

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

- **The CCG continued to expand its “law enforcement activities” to assert the PRC’s claim over the Taiwan Strait. The CCG intruded into Taiwan’s restricted waters around Kinmen and tried to expel Taiwanese fishing vessels near the middle of the Strait.**
- **Taiwan and the PRC agreed to resume negotiations about the February 14 capsizing incident that killed two PRC fishermen fleeing the Taiwanese Coast Guard near Kinmen.**
- **PRC officials and media slammed Taiwan’s Han Kuang military exercises as a futile attempt to “resist reunification.”**
- **The PRC held the Third Plenum of the 20th Party Congress, which focused on promoting economic development in alignment with national strategic goals.**
- **The PRC and Philippines reached a “provisional arrangement” for rotation and resupply missions to the Second Thomas Shoal, though significant points of disagreement remain.**
- **The PRC hosted a “reconciliation dialogue” for Palestinian factions in which Hamas and Fatah signed a joint declaration that stated their intention to form a temporary post-war unity government in Gaza and the West Bank.**

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan

The CCG continued to expand its “law enforcement activities” to assert the PRC’s claim over the Taiwan Strait. Four CCG ships entered restricted waters in four different locations around

Taiwan’s Kinmen island group on July 19. Kinmen is a Taiwanese island chain located just 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the PRC’s coast. Taiwan’s Coast Guard Administration (CGA) said this was the 32nd such incursion into Kinmen’s restricted waters in 2024.[1] On the same day, the CGA also discovered a CCG ship trying to expel Taiwanese fishing boats near the middle of the Taiwan Strait, around 48 miles west of Huayu Island of Taiwan’s Penghu archipelago.[2] The PRC claims Taiwan and all its associated waters to be Chinese territory and denies the existence of any restricted or prohibited waters around Taiwanese islands such as Kinmen. It claims the entire Taiwan Strait to be part of its Exclusive Economic Zone. TAO spokesperson Zhu Fenglian accused Taiwanese media that reported on CCG harassment of Taiwanese fishing boats of trying to “intimidate” Taiwanese fishermen and provoke cross-strait hostility by “distorting and smearing” normal law enforcement activities to enforce a summer fishing moratorium.[3]

The PRC began regular CCG patrols around Kinmen and incursions into Kinmen’s restricted and prohibited since February 2024 to assert its sovereignty over those waters and to punish Taiwan for electing President Lai Ching-te, whom the PRC considers a dangerous separatist. It substantially increased the frequency of incursions in May, around the time of Lai’s inauguration, and shifted from fixed-line patrols into Kinmen waters to designating “patrol areas” within which individual CCG ships can patrol in a less predictable pattern. Taiwanese media has also reported occasional instances of CCG ships harassing Taiwanese fishermen near the Penghu Islands, including one incident on July 5 that occurred 3.5 miles east of the Taiwan Strait median line.[4] The expansion of CCG “law enforcement” activities into Taiwan-controlled waters around Kinmen and eastward into international waters near Taiwan shows an intensifying PRC campaign to assert control over the waters near and around Taiwan.



Taiwan and the PRC agreed to resume negotiations about the February 14 capsizing incident that killed two PRC fishermen fleeing the Taiwanese Coast Guard (CGA) near Kinmen. The ROC Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) announced on July 23 that it will meet with PRC authorities at a hotel in Kinmen to further discuss a speedboat crash that killed two PRC fishers on February 14. Typhoon Gaemi's landfall in Taiwan and the PRC on July 23-24, however, halted ferry service between Xiamen and Kinmen, delaying negotiations as relatives of the deceased fishermen and other members of the PRC delegation were unable to travel to Kinmen on the day of negotiations. An MAC press release stated negotiations will continue once the PRC and ROC agree on a suitable date.[5] PRC Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) spokesperson Zhu Fenglian said on July 24 that the PRC hoped to “resolve the relevant issues through proper negotiation” but did not provide further details about the talks.[6]

The focus of the negotiation surrounds an incident on February 14, 2024, when a PRC fishing boat in Taiwanese waters near Kinmen, a Taiwanese island around ten kilometers away from the PRC city of Xiamen, capsized while fleeing from a legal Taiwan Coast Guard pursuit. The incident resulted in the deaths of two of the fishing boat's four crewmembers. The ROC took custody of the boat and the bodies. ROC and PRC representatives have held 15 rounds of negotiations to resolve disputes caused by the incident. Unresolved PRC demands from previous negotiations include the ROC revealing the truth behind the incident, returning the dead fishermen's bodies and their boat to the PRC, and apologizing for the incident. According to Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (CGA), however, negotiations failed because the PRC demanded to interrogate CGA personnel and did not respect Taiwan's maritime boundaries and law enforcement rights.[7] The Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) began patrolling the waters around Kinmen and making occasional incursions into Kinmen's restricted or prohibited waters in the months after the incident, claiming it has the jurisdiction and responsibility to do so to protect the rights and safety of fishermen from both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

The PRC seeks to secure through negotiations the deceased fishermen's bodies and boat, an apology from the ROC, and the release of detailed information about the February 14 incident and its causes.[8][9] The PRC blames Taiwan for the deaths and claimed in March that the negotiations would be postponed until after the conclusion of Taiwan's judicial investigation into the incident concludes.[10]

The new round of negotiations may be an attempted quid pro quo by the ROC to free Taiwanese nationals detained by the PRC. Kinmen Kuomintang (KMT) Legislator Jessica Chen Yu-jeen expressed hopes that the new round of negotiations could lead to an ROC fisherman surnamed Hu's release from PRC detainment or PRC authorities allowing PRC tourists to visit Kinmen.[11] The CCG detained Hu in March after his boat ran out of fuel and drifted into PRC waters near Kinmen. Chen has negotiated with PRC officials to allow Hu's family to visit him in Quanzhou, a PRC city near Kinmen, though there is no indication she will participate in the new round of negotiations.[12] The delayed negotiations were also scheduled to occur roughly three weeks after the CCG detained a Taiwanese fishing boat and its five-man crew in PRC territorial waters near Weitou, Fujian Province. The crew, three of which are ROC nationals, is still in detainment in Fujian despite ROC efforts to secure their release.[13]

PRC officials and media slammed Taiwan’s Han Kuang military exercises as a futile attempt to “resist reunification.” The ROC began its annual Han Kuang military exercises on July 22 and will hold them until July 26. The 2024 exercises are “unscripted” and will test Taiwan’s ability to protect critical infrastructure and conduct supply-delivery missions amid a PRC blockade.[14] The exercises also feature live-fire drills on Taiwan’s outlying islands of Kinmen, Matsu, and Penghu.[15] PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson Mao Ning blamed tension in the Taiwan Strait on the DPP “provocation” and “seeking independence” with help from foreign forces. She stressed that any attempt to “seek independence by force” or “resist reunification by force” will inevitably fail.[16] An article in PRC state media Xinhua claimed that changes to make the exercises unscripted and decentralized, to make them better simulate the unpredictable conditions of real combat, were superficial changes that further “hijack” the lives and safety of Taiwanese people. MND spokesperson Senior Col. Wu Qian said on June 27 that the annual Han Kuang exercises were simply a “show” that cannot change the outcome of a war.[17] TAO spokesperson Zhu Fenglian accused the DPP on July 24 of exaggerating the threat from the PRC, squandering Taiwanese people’s money to buy weapons from the United States, tying Taiwan to the “‘Taiwan independence’ chariot” and using the Taiwanese people as “cannon fodder for Taiwan independence.”[18] State media Global Times cited PRC military expert Zhang Junshe who called the exercises a “show” and claimed the drills actually aim to ensure the survival of the DPP authorities, use the Taiwanese “general public” as shields, and await foreign reinforcements.[19]

Taiwan’s Constitutional Court issued an injunction on July 19 to temporarily suspend the implementation of most provisions of a controversial legislative reform law. The Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People’s Party (TPP), which hold a combined majority in the Legislative Yuan (LY), passed the set of reforms on May 28 despite opposition from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). President Lai Ching-te of the DPP signed the bill into law on June 24 after the LY overrode his request for “reconsideration,” but the DPP filed for a “constitutional interpretation” of the law in hopes of preventing its implementation. The new law grants the LY enhanced oversight powers over the government. The law permits the LY to call on any public official to testify before an investigative committee, confirm political appointments, and impose fines or criminal charges for “contempt of legislature” against anyone who lies, refuses to answer questions, or talks back while testifying before the legislature. The law also requires the president of Taiwan to deliver a State of the Nation address and submit to a question-and-answer session by the LY.[20] The Constitutional Court ruled 13-2 to issue injunctions on the implementation of almost all these provisions while it completes a review of their constitutionality. There is no set date for the final decision. The Constitutional Court expressed concern that provisions in the new law could infringe upon the separation of powers between the LY and other branches of government, force people to express opinions or provide documents against their will, and grant the LY investigative powers that the Constitution does not stipulate.[21]

The court’s injunction order and the reasoning behind it suggest that it will find some or all of the suspended provisions unconstitutional in the final ruling. The KMT legislative caucus described the injunction ruling as “the death of judicial independence” and said it did not believe the justices who ruled to issue the injunction would be able to rule impartially on the law’s constitutionality.[22] TPP Chair Ko Wen-je called the injunction a “declaration of war” on the parliamentary system.[23] If the reforms pass constitutional review, they will increase the KMT and TPP opposition’s ability to check, investigate, and hinder the agenda and operation of President Lai’s DPP administration. The KMT and TPP together hold a majority of seats in the LY.

China

The PRC held the Third Plenum of the 20th Party Congress, which focused on promoting economic development in alignment with national strategic goals. The Third Plenum is one of seven meetings that the Central Committee of the CCP holds once every five years to chart a path for the PRC's major economic and social policies. The unifying theme of the plenum was deepening comprehensive reform, ranging from fiscal policy, urban development, industrial policy, and more. The purpose of the reforms is to advance the PRC's goal of achieving "socialist modernization" by 2035, which is a CCP-designated milestone that entails strengthening the PRC's national power through the advancement of economic, military, and political influence.

The focus of the reforms reflects the PRC's prioritization of calibrating the economy's trajectory to support national security objectives. The PRC released a resolution on July 21 that summarized the plenum's goals and planned reforms.[24] The resolution made frequent references to "high-quality development," which is an emerging slogan that entails investment in innovation to drive growth, climbing the value chain in technology and manufacturing, and deepening market reforms for a more balanced economy. The PRC's modernization drive is rooted in the construction of the so-called "integrated national strategy system," which seeks to coordinate and harmonize economic development with national defense. This concept is a product of CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's pervasive "Overall National Security Outlook," in which national security concerns permeate all facets of society.

The resolution stressed numerous priorities that reflect the PRC's urgent drive to securitize economic growth to support national defense capabilities. The resolution highlighted scientific and technological frontiers as the "main battlefield" of the economy and called for concentrating state capital in important industries related to national security. These "strategic industries" include AI, aerospace, new energy and resources, advanced technology, and quantum computing. The resolution also called for hastening the progression of independent supply chains to enhance security in integrated circuits, industrial equipment, and other advanced technology. One of the measures to achieve supply chain security included transferring critical industries within the PRC and building a "national strategic hinterland." The resolution also highlighted the need to improve access and production of "strategic minerals," which are inputs in various technologies important to national and economic security.

These priorities are consistent with the PRC's focus on insulating areas of strategic importance from what it sees as escalating efforts from hostile countries to suppress the PRC. The resolution acknowledged a "complex domestic and international situation," and called for reforms to coordinate the two. In an explainer of the resolution released alongside it, Xi Jinping urged the PRC to adapt to the challenging global environment that is characterized by growing "external attempts to suppress and contain China." [25] Xi claimed that deepening reform will help the PRC win the strategic initiative as challenges arise. The PRC began a drive to foster technology industries domestically in 2020 after the United States took measures to limit the PRC's access to dual-use technologies that are critical for achieving the PRC's ongoing militarization. Dual-use technologies are a cornerstone of the PRC's military-civil fusion strategy, which aims to ensure that economic development supports military development.

The PRC removed sanctions from US satellite communications firm Viasat, which it had sanctioned for aiding Taiwan’s military. PRC MFA spokesperson Mao Ning announced on July 22 that the PRC has lifted its sanctions against the US communications company Viasat “since the circumstances based on which the countermeasures were issued have changed.” She did not comment on media reports that Viasat is seeking cooperation with PRC firms.[26] The PRC originally imposed sanctions on Viasat in January 2024 along with four other defense firms in response to the United States announcing a \$300 million sale of equipment to Taiwan to help maintain Taiwan’s tactical information systems.[27] The sanctions froze the companies’ assets in the PRC and prohibited PRC organizations and individuals from doing business with them.[28] Taiwan’s Central News Agency (CNA) reported that this is the first time the PRC publicly announced the lifting of sanctions on a firm that sold military equipment to Taiwan.[29] Viasat’s PRC business has included a 2019 partnership with China Satellite Communications Co. to provide inflight wi-fi to PRC airlines and a sale of equipment to Sichuan Airlines in 2022. Viasat also acquired the British satellite communications company Inmarsat in 2023, which provided satellite services to China Central Television (CCTV).[30] It is unclear what “circumstances” changed to trigger the lifting of sanctions. Viasat has not commented on the removal of the sanctions as of July 24.

The PRC suspended arms control and non-proliferation talks with the United States, citing US arms sales to Taiwan. PRC MFA spokesperson Lin Jian cited repeated US arms sales to Taiwan as the reason for suspending negotiations.[31] The PRC has long been uninterested in the talks, however. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan commented on the PRC’s disinterest in “substantive dialogue” on arms control and nuclear non-proliferation in June 2023. Sullivan stated that the PRC had little willingness to “compartmentalize strategic stability from broader issues in the relationship.”[32] Sullivan stated that the PRC has not shown interest in discussions regarding the changes it is making to its nuclear forces.[33]

The United States and the PRC held the last instance of arms control negotiations in Washington in November 2023 after a five-year hiatus.[34] The meeting occurred a week before President Joe Biden and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping held a summit in San Francisco to stabilize bilateral relations. An unnamed US official familiar with the talks described the PRC’s level of engagement during that meeting as not substantive.[35] The US Under Secretary for Arms Control Bonnie Jenkins stated in Congressional testimony in May that the PRC declined a follow-on meeting and did not provide a substantive response to the risk reduction suggestions that the US side put forth during that meeting.[36] Lin rejected the notion that the PRC was dragging its feet and stated that the PRC is willing to uphold communication with the US on arms control on the condition that the US respects its “core interests.”[37]

The PRC frequently uses security dialogue as a bargaining chip to influence US behavior, rather than viewing it as a necessary aspect of bilateral relations. The PRC cut off high-level military talks with the United States after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022. The PRC agreed to resume them at the presidential summit between US President Joe Biden and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping in San Francisco in November 2023.

Southeast Asia

Philippines

The PRC and Philippines reached a “provisional arrangement” for rotation and resupply missions to the Second Thomas Shoal, though significant points of disagreement remain. The Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) released a statement on July 21, saying that this agreement was part of an effort to de-escalate the situation with China around the Second Thomas Shoal.[38] Tensions have been high since a territorial dispute occurred in June of this year when a Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) vessel collided with a Philippine supply ship during a routine transport mission to the grounded *Sierra Madre*. [39] Subsequent statements from both sides indicate that significant points of disagreement remain, however.

Neither the PRC nor the Philippines have released the details of the agreement, which has enabled the PRC to begin shaping the information environment to blame the Philippines for any failure to implement the agreement. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson Mao Ning remarked at a July 22 press conference that the Philippines and China had just completed a series of consultations on managing the situation at the Second Thomas Shoal, and had reached an agreement with the Philippines on humanitarian resupply activities based on three points guiding the PRC’s “principled position” on this issue.[40] First, China reiterates that the grounding of the *Sierra Madre* is a violation of PRC sovereign rights, and again calls for it to be removed from its current location. Second, China will allow humanitarian supply missions to the *Sierra Madre* if the Philippines informs China in advance and allows Chinese monitoring throughout the process. Third, China will not allow the Philippines to send construction materials to the *Sierra Madre* and/or attempt to build a permanent outpost in contested waters.

The DFA stated on July 22 that the MFA inaccurately characterized the agreement. The DFA contested that the Philippines must provide prior notification to the PRC and receive on-site confirmation before humanitarian supply missions can occur.[41] The DFA stated that the Philippines will continue to assert its rights within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), including in the Second Thomas Shoal. However, the DFA made it clear that it is still ready to implement the agreement on rotation and resupply efforts.

Vietnam

Vietnam filed a claim at the United Nations to extend its continental shelf in the South China Sea. The claim aims to extend the continental shelf beyond the current 200 nautical miles, but not exceeding 350 nautical miles, from baselines in its territorial waters.[42] Vietnam also seeks through the submission to reaffirm its sovereignty over the disputed Paracel and Spratly archipelagos one month after the Philippines filed a similar claim. The DFA released a statement reaffirming the Philippines’ claims on its extended continental shelf but acknowledged that Vietnam has a right to submit claims establishing the limits of the continental shelf in accordance with UNCLOS.[43] The Philippines stated its desire to engage with Vietnam on possible ways to achieve a mutually beneficial solution to issues in the South China Sea.

The PRC MFA stated that it “firmly opposes” Vietnam’s filing.[44] MFA spokesperson Lin Jian stated that such actions by Vietnam and the Philippines infringe on China’s territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests and will only serve to intensify existing conflicts.[45]

Russia

PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba from July 23-25. Wang stated that “both Ukraine and Russia have sent signals of willingness to negotiate to varying degrees,” but that the “timing is not yet ripe.”[46] The PRC readout stated that Ukraine appreciated the “positive and constructive role played by China in promoting peace and maintaining international order.” The Ukrainian readout of the meeting did not mirror the sentiments from the PRC readout, however. The Ukrainian readout stated only that Kuleba expressed conviction that peace in Ukraine corresponds to the PRC’s strategic interests and called the PRC’s role as a global force for peace important.[47]

The PRC’s readout aims to assert the narrative that Ukraine has confidence in the PRC to help negotiate an end to the war. The PRC released a vague 12-point peace plan in February 2023 that advocated for a political settlement to the war in Ukraine. Ukraine and Western allies regarded it as a non-starter due to its failure to demand Russia’s withdrawal from occupied territory. The PRC readout highlighted Ukraine’s regard for the PRC’s six-point “consensus” to reach a political solution that it jointly issued with Brazil on May 23, which lacks the same precondition for starting negotiations as the 12-point plan.[48] The PRC skipped a Ukraine peace summit in June in protest of Russia’s exclusion.[49]

The PRC’s efforts to showcase international support for its role as a mediator aim to rebuke NATO’s accusations that the PRC is supporting Russia in the war against Ukraine. The PRC also seeks to promote its peace plan as an alternative outcome to the war than the resolution that NATO and Ukraine advocate for, which is Russia’s full withdrawal from Ukrainian territory.

PRC MFA spokesperson Lin Jian expressed support to Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on July 17 for Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s peace efforts, referring to the latter’s recent shuttle diplomacy between Ukraine and Russia.[50] The PRC highlighted alignment on the issue of Ukraine between the PRC and Hungary, an EU and NATO member, during a meeting between Xi Jinping and Orbán on July 8.[51] Lin used Orbán’s appeal to European Council President Charles Michel to include the PRC in future EU peace negotiations by advocating for Russia’s involvement.

The PRC is taking parallel actions to undermine NATO on the world stage alongside its diplomatic efforts to influence the Ukraine crisis. The PRC conducted joint military exercises with Belarus near the Polish and Ukrainian border that simulated the seizure of an airport, which the two countries called “anti-terrorism operations.”[52] The exercises began on July 8, during the week of the NATO summit in Washington in which NATO heads of state labeled the PRC a “decisive enabler of Russia’s war against Ukraine.”[53] Lin Jian criticized NATO for reports that member states are considering nationalizing PRC-owned infrastructure and accused it of trying to expand its influence.[54] The PRC Ambassador to the UN Fu Cong also accused NATO of expansionism during a speech at a UN sustainability forum and stated that “history has amply proved that wherever NATO hands extend, turmoil and chaos will ensue.”[55]

Israel-Palestine

The PRC hosted a “reconciliation dialogue” for Palestinian factions in which Hamas and Fatah signed a joint declaration that stated their intention to form a temporary post-war unity government in Gaza and the West Bank.[56] Fatah is the dominant party in the Palestinian Authority (PA), which governs the West Bank. The eight-point declaration stipulates that a government involving Hamas would rule the Gaza Strip and West Bank until elections could be held at an unspecified future date.[57] The declaration reportedly does not address how or when the government will be formed, nor which party will maintain security in the Gaza Strip. Hamas has been adamant that it will keep its military wing.[58] The declaration stands in contrast to the position of the United States and other Western countries, which oppose Hamas’ involvement in the Palestinian government unless it recognizes Israel.[59] Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz accused Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas of embracing terrorism by engaging with Hamas and denied that the government will form because Israel would crush Hamas.[60] The full text of the agreement has not been released at the time of writing.

PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi lauded the declaration as a “historic moment for the cause of Palestinian liberation.”[61] Wang stated that the PRC has never had any selfish interests in the Palestinian issue and has contributed “Chinese wisdom and solutions” through various proposals under Xi Jinping. Wang outlined a three-step process for resolving the current conflict, which entailed an immediate ceasefire, the international community’s acceptance of a post-war Palestinian government in Gaza, and Palestine’s full membership in the United Nations to begin working toward a two-state solution. PRC state media highlighted congratulations from the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Sven Koopmans.[62]

The PRC’s early portrayal of the deal as a success is not easily reconcilable with the historic obstacles to the unification of the Palestinian factions. Past deals have failed to bring about substantive cooperation between Fatah and Hamas.[63] PRC MFA spokesperson Mao Ning responded to public skepticism over the declaration’s role in facilitating reconciliation and stated that “peace will not be achieved overnight.”[64]

The PRC is using engagement with Palestinian factions to portray itself as a successful global mediator that can resolve conflicts where the United States has failed. Hosting the intra-Palestinian talks is a relatively low-cost, low-risk way for the PRC to bolster its diplomatic reputation. A failure to bring about Fatah-Hamas reconciliation would amount to maintenance of the status quo and would not draw significant criticism of the PRC. Even without a material improvement in relations between Fatah and Hamas, the negotiations provide the PRC with an opportunity to tout its diplomatic credentials in a similar way to the Beijing-mediated Saudi Arabia-Iran rapprochement in March 2023.

The PRC’s diplomatic engagement could facilitate greater PRC economic and political influence in the Levant. The PRC first hosted intra-Palestinian reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas in Beijing on April 26.[65] MFA spokesperson Wang Wenbin stated on April 26 that the PRC supports strengthening the authority of the PA, which signals its intent to establish relations with the Palestinian factions that have roles in governing Gaza after the war. [66] Post-war reconstruction offers a path for the PRC to grow its economic influence. The PRC pledged \$83 million to reconstruction efforts and humanitarian aid as of May.[67] Senior Hamas official Hassam Badran stated that a Palestinian unity government would oversee reconstruction efforts under the joint agreement that the PRC facilitated.[68]



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