

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.

Key Takeaways

- **Taiwan.** The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is trying to leverage its influence in friendly countries to persecute pro-independence Taiwanese nationals who live or travel there, according to an internal Taiwanese government memo.
- **Taiwan.** Taiwanese celebrities circulated PRC propaganda that framed Taiwan as a PRC province, demonstrating how the PRC coopts media and prominent personalities to conduct information operations, especially targeting the international community and Taiwanese people.
- **Taiwan.** The PRC sent 11 high-altitude balloons into the Taiwanese ADIZ, marking a record high of balloon intrusions in a single day. The PRC likely uses the balloons to collect intelligence on items of military significance around Taiwan and to degrade Taiwan’s threat awareness.
- **PRC.** The US Justice Department unsealed indictments against 12 PRC nationals for their involvement in “global computer intrusion campaigns” targeting US public and private entities. These indictments highlight the PRC practice of contracting hackers to access and steal private data.
- **Australia.** PLA Navy vessels circumnavigated Australia following unprecedented and provocative exercises in the Tasman Sea. The PRC is likely trying to intimidate Australia while expanding its naval presence in the South Pacific. The PRC may have also conducted intelligence gathering operations during the transit.
- **Russia.** The PRC is trying to present itself to Europe as a reasonable alternative to the United States in negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. The PRC effort to play a key mediating role is unlikely to succeed due to Beijing’s continued support for Russia, however.

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is trying to leverage its influence in friendly countries to persecute pro-independence Taiwanese nationals who live or travel there, according to an internal Taiwanese government memo. The memo claimed that the PRC ordered its embassies and unofficial police stations in friendly countries to take unspecified actions against “separatist” elements. The memo specifically claimed that the PRC produced the orders during a meeting of the annual Taiwan Work Conference in February 2025, which was led by senior PRC official Wang Huning. Wang is the deputy head of the Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs, making him the most senior Chinese Communist Party (CCP) official responsible for Taiwan policy after Xi Jinping. Taiwanese officials warned in the memo that PRC-friendly countries could thus allow PRC agents to detain and intimidate Taiwanese nationals. Taiwan is reportedly considering issuing travel alerts for Cambodia, Laos, and some African countries due to these risks.^[1]

The PRC activities that the memo described mark an expansion of the PRC effort to suppress and threaten pro-independence Taiwanese nationals. The PRC issued new guidance in June 2024 on how the state should prosecute and punish “separatist” Taiwanese elements under its 2005 Anti-Secession Law.^[2] The PRC proceeded to convict the first Taiwanese national on charges of secessionism in August 2024, sentencing him to nine years in prison.^[3] The PRC Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) separately expanded its public list of “Taiwan independence diehards” in October 2024 to include twelve prominent individuals from or aligned with Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), including the current vice president and defense minister. The PRC orders to persecute Taiwanese nationals abroad, including students, tourists, and residents of foreign countries, disproves previous PRC claims that the new guidelines for prosecution and punishment only apply to a small minority of “diehard separatists.”^[4]

The role of unofficial PRC police stations in enforcing these guidelines abroad highlights the clandestine and subversive networks that the PRC has established abroad, including in the United States. These stations operate under the guise of consular service offices. The PRC runs these stations often without consent from the host countries and uses the stations for coercion and espionage.^[5] Some countries, such as Thailand, enable these PRC activities and even allow the PRC to use the stations to extradite PRC nationals without regard for due process.^[6]

Taiwanese celebrities circulated PRC propaganda that framed Taiwan as a PRC province, demonstrating how the PRC coopts Taiwanese media and prominent personalities to conduct information operations. At least 18 Taiwanese celebrities posted a graphic that PRC state media published and had text saying, “Taiwan has never been a country, was not one in the past, and it will be even more impossible [for it to become one] in the future.”^[7] The graphic also said that “Taiwan’s only title is ‘Taiwan Province, China’.” The graphic echoed similar rhetoric from PRC Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi on March 7.^[8]

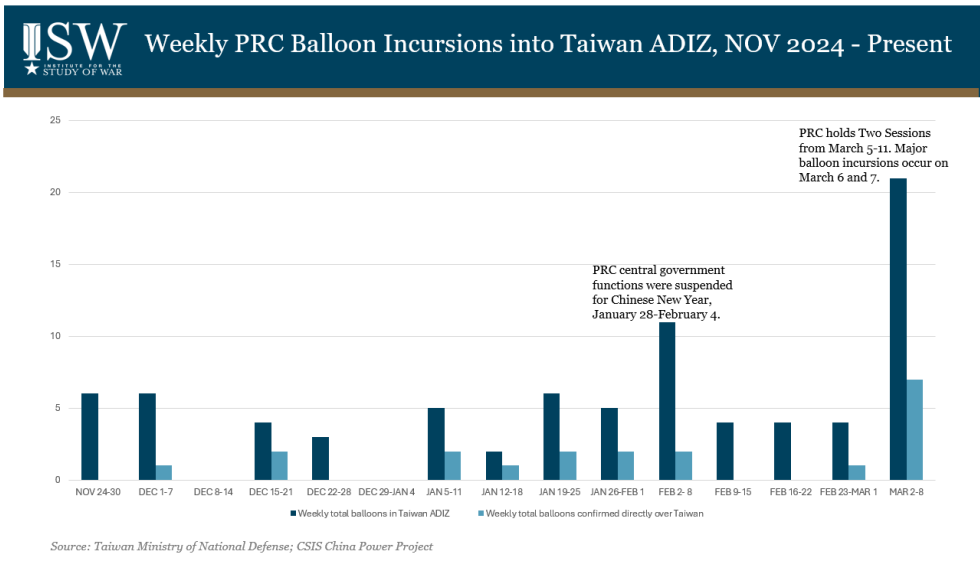
The PRC likely coordinated with these Taiwanese celebrities to post this graphic in order to delegitimize Taiwanese sovereignty and promote a false narrative of overwhelming public support for reunification. The PRC is likely using this information operation to target international audiences and the Taiwanese people, especially Taiwanese youth. The celebrities posted the graphic all around the same time, indicating prior coordination. Some of these same individuals, along with other Taiwanese celebrities, posted pro-PRC messages around the time of the major PRC Joint Sword military exercises in May and October 2024, which simulated a blockade of Taiwan. A Taiwanese documentary has accused the CCP United Front of offering financial incentives and content creation scripts to Taiwanese celebrities in order to coopt them. The United Front is a whole-of-state and –society effort to promote CCP ideology and interests by coopting segments of Chinese society. United Front activities against Taiwan support the PRC effort to assimilate Taiwan politically, especially by spreading pro-reunification sentiments among the Taiwanese people.

Taiwanese officials condemned the propagation of the PRC graphic. The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) condemned celebrities who are “willing to become pawns of the CCP’s united front against Taiwan and to destroy their own country.”^[9] The MAC added that it would investigate whether these celebrities colluded with the CCP in violation of the Cross-Strait Relations Act.^[10]

The PRC sent 11 high-altitude balloons into the Taiwanese Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) on March 6, marking a record high of balloon intrusions in a single day. The balloons flew northeastward from the median line of the Taiwan Strait through the ADIZ, with at least three passing over Taiwan directly.^[11] Another eight balloons flew through the ADIZ on March 7, which is tied for the second most intrusions in one day. At least four of those balloons flew over Taiwan directly.^[12] This spike in activity comes after the annual PRC Two Sessions meetings, during which PRC officials emphasized the need to counter “separatism” and support pro-reunification elements in Taiwan. The PRC typically reduces ADIZ intrusions during the meetings themselves in order to prevent unnecessary distractions or provocations from emerging.

The Taiwanese National Defense Ministry began reporting high-altitude balloon intrusions in December 2023.^[13] The intrusions were likely politically motivated at first, as the daily frequency increased around the January 2024 Taiwanese presidential election before decreasing gradually in the following months.^[14] The National Defense Ministry reported renewed balloon intrusions in November 2024. The PRC has sustained intermittent intrusions since then, albeit at lower frequency than around the Taiwanese presidential election.^[15]

The PRC likely uses the balloons to collect intelligence on items of military significance around Taiwan, such as infrastructure, terrain, and weather. These balloons are also meant to intimidate the Taiwanese population, exhaust Taiwanese detection resources, and potentially goad Taiwan into responding in a way that Beijing could frame as escalatory. The PRC may view balloons as a less aggressive form of intrusion into the ADIZ that sends a signal to Taiwan without triggering conflict. Balloons can intrude into Taiwan’s national airspace without provoking a military crisis because they are unmanned, can drift accidentally, and often float at much higher altitudes than aircraft can fly.^[16]



Recall petitions against 34 Kuomintang (KMT) and KMT-aligned legislators in Taiwan have passed the first threshold of the recall process, which is 83 percent of opposition lawmakers who are eligible to be recalled. These recalls could diminish KMT power in the Legislative Yuan (LY) and allow the ruling DPP to regain meaningful influence there. Recall

petitions against one KMT and one KMT-aligned legislator cleared the first phase of the recall process on March 10.^[17] The first phase requires signatures from at least one percent of eligible voters in the legislator's district. The second phase requires signatures from at least 10 percent of voters in the district within 60 days in order to trigger a recall election to remove the legislator. A successful recall, in turn, will trigger a special election to fill the vacancy.^[18] No party has held a majority in the LY since the 2024 elections, but the KMT and minority Taiwan People's Party (TPP) give the opposition a de-facto legislative majority. The recall efforts give the DPP a path to regain control of the LY if it can successfully recall and replace at least six opposition lawmakers while retaining its existing seats.

No recall petitions against DPP legislators at the national level have cleared the first phase of the recall process at the time of writing. Twelve recall petitions against DPP legislators still require additional verification of signatures to proceed.^[19]

DPP and KMT-aligned activists continue to push recall efforts at the grassroots level. DPP politicians and DPP-aligned activists initiated the recall campaigns after the KMT pushed controversial budget cuts that undermined Taiwanese military readiness and a bill that paralyzed the Taiwanese Constitutional Court, which removed the DPP presidential administration's last institutional means of blocking KMT policies.

China

The US Justice Department unsealed indictments against 12 PRC nationals for their involvement in “global computer intrusion campaigns” that involved hacking US government agencies, media, universities, and dissidents.^[20] These indictments highlight the PRC practice of hiring private hackers to acquire data. Two of them are officers in the PRC Public Security Ministry, while eight are employees of the Shanghai-based contractor i-Soon. The US Justice Department reported that the PRC Public Security Ministry and State Security Ministry paid i-Soon between 10,000 and 75,000 US dollars for each inbox that it hacked. ^[21] The US Justice Department further stated that i-Soon targeted entities of interest to the PRC, including the US Defense Intelligence Agency, a US state legislature, an unspecified US religious organization, news organizations, and critics and dissidents of the PRC.^[22] The company also targeted the foreign ministries' of Indo-Pacific countries, including India, Indonesia, South Korea, and Taiwan. All 10 individuals are at large. The United States is offering between 2 and 10 million US dollars for information leading to the arrest of each individual.^[23]

A US federal court separately released indictments on March 5 for two PRC individuals involved in hacking activities. The two individuals were members of a hacking group called APT27 or Silk Typhoon, among other names. The individuals allegedly stole data from “US-based technology companies, think tanks, defense contractors, government municipalities, and universities.”^[24] PRC government bodies and the People's Liberation Army (PLA), among other buyers, purchased data from these hackers. ^[25] One of the individuals was allegedly involved in cyberattacks targeting the US Treasury Department from September through December 2024.^[26] Microsoft has reported on how Silk Typhoon exploits zero-day vulnerabilities, unpatched applications, and third-party services in order to access and steal data.^[27]

The unsealed files are part of a coordinated effort by US government bodies to hold hackers accountable and increase awareness of PRC-led hacking efforts. The PRC has developed a hacking industry, wherein profit-driven contractors steal data and sell it to PRC entities.^[28] The evolution of the PRC hacking industry highlights the importance of strong cybersecurity systems that protect against these organized efforts to access and steal private data.

CCP and PLA leaders placed particularly strong emphasis on ideological and political education within the PLA during speeches at the Two Sessions meetings. The focus on this subject suggests that CCP and PLA leaders feel the need to further indoctrinate the PLA ranks in order to ensure their loyalty to the CCP and Xi Jinping specifically. Premier Li Qiang delivered his government work report on March 5 and stressed the progress made in promoting Xi Jinping Thought within

the PLA. Li also lauded other political edification efforts and reform in his report. [29] Zhang Youxia and He Weidong—the vice chairmen of the PLA Central Military Commission (CMC)—similarly discussed efforts to strengthen Xi Jinping Thought within the PLA, framing it as necessary to achieve the PRC military modernization goals. Zhang and He also emphasized the importance of the Two Establishes and Two Safeguards concepts and as well as the CMC Chairman Responsibility System—concepts that affirm Xi as the ultimate political and military authority and emphasize the PLA mission of protecting Xi and the CCP.[30]

This unusually strong emphasis on ideological and political thought during the Two Sessions follows CCP leaders removing senior political commissars in the CMC and PLA Ground Forces from their positions. These removals included director of the CMC Political Work Department Miao Hua, the top official responsible for instilling ideological discipline and loyalty to the CCP throughout the PLA. [31]

ISW previously observed indications of political disunity within the PLA.[32] The *PLA Daily*— the PLA’s official newspaper— published two articles in December 2024 calling for upholding collective leadership and intra-party democracy as the guiding principles of CCP control of the military. These concepts contradict the CMC Chairman Responsibility System that bestows supreme authority onto Xi.[33] The CMC Political Work Department published an article with similar language and calling for collective leadership.[34] The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) responded on February 8 by issuing directives restrict the publication of military content.[35] The messaging from the Two Sessions should be understood in this context, as CCP and PLA leaders try to reinforce the centrality of Xi Jinping Thought and a rejection of alternative principles for controlling the PLA.

Northeast Asia

North Korea

Satellite imagery revealed North Korea’s first airborne early warning (AEW) aircraft, which has a radar dome that resembles one uniquely used by PLA aircraft. The design indicates that the PRC may have transferred technology or given technical support to North Korea. Satellite imagery revealed by *38 North*—a Washington, DC-based research organization specializing in North Korea—showed an Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft at Sunan International Airport in Pyongyang on March 4.[36] The aircraft had a radar dome atop the fuselage with a distinctive triangular design, which resembles the fixed dorsal radar dome on PLA AEW aircraft such as the Shaanxi KJ-2000 and KJ-500.[37] The *38 North* report stated that “For [PRC] aircraft, the triangle signifies the placement of three non-rotating phased array radars arranged to cover 120-degree sectors,” adding that the design could indicate support or influence from the PRC, “although the triangle alone is not conclusive proof.” [38] A radar dome stores the AEW aircraft’s radar antennas and sensors to protect them from weather.[39]

The discovery follows previous indications of North Korean collaboration with Russia on AEW aircraft in 2023. *NK News*— a Seoul-based US media outlet specializing in North Korea—reported in late 2023 that North Korea had begun converting one of its three Air Koryo Il-76 cargo planes into an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) or AEW aircraft in November 2023.[40] A satellite image showed a “possible rotodome (rotating radar dome)” atop its fuselage on December 15, 2023, resembling the rotodome on the Russian A-50U Mainstay AEW aircraft, which *NK News* argued indicated technical cooperation between Russia and North Korea.[41] The “possible rotodome” atop the Ilyushin Il-76 plane did not appear to have a distinctive triangle design at the time. ISW could not verify whether the Il-76 plane observed by *NK News* in 2023 is the same one reported by *38 North* in 2025.

The radar dome that resembles a PRC design shows a significant improvement from the initial installation that appeared in satellite images in 2023. The AEW system provides air defense functions, allowing for the surveillance of enemy targets flying at low altitudes and at long ranges. The PRC KJ-2000 AEW aircraft can reportedly detect and track multiple aerial and sea-based targets within a range of over 248 miles.^[42] North Korea would be able to detect any enemy targets within the southern half of the Korean peninsula if its system has similar performance parameters. The South Korean National Defense Ministry assessed in 2022 that the North Korean air force has around 30 reconnaissance aircraft, while *NK News* reports showing versions of its Saetbyol-4 reconnaissance drone—a copycat of the US RQ-4 Global Hawk—reflect Pyongyang’s increasing efforts to use drones for reconnaissance.^[43] North Korea has not fully demonstrated the capabilities of either aerial vehicle, which limits ISW’s ability to assess its operational status or performance. North Korea’s improving air capabilities would, nevertheless, enhance its ability to surveil locations in South Korea, including the US base in Pyeongtaek as well as other US assets throughout South Korea.

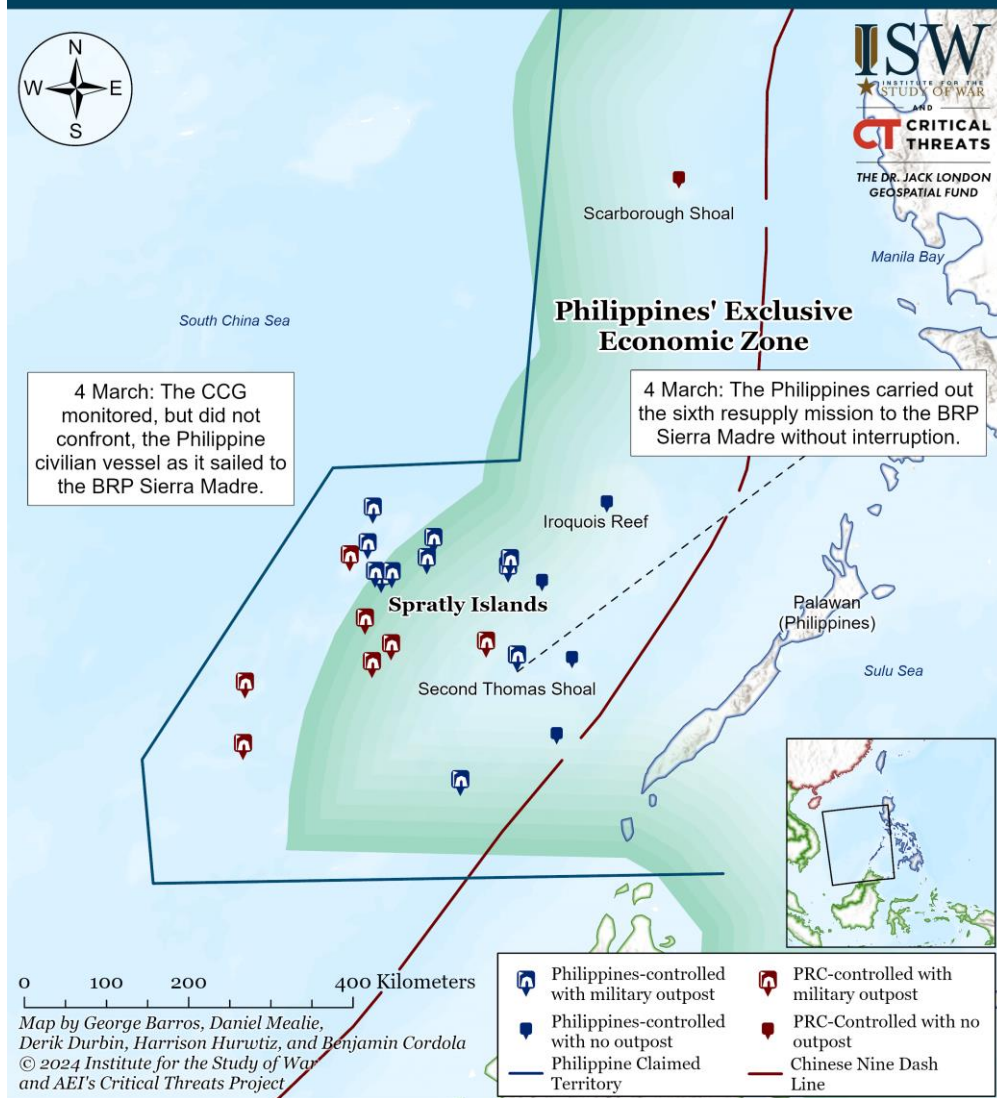
Southeast Asia

Philippines

The Philippines completed its sixth resupply mission to Second Thomas Shoal without incident since the Philippines and PRC reached a provisional agreement over the area in July 2024. The cooling of the Philippines-PRC dispute over the shoal highlights the limits of the PRC willingness to escalate in the South China Sea. China Coast Guard (CCG) spokesperson Liu Dejun said that the CCG “allowed” a Philippine civilian vessel to deliver provisions to the *BRP Sierra Madre* on March 4.^[44] The *BRP Sierra Madre* is a Philippine naval vessel that was intentionally grounded on Second Thomas Shoal in 1999 and now serves as an outpost for the Philippine military. The PRC views this grounding as illegal and has frequently called for the removal of the *BRP Sierra Madre* from the shoal, which Manila and Beijing both claim. The CCG harassed Philippine resupply vessels trying to access the *BRP Sierra Madre* over a dozen times in 2024 often violently. Tensions between the Philippines and PRC reached their peak in June 2024, when the CCG used water cannons, ramming, and blocking maneuvers to prevent a resupply mission from accessing Second Thomas Shoal.^[45] The CCG injured several Philippine sailors. Analysts speculated at the time whether conflict would erupt and potentially trigger the US defense treaty with the Philippines. The Philippines and PRC negotiated a provisional agreement in July 2024, which has resulted in a cessation of PRC harassment up to the present.^[46] PRC rhetoric that it “allows” these resupply missions to occur is likely intended to give the impression that the PRC has legal jurisdiction over the Second Thomas Shoal, which the Philippines rejects.

PRC behavior around the Second Thomas Shoal since July 2024 provides insight into the limited PRC tolerance for conventional conflict in the South China Sea. The PRC has indicated its willingness to confront states that it claims are taking “illegal” or “provocative” actions in what the PRC views as its sovereign territory. Philippine resupply missions and alleged deliveries of construction materials to the *BRP Sierra Madre* served to maintain and strengthen the Philippine presence in the shoal, which the PRC sought to prevent. PRC actions indicate that it is willing to act to prevent other states from solidifying their control over territory in the South China Sea but will also try to avoid escalating to armed conflict, especially conflict that could trigger the US-Philippine mutual defense treaty and lead to US military intervention.

Events Near Second Thomas Shoal March 2025



The Philippines uncovered a network of hundreds of alleged PRC spies in the Philippines, according to a senior Philippine official. The PRC has conducted a long-term effort to infiltrate Philippine society and conduct intelligence gathering operations in the country. The Philippines is currently investigating the network and has yet to release details.[47] The Philippines recently uncovered numerous cases of PRC nationals residing in the Philippines trying to surveil and systematically map critical infrastructure and terrain. Philippines authorities arrested PRC national Deng Yuanqing—an alleged PRC agent—and two Filipino accomplices on January 17 for collecting topographic data and surveilling critical infrastructure in the northern island of Luzon.[48] One of the Filipino accomplices gave a sworn statement before the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) claiming they were required to travel at least 600 kilometers a day.[49] They managed to map 120 areas of interest in Luzon over 35 days, from December 13, 2024, to January 17, 2025.[50] The investigation revealed that the individual was supposedly working for Zhejiang ATTC—a company that claims to work with

advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS)—but failed to show permits for the military grade LIDAR scanner on the car that recorded topographic and terrain data.[51] Philippine authorities also arrested five PRC nationals on January 24 and 25 for installing surveillance equipment and flying drones to spy on the Philippine Navy and Coast Guard in Palawan—the Philippine island that forms the southeastern boundary of the South China Sea.[52] Recent investigations found that four out of the five had donated cash to the city of Tarlac and vehicles to police forces through CCP-affiliated groups for unclear reasons.[53] The NBI arrested two PRC nationals and three Filipinos on February 20 for driving suspicious of vehicles with IMSI catchers, which impersonate cell towers to steal information from devices that connect to it, through sensitive government and military headquarters and facilities.[54] Targeted locations included the US embassy in Manila, the Philippine National Police Headquarters at Camp Crane, and Villamor Air Base. [55]

The PRC nationals in these cases were well integrated into their communities, with one of them having married a Filipina and settling in the Philippines in 2017, and several of the individuals in the Palawan case having permanent residence visas.[56] This indicates that the PRC has long planned the espionage network that the Philippine authorities are now uncovering. The PRC espionage efforts appear to target critical military and government sites in an organized manner for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance purposes.

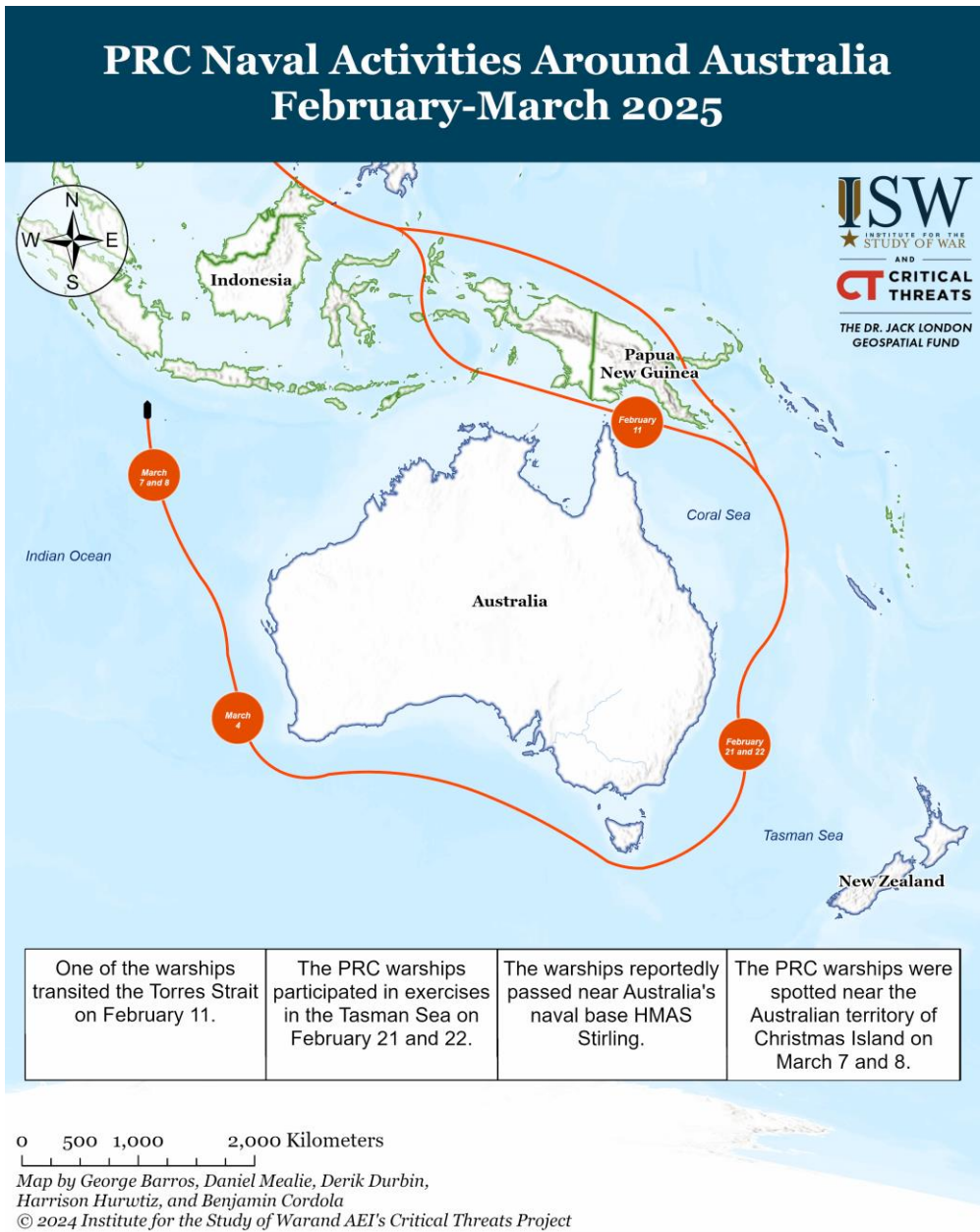
Oceania

PLA Navy warships circumnavigated Australia following unprecedented exercises in the Tasman Sea.[57] The PRC is trying to expand its naval presence in the South Pacific and likely to intimidate Australia—a key US ally and Indo-Pacific coalition partner. PLA warships staged exercises in the Tasman Sea on February 21 and 22.[58] The Australian military reported that it did not observe the warships firing on a target, although the ships moved in a pattern consistent with live-fire drills.[59] The PLA ships then circumnavigated Australia, traveling past Tasmania and up Australia’s west coast. The fleet, led by the Type 055 destroyer *Zunyi*, passed HMAS Stirling naval base in Perth as the base hosted US nuclear-powered submarines.[60]

The PRC likely executed both the circumnavigation and naval exercise as a show of force near Australia—a key US ally that is a member of the Quad, the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network, and the AUKUS pact with the United States and United Kingdom. Australia is a key partner in the US-led coalition in the Indo-Pacific and has participated in military activities to challenge PRC claims in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. Beijing perceives such alliances and activities as a US-led effort to “contain” the PRC within the First Island Chain. The PRC transit around Australia follows a “blue economy cooperation” memorandum of understanding that Beijing negotiated with the Cook Islands—a country in free association with New Zealand—in February 2025. The agreement may include cooperation on “port wharves, shipbuilding and ship repair,” and other forms of maritime cooperation.[61] PRC efforts to intimidate Australia support the PRC’s broader goal of breaking Western coalitions in the Indo-Pacific. PRC military exercises, transits, and security deals in the South Pacific are part of a unified and increasingly assertive Pacific strategy.

The PLA fleet may have conducted surveillance during its transit.[62] Villagers in Papua New Guinea reportedly spotted a drone near the waters of the Torres Strait, north of Australia, near the time that the PRC frigate *Hengyang* transited the strait before rejoining the other two ships in the fleet for the exercise on February 11. Malcolm Davis of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute said that the PRC vessels may have launched a reconnaissance drone.[63] The Torres Strait is a maritime chokepoint that is critical to Australian defense. Australia views the Torres Strait as a key strategic passage, and Australian scholars have previously characterized PRC activity near the strait as a threat to Australian security.[64]

The PRC may seek to enhance its surveillance of the waters west of Australia, as it strives to project power in the Pacific. HMAS Stirling, which the PRC warships passed near, serves as an operating base for the AUKUS coalition. It will host US and UK nuclear-powered submarines on a rotational basis beginning in 2027 to facilitate Australia’s nuclear-powered submarine training and development efforts.[65] PRC officials have publicly criticized AUKUS and portrayed Australia’s acquisition of nuclear submarines as a danger to regional security and the international nuclear non-proliferation regime.[66] PRC transits and activities near Christmas Island, as observed on March 7 and 8, could indicate an effort to surveil Australian submarine routes.[67] Australian officials observed PRC surveying ships near the island in 2020 and said that the ship was mapping a route used by Australian submarines traveling to and from the South China Sea.[68]



Russia

The PRC is trying to present itself to European countries as a reasonable alternative to the United States in negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. The PRC's effort to play a key mediating role is unlikely to succeed due to Beijing's continued support for Russia, however. PRC special envoy for European affairs Lu Shaye said on March 6 that he was “appalled” by the way US President Donald Trump treated allies in Europe and criticized the United States for excluding European countries in US-Russia negotiations on the war in Ukraine. Lu said, “I believe European friends should reflect on this and compare the Trump administration’s policies with those of the Chinese government. In doing so, they will see that China’s diplomatic approach emphasizes peace, friendship, goodwill, and win-win cooperation.” Lu made the comment on the sidelines of the annual Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) session in Beijing.^[69] PRC Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi said on March 7 that the PRC is willing to work with the international community “in light of the wills of the parties to the [Ukraine] conflict” to “continue to play its constructive role in resolving the crisis.”^[70] Wang and PRC ambassador to the United Nations Fu Cong made similar comments on February 17 and 18 and urged the participation of “all parties” in peace talks, around the time that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov met in Riyadh to discuss Ukraine peace negotiations without the presence of Ukrainian or other European interlocutors.^[71]

The PRC may be trying to exploit growing uncertainty about the US-Ukraine and US-Europe relationships to undermine US credibility as a negotiator and promote Beijing’s own role in the peace process. The PRC consistently tried to portray itself as a mediator and advocate for peace in the Ukraine war through official statements and the promotion of two peace plan proposals. The PRC Foreign Affairs Ministry released its first 12-point peace plan in February 2023, which called for the resumption of peace talks, cessation of hostilities, abandonment of the “Cold War mentality,” protection of nuclear power plants, and promotion of post-conflict reconstruction, among other points. The plan avoided criticizing Russia and did not call for the withdrawal of any Russian troops.^[72] The PRC and Brazil jointly announced a six-point peace plan in May 2024 that proposed a broad set of principles for a peace settlement.^[73] The PRC has condemned the United States throughout the conflict for “adding fuel to the fire” by providing military aid to Ukraine while downplaying concerns about its own material support for Russia as “normal trade relations.”^[74] It consistently advocated for Russian participation in peace summits where Russia was excluded. PRC officials have increasingly advocated for European—rather than Russian—participation in negotiations in response to US President Donald Trump’s Ukraine policy, however. Lu Shaye implied on March 6 that the PRC is less pro-Russia than the United States, saying, “Are people still asking whether China is leaning towards Russia? If they are, they should blame the US too. The US is not only leaning [towards Russia], they are supporting [Russia].”^[75]

The PRC is unlikely to win support as an important mediator in the Russia-Ukraine war, however. The proposed PRC peace plans have gained little traction with Ukraine or Europe largely because the plans avoided criticizing Russia’s invasion and did not address core issues in dispute between the warring parties, including the status of Ukrainian territory that Russia occupies. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy criticized the PRC and Brazil’s joint proposal, saying that “alternatives, half-hearted settlement plans, [and] so-called sets of principles” cannot stop Russian aggression.^[76] The PRC efforts to mediate are hampered by both that fact and the widespread perception in Europe that the PRC has been Russia’s lifeline in the war, supporting Russia’s economy and defense industry. Beijing consistently opposed “unilateral sanctions” against Russia and has not used its considerable leverage over Moscow to pressure Russia to deescalate or stop its invasion. NATO countries labeled the PRC as a “decisive enabler” of Russia’s war against Ukraine in a July 2024 communique.^[77] The Council of the European Union also imposed “fully-fledged sanctions” on PRC entities and individuals supplying drone and microelectronic components to the Russian military in December 2024.^[78] The PRC appointment of Lu Shaye to be its

Special Representative for European Affairs in February 2025 may further reduce Beijing’s credibility as a mediator; Lu repeatedly alienated European partners while serving as ambassador to France with his abrasive and controversial comments, including questioning the sovereignty of post-Soviet states.[79] Finally, the PRC and Russia maintain regular communication, including phone calls and meetings between PRC President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The most recent phone call on February 24 reaffirmed the “no limits” partnership between the two countries, which they first declared days before the Russian invasion in February 2022.[80] The PRC does not have similar levels of coordination with Ukrainian officials. Various individuals, including PRC and US officials, have floated the possible deployment of PRC peacekeepers to Ukraine to ensure post-war peace. The potential for this kind of arrangement cannot be ignored even if the PRC is unlikely to play a decisive role in mediating an end to the war.[81] The PRC has neither confirmed nor denied its interest in a post-war peacekeeping arrangement in Ukraine.

Iran

The PRC, Iran, and Russia began combined naval drills called the Maritime Security Belt 2025 in the Gulf of Oman on March 11 and confirmed nuclear talks scheduled for March 14, highlighting their continued cooperation. This is the fifth iteration of the Maritime Security Belt drills between these three countries, which began in 2019.[82] The drills started on March 11 in the Gulf of Oman near the port of Chabahar and near the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait of Hormuz is the world’s most important chokepoint for fossil fuel shipments, with approximately a quarter of the global supply of seaborne-traded oil and a fifth of the global supply of liquefied natural gas transiting through it.[83] The PRC Defense Ministry stated that the exercise “includes drills on striking maritime targets, damage control, and joint search and rescue operations” to strengthen cooperation among the three navies.[84] GPS interference disrupted transit for several hours in the Strait of Hormuz on March 10.[85] The Russian Defense Ministry press statement detailed that about 15 ships, support vessels and combat boats as well as naval aviation helicopters participated in the exercise, including the Russian Navy’s medium-sized sea tanker Pechanga and corvettes Rezky and Aldar Tsydenzhapov.[86] The PRC Defense Ministry stated that it sent the Type 052D destroyer Baotou and the Type 903A supply ship Gaoyouhu.[87] Iranian destroyers Jamara, Alvand, and Bayander; frigates Nizeh, Ganaveh, Nayband, and Barhrgan; and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy vessels Shahid Sayyad Shirazi, Shahid Roohi, and Shahid Mahmoudi also participated in the exercise.[88]

The PRC Foreign Affairs Ministry also announced on March 12 that the three countries will hold nuclear talks on March 14 in Beijing. The PRC Vice Foreign Affairs Minister Ma Zhaoxu will chair the meeting and Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Ryabkov Sergey Alexeevich and Iranian Deputy Affairs Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi will attend the meeting to discuss the Iranian nuclear issue among other topics.[89]

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BABELSTREET

[1] <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-fears-beijing-is-taking-independence-crackdown-overseas-2025-03-07/>

[2] http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/13/content_1384075.htm

[3] https://www.mac.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=B383123AEADAEE52&s=D34FB2801611FCA9

[4] http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/xwdt/xwfb/xwfbh/202409/t20240911_12649283.htm

[5] <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/new-york-resident-pleads-guilty-operating-secret-police-station-chinese-government-lower>

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<https://safeguarddefenders.com/sites/default/files/pdf/110%20Overseas%20%28v5%29.pdf>

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