

The China–Taiwan Weekly Update



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The PLA has conducted shows of strength in recent days in celebration of its 98th anniversary. The PLA debuted its fourth Type 075 amphibious assault ship during an exercise in the South China Sea.[1] The PLA also published a five-part documentary that included footage of PLA weapons and exercises and the final construction phase of the *Fujian* aircraft carrier.[2] The documentary series contained unreleased footage of PLA exercises, footage of the final stage of the PLAN aircraft carrier *Fujian*’s development, and footage of new PLA unmanned and missile systems. The documentary echoed typical nationalist rhetoric seen in PLA propaganda, showcasing PLA strength, innovation, and technological advancement.

The documentary included some sections likely meant to intimidate PRC adversaries. The documentary included, for instance, footage of the China Coast Guard (CCG) confronting a Philippine vessel near the Second Thomas Shoal and the “infringing vessel being towed away.”[3] This footage marks the first time that the PRC has acknowledged that it towed Philippine vessels from the area. The CCG has typically used vaguer language that portrays its actions around the South China Sea as generic law enforcement operations. The Philippines responded to the footage by accusing the PRC of recycling old footage from June 2024 to manipulate public opinion.[4] The documentary series separately included a depiction of a “cold start” operation wherein an exercise transitioned into a full-scale assault, presumably against Taiwan.[5] The documentary series condemned Taiwanese “independence activists.” The documentary is likely meant to stoke Taiwanese concerns that the PLA could unexpectedly launch large-scale combat operations against the island.

The PRC likely sought out the documentary to rally public support for the PLA and increase confidence in its strength. The PRC may have sought to allay potential perceptions of weakness amid the ongoing purges and corruption investigations in the PLA.

Key Takeaways

- **PRC.** The PLA has conducted shows of strength in recent days in celebration of its 98th anniversary. The PLA debuted a new amphibious assault ship and published a five-part documentary meant to intimidate foreign adversaries and rally public support for the PLA.

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan

A Taiwanese television show depicting a PRC attack on Taiwan—titled *Zero Day Attack*—will premiere in August 2025. The Taiwanese government contributed funding for the show, which will depict an invasion scenario following the next Taiwanese presidential election in 2028.[6] The show focuses primarily on non-kinetic aspects of warfare, particularly information operations and cognitive warfare based on actual PRC tactics.[7] The show will also feature sabotage operations, including some targeting critical infrastructure, conducted by clandestine and criminal networks.[8] The series focuses on the role of societal resilience and civilian preparedness, which are central elements of Taiwanese President William Lai Ching-te’s plan to defend Taiwan against PRC aggression.[9]

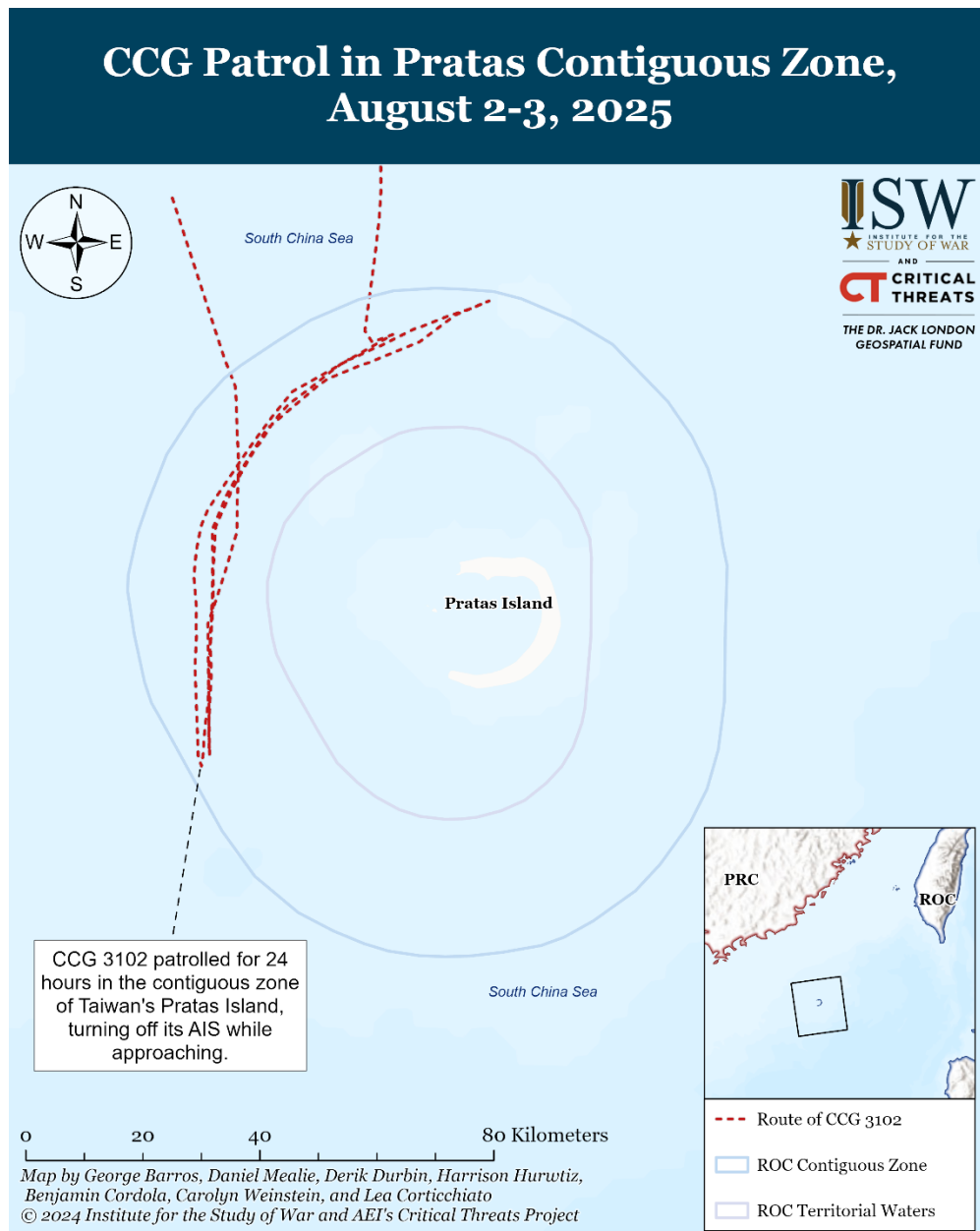
Zero Day Attack will air in Taiwan, Japan, and Indonesia in August.[10] The producer, Cheng Hsin-mei, said that “the war [between the PRC and Taiwan] has already begun” through “information and infiltration” and that she hopes that Taiwanese audiences will “become more aware of the infiltration of modern grey-zone warfare.”[11] Cheng said that the PRC has already infiltrated “temples, elections, political class, [and] organized crime networks,” and that such infiltration could compromise Taiwan in an invasion contingency.[12]

The PRC responded to the news of *Zero Day Attack* by denigrating Taiwanese leaders and downplaying its aggression toward Taiwan. PRC Ministry of National Defense spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang accused Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of stoking “war anxiety” and using the Taiwanese people as “cannon fodder” in the name of cross-strait conflict.[13] Zhang similarly criticized the Taiwanese drone development and US military officials’ observation of the recently concluded Han Kuang exercises in the same press conference.[14] Zhang used unusually harsh rhetoric, saying that “We are telling the DPP authorities that, if they do more injustice, they will kill themselves, and no matter how much they toss, it will be in vain.”[15] Such rhetoric reflects PRC efforts to blame the DPP for cross-strait tensions despite increasing PRC aggression. Zhang’s comments serve ongoing PRC information operations to demoralize and isolate Taiwan diplomatically.

A CCG ship patrolled for 24 hours in the contiguous zone of Taiwan’s Pratas Island. The CCG is continuing to experiment with methods to test Taiwan’s responses while normalizing its law enforcement presence in Taiwanese-administered waters. CCG ship 3102 entered the Pratas contiguous zone on August 2 and patrolled north and west of the island until August 23. It deactivated its Automatic Identification System (AIS) to hide its approach but reactivated it while within Taiwanese-administered waters.[16] Taiwan’s Coast Guard Administration (CGA) reported that the ship at one point came within one nautical mile of a CGA ship sent to expel it and ignored the CGA’s attempts to do so.[17]

The incursion reflects a trend of increased CCG activity around Pratas since February 2025. At least six patrols between May 28 and July 2, 2025, completely circled the island, according to data from the ship tracking software Starboard. Several CCG ships patrolled simultaneously within Pratas waters with their AIS deactivated from July 7-11, coinciding with Taiwan’s annual Han Kuang military exercises.[18] The August 2 patrol suggests that the PRC is continuing to experiment with its patrol methods and patterns around Pratas.

The CCG activity around Pratas closely resembles the progression of the “Kinmen model” seen in 2024. The “Kinmen model” is a concept introduced in PRC state media in May 2024 that refers to normalizing CCG “law enforcement” patrols around Taiwan’s outlying islands, starting with Kinmen, to assert PRC legal jurisdiction there and erode Taiwan’s control of those waters.[19] The PRC could justify this model in the name of protecting PRC fishermen while using it to set conditions for a future quarantine or seizure of the islands.



The PRC will likely increase its efforts to build support for more cross-strait economic integration amid trade tensions between Taiwan and the United States. The United States imposed 20 percent tariffs on Taiwanese imports on July 31, which will take effect on August 7.[20] The United States lowered tariffs to the current level from 32 percent, which President Donald Trump announced in April 2025.

The PRC has pursued cross-strait economic integration to increase Taiwanese dependence on the PRC.[21] The PRC has advocated in particular for greater cross-strait economic integration in the wake of US tariffs to offset harm to Taiwanese industries.[22] PRC state media has amplified criticism of the DPP from minor PRC-aligned parties in Taiwan, calling the DPP a “pawn” of the United States, which is increasing its hegemony over Taiwan through the implementation of tariffs.[23] PRC Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) spokesperson Chen Binhua disparaged the DPP for “bowing to foreign pressure” and suggested that Taiwan would become a “dumping ground” for foreign capital if Taiwan removed tariffs on US goods, as some Taiwanese officials have proposed.[24]

Taiwanese President William Lai Ching-te said on August 1 that the 20-percent tariff rate is temporary and that the United States and Taiwan will continue to negotiate.[25] Lai announced that the Executive Yuan would send a special budget proposal to the Legislative Yuan worth approximately 3.1 billion US dollars to relieve financial stress on affected Taiwanese enterprises.[26]

The US Congress continues to show its support for Taiwan, despite US President Donald Trump’s decision to deny Taiwanese President Lai’s visit to the United States. US Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker will lead a bipartisan congressional delegation to Taiwan in August 2025, according to the Financial Times.[27] The announcement follows Trump’s decision to block Lai from transiting through New York and Dallas as part of a diplomatic trip to Latin America.[28] Trump’s decision drew criticism from members of Congress, who expressed concern that Trump conceded to PRC demands to reach a trade deal with Beijing.[29]

PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Guo Jiakun demanded that the United States cease official exchanges with Taiwan and stop supporting “separatists” advocating for “Taiwan independence.”[30] Trump announced on August 5 that he was “getting very close to a deal” with the PRC.[31] The PRC may continue to use economic coercion against the United States to get additional concessions and disrupt US-Taiwanese cooperation. This could include demanding that the Trump administration denounce or prevent the upcoming US congressional visit to Taiwan.

Wicker’s visit highlights continued bipartisan support within the US Congress for Taiwan. PRC TAO Spokesperson Chen Binhua recently condemned the US House of Representatives for approving 500 million US dollars in aid for Taiwan.[32] The Trump administration has aimed to increase US military sales to Taiwan beyond the level sold during the president’s first term.[33]

China

UK-China Transparency—a UK think tank—reported that the CCP allegedly organized the harassment and surveillance of academic researchers and students in the UK studying the PRC and Taiwan. These efforts are part of the PRC campaign to censor certain discussions abroad. Members of Chinese Student and Scholars Associations (CSSAs) at UK universities reportedly accosted researchers and students online and in person. PRC embassies and consulates frequently issue orders to CSSAs. The United Front Work Department, which works to increase CCP influence abroad, oversees the parent organization for CSSAs.[34] PRC police also harassed family members of PRC nationals who lectured on subjects which the PRC considers “sensitive,” according to the report.[35]

The report identified Taiwan as a “sensitive” subject, which the CCP pressures researchers and students to avoid openly discussing. One of the researchers said that they believed discussion of Taiwan “perhaps face[s] greater CCP repression than the discussion of affairs in mainland China,” such as Xinjiang, Chinese tech companies, and COVID-19. PRC officials denied travel visas to researchers working on such topics and asked PRC nationals studying abroad to spy on their classmates, according to the report.

Professors and PRC nationals at US universities have previously voiced similar complaints.[36] Students interviewed by Voice of America in 2020 reported self-censoring and refraining from publicly discussing issues, such as Taiwan’s political status, to the point of negatively impacting their undergraduate research, over fears that they could be reported to CCP officials by fellow students.

PRC coercive efforts to control academic narratives about Taiwan abroad support its information operations and cognitive warfare efforts to erode Taiwan’s sovereignty. The PRC seeks to erase discussions of Taiwan’s sovereignty, only allowing narratives that support its claims of control over Taiwan to spread.

Northeast Asia

Japan

CCG vessels intruded into Japan’s territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands for four consecutive days. The Japan Coast Guard (JCG) reported that the two CCG ships entered the waters on August 2 and remained for 43 hours.[37] The two CCG ships returned to the area and attempted to approach a Japanese fishing vessel on August 4, and four other CCG ships entered the Senkakus’ territorial waters for approximately two hours on August 5.[38] The JCG dispatched patrol vessels to monitor and issue warnings to the CCG ships, which were equipped with naval guns.

CCG spokesperson Gan Yu said that the two ships were “taking necessary control measures” to repel the “illegal entrance” of a Japanese fishing vessel and urged Japan to “cease all illegal activities.”[39] The CCG claimed in a separate press release that the second CCG group was legally patrolling the waters to protect PRC rights.[40] The PRC, Taiwan, and Japan all claim the Senkaku Islands. The PRC routinely frames Japan’s claims over the islands as the “illegal occupation of Chinese territory.”[41] PRC government vessels have entered the Senkakus’ territorial waters at least once a month since October 2020.[42] Japan has confirmed the presence of PRC government vessels around the Senkakus, including territorial water incursions, for a record-breaking 260 days since November 2024.[43] The last CCG incursion occurred between July 9 and 11.[44] The PRC’s presence around the Senkakus is likely to support its territorial claims

North Korea

The PRC is permitting North Korean oil tankers to sail in its waters, despite UN regulations. This is the latest instance of expanding cooperation and alignment between the two countries. Five North Korean oil tankers sailed into PRC waters in July 2025 while transmitting their signals.[45] Four of these vessels are under UN sanctions, and the fifth has previously been involved in oil smuggling. The five vessels were observed at multiple locations along the southeastern PRC coast that have been the sites of previous North Korean smuggling operations.[46]

UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2371 bans blacklisted vessels from entering ports except in emergencies, and UNSCR 2397 mandates that member states seize, inspect, and impound ships suspected of violating sanctions.[47] The PRC allowed the North Korean tankers to sail through its waters unimpeded—a clear violation of UN regulations. The UN has blacklisted dozens of ships and shipping companies for their involvement in North Korean oil and coal smuggling.

Experts have observed that North Korean vessels have grown increasingly brazen since 2023, no longer concealing their locations despite the risk of international backlash. Former member of the UN panel of Experts Neil Watts said that this shift likely stemmed from recently growing Russian support for North Korea.[48] Russia vetoed the extension of the mandate for the UN Panel of Experts tasked with monitoring North Korean sanctions in March 2024, likely to gain additional North Korean support in advance of their entry into the war in Ukraine.[49] The PRC abstained from the March 2024 vote and delayed US-led efforts to blacklist North Korean smuggling vessels in 2018. The PRC's allowance of these vessels to sail in its waters while openly violating UN regulations is likely a reflection of strategic alignment between the two states. CDOT-ISW has assessed that the PRC seeks to maintain its economic influence over North Korea amid strengthening North Korea-Russia relations.[50] Strong support from the PRC and Russia could embolden North Korea to continue its open violations of international regulations.

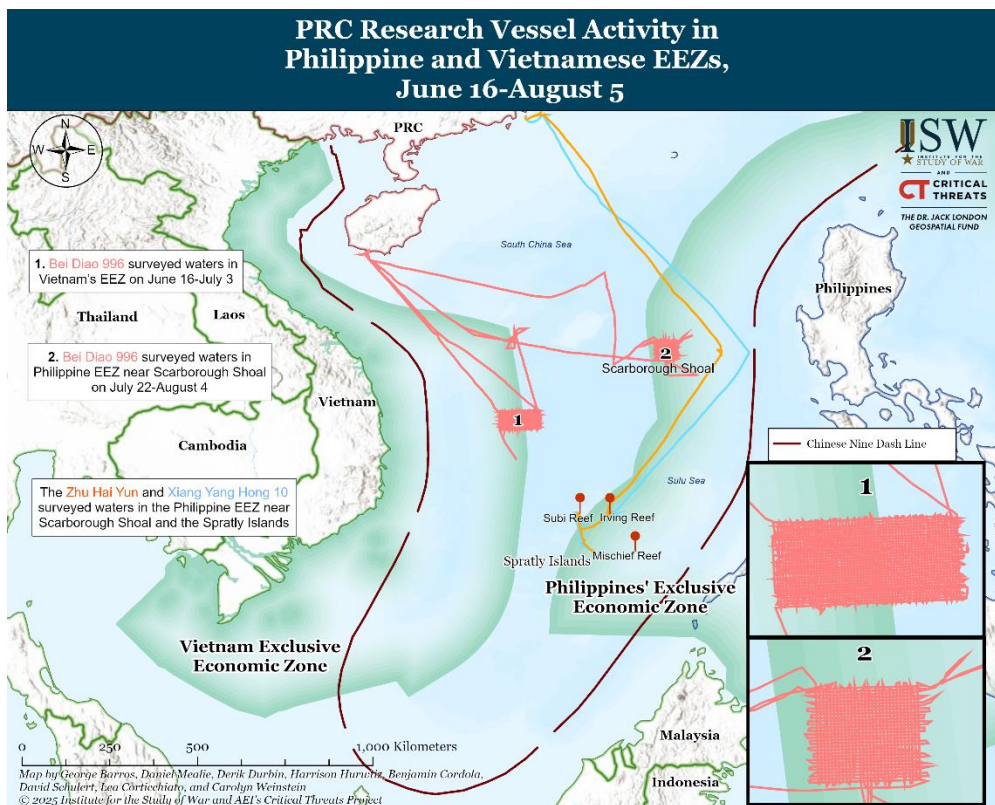
Southeast Asia

Philippines

Multiple PRC scientific research vessels have operated around the disputed areas in the South China Sea over the past month. The PRC is possibly conducting maritime research in areas of strategic importance to support the operation of its naval vessels in preparation for future conflict. The *Bei Diao 996*, a vessel that is outfitted with underwater acoustic sensors and sonar equipment, has operated in Vietnam and the Philippines' exclusive economic zones (EEZ) in the past two months.[51] The *Bei Diao 996*'s sailing pattern resembled a grid-like shape that is typical of seabed mapping, indicating that the vessel was possibly conducting bathymetric surveys to facilitate submarine navigation.

CDOT-ISW previously assessed that PRC research vessel activity in the Luzon Strait, a militarily important waterway, throughout April and May possibly served the same purpose.[52] The *New York Times* reported that PRC research vessels conducted similar activity near Guam, which hosts a significant US military presence.[53] The *Bei Diao 996*'s activities took place near Scarborough Shoal, a disputed feature in the South China Sea that is the site of frequent confrontations between the PRC and the Philippines.[54]

Two other PRC research vessels, the *Xiang Yang Hong 10* and *Zhuhai Yun*, operated in late July in the Spratly Islands, which the PRC disputes with the Philippines and Vietnam. Both of these vessels also possess undersea mapping capabilities, but did not exhibit the same stitch-like sailing patterns as the *Bei Diao 996*.



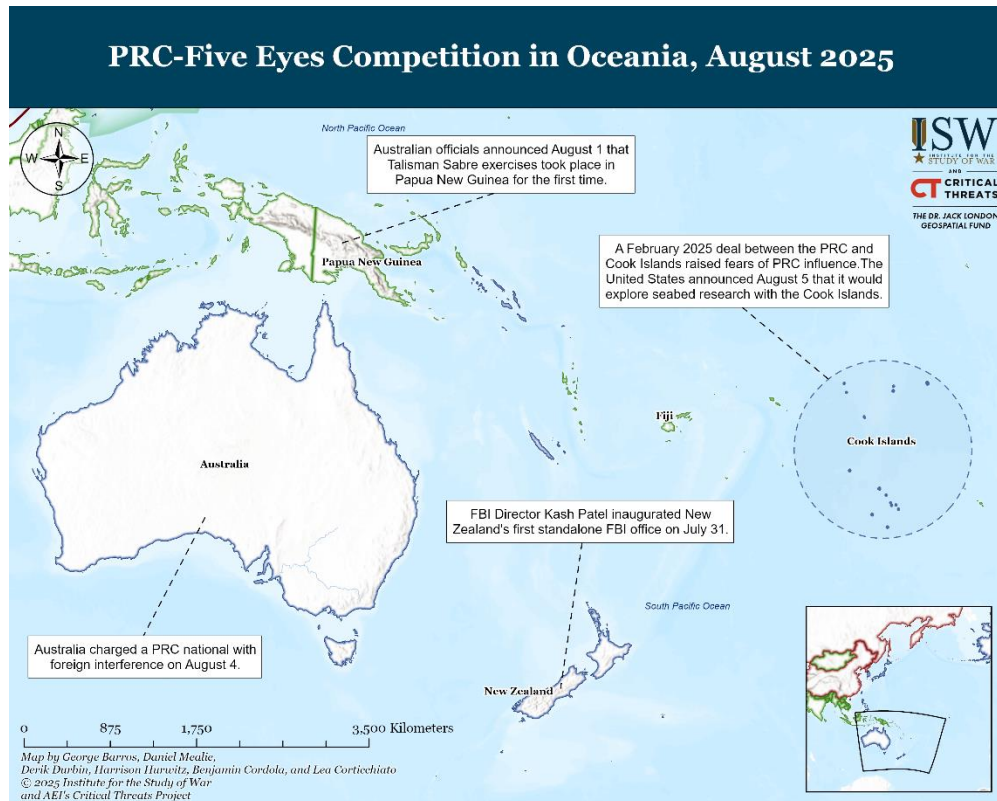
Oceania

The PRC criticized the opening of the first standalone US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) office in New Zealand on July 31. The FBI stated that the office would take point on US partnerships in New Zealand, Samoa, Antarctica, Niue, Tonga, and the Cook Islands and did not specifically mention the PRC.[55] FBI Director Kash Patel said that the new office would assist in countering CCP influence, however.[56]

The FBI office opening reflects growing concerns about PRC espionage and interference in Oceania. The Cook Islands, in free association with New Zealand, signed a controversial deal with the PRC in February 2025. New Zealand is a member of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing group along with the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. New Zealand's Security Intelligence Service Director General Andrew Hampton said in March 2025 that he would increase scrutiny of the Cook Islands following the deal.[57] The United States announced on August 6 that it would explore seabed research—one of the topics outlined in the earlier Cook Islands-PRC deal—with the Cook Islands.[58]

The PRC has consistently deflected concerns about its cooperation with the Cook Islands and claimed that such cooperation is not aimed at any third parties. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Guo Jiakun said the PRC was “shocked” by Patel’s comments and that the involved parties should “do more to enhance mutual trust and cooperation among countries.”[59] PRC interference has raised concerns among other Five Eyes partners, including Australia, which on August 4 charged a PRC national with monitoring a religious organization on behalf of the PRC Public Security Bureau.[60]

The opening of the new FBI office follows the United States-Australia Talisman Sabre exercises, which incorporated drills off Papua New Guinea.[61] The 2025 Talisman Sabre exercises were the largest and most comprehensive in the series to date, reflecting ongoing US and Five Eyes commitment to alliance building in the Indo-Pacific. The PRC will likely continue to criticize these efforts and attempt to weaken them as part of a coalition-breaking campaign.



Russia

Note: A version of this text appeared in ISW's Adversary Entente Task Force update on August 6.

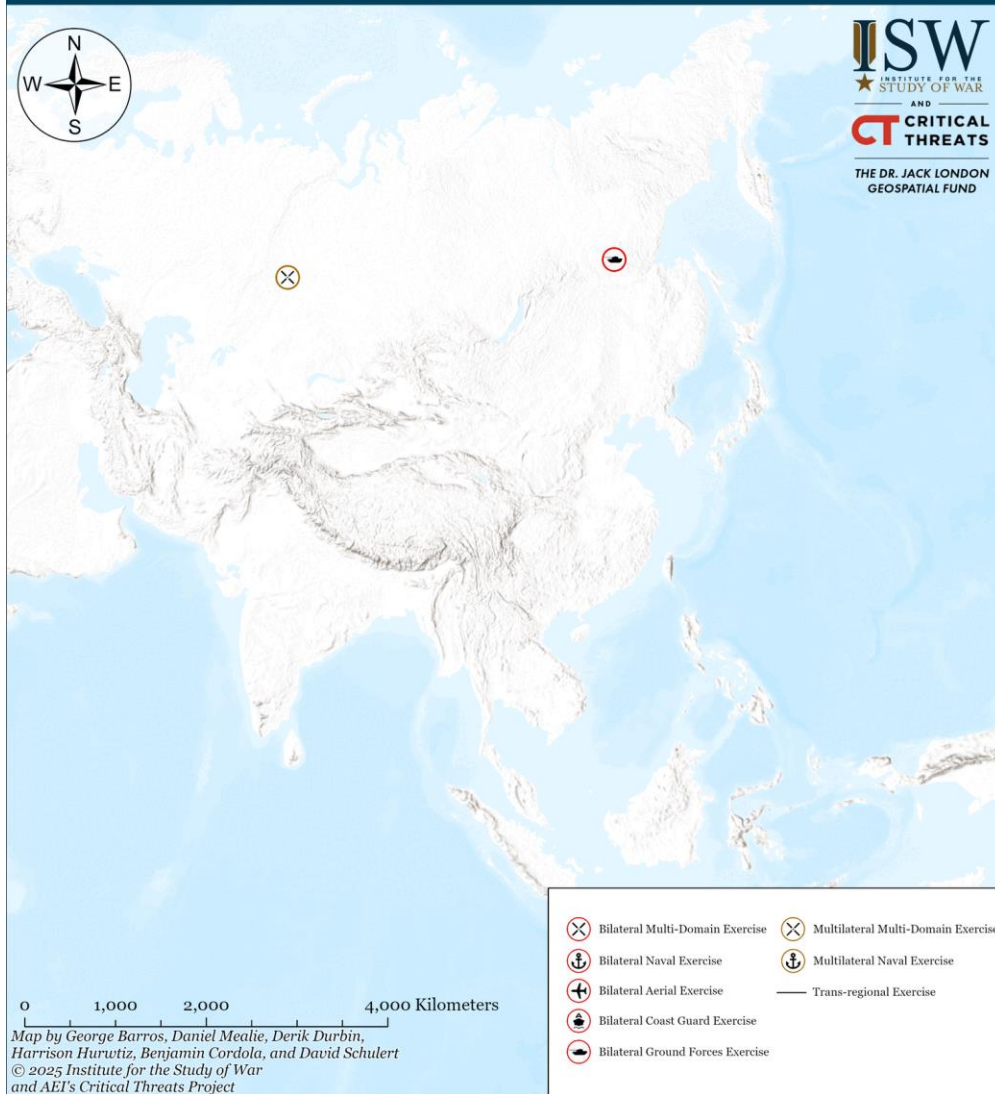
The PRC and Russia conducted an annual combined naval exercise—known as Maritime Interaction or Joint Sea—near the Russian port of Vladivostok on August 1-5. The exercise included a two-day, shore-based planning phase and a three-day live-fire implementation phase, featuring drills in surface-to-surface, anti-submarine warfare, air defense, and submarine rescue. **[62]** The participating PLA forces included the guided missile destroyers Shaoxing and Urumqi, supply ship Qiandaohu, rescue ship Xihu, and submarine Great Wall 210, as well as fixed-wing aircraft, ship-borne helicopters, and marines. Participating Russian forces included the destroyer Admiral Tributs, light frigate Gromkiy, submarine rescue ship Belousov, submarine Volkhov, as well as fixed-wing aircraft, ship-borne helicopters, and marines. The PRC and Russia have conducted this naval exercise series since 2012. This most recent iteration was the eleventh and marked the first time that a PLA submarine has participated.

PRC-based military experts boasted that the exercise highlighted the strength of the current Sino-Russian relationship. PRC state-owned tabloid Global Times cited military affairs expert Wang Yunfei,

who said that the involvement of submarines, which are highly classified systems, shows the deepening of the PRC-Russia relationship.[63] PLA expert Zhang Junshe said that this is the first time that the exercise has listed the theme of "jointly countering security threats in the Western Pacific" in addition to "jointly safeguarding strategic maritime routes." The new language suggests that the two countries may be using the scheduled exercise to posture against the United States and its allies in the Indo-Pacific and are trying to increase interoperability for future combat operations. The exercise took place against the backdrop of an exchange of threats between the United States and Russia, with US President Donald Trump saying on July 31 that he has redeployed two nuclear submarines to "appropriate regions" in response to nuclear threats by Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev.[64] Japan's 2025 Defense White Paper expressed concern that the repeated combined exercises were demonstrations of force against Japan.[65] Russia is unlikely to directly fight in a war in the Taiwan Strait or Korean Peninsula alongside the PRC, but it may help Asian allies (namely the PRC and North Korea) by harassing and threatening Japan to prevent Japanese intervention. Press statements from both the PRC and Russia stated that the exercise was routine, defensive, and not targeted at any third countries, however.[66] Both PRC and Russian sources routinely use this language to describe the nature of the Sino-Russian relationship.[67]

The PRC and Russia have significantly increased their military cooperation across all domains, especially maritime, since 2012. They held a record high of 11 combined exercises, patrols, or military competitions in 2024, mostly in the Indo-Pacific.[68] The most recent naval exercise described here is only the second PRC-Russia exercise this year after a trilateral exercise with Iran in March 2025. These countries will likely conduct more in the following months, though.[69] PRC Ministry of National Defense spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang said that the two sides would conduct their sixth annual maritime patrol in the Indo-Pacific immediately following the exercise.[70]

PRC-Russia Joint Exercises 2018



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