

STRATEGIC SNAPSHOT

CCP Aggression Against Taiwan

May 13, 2025



In the last 6 months, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased its aggressive actions targeting Taiwan. These include military provocations, infiltration operations, and gray zone activities. In his 2024 New Year's Eve address, PRC President Xi Jinping reiterated the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) ambitions for national unification, saying, "As compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are one family, no one can sever our bloodline affinity, and no one can block the historical momentum of the unification of the motherland."

The PRC is taking a full-spectrum approach to intimidate Taiwan. On the military front, there have been increased incursions across the median line and a series of full-scale drills. Espionage activities include infiltrating Taiwanese media outlets, attempting to influence Taiwanese public opinion using united front activities, and stealing intellectual property to break Taiwan's "silicon shield." The PRC hopes these activities weaken Taiwanese citizens' and government officials' confidence in its national security apparatus, creating vulnerabilities to make a forceful reunification attempt easier.

Taiwan is bolstering its whole-of-society resilience drills in response. In March 2025, Taiwan's president Lai Ching-te gave a speech in which he introduced a 17-point national security initiative to address the CCP infiltration methods, raise public awareness, and tell the world that Taiwan will counter the PRC's influence operations. Shortly thereafter, Taiwan conducted its first resilience drill, involving 1,500 participants and testing evacuations, emergency responses, and civilian coordination. Readiness remains an ongoing struggle, however, in the face of steadily increasing PRC coercion.

Selected Jamestown Analysis on CCP Military Aggression Against Taiwan

Articles published in the last six months have highlighted various aspects of military preparations for potential operations against Taiwan. These include advances in work on capabilities, strategy and tactics, and legal justifications for certain operations, such as a blockade of the island.

‘Strait Thunder-2025A’ Drill Implies Future Increase in PLA Pressure on Taiwan

Tai-yuan Yang, K. Tristan Tang, China Brief, April 11, 2025

- People’s Liberation Army (PLA) operations against Taiwan on April 1–2 consisted of multiple drills that had limited interconnection, distinguishing them from exercises that tend to be more complex and confrontational.
- Recent training reforms have meant that drills now tend to involve more cross-service coordination and are likely to match the scale of military exercises. The “Strait Thunder-2025A” drill is evidence of this trend, as its scale is comparable to past “Joint Sword” exercises.
- “Strait Thunder-2025A” exhibited a new focus on chokepoint control with the emergence of a dual-layer “Cabbage Strategy,” in which an inner circle of maritime militia, coast guard, and naval forces surrounds Taiwan while a separate outer circle harasses foreign military forces.
- The name of the drill, “Strait Thunder-2025A,” suggests that the PLA is likely to conduct additional such drills this year. It also hints that future exercises could exceed the scale of previous Joint Sword military exercises.

Military Implications of PLA Aircraft Incursions in Taiwan’s Airspace 2024

Cheng-kun Ma, K. Tristan Tang, China Brief, January 17, 2025

- In 2024, the number of days and sorties involving Chinese military aircraft crossing the Taiwan Strait median line reached a peak, but the total sorties of Chinese aircraft around Taiwan and the number of peak incursion periods were not significantly higher than in 2023.
- While the number of Chinese military aircraft incursions into Taiwan’s airspace has surged, the operational capacity of the PLA Eastern Theater Command Air Force is likely already at its maximum peacetime readiness level.
- The sharp increase in Chinese military aircraft incursions targeting Taiwan is not solely aimed at President Ching-te Lai but also reflects changes in the scope and intensity of the PLA’s training and exercises around Taiwan.
- Unless new airbases are constructed or logistical support capabilities are significantly improved within the PLA Eastern Theater Command, the number of sorties into Taiwan’s airspace is unlikely to increase substantially in 2025.

Instead of Joint Sword-2024C, PLA Intensifies Winter Naval Training

Cheng-kun Ma, K. Tristan Tang, China Brief, December 20, 2024

- People's Liberation Army (PLA) naval training drills near Taiwan and surrounding the First Island Chain on December 9–11 did not constitute a full-scale joint exercise but sent a signal to the incoming US administration.
- Beijing's power projection demonstration, involving 60 vessels, signals to President-elect Trump that its naval capabilities in the Western Pacific are comparable to those of the US Seventh Fleet based in Japan.
- The PLA Navy appears to be intensifying its winter naval training around the waters of the First Island Chain, sustaining a sizeable naval presence over eight consecutive days. Coast Guard involvement indicated a possible circumnavigation of Taiwan.
- Taiwan's mobilization seems precautionary rather than a response to an immediate threat, with its Ministry of National Defense establishing a response center and mobilizing forces to maintain a heightened state of readiness.

PLA Unveils New Unmanned Weapons Aimed at Taiwan at the Zhuhai Airshow

Peace Ajitotutu, China Brief Notes, December 20, 2024

- The People's Liberation Army Air Force has been developing drone technology specifically for use in a Taiwan contingency, some of which was on display at the Zhuhai Airshow in November.
- The People's Republic of China (PRC) is framing the country's rapid expansion of its unmanned systems capabilities as having a deterrent effect on the United States, suggesting it has caused the US military to scale back supposed plans for a drone-based "Hellscape" strategy in the Taiwan Strait.
- Statements by PLA officers and military commentators demonstrate confidence in what they see as the PRC's superior drone capacity, noting that three quarters of drone components come from the PRC.

Joint Sword-2024B: Quarantining Key Ports and Seizing Comprehensive Superiority

Cheng-kun Ma, K. Tristan Tang, China Brief, November 1, 2024

- The Joint Sword-2024B exercise on October 14 focused on quarantining Taiwan’s ports and establishing sea and air superiority. It showcased the ability of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to coordinate maritime control with China Coast Guard (CCG) assets.
- “2024B” was the fourth exercise in the last three years. Each has moved progressively closer to Taiwan and increased in intensity—October 14 saw the PLA Air Force conduct at least 153 sorties, the highest in a single day, and the exercise involved the most naval vessels of any to date.
- CCG vessels activated their AIS tracking signals, in a bid to intimidate, but also to routinize their patrols as part of the PRC’s jurisdictional claims in the Taiwan Strait.

PRC Uses Legal Warfare to Support Maritime Blockade Against Taiwan

Masayoshi Dobashi, Rena Sasaki, China Brief, March 15, 2025

- Creative legal strategies have been deployed in recent years to support a justification for a blockade around Taiwan.
- International law contains the concept of a “long-distance blockade” and the “continuous voyage doctrine” that could both be invoked to restrict access to Taiwan by the international community in the event of a blockade.
- Domestic laws such as the China Coast Guard Law and the Maritime Traffic Safety Law reinforce the foundation for a blockade by empowering the China Coast Guard and People’s Liberation Army Navy to intercept, detain, and regulate foreign vessels in contested waters.

China Brief has also published a number of pieces addressing Taiwan's vulnerability to united front and espionage activities. A notable development since 2023 is the rise in espionage cases prosecuted against Taiwanese military personnel recruited by the CCP to gather sensitive intelligence and undermine Taiwan's national security apparatus. The CCP also targets Taiwanese media outlets, content creators, and youth to spread disinformation.

Taiwan Exposes More PRC Military Infiltration Cases

Yu-cheng Chen, China Brief, May 9, 2025

- Recent infiltration cases indicate that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has significantly intensified non-military espionage operations targeting Taiwan's military, demonstrating strategic diversification beyond traditional military threats.
- Data reveals a sharp rise in prosecuted espionage cases over 2021–2024, with military personnel (active and retired) comprising approximately 66 percent of indicted individuals.
- The CCP's infiltration objectives encompass gathering sensitive military intelligence, psychological and cognitive warfare—including inducing military personnel to pledge surrender or create surrender videos—and recruiting senior military officials to form internal networks designed to undermine Taiwan's security from within.
- Responding to these threats, President Lai Ching-te announced a comprehensive 17-point national security initiative in March 2025, explicitly addressing CCP infiltration methods, raising public awareness, and signaling to the international community Taiwan's unwavering determination to counter China's covert influence operations—measures as essential as traditional military preparedness.

Star Hostage: TSMC, China's Drive to Conquer Taiwan, and the Race to Win AI Superiority

Matthew Brazil, Matthew Gabriel Cazel Brazil, China Brief, January 31, 2025

- Talent flows uncovered between Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's (TSMC) operations in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and several sanctioned PRC firms constitute risks to the company's position at the leading edge of the global chip industry.
- TSMC's transition to encompass other parts of the value chain, ostensibly to avoid monopoly concerns, exacerbates these risks.
- If TSMC cedes its dominance, the deterrent effect of Taiwan's "silicon shield" would be greatly reduced. It could also affect Washington's support for Taiwan.
- The company has begun to diversify by setting up fabrication plants in the United States in an effort that has been encouraged by its main customers, including Western tech giants such as Apple and Nvidia.

Expulsion of PRC Media Outlet Reveals Scale of Taiwan's Information Challenge

Aynur Kerimu, China Brief Notes, January 27, 2025

- Taiwan is acting against media organizations operating in the country that are affiliated with the People's Republic of China's (PRC) party-state.
- In early January, Taiwan's government revoked the operating license of the magazine Strait Herald following revelations about its influence and infiltration activities.
- A sharp increase in disinformation targeting Taiwan in 2024 has prompted robust countermeasures, legislative reforms, enhanced cognitive warfare defenses, and international collaboration to combat PRC influence operations.
- Calls to improve Taiwan's national security framework, including by setting up courts dedicated to prosecuting espionage and infiltration cases, indicate how vulnerable Taiwan remains to digital and media influence operations.

Viral Documentary Exposes CCP's United Front Operations in Taiwan

Cheryl Yu, China Brief Notes, January 13, 2025

- The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s united front tactics include recruiting Taiwanese content creators and youth through cultural exchanges, financial incentives, and networking opportunities, according to a viral Taiwanese documentary released in December 2024.
- CCP officials target Taiwanese individuals, including those who have never visited the People's Republic of China (PRC). They have also offered social media influencers with large followings all-expenses-paid trips to the PRC, and to facilitate the provision of PRC identification documentation for other Taiwanese citizens.
- Taiwan's response has been mixed. Public awareness of and student activism against united front activities have increased, but some political figures have downplayed the documentary or echoed CCP talking points.

Recent China Brief articles highlight the PRC's use of gray zone activities against Taiwan. These include civilian drone incursions into Taiwanese airspace to assert territorial claims over Taiwan and potential efforts to sabotage undersea cables, disrupting Taiwan's energy and connectivity systems.

Creative Destruction: PRC Undersea Cable Technology

Sunny Cheung, Cheryl Yu, China Brief Notes, January 16, 2025

- Taiwan has suffered an annual average of 7–8 undersea cable disruptions over the past three years, most of which it attributes to vessels from the People's Republic of China (PRC). Undersea cables carry 95 percent of global internet traffic.
- Recent PRC research and patented technologies includes tools to locate and sever undersea cables. Ostensibly for civilian use, these tools have clear dual-use potential and could be deployed in military applications in contested waters like the Taiwan Strait.
- Military universities, “Sevens Sons of National Defense” universities, and companies that are part of the PRC's defense industrial base are behind much of this research and development.

PRC Gray Zone Activities Against Taiwan: Civilian Drone Incursions

Yiyao Alex Fan, China Brief, December 20, 2024

- Civilian drones launched from the People's Republic of China (PRC) have repeatedly violated the Republic of China's (ROC) airspace over the outlying islands of Kinmen and Matsu, which serves as part of a gray zone campaign to discredit the self-governing democracy's ability and undermine its determination to defend itself.
- Incursions were effectively discontinued following the downing of one drone, indicating that credible deterrence is crucial to countering PRC operations in the gray zone.
- The PRC's repeated efforts to curb civilian drone operations following the shutdown not only suggest civilian involvement but also reveal the authorities' aversion toward unintended escalation.

Taiwan has responded to PRC aggression through increased whole-of-society resilience measures. A recent defense ministry review also points to developments in the Taiwanese military's concept of operations, though it lays bare key areas where deficiencies are impacting readiness.

Taiwan Bolsters Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience

Kuang-Cheng Hsu, Calvin Chu, China Brief Notes, April 29, 2025

- Taiwan is bolstering its deterrence posture through whole-of-society defense resilience drills, involving civilians in readiness activities in part to raise confidence in national defense and drawing on European and Japanese models in the process.
- The most recent drill included 1,500 participants and tested evacuations, emergency responses, and civilian coordination at a potential invasion site in southwestern Taiwan.
- Recommendations made following the drill include making better use of information systems, expanding volunteer training programs, pre-positioning medical supplies, and modularizing the medical system for greater flexibility.
- Future resilience drills will test responses to communications blackouts, transportation disruptions, and large-scale cyber-attacks.

Taiwan Focuses on Societal Resilience and U.S. Cooperation in New Defense Review

Kitsch (Yen-fan) Liao, China Brief Notes, April 28, 2025

- Taiwan's 2025 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) prioritizes enhancing all-of-society resilience and emphasizes U.S.-Taiwan military cooperation.
- The document represents a significant improvement over its predecessor in content and clarity but suffers from being a document without consensus: Published by the Ministry of National Defense, the QDR does not reflect the views of other government agencies, limiting its ability to tackle the challenges it lays out.
- The new concept of operations (CONOP) detailed in the QDR has three new focuses: gradually "attriting" enemy forces as they encounter each defensive layer; a renewed focus on post-"beachhead operations," referring to continued resistance after the PLA has gained further ground; and increasing the effectiveness of multi-domain operations buttressed by increased readiness.
- Amid some progress, issues remain for equipment acquisition, logistics requirements, and force retention and morale.

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