guidance to PLA political officers to further enhance party loyalty among the military ranks. The first part of the series focused on political loyalty and the duty of political officers to ensure the absolute control of the CCP over the PLA.[20] The second part of the series emphasized that political officers should uphold truthfulness and put the advancement of the CCP before personal interests.[21] The final part of the series covered the importance of political officers in promoting integrity in the military promotion process. The series condemned nepotism in the promotion of military commanders.[22]

The *PLA Daily* series—along with the new CMC guidance to PLA political officers—reflects ongoing CCP efforts to promote political loyalty and ideological conformity within the military. The National People’s Congress has removed over a dozen military lawmakers and defense industry executives since its current term began in March 2023, including former CMC member Miao Hua, former defense ministers Li Shangfu and Wei Fenghe, and Navy Chief of Staff Vice Admiral Li Hanjun.[23] The purges may partially result from the CCP’s perception of inadequate commitment to Xi Jinping and the party.[24] The *PLA Daily* commentaries suggest that the purges relate to the CCP’s perception that military personnel have pursued self-interest over party interests or engaged in corrupt military promotion processes. The CMC has not published the full text of its new guidelines, but more information regarding the guidelines or the PLA purges at large may be announced at the Politburo meeting before the CCP leaders’ retreat in Beidaihe in early August.[25]

Northeast Asia

Japan

The PRC protested Taiwanese Foreign Affairs Minister Lin Chia-lung’s visit to Japan. Lin visited the World Expo in Osaka and Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Tokyo during his unpublicized visit, making Lin the first Taiwanese foreign minister to visit Taiwan’s de-facto embassy in Japan.[26] Lin also met with members of the Japan-ROC Diet Members’ Consultative Council, including former Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara and Former Economic Security Minister Sanae Takaichi, a popular candidate to replace Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba.[27] The Japan-ROC Diet Members’ Consultative Council is a cross-party group of Japanese legislators aimed at promoting relations and parliamentary exchanges with Taiwan. Members of the council have made official visits to Taiwan multiple times and declared in its 2025 policy guidelines that a Taiwan contingency must be prevented.[28]

The Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) claimed that Lin’s trip was a “private visit” and declined to release details. The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) filed official complaints with Japan over Lin’s visit.[29] Liu reiterated that the Taiwan question is at “the core of the PRC’s core interests” and should be the foundation of PRC–Japan relations. Liu added that Japan has “provided a stage for anti-China separatist activities” by tolerating Lin’s “illegitimate visit [窜访][30] The PRC often refers to Taiwanese official visits as “illegitimate” to undermine Taiwanese sovereignty. The PRC Embassy in Tokyo and MFA spokesperson Guo Jiakun also issued protests against Lin’s visit to Japan.[31]

The Japanese Foreign Ministry did not comment on Lin's visit, as Japan's executive branch has typically refrained from engaging with Taiwanese officials since Japan switched diplomatic recognition to the PRC in 1971. Japan does not have laws regulating relations with Taiwan like the United States' Taiwan Relations Act. Government exchanges with Taiwan are often carried out by Diet members and former executive branch officials, including former prime ministers. The PRC routinely criticizes "any form of official exchanges with Taiwan," including by legislators and former officials, and demands countries to "stop sending the wrong signals to Taiwan-independence separatists," however.

North Korea

South Korean Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said that he will recommend that President Lee Jae-myung scale back upcoming US–South Korea combined military exercises in response to a statement from North Korea's Kim Yo Jong. This would mark the first instance of South Korea altering its military activity along the inter-Korean border since Lee took office. Kim Yo Jung, Deputy Director of the Publicity and Information Department of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) and sister of WPK General Secretary Kim Jong Un, delivered a speech on July 28 saying that South Korean President Lee Jae-myung's efforts to improve inter-Korean relations were all "futile."^[32] Kim cited several of Lee's policy changes, such as the halting of propaganda through radio broadcasts and leaflet distribution, and described the efforts as "meaningless" given South Korea's continued military cooperation with the United States.^[33] Kim identified combined US–South Korean military exercises as a roadblock for future communication, as Pyongyang perceives them to be preparations for an invasion. The Lee administration maintained its desire to resume inter-Korean dialogue following Kim's speech.^[34] Lee and Unification Minister Chung Dong-young both emphasized the importance of establishing peace, despite Kim's assertion that North Korea continues to view South Korea as an "enemy."^[35] Chung said that he will propose to Lee an adjustment in the upcoming combined US–South Korea Ulchi Freedom Shield (UFS) military exercises following Kim's statement.

Chung did not provide details on what this adjustment would entail, and it is unclear whether Lee would agree to alter the exercises. An adjustment to the UFS exercises would likely entail a reduction in the exercise scale, which in previous years has included around 19,000 South Korean troops and took place over eleven days.^[36] The Lee administration, up to this point, has not made any changes to its military positioning or activities, despite its stated desire to reduce tensions with North Korea. An adjustment in the UFS exercises immediately following Kim's speech could suggest to the North Korean government that the Lee administration is willing to make further concessions in order to progress towards inter-Korean dialogue and peace. This would go against the United States' stated desire for "alliance modernization," which includes increased South Korean defense spending, greater cost sharing for US assets deployed in South Korea, and a desire for Seoul to play a role in a potential US conflict with the PRC.^[37] US–South Korean misalignment on defense priorities could have significant impacts on regional security and the alliance between the two states.

South Korea

PRC Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi called for greater PRC–South Korea cooperation and urged a move away from the United States during his first phone call with South Korean Foreign Affairs Minister Cho Hyun on July 28. The PRC is exploiting current US–South Korean trade and defense disagreements to target and

weaken their alliance. The call between Wang and Cho took place soon after the last-minute US postponement of the scheduled 2+2 trade and financial talks between top US and South Korean officials ahead of the August 1 tariff deadline. Japan and the Philippines both secured trade deals with the United States last week.[38] The United States also announced a 60 million US dollar aid package to the Philippines.[39] The United States formally asked South Korea to expand its Mutual Defense Treaty commitments to include conflicts in the Indo-Pacific beyond the Korean Peninsula, implying support for the United States in a potential US–PRC conflict, and to increase its defense spending from 2.3 percent of GDP up to 5 percent during trilateral talks in Tokyo on July 18.[40] The US requests go against South Korean President Lee Jae-myung’s stated desire to improve South Korean–PRC relations. US President Donald Trump and President Lee separately announced on July 30 that the United States and South Korea had reached an initial framework for a trade deal ahead of the deadline.[41]

Wang emphasized to Cho the importance of close PRC–South Korean relations, to the implicit exclusion of the US as a significant partner. Wang asserted that PRC–South Korea relations “are not targeted at any third party, and should not be subject to any third party,” and urged South Korea to maintain its autonomy and “oppose decoupling and supply chain disruption,” veiled references to US economic behavior.[42] Cho expressed that South Korea would continue to strengthen its relations with the PRC, “face history squarely (正视历史) and jointly safeguard regional peace,” according to the PRC readout of the call, echoing language from the PRC–Japan–South Korea trilateral foreign ministers’ meeting held in March.[43] Cho reportedly invited Wang to visit South Korea, which Wang agreed to do “at a time convenient for both sides,” suggesting that further diplomatic engagement between the two countries is likely.[44] Wang’s statement may reflect the PRC’s assessment that current US–South Korea tensions and Lee’s relatively pro-PRC stance present an opportunity to disrupt the US–South Korea alliance. PRC military strategists view US relationships with its global allies as a key strength in its ability to contest the PRC, but one which the PRC can blunt by targeting and weakening these relationships through hybrid warfare operations, especially in the diplomatic and information domains.[45]

Oceania

Australia tested precision strike missiles (PrSMs) for the first time as part of its annual Talisman Sabre exercises. This year’s Talisman Sabre exercise is its largest and most comprehensive thus far, reflecting an increasing emphasis on Indo-Pacific security. Australia tested these US-supplied systems two years ahead of schedule as part of its largest annual training exercise, which is ongoing at the time of writing.[46] The 2025 Talisman Sabre exercises marked the first time that the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia executed a combined High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) battery, as well as the first time the United States demonstrated its Typhon Missile capabilities at a Talisman Sabre exercise.[47] Deputy Commanding General for US Army Pacific Lieutenant General Joel Vowell said that such surface fire capabilities would comprise a key asymmetric response to PRC anti-access/area denial.[48]

Nineteen nations are participating in the 2025 Talisman Sabre exercises, reflecting coalition-building efforts in the Indo-Pacific. Vowell said that PRC behavior, along with threats from North Korea and Russia, drove increased participation in the exercises.[49] UK Secretary of State for Defense John Healey reportedly told the *Telegraph* that the United Kingdom is prepared to jointly fight alongside Australia in the Pacific.[50] Former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison

similarly urged the United States to “double down” on economic support to the Indo-Pacific as a means of strategic competition with the PRC.[51] The PRC criticized a joint statement between the UK and Australia critiquing PRC policy, including toward Taiwan.[52] The PRC statement, which came shortly after a UK aircraft carrier arrived in Australia for the Talisman Sabre exercises, accused the UK and Australia of “unwarranted accusations and political manipulation.”[53] The PRC will likely continue to criticize US-UK-Australian coalition-building efforts in an attempt to divide US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific.

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