

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 PRC launched a large-scale military exercise around Taiwan in response to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te’s National Day speech. It framed Lai’s speech as a new level of “provocation” even though the speech was more restrained than Lai’s inaugural address. The PRC was likely planning a strong military reaction regardless of the content of Lai’s speech.**
- **The Joint Sword 2024B exercise was an escalation from previous Joint Sword-series exercises and featured a significantly expanded role for the Chinese Coast Guard in blockade operations.**
- **The PRC announced sanctions against Taiwanese DPP legislator Puma Shen, United Microelectronics Corporation founder Robert Tsao, and Shen’s Kuma Academy civil defense organization. It added Shen and Tsao to its list of “‘Taiwan independence’ diehards.”**
- **The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced sanctions on October 10 against three US defense firms and ten senior executives over military aid to Taiwan that the United States approved on September 29.**
- **Russia and the PRC concluded joint naval drills and patrols in the Pacific.**

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan

The PRC launched a large-scale military exercise around Taiwan in response to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's National Day speech. It framed Lai's speech as a new level of "provocation" even though the speech was more restrained than Lai's inaugural address.

Lai gave his first National Day speech as Taiwan's president on October 10. The speech was notably less critical of the PRC than his inauguration speech on May 20 and did not feature any changes to Lai's well-established position on cross-strait relations. He stated that the Republic of China "put down roots in Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu" and repeated a line from his inauguration speech that "the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China are not subordinate to each other," adding that "the People's Republic of China has no right to represent Taiwan." He stressed his commitment to "resist annexation or encroachment upon our sovereignty." The speech did not directly reference the PRC's military actions, gray-zone coercion, infiltration, or other actions against Taiwan that Lai discussed in his inauguration speech, however.[1] It focused heavily on domestic issues and emphasized building Taiwan's resilience against climate change, infectious disease, and security threats, implicitly framing the PRC as merely the third of three main challenges that Taiwan faces. Lai expressed willingness to work with the PRC on climate change, infectious disease, and regional security, the same three core challenges he identified. Lai ended his speech by signaling continuity in Taiwan's cross-Strait policy: the Taiwanese people's determination to defend national sovereignty, their efforts to maintain the status quo of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, their hope for parity and dignity in cross-strait dialogue and exchanges, and their determination to protect their free and democratic way of life all remain "unchanged." [2]

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) highlighted Lai's emphasis on continuity in Taipei's cross-strait policy and his expression of goodwill toward the PRC, including efforts to promote cross-strait exchanges and collaborate on shared concerns. It also reiterated Lai's statement that the ROC and PRC are mutually non-subordinate, however, and said the PRC's "one China principle" has no room for the survival of the Republic of China.[3]

The PRC's response to Lai's speech did not acknowledge any de-escalation in Lai's rhetoric and instead framed the speech as a serious and deliberate provocation of Beijing. The PRC's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) spokesperson Chen Binhua said on the day of the speech that Lai advocated a "'new two-state theory' of 'mutual non-subordination,' fabricated the fallacy of 'Taiwan independence,' promoted separatist ideas, and incited hostile confrontation between the two sides of the strait." Chen rejected the notion that the division between the PRC and ROC is about "democracy vs authoritarianism," a motif of many Lai speeches, saying that different political systems "are not an obstacle to reunification, nor are they an excuse for division." He stressed that the PRC has "the confidence and ability to achieve the complete reunification of the motherland" and is "closer than ever to achieving national rejuvenation." [4] Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson Mao Ning made similar comments that day and repeated standard PRC rhetoric about Taiwan. It is relatively rare for the MFA to comment at length about developments in Taiwan because the PRC does not consider Taiwan a foreign affairs issue.[5]

The PLA Eastern Theater Command (ETC) and Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) carried out a large-scale one-day exercise called Joint Sword-2024B that simulated a blockade of Taiwan. The exercise occurred on October 14, four days after Lai's speech. This is the second such exercise in 2024, after the two-day Joint Sword-2024A that followed Lai's inauguration in May.

PRC government bodies and state media released a collection of statements and commentaries about Lai's speech on and around October 14 that were significantly harsher than the initial PRC reactions on October 10. Ministry of National Defense (MOD) Spokesperson Wu Qian accused "Lai Ching-te and his ilk" of forgetting their ancestors, deliberately severing historical ties to China, and inciting hostility and confrontation between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. He said the purpose of the PLA exercise is to communicate to "Taiwan independence elements" that "the sword is hanging over their heads and that seeking 'independence' is a dead end." He said that Joint Sword 2024B is not a repeat of 2024A but an increase in pressure triggered by pro-independence "provocations." [6] TAO spokesperson Chen Binhua said the drills were a "resolute punishment" for Lai's "separatist claims" and warned that Lai would "push the Taiwanese people into the abyss of disaster" if he continued his "delusions" and pro-independence "provocations." [7] Chen, who gave the initial TAO response to Lai's speech, gave another statement on October 15 that claimed Lai's National Day speech was an "even more harmful and destructive 'Taiwan independence' statement" than before. Chen picked apart lines in Lai's speech to argue that Lai was trying to sever the historical ties between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and to mobilize all of Taiwan's society to pursue "secession." He denied that there was any "goodwill" in Lai's speech, possibly in rebuttal to the MAC statement on October 10, and called Lai a "peace destroyer." [8] Authoritative commentaries in state media called Lai an "outright secessionist" and warned Taiwanese "secessionists" that "the more they provoke, the faster they will perish." [9]

The PRC was likely planning a strong military reaction regardless of the content of Lai's speech. Media on both sides of the Taiwan Strait speculated after the Joint Sword 2024A exercises in May that the PLA would hold a second exercise in the series later in the year, as the naming convention implied there would be a Joint Sword 2024B. [10] The PRC also launched a rocket that flew through Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) on Taiwan's National Day and announced the launch in advance. [11] The PRC considers Lai and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) dangerous separatists and was deeply displeased when Lai's election victory in January gave the DPP an unprecedented third consecutive presidential term. CCP media and officials often label Lai in particular a "Taiwan independence worker," a term he once used to describe himself, despite Lai's efforts to moderate his position later in his political career. [12]

The PRC framed Lai's speech as an "escalation" likely to justify increased military coercion against Taiwan. The MOD framed the October 14 drills as an escalation in response to "provocation" by Lai even though Lai's National Day speech was milder on the issue of cross-strait relations than his inauguration speech and did not reveal any shifts in his administration's position. The TAO also issued harsher rhetoric about Lai's speech on October 15 to retroactively justify the scope of Joint Sword 2024B.

The Joint Sword 2024B exercise was an escalation from previous Joint Sword-series exercises and featured a significantly expanded role for the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) in blockade operations. The PLA Eastern Theater Command (ETC) published a map of the approximate exercise areas, which included six zones to the north, northwest, southwest, and east of Taiwan. It showed three additional zones near Taiwan's outlying islands of Matsu, Dongyin, and Wuqiu. [13] ETC Spokesperson Li Xi stated that the Liaoning aircraft carrier group operated jointly with PLA Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force troops to train ship-aircraft cooperation, joint air control, and strike on maritime and ground targets. Li stated that the purpose of the drills was to test the joint

combat capabilities of all services and arms, blockade key ports and areas, and send a strong warning against “separatist acts.”[14] This is the first time the *Liaoning* participated in a Joint Sword exercise, though the *Shandong* aircraft carrier participated in the first exercise of the series in 2023. The ROC Ministry of National Defense (MND) stated that 125 PLA aircraft flew sorties around Taiwan on October 14, of which 111 crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and entered Taiwan’s ADIZ. This is nearly double the previous all-time high of 56 ADIZ incursions in one day.[15]

All the six claimed areas of operation around Taiwan in Joint Sword 2024B overlapped with the ROC’s contiguous zone, the area of water between 12 and 24 nautical miles from Taiwan’s shores. This is an escalation compared to the 2024A exercise in May when all the exercise areas pressed up against the ROC’s contiguous zone but did not cross into it. The PLA exercises around Taiwan in August 2022, an unnamed precursor to Joint Sword that the PRC launched in response to then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, went even further by overlapping in some areas with Taiwan’s sovereign territorial waters. The areas of the major PLA exercises between 2022 and October 2024 collectively include nearly all the waters surrounding Taiwan. The PLA is developing its capacity to operate anywhere around Taiwan and establish sea and air control wherever it may need to.

The *Liaoning* aircraft carrier group operated in Joint Sword 2024B to the southeast of Taiwan, past the Bashi Channel between Taiwan and the Philippines. Approximately 90 J-15 fighter jets and 40 carrier-based helicopters took off from the *Liaoning* in one day, compared to 80 fighter jets and 40 helicopters from the *Shandong* in three days during the inaugural Joint Sword exercise in April 2023.[16] ETC spokesperson Li Xi said the *Liaoning*’s involvement helped to “test the combat capabilities of integrated operations inside and outside the island chain by troops of multiple services.” PLA National Defense University Professor Zhang Chi said the *Liaoning*’s position east of the Bashi Channel allowed it to control a key chokepoint, form a “solid maritime barrier” and establish “external blockade and internal pressure.”[17] Placing an aircraft carrier group east of the Bashi Channel could be the PLA’s means of blocking the passage of foreign militaries seeking to support Taiwan in a blockade or invasion scenario.

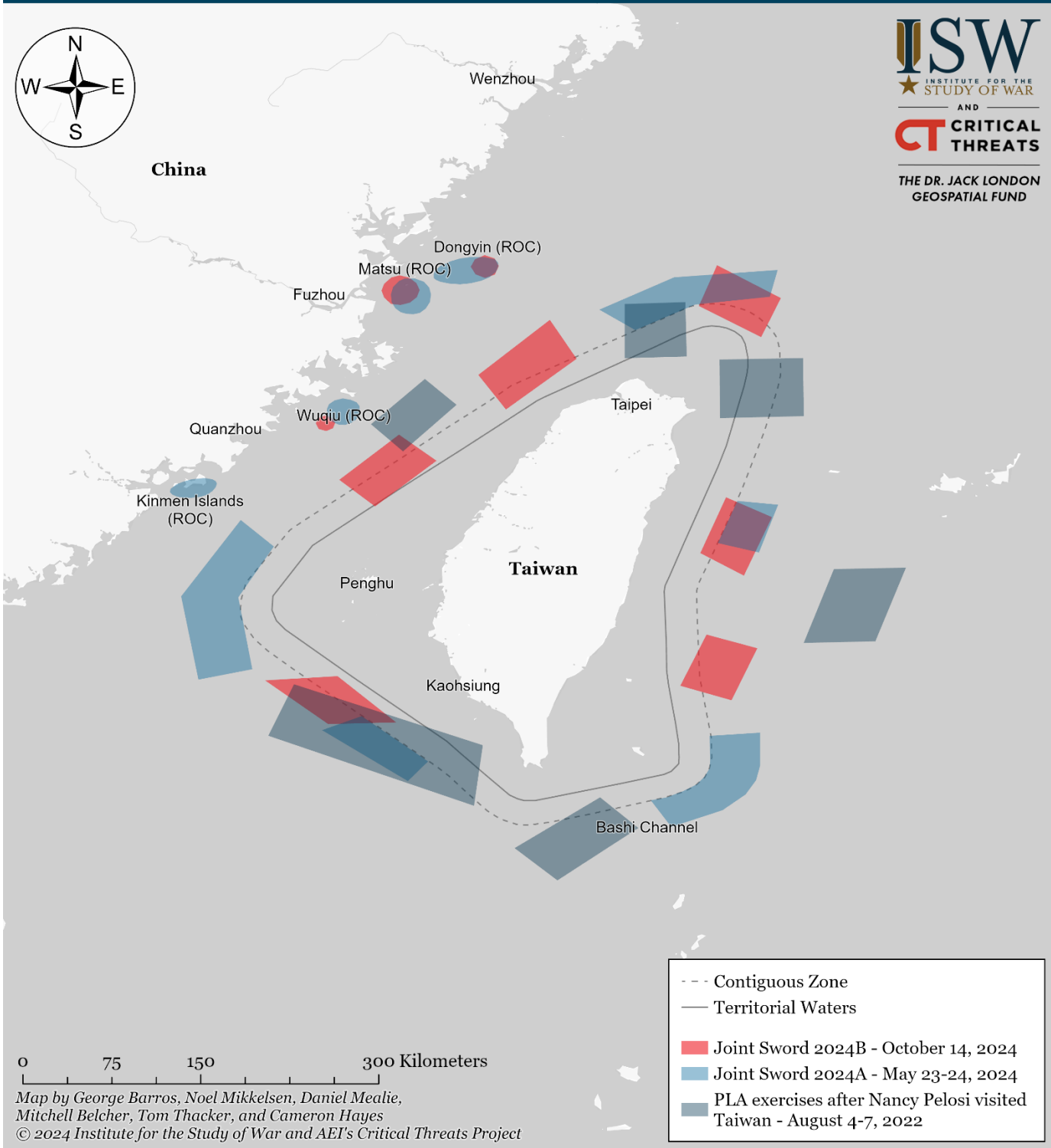
The October 14 exercise was the shortest of the PRC’s major joint exercises around Taiwan, lasting only 13 hours. Joint Sword-2024A in May lasted two days, Joint Sword-2023 lasted three days, and the August 2022 drills lasted over ten days. It is unclear whether the reduced length of the drills is a sign of restraint by the PRC or intended to demonstrate the PLA’s ability to mobilize and execute missions quickly.

The CCG played a much more prominent role in the exercise than it did in previous exercises around Taiwan, which indicates that the PRC plans for it to play a critical role in a potential blockade of Taiwan. 17 CCG ships participated in the exercise around Taiwan, the same as the number of PLA ships. CCG formations 2901, 1305, 1303, and 2102 completed a patrol that fully encircled Taiwan for the first time and coordinated with PLAN ships drilling in the same areas. CCG ship 2901, one of the Coast Guard’s largest ships, participated for the first time.[18] The CCG released a rough map of the patrol that depicted the route in the shape of a heart around Taiwan, with the message “the patrol is in the shape of loving you.”[19] A similar number (16) of CCG ships participated in the 2024A exercise in May, but the majority of them patrolled around Taiwan’s outlying islands.[20] Four CCG ships operated east of Taiwan during the 2024A exercise but in a much more limited geographic scope. CCG ships also

patrolled around Taiwan's outlying islands in the Taiwan Strait on October 14. Four of them entered restricted waters around the islands, which also happened during the 2024A drills.[21]

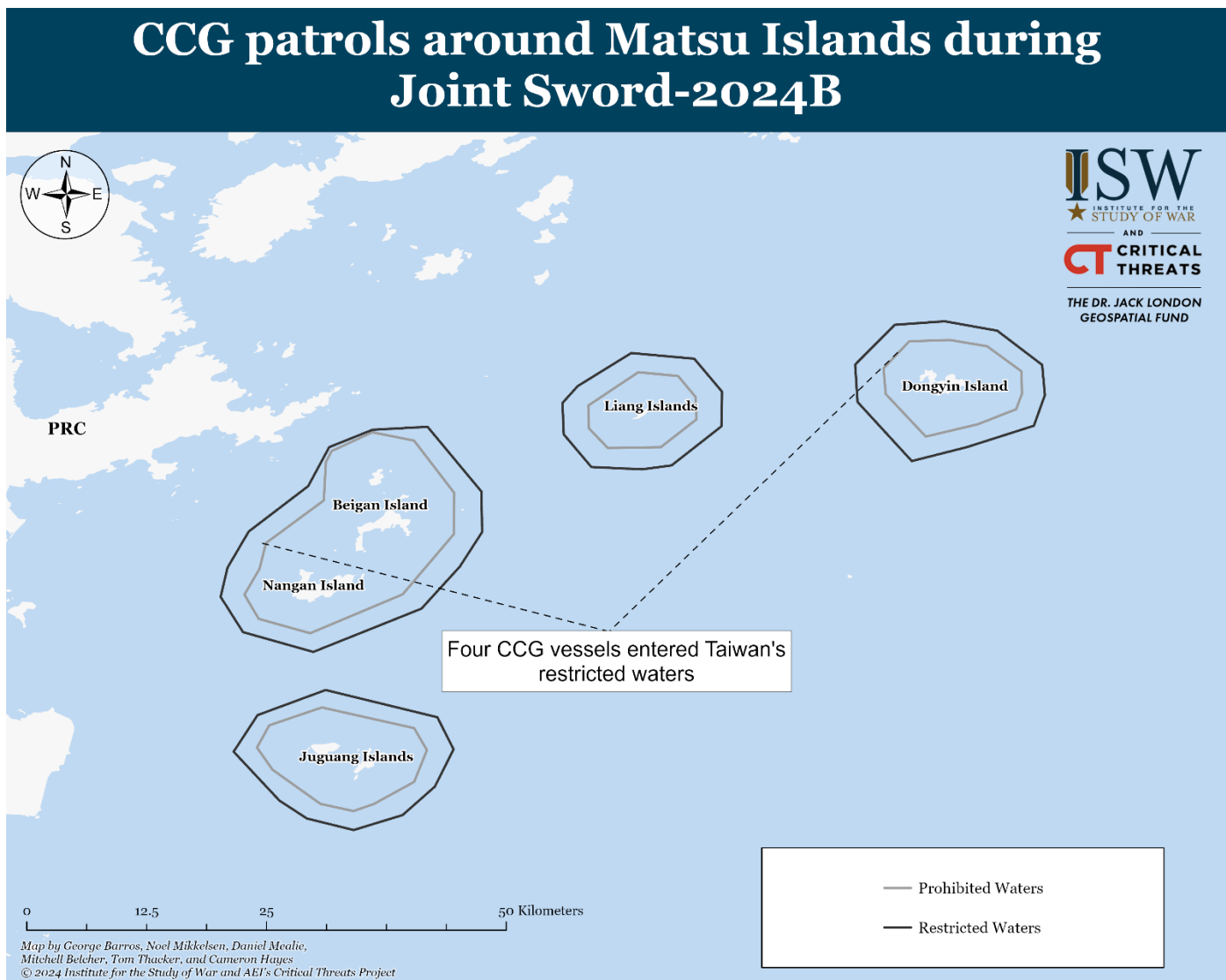
The expanded role of the CCG in the blockade drills is consistent with the PRC increasingly relying on the CCG over other maritime forces to assert the legitimacy of its law enforcement authority in waters that it claims. The PRC has normalized CCG patrols in the restricted waters of Taiwan's Kinmen islands since February to erode Taiwan's control over the waters and assert PRC jurisdiction there. The CCTV-affiliated state-run social media Yuyuan Tiantian suggested that the "Kinmen model" can be applied around other Taiwan-controlled territories and ultimately around Taiwan itself.[22] The state-owned tabloid Global Times cited an anonymous PRC expert who speculated that the CCG will intensify and increase the frequency of its activities around Taiwan to "restrict the operational space of 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces." The same expert said the CCG 2901 ship in particular could be used to prevent "separatists" from fleeing through Taiwan's eastern waters, as the large ship can operate at sea for an extended period.[23] The PRC may plan to use the CCG to patrol in and around Taiwan-controlled waters during a real blockade operation, intercept Taiwanese ships attempting to pass, and arrest "separatists" under the guise of legitimate law enforcement. It will likely use PLA Navy ships and other military assets to prevent entry by US or other Taiwan-friendly foreign forces into the region.

PRC-announced Areas of Military Exercises around Taiwan (October 14, 2024)



Four CCG ships entered the restricted waters of Taiwan’s Matsu Islands during the PRC’s Joint Sword 2024B drills around Taiwan. Taiwan’s Coast Guard Administration (CGA) detected two CCG ships that entered the restricted waters west of Nangan (Matsu) Island and another two that simultaneously entered restricted waters north of Dongyin Island at 8 am on October 14. The ships circled the islands continuously until 6 pm, with the former two ships sailing around both Nangan and Beigan islands.[24] The CGA said the PRC has intruded into Taiwan-controlled waters near Taiwan’s outlying islands 44 times this year, including the October 14 incursions. One CCG ship also carried out patrols near the Taiwanese island of Wuqiu, though Taiwan did not report an incursion into restricted waters there.[25] The CCG said it practiced boarding and inspection drills during these patrols.[26]

Joint Sword 2024B did not include patrols around Kinmen, even though Kinmen was included in the 2024A exercises in May and has been the most frequent site of CCG incursions into Taiwan-controlled waters this year. Nearly all the 44 PRC incursions into Taiwan’s restricted or prohibited waters in 2024 were around Kinmen, the closest of Taiwan’s territories to the PRC. The only CCG incursions into Matsu’s restricted waters occurred during the Joint Sword 2024A exercise in May 2024.



The PRC is considering unspecified “further measures” in retaliation for Taiwan’s trade restrictions on the PRC. The measures are very likely part of the CCP’s economic coercion against the Lai administration. The PRC Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) claimed on October 12—two days after Lai’s National Day speech—that the DPP has not taken any measures to lift trade restrictions that MOFCOM designated as “illegal trade barriers” in December 2023.[27] MOFCOM stated in December 2023 that it concluded an investigation and found Taiwan’s bans on 2,509 imports from the PRC to be in violation of the Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), a 2010 agreement in which the PRC and Taiwan committed to reducing trade barriers. ISW assessed that the December 2023 announcement was timed to influence Taiwan’s 2024 elections, as it came less than a month before Taiwan’s presidential elections on January 13, 2024.[28]

MOFCOM’s threat of unspecified economic measures against Taiwan is part of its multifaceted coercion campaign against Lai’s administration. MOFCOM has used the pretext of trade disputes to implement economic coercion against Taiwan on several occasions in the past year. It suspended ECFA tariff exemptions on 12 Taiwanese hydrocarbon and petrochemical products on December 21, before the Taiwanese election, and on 134 Taiwanese products of various kinds after Lai took office in May 2024.[29] The lack of specificity in MOFCOM’s October 12 announcement suggests that the PRC wanted to make the announcement shortly after Lai’s speech but is still deciding what specific measures it will impose.

The PRC announced sanctions against Taiwanese DPP legislator Puma Shen, United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC) founder Robert Tsao, and Shen’s Kuma Academy civil defense organization. It added Shen and Tsao to its list of “Taiwan independence’ diehards.” TAO spokesperson Chen Binhua claimed that the TAO decided to punish Shen, Tsao, and Kuma Academy after “carefully verifying” tips that it received from “people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.” The TAO received the tips in an email mailbox it set up on August 7 to encourage reporting on Taiwanese “separatism.” [30] Kuma Academy is a Taiwanese nonprofit organization that trains Taiwanese civilians in civil defense skills such as first aid, self-defense, evacuation procedures, and countering disinformation.[31] Chen claimed that Kuma Academy cultivates “violent Taiwan independence elements” with support from DPP authorities and is an “out-and-out ‘Taiwan independence’ base.” He accused Puma Shen, as the head of the organization, of “maliciously” selling secessionist and “anti-China” ideas to Taiwanese people and widely spreading “the seeds of violent conflict in the Taiwan Strait. He said Tsao “provided huge financial support” for Kuma Academy to “engage in secessionist criminal activities” and funded pro-independence films and TV dramas.[32] Tsao pledged one billion Taiwan dollars (about US\$32 million) to Kuma Academy in 2022.[33]

Chen said the TAO’s sanctions against Shen and Tsao will prohibit both men and their families from entering the PRC, restrict the cooperation of their “affiliated institutions” including Kuma Academy with PRC-based individuals and organizations, and “never allow” their affiliated companies and financiers to make profits in the PRC. He did not specify how this would affect UMC’s business in the PRC. The TAO also added Shen and Tsao to its list of “Taiwan independence’ diehards,” a list that it originally published in 2021 and now includes twelve people, including Shen and Tsao. This is the first time the TAO has added people to the list since 2022. Chen said Shen and Tsao will be “held accountable for life” and subjected to “other necessary punishment measures” under the PRC’s “Opinions on Punishing Taiwan Independence Diehards for Crimes of Separatism and Inciting Separatism.”[34] The

“Opinions” are a set of authoritative legal guidelines that the PRC issued on June 21 to clarify the definitions and punishments for what it considers criminal Taiwanese “separatist activities” under its 2005 Anti-Secession Law. The Opinions called for severe criminal penalties up to life imprisonment or death for separatist “diehards,” which likely refers to the people on the list.[35] The PRC has not attempted to detain or charge any of the people on the list, even though its law permits trials in absentia.

The PRC’s sanctions against Shen and Tsao are very likely part of Beijing’s multifaceted “punishment” of the Lai administration following his National Day speech. Shen and Tsao are not officials in Lai’s administration and the TAO has not added Lai himself to its list of “diehard” separatists. The timing and stated reasons for the sanctions both point to a connection with Lai, however. The TAO announced the sanctions on October 14, the same day the PRC launched its Joint Sword 2024B exercises to “punish” Lai.

Targeting the sanctions at major proponents of Taiwan’s civil defense is likely meant to send a threatening message against Lai’s civil defense initiatives, which Lai mentioned in his speech. Lai inaugurated the Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee in September to engage members of government, industry, academia, and civil society in improving Taiwan’s civil defense capabilities. Kuma Academy chair Liu Wen is a committee member and Robert Tsao is an advisor to the committee.[36] The committee aims to mobilize around 400,000 volunteers for Taiwan’s civil defense. It will organize a tabletop exercise in December, a small unscripted civil defense drill in March 2025, and a nationwide drill in June 2025 that will coincide with Taiwan’s annual Han Kuang military drills. [37]

The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced sanctions on October 10 against three US defense firms and ten senior executives over military aid to Taiwan that the United States approved on September 29. The PRC will freeze the assets of Edge Autonomy Operations LLC, Skydio Inc., and Huntingdon Ingalls Industries Inc.[38] PRC Ministry of Defense (MOD) spokesman Wu Qian called the United States “treacherous” over the \$567 million aid package, originally announced on September 29. The military aid package is the largest the United States has ever sent to Taiwan. Wu accused the United States of “double-dealing,” and called it to “stop using ‘two faces’ to deal with China.”[39] Wu made this statement outside the MOD’s regularly scheduled press conferences and more than ten days after the Ministry of Defense had already commented on it, marking a rhetorical escalation from past MOD statements against US military aid and arms sales to Taiwan. MOD spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang called on the United States to “stop military collusion” with Taiwan but did not call it “treacherous” in a regularly scheduled September press conference.[40]

Tsai Ing-wen visited Prague and addressed EU countries at the 28th Forum 2000 meeting. Former Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen discussed the threat that authoritarianism poses to democratic societies and emphasized Taiwan’s support for Ukraine. Tsai highlighted Taiwan’s resilience and efforts to build ties with the United States and European Union. [41][42]

The Czech Republic, which hosts the Forum 2000, has a history of bilateral cooperation with Taiwan. In 2023 the Czech Republic and Taiwan negotiated an arms sale of Czechian howitzers and missile transport trucks and agreed to collaborate on drone research.[43] In 2022 the Taiwanese drone firm Geosat signed an MOU with Czech firm Primoco.[44]

China

A PRC state-sponsored cyber threat actor's apparent espionage campaign that targeted US telecommunications companies affected major internet service providers. Two anonymous people involved in the ongoing investigation stated that AT&T, Verizon, and Lumen were among the 10-12 companies that were affected.[45] Gaining access to the digital infrastructure of ISP and telecom companies would position PRC-based threat actors to steal sensitive data and potentially affect the flow of internet traffic. The Washington Post cited an unnamed US official who stated that the operation may have targeted systems that track federal wiretap requests to telecommunications providers, though it is not certain that the systems were compromised. Such a vulnerability would represent a significant risk for US intelligence efforts should the PRC plant false information or inform targets to hamper US surveillance.

Investigators are calling the campaign Salt Typhoon, following the Microsoft naming convention for cyber threat actors attributed to the PRC.[46] The ongoing investigation by the US government is still determining the scope and the nature of the compromise. The Biden administration established an interagency team to coordinate investigation and response efforts across the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), and the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Information Security Agency (CISA).[47] Former CISA Director Chris Krebs suggested that the threat actor could be Advanced Persistent Threat 40 (APT40), another cyber threat actor that the Five Eyes, Germany, South Korea, and Japan have attributed to the PRC Ministry of State Security (MSS) Hainan branch.[48]

Salt Typhoon is also known as GhostEmperor and Famous Sparrow, according to Microsoft's cybersecurity division. Estonian cybersecurity research firm ESET discovered the threat actor, which it named FamousSparrow, in 2021 after observing activity that targeted hotels, engineering companies, and international and government organizations in 12 countries worldwide, including Taiwan.[49] Russian cybersecurity research firm Kaspersky publicized other malicious activity from a Chinese-speaking threat actor that it called GhostEmperor a week later.[50] Kaspersky linked GhostEmperor to FamousSparrow based on a common IP address across the activity in both companies' investigations. Kaspersky reported that the threat actor infiltrated government entities and telecommunications companies in Southeast Asia and suggested geopolitically motivated espionage as a possible purpose, based on the targets.

The PRC's National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center, its cyber defense agency, released a report that accuses the United States and Five Eyes countries of cyber espionage against other countries amid the Salt Typhoon investigation.[51] The PRC consistently times its accusations of malicious foreign cyber activity to coincide with revelations of its hacking operations. The CVERC report, which has versions in English and several other languages, also claims there is "ironclad evidence" that the United States conducts false flag operations and uses stealth tools to mislead attribution analysis. The report also claimed that the United States inserts strings of other languages, such as Chinese characters, in digital footprints to frame China and other countries. PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson Mao Ning claimed that some US tech companies, likely referring to Microsoft, are accomplices in US government cyber attacks against the global supply chain because they allow the US to exploit backdoors in their products and participate in US narratives

that demonize the PRC.[52] The CVERC released reports in April and July that characterized another PRC state-sponsored cyber threat actor, dubbed Volt Typhoon, as a disinformation campaign that US intelligence agencies conducted to exaggerate threats from the PRC and expand their budgets.[53]

Southeast Asia

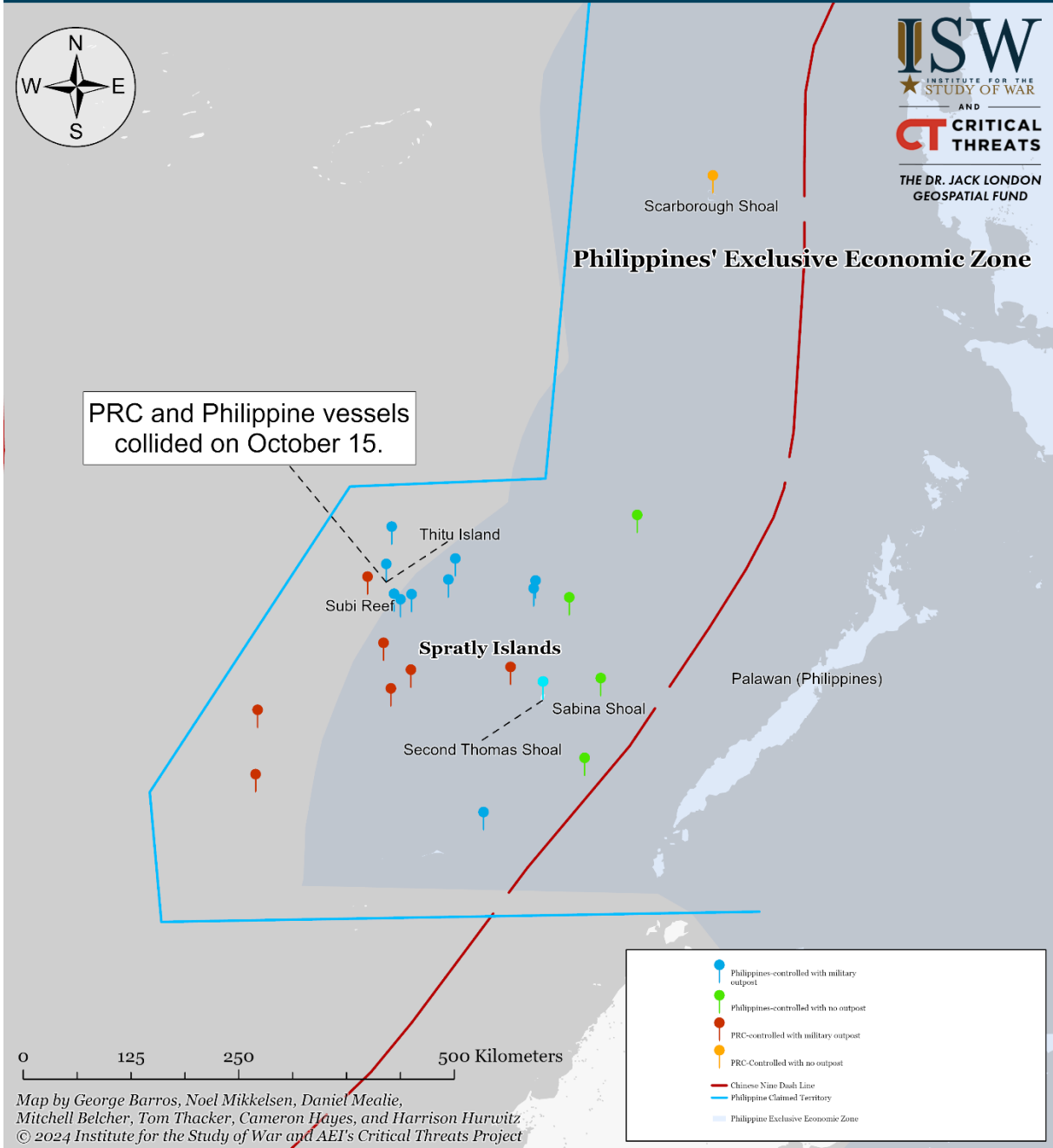
The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states pressured the PRC to respect international law and push for a code of conduct for the South China Sea. The biannual ASEAN summit took place in Laos from October 6-October 11, with representatives from the ten member states and observing states in attendance.[54] During the summit, leaders discuss several issues including economic development, regional security, and diplomatic engagement. Several speeches and bilateral engagements discussed matters related to the South China Sea, where increased tensions between the PRC and ASEAN states have resulted in multiple maritime incidents. In a meeting between ASEAN leaders and the PRC, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. expressed concern at the PRC's "disregard of international law and standards" as evident in its actions in the South China Sea.[55] Marcos cited some recent incidents between the PRC and the Philippines, which he described as examples of harassment and aggression from the CCG. Li Qiang denied that the recent spike in tensions was the fault of the PRC, placing the blame on "external forces" interfering in the region.[56] Li stated that the PRC has a right to defend its sovereignty, and its actions follow international law. Leaders from several ASEAN states called for increased urgency in negotiations with the PRC to create a code of conduct governing behavior in the South China Sea. This code of conduct has been under negotiation since the early 2000s but has made little progress despite the increase in regional tension.

Philippines

Philippine and PRC vessels collided near Thitu Island on October 15. The Philippines Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) accused the PRC ship, which it stated was part of the Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM), of conducting dangerous maneuvers and threatening the safety of BFAR's *BRP Datu Cabaylo*. [57] The CMM vessel reportedly sideswiped and collided with the *BRP Datu Cabaylo*, resulting in minor damages. The *BRP Datu Cabaylo* and another BFAR vessel were patrolling near Thitu Island, a Philippine-occupied island with a Coast Guard base and military infrastructure. Thitu Island is near Subi Reef, a South China Sea feature, and the location of a PRC military base. The PRC has previously stated its concern that the Philippines will continue to expand its military infrastructure on the island, threatening PRC territorial sovereignty.[58]

In response to the October 15 incident, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Mao Ning accused the Philippines of inciting violence and placing PRC fishermen in danger.[59] Mao stated that the Philippines had collided with the PRC, in direct opposition to Philippine official reports. This collision is the latest incident in a series of confrontations between the Philippines and PRC over disputed features in the South China Sea.

Events in the West Philippine Sea (October 15)



Vietnam

Vietnamese President To Lam and PRC Premier Li Qiang released a joint statement reiterating their earlier promise to manage maritime disputes peacefully. Premier Li traveled to Hanoi from October 12-14 for discussions on economic, diplomatic, and security issues.[60]

During these meetings, the PRC and Vietnam signed ten agreements expanding bilateral cooperation on agriculture, manufacturing, and infrastructure.[61] They also released a joint statement that included an agreement to increase bilateral military exchanges and patrols and reiterated the importance of cooperation in the fields of security, intelligence, counter-terrorism, and transnational criminal activity.[62] Li and Lam also discussed developments in the South China Sea, promising to peacefully manage disagreements and preserve regional stability.[63] In addition to agreeing to avoid escalatory behavior in disputed waters, both sides agreed to effectively implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and move towards the creation of a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea per international law. The two states previously agreed to manage disputes in the South China Sea peacefully during a meeting between Xi Jinping and To Lam in August 2024.[64]

The meeting between Li and Lam follows the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry's October 4 accusations against the PRC, blaming them for attacks perpetrated against Vietnamese fishermen fishing near the Paracel Islands.[65] The fishermen reported that 40 assailants attacked them with metal pipes on September 29, resulting in three broken bones.[66] The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry blamed PRC law enforcement for the attacks, saying that their actions violated Vietnamese sovereignty, international law, and their earlier agreement to manage conflict peacefully.[67] The PRC MFA responded to these accusations, saying that while they did carry out law enforcement measures against "illegal" Vietnamese fishing, PRC law enforcement acted professionally throughout the encounter.

Russia

Russia and the PRC concluded joint naval drills and patrols in the Pacific. The PLA Navy WeChat reported that guided-missile destroyers Xining and Wuxi, supply ship Taihu, and missile frigate Linyi "completed troop assembly with Russia" in the Sea of Japan on September 9.[68] The same source described live-fire exercises between PRC and Russian ships from September 11-27 as part of the Beibu-2024 exercise, after which PRC and Russian naval fleets traveled to "relevant waters in the Pacific" and "conducted the fifth joint cruise." [69]

Newsweek reported that a joint patrol began following the close of the Beibu-2024 exercises on September 27. It said that "Russian destroyers *Admiral Panteleyev* and *Admiral Tributs*, as well as Chinese destroyers CNS *Xining* and CNS *Wuxi*, frigate CNS *Linyi*, and replenishment ship CNS *Taihu*, took part in the patrol" but that it "was not clear whether they had sailed near the US coast off Alaska." Newsweek also reported that the joint naval detachment "searched for a mock enemy submarine and used rocket-bomb launchers to destroy the target" and "practiced using air defense missile and jamming systems to repel an enemy air missile attack," citing the Russian Pacific Fleet.[70] Newsweek reported that the Russian and PRC forces separated on October 14, with Russian warships entering the Miyako Strait and the PRC ships heading west toward Taiwan. [71] The PRC contingent approached southeast Taiwan during Joint Sword 2024-B exercises, according to Japan's MOD.[72] Taiwanese defense researcher Chieh Chung said that these four ships "should have rendezvoused" with the PLA aircraft carrier Liaoning and Type 055 destroyer Anshan as they remained near Taiwan for the Joint Sword exercise.[73]

The PLA Navy WeChat reported that the Beibu exercises formally concluded in Qingdao with the arrival of Russian and PRC fleets on October 17.[74] Joint PRC-Russia coast guard drills incorporating the CGC's Meishan and Xiushan ships also concluded on October 17. PRC and Russian ships "formed a

formation for the first time to enter the North Pacific high seas joint patrol, conduct inspections and supervision of operating vessels in accordance with the law, and actively maintain the production order of fisheries in the North Pacific high seas.”[75]

Russian Defense Minister Andrey Belousov met PRC CMC Vice-Chair Zhang Youxia and PLA Admiral Dong Jun to discuss deepening PRC-Russia defense cooperation. Both sides affirmed strong PRC-Russia ties.[76] Belousov said that Russia will work with the PRC to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Soviet Great Patriotic War and the PRC’s War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression.[77]

Iran

The PRC condemned the Israeli Defense Forces for attacking UN peacekeeper outposts in southern Lebanon on positions and sentry towers, which resulted in injuries to some peacekeepers. MFA Spokesperson Mao Ning and Ministry of Defense (MOD) Spokesperson Wu Qian stated that the PRC demands an investigation, accountability for those responsible personnel, and measures to prevent it from happening again. The PRC had 419 UN peacekeepers in the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon as of April.[78] The PRC peacekeeping contingent includes a multi-functional engineer detachment, a construction engineer detachment, and a medical detachment.[79] Wu stated that the PRC contingent was safe and that the PRC would take measures to enhance its security.[80]

PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi held separate phone calls with the Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on October 14.[81] Wang praised Iran’s recent diplomacy with Middle Eastern countries to mitigate potential Israeli retaliation for an Iranian missile barrage on October 1.[82] Wang stated that the PRC would “demonstrate its responsibility as a major country... and play a constructive role in promoting the cooling of conflicts.”

During a UN Security Council meeting on the Middle East on September 30, Wang advocated for a ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon, a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, a Palestinian-led government of post-war Gaza, and increasing international humanitarian assistance to the Middle East.[83] Wang claimed that the PRC is a “builder of peace, promoter of stability, and a contributor to the development of the Middle East... that never interferes in the internal affairs of Middle Eastern countries, never carves out spheres of influence in the region, and never seeks geopolitical interests by exploiting hot issues.”

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