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Beijing's New Approach to Taiwan

By Arran Hope



A spokesperson for the Office for International Military Coordination (OIMC) calls for Taiwan's inevitable return.
(Source: [PRC Ministry of National Defense](#))

Executive Summary:

- In 2025, Beijing has intensified its approach to Taiwan across legal, military, discourse, and political dimensions.
- In October, a local public security bureau opened investigation into a sitting Taiwanese lawmaker for the first time, enhancing its legal warfare tactics against the democratic state.
- Purges at the top of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) may have precipitated a tactical switch away from He Weidong's approach, which emphasized persistent gray-zone activities, toward Zhang Youxia's expressed preference for buying time to build up military capacity.
- The Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) has ramped up its media and social media presence in recent weeks, while other parts of the messaging apparatus are foregrounding the phrase "Taiwan's inevitable return" across official media channels.
- The new chair of the Kuomintang, Cheng Li-wun, has shown a willingness to engage with Beijing. She exchanged letters with General Secretary Xi Jinping, and sent a newly appointed vice chair to meet with TAO director Song Tao, who announced a "new starting point" in their relations.
- Beijing sees its relationship with the United States as a key variable influencing its behavior toward Taiwan.

Beijing is shifting its approach to Taiwan. Over the course of 2025, it has intensified legal and cognitive pressure toward its small democratic neighbor, advanced a strategy of political warfare, and adapted its military posture. Several factors have informed this shift. Personnel changes within the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) may have played a role. Political developments within Taiwan also likely contributed. And behind all these considerations are the position of the United States under the new administration of President Donald Trump. As General Secretary Xi Jinping has often pointed out, U.S.-PRC relations are “one of the most important bilateral relations in the world” (世界上最重要的双边关系之一) ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), October 16, 2024).

A question remains about whether Beijing's evolving approach constitutes a change of degree or of kind. Some of the actions taken this year, especially in the legal domain, have relied on instruments that the PRC has created over the past few years for this purpose. Shifts in military posture may similarly have as much to do with the availability of new capabilities coming—or current capabilities meeting capacity limits—than with tactical changes. Possible avenues for political influence, chiefly through the nationalist Kuomintang, similarly are just now becoming clear following the election in October of a new party chair. Whichever the case may be, the general trend of Beijing's actions is the same: toward greater coercion and a ratcheting up of pressure across all domains.

Beijing Steps up Lawfare With Puma Shen Investigation

On October 28, Chongqing City's public security bureau announced that it was opening an investigation into the “diehard ‘Taiwan Independence’ activist Puma Boyang [Puma Shen]” (“台独”顽固分子沈伯洋). Shen is a member of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan. He is also a co-founder of the Kuma Academy (Black Bear Academy; 黑熊學院), a Taiwanese non-profit civil defense organization. [1] According to the bureau's announcement, public security officials will “resolutely crack down on Puma Shen's criminal activities aimed at splitting the nation” (为坚决打击沈伯洋 … 分裂国家犯罪活动) ([People's Public Security News](#), October 28).

This is the first time PRC authorities have opened a criminal investigation into a sitting Taiwanese lawmaker. But it is not the first time that the PRC has sought to use lawfare to harass Puma Shen or his family. In October 2024, the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) added Puma Shen to a list of “diehard ‘Taiwan Independence’ activists,” according to the announcement. In March 2025, the TAO relaunched a webpage (originally introduced the preceding year) for reporting “malicious acts of ‘Taiwan independence’ separatists and accomplices persecuting fellow Taiwanese” (‘台独’打手、帮凶迫害台湾同胞恶劣行) ([TAO](#), August 2, 2024). And in June, the office unveiled sanctions against a company owned by Shen's father ([TAO](#), June 5). This latter measure is part of Beijing's long history of using intimidation and coercive techniques against the family members of its critics in an attempt to silence them ([The Wall Street Journal](#), March 30, 2018; [Council on Foreign Relations](#), November 23, 2021; [Human Rights Watch](#), May 4; [Amnesty International](#), accessed October 31).

PRC authorities have used law enforcement to pursue additional targets this year. In June, a separate Public Security Bureau, this time in Guangzhou, offered a reward of renminbi (RMB) 10,000 (\$1,400) for information leading to the apprehension of 20 retired and active personnel in Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND).

This was the first known instance of PRC public security authorities targeting Taiwanese military personnel via law enforcement framework ([China Brief](#), July 25).

The legal basis for the bureau's investigation into Puma Shen include provisions of the PRC's *Criminal Law* (刑法) and the *Opinions on Punishing Diehard 'Taiwan Independence' Activists for Crimes of Secession and Inciting Secession* (关于依法惩治“台独”顽固分子分裂国家、煽动分裂国家犯罪的意见) ([China Law Translate](#), June 21, 2024). The latter opinions were drafted collectively by the Supreme People's Court, Supreme People's Procuratorate, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of State Security, and Ministry of Justice and released in mid-2024. Laws invoked in other cases include the *Cybersecurity Law* (网络安全法), the *Counter-Espionage Law* (反间谍法), and the *Anti-Secession Law* (反分裂国家法). The PRC has little ability currently to enforce its laws extraterritorially in Taiwan. But as with other legal instruments drafted to apply beyond the PRC's borders, these opinions have symbolic force and psychological weight. And while they may have little effect on dampening Puma Shen's individual efforts to enhance Taiwan's resilience, they may well affect the considerations of others who might wish to speak out against Beijing.

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) now fears that the next step Beijing could take is to leverage Interpol and issue an arrest warrant for Puma Shen ([CNA](#), October 30). This would not be unprecedented. The PRC's Ministry of Public Security has issued a number of “red notices” in recent years, not against criminals, but against critics of its regime ([Human Rights Watch](#), September 25, 2017; [Safeguard Defenders](#), October 23, 2024; [Red Notice Monitor](#), February 24; [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#), April 25).

Personnel Changes Behind PLA's Tactical Switch

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) also appears to have changed its approach in recent months. In 2024, the percentage of aerial sorties by the PLA Air Force that crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait was not markedly higher than the previous year. The same was true for the frequency of peak incursion periods. Analysts have argued that this plateauing could indicate that the operational capacity of the PLA's Eastern Theater Command Air Force had reached its limits ([China Brief](#), January 17). PLA activity so far in 2025 has not provided dispositive evidence of this thesis. Instead, there has been a notable slowdown in recent PLA air and maritime activities around Taiwan, according to Ma Cheng-kun, director of the Research Project on China's Defense Affairs (RCDA). [2] Not only have the scale and frequency of activity around the Taiwan Strait decelerated, but August—a typical peak time for drills and exercises—was relatively quiet this year.

One potential reason for this change relates to personnel changes. In March, Central Military Commission (CMC) Vice Chairman He Weidong (何卫东) disappeared (his expulsion from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was confirmed on October 17) ([China Brief](#), October 17). He had been responsible for planning and executing the PLA's exercises encircling Taiwan following U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to in August 2022, after which he was promoted to CMC vice chair. Following his promotion, He oversaw the military's Political Work Department, which emerged as a key driver of the PLA's gray-zone operations. But his tenure also coincided with heightened tensions in the Taiwan Strait, the election in Taiwan of a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) president for a third consecutive term, and worsening relations with the United States, including over Taiwan. He's downfall may not be a direct result of his handling of PLA activities toward Taiwan,

but Xi Jinping may not have appreciated heightened instability in the Taiwan Strait and a lack of success in intimidating Taiwan's public.

Since He's disappearance, the CMC's other vice chair, Zhang Youxia (张又侠), likely has had more influence over the PLA's approach to Taiwan. Ma Cheng-kun argues that Zhang is more pragmatic than He, and sees buying time to build capabilities as a priority, instead of escalating tensions through persistent gray-zone operations. New capabilities have been detected in recent months, which lends credence to this argument. Some have been deployed for testing and others used for training. These include a Type 072 tank landing ship, pontoon-style landing barges, a Chinese-flagged tug boat circumnavigating Taiwan, and large roll-on/roll-off cargo ships repositioned to Fujian Province, across the strait from Taiwan.

Influence Operations Intensify

If military gray-zone operations have reduced in salience in recent months, the same cannot be said for the PRC's approach in the social media and discourse domains. Influence efforts on social media stepped up on October 18, when the Taiwan Affairs Office launched a Facebook page. Across its first two weeks, the TAO has been active, posting multiple times daily; though most of the comments and reactions under its posts suggest that it will not succeed in winning the hearts and minds of Taiwanese ([Facebook/TAOspokesperson](#), accessed October 23). [3] The office has also doubled the frequency of its press conferences and appointed a new spokesperson, Peng Qing'en (彭庆恩), who has been working on Taiwan issues since 1995 ([CNA](#), October 29). In traditional media, the TAO also published a trilogy of articles with Xinhua under the pseudonym *Zhong Taiwan* (钟台文) to coincide with "Taiwan Retrocession Day" (Xinhua, [October 26](#), [October 27](#), [October 28](#)). These changes within the TAO could signal a desire to emphasize the material benefits of warmer cross-strait ties. For instance, Peng, the new spokesperson, remains head of the office's economic bureau. One of the Xinhua articles, meanwhile, highlighted the positive economic returns that national unification would bring.

These supposed carrots are also coupled with rhetorical sticks. A PRC television drama about Taiwan has recently popularized the phrase "Taiwan's inevitable return" (台湾必归) ([Xinhua](#), October 24). The phrase has been around for a number of years. Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) used it at a press conference in 2022. And CCTV unveiled a poster featuring the phrase in mid-2024. But its use in the show "Silent Honor" (沉默的荣耀) has driven its promotion, to the extent that it has now been used by an official at the Ministry of National Defense (MND). Its mention came at a press conference hosted by the Office for International Military Coordination (OIMC; 国际军事合作办公室). The OIMC is in part responsible for foreign intelligence and information operations and is directly subordinate of the CMC. [4] The office spokesperson used a question about the TV show to state that "Taiwan's inevitable return is an unstoppable force. The unfinished cause of our martyrs shall be fulfilled" (台湾必归，势不可挡，先烈们未竟的事业必将完成). He also argued that President Lai Ching-te (赖清德) was positioning himself "on the opposite side of history" (到历史的对立面) and would "inevitably be buried by the tide of history and face the most severe judgment of justice" (必将被历史潮流埋葬，受到正义最严厉的审判) ([MND](#), October 30).

The press conference also provided an opportunity for further intimidation. A state media journalist noted that a commercial satellite had recently released multiple high-definition satellite images of Taiwan, in which "every

street in Taiwan is clearly visible” (台湾的每条街道都清晰可见). The journalist then wondered whether, given such clear images were available from commercial satellites, the PLA’s military satellites are even more precise. The spokesperson simply responded that it is “perfectly normal for Chinese satellites to observe the beautiful landscapes of Taiwan, China” (中国的卫星看看中国台湾的大好河山很正常) ([MND](#), October 30).

The KMT’s ‘New Starting Point’ With the CCP

Taiwan’s domestic politics has also provided fertile ground for advancing influence. October saw a former spokeswoman for the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP), Ma Chih-wei (馬治薇), handed a two-year sentence for taking CCP money to run as a legislator in 2024 and providing information to her CCP handlers, including a list of contacts for central government agencies and business cards for personnel involved in national security ([UDN](#), October 16). But perhaps the most significant change this year is the KMT’s recent election of a new party chair.

The arrival of Cheng Li-wun (鄭麗文) as chairwoman of the KMT could herald a new approach for the CCP. Cheng, who identifies as Chinese (“我是中國人”), received a congratulatory letter from Xi Jinping, to which she responded in kind. According to Xinhua, in her letter she called for “opening up a grand future for national rejuvenation (为民族复兴开辟宏伟前程)” ([China Brief](#), October 4; [Xinhua](#), October 19). To provide a sense of Cheng’s politics, she used her first interview with international media to double down on her stance that Russia is a democracy and Putin a “democratically elected” (民主選舉產生的) leader ([DW](#), October 30). Her first appointments also indicate her desire to engage with the CCP. At an October 28 meeting with the TAO’s director Song Tao (宋濤), her new vice chair Hsiao Hsu-chen (蕭旭岑) echoed the language from her letter to Xi and criticized Taiwan’s administration. Song responded by saying that they were “Standing at a new starting point” (站在新的起点上).

Cheng is content to call for unification, but her statements to date suggest that she believes unification can be achieved on terms other than those dictated by Beijing. This is not what the CCP means when it talks of unification. As laid out in a recent op-ed by the PRC’s consul in Denpasar, Indonesia, reunification means “fully sharing the dignity and honor of *the People’s Republic of China* on the international stage” (将来海峡两岸实现统一后，海内外台湾同胞将更能够与全国各族人民一道，充分共享中华人民共和国在国际上的尊严与荣誉) ([PRC Consulate in Denpasar, Indonesia](#), October 25). The Republic of China is not mentioned.

Conclusion

Across legal, military, social, and political dimensions, Beijing has engineered a shift in its approach to Taiwan. It is difficult to gauge what level of coordination exists between the PLA/CMC, the TAO, the MPS, and other relevant parts of the system on a unified strategy. But in each of these areas—with the possible exception of military gray-zone activity (though not overall PLA pressure)—the ratchet has tightened. Whether this constitutes a “new starting point,” in TAO director Song Tao’s words, remains to be borne out. For now Beijing is making its intentions clear, seeing no reason to stop forging ahead in its pursuit of unification.

Arran Hope is the editor of China Brief at The Jamestown Foundation. He would like to thank Dennis Yang for assisting in some of the research for this article.

Notes

[1] Puma Shen has previously written for China Brief ([China Brief](#), February 16, 2024).

[2] The information in this section comes from a paper that Ma Cheng-kun titled “China’s Military Posture Toward Taiwan” delivered at the International Conference on U.S.-China Strategic Competition in 2025: Implications for China and Cross-Strait Relations. The conference, hosted by the MAC, was held in Taipei on October 21, 2025.

[3] Most comments either troll the TAO or contain pro-Taiwan content. And on the account’s first post, by far the largest proportion of engagements were “angry” reactions.

[4] Miller, Frank, Tung Ho, Kenneth Allen, and Arran Hope, eds. *The People’s Liberation Army as Organization Volume 3.0*. Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation; Vienna: Exovera, 2025. p.85.

[5] The press conference also provided an opportunity for further intimidation. A state media journalist noted that a commercial satellite had recently released multiple high-definition satellite images of Taiwan, in which “every street in Taiwan is clearly visible” (台湾的每条街道都清晰可见). The journalist then wondered whether, given such clear images were available from commercial satellites, military satellites are even more precise. The spokesperson simply responded that it is “perfectly normal for Chinese satellites to observe the beautiful landscapes of Taiwan, China” (中国的卫星看看中国台湾的大好河山很正常).

PLA Insights from Ukraine's Asymmetric USV Operations

By Sunny Cheung & Owen Au



“Blue Whale” (蓝鲸号) unmanned surface vehicle launching in Zhuhai, China. (Source: Xinhua)

Executive Summary:

- The People's Republic of China (PRC) closely studies Russia's war in Ukraine, viewing Ukraine's innovative use of unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) as a transformative model for future naval warfare and asymmetric operations.
- Chinese analysts emphasize the cost-effectiveness, mass-producibility, modular flexibility, and stealth of USVs, framing them as key tools for achieving an asymmetric maritime advantage, which aligns with China's focus on cost-efficient deterrence and military-civil fusion.
- Experts advocate combining USVs with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), and manned fleets under unified command systems. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) envisions AI-driven “super-brain” decision-making to manage complex, multi-domain operations.
- While recognizing USVs' potential, PLA experts warn of vulnerabilities to similar swarm tactics targeting China's coasts and islands. Proposed countermeasures include early warning, physical barriers, electronic and kinetic defenses, and future adoption of directed-energy weapons for anti-USV operations.

In September, Zhuhai Yunzhou Intelligence Technology (珠海云洲智能科技) launched a new type of dual-mode naval platform. “Blue Whale” (蓝鲸号), an unmanned surface vehicle (USV), is capable of operating both on the surface and underwater, where it can remain submerged for over a month. It represents an advance in the country’s innovation capabilities, as well as signaling a growing demand for unmanned systems ([Zhuhai City Innovation Bureau](#), September 12). [1] This demand is shaped by a focus within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) on maritime warfare, especially in preparation for a Taiwan contingency, as evidenced by numerous naval trainings and drills in recent years. The influence of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine is also a clear influence on decisions for PLA equipment procurement.

Since February 2022, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has closely followed developments both on and off the battlefield in Russia and Ukraine (China Brief, [March 28](#), [July 18](#)). One area that has attracted attention from Chinese military analysts is Naval combat in the Black Sea. Academics have estimated that roughly half of Ukraine’s USV attacks by the end of 2024 achieved significant military results, sabotaging Russian warships and logistical infrastructure. [2] Analysis by military experts, scholars, and practitioners from leading PRC defense institutes over the past three years shows that the PRC is moving decisively toward embracing USVs, but that technological hurdles remain and not all scenarios necessarily favor their deployment.

USVs are Cheap, Scalable, Flexible, and Undetectable

PRC observers highlight four major characteristics of USVs. First, despite their relatively low cost, USVs can be very effective operationally. In March 2024, Ukrainian forces successfully sank Russian patrol warship Sergei Kotov using a group of Magura V5 USVs ([Defense Intelligence of Ukraine](#), March 5, 2024). While the destroyed ship reportedly cost around \$65 million, each Magura V5 costs less than \$300,000. [3] Some PLA analysts have described this as a textbook example of “countering the large and superior with the small and frugal” (以小博大，以廉制优). The logic can be found in PLA discussions of the characteristics of contemporary drone warfare more generally ([China Brief](#), March 28). [4]

Second, USVs are easy to mass-produce. Their production does not require highly specialized technologies or materials. Some PRC analysts reference American reports suggesting that Ukrainian USV models could be assembled in a garage using basic tools ([Global Times](#), November 28, 2023). Experts from China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC; 中国船舶集团), a major naval contractor for the PLA Navy (PLAN), emphasize that USVs can be mass-produced by civilian facilities during crises, and that civilian vessels can be conveniently converted into military-use USVs. [5] This capability would benefit the PRC in particular, given it is the world’s largest shipbuilder and has the world’s largest navy by vessel count ([U.S. Department of Defense](#), December 18, 2024). In addition, the PRC’s military-civil fusion (军民融合) development strategy and ongoing institutional efforts to strengthen national defense mobilization provide Beijing with significant advantages in potentially flooding maritime battlefields with domestically produced USVs ([State Council](#), December 4, 2017).

Third, USVs’ modular design allows components to be reconfigured or easily replaced, offering tactical flexibility. In the early phase of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ukraine’s USVs were used primarily for suicide attacks. While some PLA experts praised this as a creative innovation, others criticized its lack of versatility. [6] Over time, however, Ukraine has diversified USV functions using what some scholars characterize as a

“platform + payload” (平台+载荷) model, pairing vessels with mission-specific payloads for surveillance, anti-air strikes, and electronic jamming. Researchers within the PLAN have asserted that USVs are evolving into a new class of weapon system, integrating “reconnaissance, strike, assessment, and disruption” (集‘侦、打、评、扰’于一体). [7]

Fourth, USVs are difficult to detect and intercept. They are therefore ideal for high-speed penetration operations (高速突防). The Magura V5’s semi-submersible design yields an exceptionally small radar cross-section (a measure of detectability). Its radar cross-section is 0.01 m², comparable to that of a small bird, making it extremely challenging to be detected by conventional surveillance systems ([Global Security](#), September 4, 2019). [8] Made from composite materials, it is challenging to distinguish from sea clutter on radar. USVs’ agility also complicates interception, particularly in swarm attacks. [9]

These characteristics have led both Chinese and American defense experts to regard USVs as providing an asymmetric advantage ([Phoenix](#), September 21, 2023; [Academy of People’s Armed Police](#), March 3, 2024; [CSSN](#), April 15, 2024). Many credit USVs with enabling Ukraine to regain control over the western Black Sea, despite the near destruction of its conventional navy in the early stages of Russia’s full-scale invasion. [10]

Asymmetric warfare has long been a central topic among Chinese military theorists. A PLA-affiliated publication, shared on the website of the PRC Ministry of National Defense (MND), has discussed the U.S. military’s historic difficulties countering asymmetric strategies ([PRC MND](#), March 27, 2018). PRC naval strategists see asymmetric warfare, especially through emerging deep-sea and unmanned technologies, as a potential means for the PLA to secure dominance over key maritime areas when facing superior adversaries ([PRC MND](#), February 14, 2023; [PLA Daily](#), July 23, 2024). Recognizing the asymmetric nature of Ukraine’s USV employment, some PLA experts explicitly call for developing “multi-level, multi-domain, and multi-capability unmanned platforms” (多层次、多领域、多能力的无人装备平台) to leverage the PLAN’s asymmetric strengths in future conflicts as performed by the Ukrainian forces. [11]

Concerns Over USV Limitations

A second lesson can be drawn about USVs from Ukraine’s Black Sea operations—that of their limitations. Analysts note that all successful Ukrainian USV attacks were conducted as nighttime surprise operations, suggesting that their effectiveness could be highly conditional. If a surprise attack fails, USVs may become less effective and vulnerable in high-intensity, contested environments. [12]

The small size that gives USVs high maneuverability also limits their fuel capacity and seakeeping performance in open waters ([Global Times](#), November 28, 2023). In the PRC’s case, this means USV deployment would be suitable mainly in nearshore regions. For expeditionary operations, USVs would have to rely on larger manned carrier vessels, increasing detection risks. Current USV swarms are not fully automated and still depend on remote control via microwave communication. If the control link is jammed or disrupted, USVs may lose functionality or become uncontrollable. [13]

USVs to Integrate Into Systems Warfare Approach

PRC experts are exploring ways to maximize the asymmetric potential of USVs while mitigating their limitations. Many advocate for integrating USVs into operations that coordinate manned and unmanned systems. Analysts frequently cite Ukraine's coordinated use of USVs with drones, missiles, and unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) as examples of "cross-domain coordination" (跨域协同) for integrated offensive operations. A defense journal under China Aerospace Science & Industry Corporation (CASIC; 中国航天科工集团), a major state-owned missiles manufacturer, argues that coordinated operations between manned fleets, unmanned fleets, and drones (有人舰队+无人舰队+无人机协同作战) will become the defining operational concept for future naval and aerial battles. [14] A paper published by the Chinese Academy of Engineering (中国工程院), an institution under the State Council, similarly advocates enhancing coordination among cross-domain unmanned platforms of all kinds to exploit asymmetric advantages.

Some scholars embed discussion of future naval conflict within the broader theoretical frame of system of systems warfare ([The Jamestown Foundation](#), January 2017). This line of thinking views conflicts as consisting not of battles between weapons or platforms, but of battles between systems. [15] To build an effective system requires achieving deep cross-domain integration. Effective situational awareness and information management are essential. Command systems must process overwhelming amounts of real-time, multi-domain data. PRC naval researchers predict that the development of "super-brain'-enabled decision-making" ('超脑化'辅助决策) will become inevitable, indicating that future command decisions will rely heavily on advanced artificial intelligence (AI) systems with computational and perceptual capabilities and, eventually, cognitive intelligence. [16]

Benefits and Costs to Proposed USV Countermeasures

For the user, the potential benefits of USVs are many. In the hands of an adversary, however, they constitute a decisive threat. This is something PRC experts identify as a growing concern. The PRC's extensive coastline exposes it to possible USV swarm attacks. Numerous strategic assets, including ports, shipbuilding facilities, and offshore energy infrastructure, are vulnerable. Coordinated USV and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) assaults could pose additional risks to the PRC's economically vital coastal regions. As the PRC consolidates its expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea with military and scientific facilities, these too are exposed to potential swarm attacks ([The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative](#), accessed October 30). Analysts have pointed out that small islands inherently favor attackers and are difficult to defend. This was the case for the Black Sea's Snake Island, for example, in the early stages of the Russian invasion. [17]

Chinese military experts have proposed four anti-USV countermeasures. The first is "early warning detection" (预警探测). USVs are currently difficult to detect via radar. Detection consequently often relies on physical observation by naval officers. Some experts propose developing automatic detection technologies for small maritime targets. Others have suggested learning from Russia's remote radio-technical monitoring system (远程无线电技术监测系统), which identifies USVs indirectly by tracing their remote-control signals ([WeChat/沃德舆情观察](#), September 2, 2024). [18]

The second measure is creating a “physical blockade” (物理拦阻) by deploying barriers around maritime infrastructure to block an USV’s approach. Following Ukraine’s attack on the port city of Sevastopol, Russian forces implemented such barriers effectively. The downside of this approach is a reduction in operational efficiency for friendly vessels, which also are impeded by the barriers. And for the PRC, the country’s vast coastline and numerous offshore assets make large-scale physical blockades costly and impractical. [19]

The final two measures rely on electronic countermeasures and fires. Referred to as “soft kill” (软杀伤) and “hard kill” (硬杀伤), they entail disrupting USV operations through jamming and directly destroying USVs with kinetic weapons. Although cost-effective in principle, this method faces technical challenges. Most current shipboard jammers are designed for low-angle, sea-skimming threats and perform poorly against high-elevation satellite communications. Conventional electronic warfare systems also suffer from modular segmentation, frequency gaps, and coordination issues, reducing their effectiveness. “Hard kill” measures are often described as a “last-resort anti-USV measure” (反无人艇的保底手段), as conventional anti-ship and anti-submarine weapons are seen as too expensive for use against low-cost USV swarms. Close-in weapon systems (CIWS), automated, short-range defense systems that use rapid-fire guns or missiles to intercept incoming threats, offer a more economic option but have limited ammunition and deplete quickly, leaving ships vulnerable to subsequent drone or missile attacks. [20]

Dating back to 2018, PRC had already unveiled the missile-armed USV Watcher II (瞭望者 II), its first such platform and, after Israel’s “Sea Knight,” the world’s second USV to successfully test-fire a missile. It can perform precision strikes against small- and medium-sized maritime targets around islands and coastal waters and support amphibious forces attacking near-shore moving targets ([Times of Israel](#), March 8, 2017; [PRC MND](#), November 10, 2018). Recent PRC military parades have showcased systems that claim to be high-energy laser (HEL) and high-power microwave (HPM) weapons ([CCTV](#), September 13; [China Brief](#), October 1). According to state media, these technologies, featuring high engagement speed and low cost per shot, are expected to become the PLA’s primary tools against UAV and USV threats. PRC analysts are also showing interest in micro-USVs (微型无人艇) for potential anti-USV applications. This interest stems from Russia’s development of lightweight attritable USVs such as the Marlin ([China Military Online](#), May 6).

Conclusion

The ongoing evolution of naval warfare, exemplified by Ukraine’s deployment of USVs in the Black Sea, presents both opportunities and challenges for the PRC. For Chinese military planners, Ukraine’s experience offers valuable lessons in both the potential and the limitations of unmanned maritime systems. It also provides insight into the future dynamics of asymmetric naval conflict, and hints at the PRC’s direction of future technological development.

In the PRC defense start-ups and state-owned companies already have made notable USV breakthroughs; and are moving toward deployment and integration into war planning. These advances underscore Beijing’s growing ambition and the need for others to move quickly to avoid a widening gap.

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Notes

[1] Not to be confused with the BlueWhale, a UUV manufactured by the Israeli defense firm ELTA Systems.

[2] Zhang, Jiakui (张家奎), Li Xiaodong (李晓东), Zhou Heyu (周河宇), and Wu Xiaotao (吴小涛). “俄乌冲突中无人艇作战运用的分析研究 [Analysis of the Operational Use of Unmanned Surface Vessels in the Russia–Ukraine Conflict].” 数字海洋与水下攻防 [Digital Ocean and Underwater Offense & Defense] (December 2024).

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CCP Appropriates Taiwan Retrocession Day

By Dennis Yang



Taiwan Retrocession 80th Anniversary hosted by the Philadelphia Chapter of the Alliance for China's Peaceful Reunification. (Source: ACPR)

Executive Summary:

- The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is using the 80th anniversary of Taiwan's retrocession to push a revisionist history, formally designating it as a national holiday, and framing 1945 as the legal return of Taiwan to China to strengthen its sovereignty claims over Taiwan.
- Through its "Three 80th Anniversaries" campaign, Beijing ties Taiwan's retrocession to China's World War Two victory and the founding of the United Nations, repackaging these events as historical proof of rightful unification.
- Taiwan's domestic struggles regarding its identity and different interpretations of the retrocession by the two leading parties create social cleavages that Beijing exploits.
- The People's Republic of China (PRC) is sponsoring retrocession commemoration events in the United States, exporting misinformation and lawfare abroad, and using historical commemoration to legitimize present-day territorial claims.

On October 24, the New York chapter of the Alliance for China's Peaceful Reunification (ACPR; 全美和平统一促进会) hosted a gala in Flushing to commemorate the "80th Anniversary of Taiwan's Retrocession" (台湾光复 80 周年). The event, attended by the New York Consul General of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Chen Li (陈立) and several deputies, combined a policy forum with a cultural performance. Chen called on overseas Chinese to "support national reunification and oppose 'Taiwan independence'" (支持国家统一、反对'台独'). Organizers hailed Beijing's decision to designate October 25 as "Taiwan Retrocession Memorial Day" (台湾光复纪念日), describing it as a reminder of the "shared bloodline and destiny between compatriots on both sides of the Strait" (两岸同胞血脉相连、命运与共) ([The Voice of Chinese](#), October 25). At a similar event in June, the Philadelphia ACPR declared that the victory in the anti-Japanese War belongs especially to the "Taiwan compatriots" (尤其是台湾同胞) who sacrificed their lives ([ACPR](#), June 9). [1] The commemorations on U.S. soil highlights the PRC's use of united front networks to export revisionist historical narratives that use the language of remembrance to advance legally dubious present-day sovereignty claims.

Throughout 2025, PRC embassies and consulates have collaborated with a network of organizations to sponsor retrocession anniversary events. This network is called the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (CPPRC; 中国和平统一促进会), and it is a primary overseas channel that Beijing uses to cultivate diaspora support for its Taiwan agenda. CPPRC branches share leadership networks with local Chinese chambers of commerce, student associations, and cultural associations ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2019). In August, over 60 Chinese associations joined a large-scale retrocession commemoration in New York hosted by the local chapter of the CPPRC. The American Lianjiang Association (美国连江同乡会), a united front-linked organization with alleged ties to organized crime, called Taiwan's retrocession "an important turning point in the history of the Chinese nation" (中华民族历史的重要节点) and said that Taiwan and Lianjiang are "connected by blood" (血脉相连) ([The New York Times](#); [WeiWei TV](#), August 25).

Taiwan Retrocession Completes the 'Three 80 Anniversaries'

October 25, 1945, marks the surrender of Japan's last Governor-General in Taiwan, Andō Rikichi, to Republic of China (ROC) representatives. In the PRC's narrative, this was the day Taiwan was restored to China following fifty years of colonial rule ([Taiwan Affairs Office](#), September 11). On October 24, 2025, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress formally designated Taiwan Retrocession Day as a holiday. The PRC sees Taiwan's retrocession as a key outcome of the war and one that supports its sovereignty claims over Taiwan, as it "is an important link in the historical and legal framework affirming that Taiwan is part of China" (是台湾作为中国一部分的历史事实和法理链条的重要一环) ([Xinhua](#), October 24).

The PRC's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) has published three articles in Xinhua under the pseudonym *Zhong Taiwan* (钟台文) since October 25 ([CNA](#), October 27; [Storm Media](#), October 28). One, titled "The Origins and Essence of the Taiwan Question" (台湾问题的由来和性质), lays out the historical and legal claims the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) makes regarding Taiwan. It claims that Chinese government announced the restoration of the exercise of sovereignty over Taiwan on October 25, 1945 ([Xinhua](#), October 26).

This revisionist view of history rests on three claims. First, it portrays the 1945 handover as an act of completed national reunification rather than a provisional wartime arrangement. Second, it erases the institutional difference between the Qing, which ceded Taiwan to Japan in 1895, the ROC, which accepted Japan's surrender in 1945, and the PRC, which was only established four years later, in 1949. Third, it conflates the Second Sino-Japanese War with the CCP's legitimacy, implying that both Taiwan's "recovery" and the CCP's later victory in 1949 formed a single historical continuum. Through this framework, the CCP positions itself as the rightful inheritor of the wartime struggle and the only authority capable of defending its "fruits of victory."

Legally, the argument is tenuous. The *Japanese Instrument of Surrender* of 1945 and the subsequent *General Order No. 1* issued by Supreme Allied Commander General Douglas MacArthur authorized Allied forces, including the ROC, to accept Japan's capitulation and to occupy Taiwan provisionally. No treaties explicitly transferred sovereignty ([U.S. Department of State](#), August 1945). Both the 1951 *San Francisco Treaty* and the 1952 *Treaty of Taipei* similarly confirmed Japan's renunciation of Taiwan without naming a successor state ([United Nations](#); [Taiwan Law Database](#), 1952). The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) recently endorsed this narrative of the "undetermined status of Taiwan," and the U.S. Department of State confirmed it in September 2025 ([CNA](#), September 13; [UDN](#), September 16). When the PRC was established in 1949, it neither participated in these instruments nor governed Taiwan. Nevertheless, Beijing's propaganda now speaks of inheriting both the ROC's wartime role and the authority conferred by Allied decisions. The CCP's objective is to muddy the perception that Taiwan's status was settled 80 years ago and any contrary position constitutes historical nihilism ([China Brief](#), March 28).

This narrative is integral to the CCP's "Three 80 Anniversaries" (三个八十年) campaign, which frames 2025 as a pivotal year for asserting the PRC's claims over Taiwan. The campaign revolves around the 80th anniversaries of the end of World War II, the founding of the United Nations, and Taiwan's retrocession. Official PRC sources and government-aligned think tanks have described these anniversaries as opportunities to conduct "lawfare" (法律战) and "historical narrative warfare" (历史论述战) to reinforce the position that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China. In June 2025, the China Review Think Tank Foundation (中评智库基金会) and Renmin University's Cross-Strait Relations Research Center hosted a forum in Beijing titled "The Thinkers' Forum: The Three 80th Anniversaries and the Taiwan Question" (思想者论坛：三个 80 周年纪念与台湾问题). At the forum, Wu Yongping (巫永平), head of Tsinghua University's Institute for Taiwan Studies, said the three anniversaries are interconnected and mark the beginning of the post-war order. Wu further argued that this post-war order is now collapsing, and that China must take advantage of the emerging new order to "shape the inevitable trend of national unification" (发挥好新秩序的作用，是我们塑造国家必然统一大势的内在组成部分) ([CRNTT](#), June 23; [CNA](#), July 1).

The CCP actively courts Taiwanese participation in its attempts to rewrite history. At a Taiwan retrocession commemoration event in Shaanxi, descendants of prominent Taiwanese anti-Japan military leaders endorsed the CCP's historiography and said that "if we want to save Taiwan, we must first save the motherland" (欲救台湾、先救祖国) ([Shaanxi Government](#), September 24). In Beijing, Taiwanese conglomerate Want Want Group (旺旺集团) co-hosted a calligraphy show to celebrate Taiwan's retrocession. Its representative, Lin Tianliang (林天良), originally from Taiwan, proclaimed that the retrocession "welcomed Taiwanese

compatriots back into the embrace of the motherland, and rediscovered our ethnic dignity” (讓台灣同胞重新回到祖國的懷抱，也重新獲得民族的尊嚴). The TAO announced plans to invite “Taiwanese compatriots” to retrocession celebrations, promoting reunification as part of the CCP’s broader goal of national rejuvenation ([CTEE](#), October 17; [TAO](#), October 22).

Divergent Views of October 25 in Taiwan

The meaning of Taiwan Retrocession Day has itself become a subject of intense debate within Taiwan. During the period in which the country was under martial law, the Kuomintang (KMT) established the day as an official holiday to commemorate the 1945 transfer of Japanese authority on Taiwan to the ROC. The KMT regime used the holiday to affirm its legitimacy as the government that had “recovered” Taiwan and to emphasize continuity with prewar China. For many Taiwanese, however, especially after democratization, the term *guangfu* (光復; restoration) came to symbolize the replacement of one colonial authority with another, rather than liberation ([Taiwan Presidential Office](#), October 25, 2005).

In May 2025, the KMT-majority Legislative Yuan passed a bill designating October 25 as an official national holiday once again. Supporters framed the move as a reaffirmation of ROC sovereignty. At a KMT-hosted retrocession commemoration at Taipei’s Zhongshan Hall, KMT outgoing party chair Eric Chu (朱立倫) said that “Taiwan has been retrocessed, this is a historical fact” (台灣光復了，這是歷史的事實). He argued that commemorating Taiwan Retrocession Day honors those who fought in the war and symbolizes the end of Japanese colonial rule on Taiwan ([UDN](#), October 25).

The political revival of the holiday magnified existing cleavages in Taiwan’s identity politics. It also created new opportunities for Beijing to exploit the symbolic overlap between its own retrocession narrative and the KMT’s historical framing, even though the two come from fundamentally different political premises. For the KMT, the holiday also commemorates the Battle of Kuningtou, which began on October 25, 1949, when ROC forces on the island of Kinmen (Quemoy) repelled a PLA amphibious assault. At the time, the ROC’s presence on Mainland China was quickly collapsing, and the PLA under Mao was preparing an amphibious assault on Taiwan. The victory halted the PLA and laid the foundation for the status quo of the Taiwan Strait ([Kinmen National Park](#), October 21, 2024; [Taiwan Law Database](#), May 28).

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and pro-Taiwan independence voices viewed the legislation differently. DPP legislators criticized the revival of the holiday as a reminder of human rights abuses that took place during the KMT-imposed martial law period ([Facebook/Lin Yi-chin](#), May 9). On October 25, Taiwan President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) commemorated the victory at Kuningtou without mentioning Taiwan retrocession. He said that the ROC military “halted the PLA invasion, and created peace across many decades” (擋下中共的入侵，塑造了數十年的和平) ([YouTube/0612ray](#), October 25; [Facebook/Lai Ching-te](#), October 25). The DPP’s Secretary-General, Hsu Kuo-yung (徐國勇), went further, declaring that there is “no retrocession day in Taiwan” (沒有什麼台灣光復節) because Chiang Kai-shek had merely acted according to MacArthur’s order as a representative of the Allied nations ([U.S. Department of State](#), August 1945; [YouTube/DPP](#); [DPP](#), September 16).

In October 2025, Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) banned government officials from participating in PRC-organized retrocession commemorations, describing them as attempts to "shape the united front narrative that 'both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China'" (形塑‘兩岸同屬一中’的統戰訴求). The statement reframed October 25 as a commemoration of the ROC's victory in the Second Sino-Japanese War and its victory at Kunming in 1949, rather than a symbol of submission to Beijing. MAC also believes that the CCP's manufactured narrative of Taiwan retrocession is a stepping stone to eventual "forcible reunification" (強制性統一) ([CNA](#); [LTN](#), October 17).

Retrocession Narratives Reinforce CCP Worldview

The PRC's insistence on retrocession narratives seeks to consolidate historical legitimacy, shape international discourse, and prepare the cognitive environment for future coercive action. Beijing pursues historical legitimacy as the first objective of its historical revisionism. The CCP grounds its authority in the idea that it is responsible for liberating China from foreign domination, and by incorporating Taiwan's 1945 "return" into its discourse, it transforms a legal ambiguity into a moral triumph. In this retelling, the CCP, not the wartime ROC, emerges as the ultimate beneficiary of the victory over Japan. Now, the Party that supposedly expelled the imperialists must complete national reunification.

By embedding the retrocession narrative into global diplomatic language and practice, Beijing seeks to make its interpretation the default frame through which foreign audiences understand Taiwan's history. When journalists or officials abroad adopt this phrasing, they reinforce the notion that unification represents restoration rather than change. This rhetorical campaign runs in tandem with efforts to cite UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 as a final settlement of Taiwan's status ([TAO](#), May 14). [2]

The narrative of restoration prepares the cognitive battlespace for future coercion. According to the CCP's "Three Warfares" (三战) concept, which includes narrative, psychological, and legal warfare, the Party is reinforcing the belief that Taiwan's retrocession was a fait accompli established eight decades ago. The PRC uses this narrative to undermine resistance to any future Taiwan annexation and present potential aggression against Taiwan as a rectification of the existing order.

Conclusion

The Party faces a dilemma. As time goes on, its claims of the inevitability of unification become increasingly untenable, as Taiwan grows more linguistically, politically, and generationally distinct from the PRC. Designating October 25 as a PRC holiday and reasserting 1945 as the "beginning of Taiwanese history" allows the Party to freeze time symbolically, portraying separation as an aberration rather than a new normal. The struggle over 1945 is a struggle over legitimacy. If Beijing's narrative dominates international discourse, the space for viewing Taiwan as a sovereign entity narrows. Conversely, recognizing the 1945 retrocession as a military handover rather than a sovereignty transfer sustains the current equilibrium of Taiwan's sovereign yet undetermined status.

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Notes

[1] In Taiwan and the PRC, the Second Sino-Japanese War is commonly referred to as the “anti-Japanese War” (抗日战争), or the “war of resistance” (抗战).

[2] UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 recognized the PRC as China’s representative at the UN, but did not address the issue of Taiwanese sovereignty ([United Nations](#), 1971).

DeepSeek Use in PRC Military and Public Security Systems

By Sunny Cheung & Kai-shing Lau



DeepSeek's founder, Liang Wenfeng, met Xi Jinping at a symposium in February. (Source: CCTV)

Executive Summary:

- The PLA is rapidly adopting homegrown AI systems like DeepSeek to accelerate its shift toward “intelligentized warfare.” This reflects a decisive effort to embed large-model reasoning and automation across command, control, and surveillance networks. DeepSeek also enhances the capabilities of autonomous and edge platforms, enabling faster, more adaptive battlefield decision-making.
- DeepSeek’s reach extends beyond the battlefield into public security, policing, and finance. Its open-source framework allows broad deployment across sectors while reinforcing centralized oversight. Together, these applications reflect the PRC’s broader strategy to fuse AI innovation with governance, surveillance, and regime stability.
- DeepSeek exemplifies the PRC’s pursuit of technological self-reliance by running on domestically made chips and processors. Its design reduces dependence on Western technology and strengthens Beijing’s control over critical digital infrastructure. The model’s success is framed as both a technological breakthrough and a political achievement in “algorithmic sovereignty.”

On October 21, the Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) company DeepSeek (深度求索) announced the release of a new tool to convert large text datasets into compact image-based formats: DeepSeek-OCR ([DeepSeek](#), October 21). While not the long-awaited R2 large language model (LLM), the firm's latest release shows that it is continuing to innovate, even as it moves deeper into the orbit of the Party-state. DeepSeek's success, however, has brought it to the attention of not just the government in the People's Republic of China (PRC), but also the military.

A procurement platform run by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) shows that a number of defense companies have won contracts to develop AI tools for the Chinese armed forces. Across the past six months, dozens of distinct procurement documents have explicitly called for tools based on AI models created by DeepSeek. Although the number of procurement notices for military AI are relatively small (the platform posts around 25,000 notices every day), the focus on DeepSeek in the notices that are publicly available is still significant.

DeepSeek's adoption by the PLA and, to a lesser extent, in the public security domain, is evident beyond this dataset. Research published by military institutions frequently discusses how DeepSeek and other models could be deployed across a range of application scenarios. In some cases, pilots of these systems are already underway. DeepSeek's models have also been deployed widely across the public and private sectors over the course of 2025, and have become increasingly aligned with state interests (China Brief, [March 28](#), [April 25](#)). Given the PRC's policy of military-civil fusion, PLA deployment of DeepSeek was only ever a matter of time.

Private Firms Top PLA Procurement of DeepSeek Tools

Private companies, rather than state-owned enterprises (SOEs), have won a majority of contracts to build DeepSeek-integrated tools for the PLA. This could reflect the greater capacity of private firms to respond quickly to shifting market dynamics. SOEs tend to be more cautious and slower to adapt to technological advances ([Zhou et al.](#), 2017).

Among these, Shanxi 100 Trust Information Technology (100 Trust; 山西百信信息技术) has won one of the biggest PLA contracts. The company, based in a less prosperous coal-mining region in North China, is the only wholly privately-owned firm included in the PRC's "information technology application innovation" (信息技术应用创新/"信创") framework. This framework was created by the China Electronics Standardization Association (CESA; 中国电子工业标准化技术协会/中电标协) to promote the domestic production of information technology products, software, and infrastructure, and to reduce reliance on foreign systems. The company also is eligible to work on classified projects, enabling it to compete with SOEs for military contracts ([China News](#), August 25, 2023; [Sohu News](#), August 1). On its product page, 100 Trust highlights "domestically produced core components" (核心部件国产化) as a key selling point. Its computing infrastructure (算力底座) is based primarily on Huawei's Kunpeng (鲲鹏) processors and Ascend (昇腾) AI chips. It also has large-scale contracts with state-owned finance firms for domestically produced hardware ([Zhiliao Bidding Information](#)).

A significant share of the company's revenues appear to come from defense contracts worth tens of millions of renminbi. These contracts, all for AI hardware, have been procured by the PLA and other defense-related entities such as the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC; 中国航天科技集团). (CASC operates the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center, which is also in Shanxi ([CASC](#), accessed October 10).)

This suggests that demand for domestically produced AI hardware in the PRC’s defense sector is already substantial. The awarding of high-value military procurement orders to a privately-owned enterprise conversely suggests that traditional suppliers are unable to meet this demand.

Table 1. Key Private Companies Awarded PLA Procurement Contracts on DeepSeek

Company Name	Procurement Project
Shanghai Longjing Technology (上海珑京信息科技)	PRC-made AI large-model all-in-one system
Zhejiang Hengda Network Engineering (浙江恒大网络工程)	High-performance inference server and on-premise deployment of PRC-made industry-specific AI models
Hubei Zhongke Network Technology (湖北中科网络科技)	Large language model server
Shenzhen Xunfang Technology (深圳市讯方技术)	Integrated AI training and inference server
Shanxi 100 Trust Information Technology (山西百信信息技术)	Computing power for large models

(Source: PLA Procurement Portal)

Deep Support for DeepSeek Integration

The PLA’s use of DeepSeek is part of a push to anchor the next phase of “intelligentized warfare” (智能化战争) on domestically controlled, low-cost AI infrastructure. Across official and academic publications, PLA experts describe DeepSeek not as a single product but as an evolving system architecture that combines a large-scale reasoning core with modular and domain-specific layers. They envision integrating this system across the PLA’s entire command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) chain.

PLA researchers credit DeepSeek with reducing the need for vast amounts of computing power, allowing advanced reasoning functions to run on Ascend and Kirin processors that are less advanced than cutting edge alternatives. This indigenization is framed as a breakthrough in technological sovereignty, reducing dependence on Western supply chains and enabling widespread AI deployment throughout the military apparatus.

Benchmarks from the National University of Defense Technology (NUDT; 国防科技大学)—a military institution—and related institutes make impressive claims about the abilities of DeepSeek models. According to one paper, DeepSeek’s optimized architecture can reduce energy consumption during training runs by roughly 40 percent compared with GPT-4-class systems while maintaining equivalent inference accuracy. [1] These capabilities are described as essential for edge-level deployment—that is, running AI models close to where data is generated rather than depending on centralized cloud or data center infrastructures. This is critical for continuing functionality in environments where platforms lose connection, for instance due to electronic jamming. Other studies have found similar results. DeepSeek uses a smart “attention-pruning” (注意力权重剪裁) system that helps it focus only on the most important information as situations change on the battlefield. This makes it faster, as it involves less work. Its smaller size—about one-eighth of GPT-4—means it can run on smaller platforms, such as drones. [2]

DeepSeek is well-suited for use cases such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), autonomous surface vessels, and forward fire-control nodes where limited power and communications bandwidth have historically restricted AI use. According to NUDT experts, it is particularly useful for electronic warfare. DeepSeek can integrate radar, satellite, and UAV inputs to deliver real-time electromagnetic awareness and actionable insights, which allows commanders to adjust tactics and deploy countermeasures within much shorter timeframes than if relying on other technologies. [3]

The PLA’s adoption of DeepSeek has the backing of critical groups within the system. Established defense research organizations with expertise in weapons design, aircraft and unmanned systems, and groups experienced in supercomputing and mission-oriented AI have advocated for its deployment. These include the Chengdu Aircraft Design Research Institute (CADI; 成都飞机设计研究所), which is under the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC; 中航工业), and groups affiliated with NUDT. Experts affiliated with each of these institutions have authored articles in support of DeepSeek’s adoption. [4]

Top engineers are already using the technology. Earlier this year, the director of AVIC’s Shenyang Aircraft Design Institute Science and Technology Committee, who was involved in the development of the PLA’s J-15 and J-35 fighter jets, said that his team was using DeepSeek, which he praised for its potential to provide new methods for aeronautical research ([China News](#), May 2). This kind of support matters rhetorically inside PLA decision cycles. It lets proponents claim both technical rigor and operational relevance when recommending where and how to field DeepSeek variants.

These same institutions typically remain cautious, noting that DeepSeek’s utility is predicated on its ability to provide meaningful operational leverage. This means that its claimed cost, latency, and interpretability benefits must survive PLA-grade verification and should be paired with oversight measures that preserve human authority and system resilience. Some analysts expand on these concerns, acknowledging structural weaknesses and unresolved risks in DeepSeek models. Different models are suited to different application scenarios. The enormous scale of R1, for instance, precludes field deployment of small autonomous platforms, according to experts from the PLA Army Artillery and Air Defense Academy (陆军炮兵防空兵学院). The more compact V3 variant is better suited for such scenarios, but has inferior depth of reasoning skills and sometimes generates unstable or high-risk tactical outputs, such as over-aggressive target assignments.

Evaluations from defense research institutes note latency fluctuations, limited reproducibility under network stress, and small-sample testing that undermines statistical confidence. [5]

Other analysts fear that the open-source nature of parts of the ecosystem could lead to problems, such as code exposure, adversarial manipulation, and potential data leaks. As with all large models, reliance on automated reasoning introduces the risk of “black-box” decision chains that could erode human oversight and complicate accountability in lethal operations. Proponents of broad-based deployment of DeepSeek recommend a three-layer regime to ensure model security in response. This would include federated verification, watermark tracing, and multifactor authentication. [6]

For some PLA theorists, these drawbacks do not diminish DeepSeek’s significance. They instead define the contours of a managed transformation. The PLA increasingly treats DeepSeek as both a technological accelerator and a doctrinal experiment. Its strengths, such as computational efficiency, domestic hardware integration, and cross-domain reasoning, align with a push for resilient, self-reliant combat networks. Its shortcomings highlight the persistent need for rigorous testing and layered human-in-the-loop control.

AI-Backed Public Security, Policing, and Surveillance

Beyond the military, the PRC’s public security and policing sector is also embracing DeepSeek, embedding its multimodal capabilities into video surveillance systems to analyze faces, vehicles, and crowd behavior in real time. Akin to a “Minority Report”-style of preemptive control, this is transforming monitoring from passive data collection into proactive risk identification and anomaly prediction ([China Brief](#), December 6, 2024; [Li](#), 2025). [7] Police are also piloting DeepSeek as a tool to integrate case data, generate incident reports, and provide decision support to officers on the ground, reducing reliance on manpower while promising greater efficiency ([Liu and He](#), 2025). [8] Most of these applications are still in their pilot stages. Local public security bureaus continue to be extraordinarily labor-intensive, relying heavily on manpower for daily operations. DeepSeek is mostly used for drafting documents and other basic tasks ([Pei](#), 2024). [9]

Public security literature also frames DeepSeek as a tool for intelligence-led governance. One article praises its ability to identify emerging security hotspots by integrating and analyzing data on traffic flows, online behavior, and demographic information. This is a key part of a growing shift in police work from post-incident response to pre-emptive prevention ([China Brief](#), December 6, 2024; [Li](#), 2025). [10] Official discourse further elevates DeepSeek as critical to “new-type public security combat power” (新质公安战斗力). An article from the Journal of Guangzhou Police College, for instance, describes DeepSeek as an institutionalized instrument under the CCP’s total national security framework to strengthen data-driven policing and stability maintenance ([Fu and Cheng](#), 2025). [11] PRC sources acknowledge concerns over data security, algorithmic bias, and transparency, but the broader trajectory is clear. DeepSeek is being localized and integrated into the country’s public security and policing systems, enhancing law enforcement and supporting regime stability.

Conclusion

Beijing’s adoption of DeepSeek across the military and public security sectors is part of a broader convergence between military modernization and techno-nationalist self-reliance. For a state focused on AI applications and diffusion, open-source systems fit naturally into its strategy. In Beijing’s hands, open-source technologies

become an instrument of fostering a dynamic domestic ecosystem and projecting influence over international standards. Adoption of DeepSeek remains nascent and much of the technology continues to evolve. PLA experts are not uncritically supportive of DeepSeek's adoption. Some continue to warn that DeepSeek also introduce new risks. Structural hurdles like limited compute and training chips await resolution ([Baidu](#), September 15; [Bilibili](#), October 10). But the direction of travel is clear, as the PRC now treats AI as critical infrastructure that is essential for national strength.

The Party-state's deployment of DeepSeek in military systems poses a challenge to the world. Without norms, safeguards and deterrence, AI models will continue to be stronger and exploited by Beijing to support the emergence of an intelligentized security state that fuses data governance with combat readiness under a single logic of computational sovereignty.

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Notes

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Beijing's Growing Power Over Global Gas Markets

By Elizabeth Frost, Jia-Shen Tsai, and Angela Glowacki



Workers operate on a station of the China–Central Asia Natural Gas Pipeline. (Source: Xinhua)

Executive Summary:

- Growing investments by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in liquefied natural gas (LNG) and pipeline infrastructure are increasing its geopolitical influence in energy markets.
- PRC LNG re-exports have increased dramatically from 2022, with re-exports surging nearly 770 percent in 2024.
- Recent progress on the Power of Siberia 2 pipeline and its strong gas partnership with Turkmenistan indicate a desire to deepen ties with Eurasian neighbors.
- The PRC's gas import diversification strategy is motivated by both economic and geopolitical considerations: bridging the domestic supply gap, securing favorable prices, responding to the U.S. trade war, and developing strategic energy partnerships.

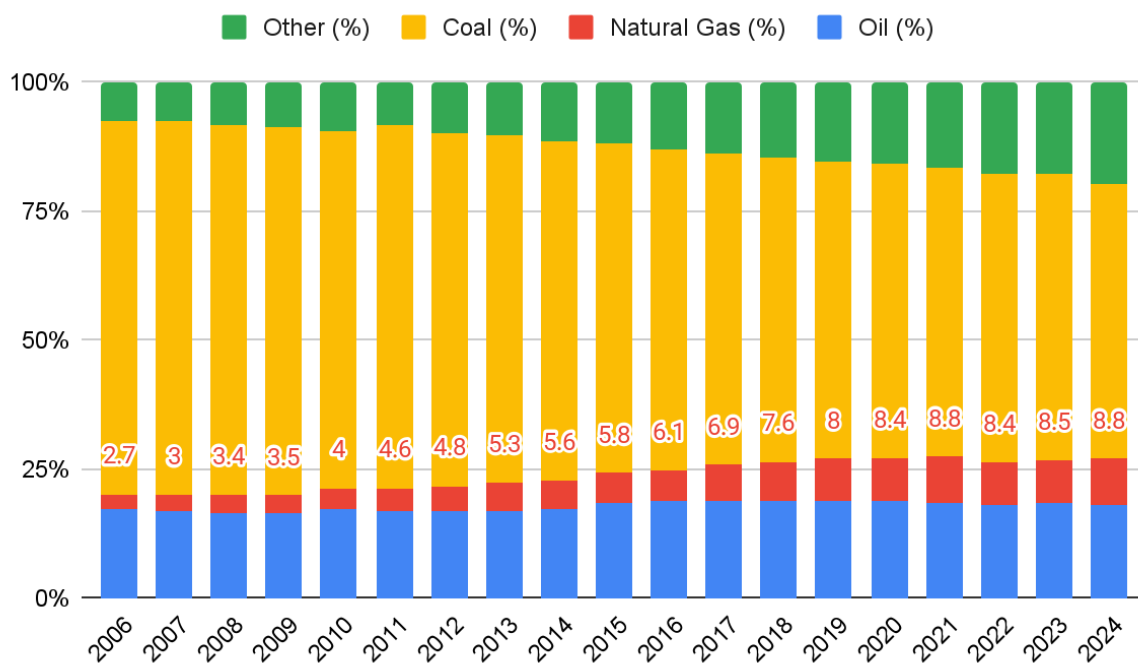
The governments of Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have signed a legally binding agreement to build the Power of Siberia 2 gas pipeline, according to Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller ([Bloomberg](#), September 2). The pipeline signals deepening energy ties between Beijing and Moscow at a time when the PRC has suspended imports of U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) in retaliation to President Trump's tariffs ([Bloomberg](#), March 18; [Natural Gas Intelligence](#), October 29).

Despite steady growth in domestic production, the PRC remains externally dependent on LNG and pipeline gas for around 40 percent of its supply. Beijing's approach to diversifying suppliers, including with Russia, is motivated by both economic and geopolitical concerns. These include desires to maintain competitive pricing, develop its position as a re-seller of LNG, respond to trade wars, and enhance strategic partnerships with key partners.

Security Concerns Drive Decade of Gas Imports and Production

Beijing initially promoted transitioning from coal to gas in 2013 as a means to curb urban air pollution and advance its dual carbon targets (双碳目标) to peak CO₂ emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060 ([PRC State Council](#), September 10, 2013). The country's natural gas consumption has increased significantly since, both in total volume and as a percentage of the national energy mix. In 2024, total demand reached nearly 430 billion cubic meters (bcm), marking an 8.4 percent increase from the previous year. Gas now accounts for almost 9 percent of primary energy use, up from just 2.7 percent when the PRC started to import natural gas in 2006 ([National Bureau of Statistics \[NBS\]](#), February 28).

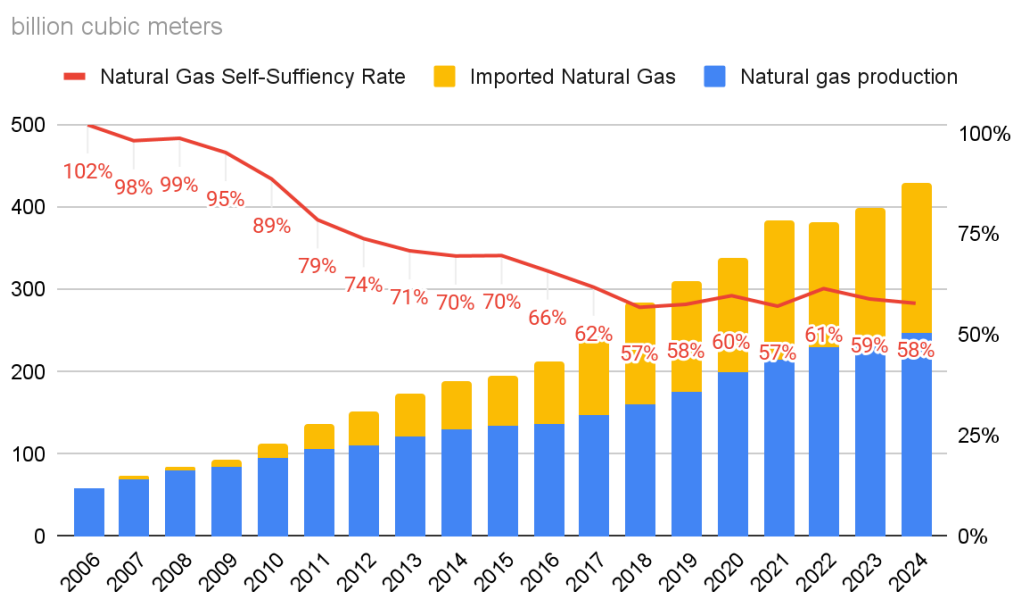
Figure 1: Natural Gas Continues to Rise as Share of PRC Primary Energy Use



(Source: 2006–2022 data from [NBS](#); 2023–2024 data from [Statistical Yearbook](#), 2024)

The accelerated fuel transition triggered a supply shortage and price spike in 2017, exposing bottlenecks in infrastructure and production capacity. The State Council responded by tempering its approach, stipulating that the replacement of coal-fired power with gas would henceforth be based on the principle of “letting gas supply determine the pace of [coal-to-gas] conversion” (以气定改). In other words, securing the country’s gas supply before transitioning to coal ([State Council](#), August 30, 2018; [Center for Industrial Development and Environmental Governance \[CIDE\]](#), December, 2018). Subsequent plans also have stressed close monitoring of “coal-to-gas” (煤改气) progress ([National Development and Reform Council \[NDRC\]](#), March 15, 2023). Gas demand has nevertheless continues to grow across all sectors, rising 8–10 percent year-on-year in 2024, and usage has more than doubled in the last decade ([National Energy Administration \[NEA\]](#), 2024). State-owned oil giant Sinopec projects gas use to reach 610 bcm by 2035 ([Sinopec](#), January 9, 2024).

Figure 2: PRC Self-Sufficiency in Natural Gas Sustained at 60 Percent since 2018.



(Source: 2006–2022 data from [NBS](#); 2023–2024 data from [Statistical Yearbook](#), 2024)

Both high-level statements and the country’s shifting energy mix indicate that concerns over energy security have driven the pivot toward gas. The 2017 supply shock likely only heightened those concerns. Starting the following year, domestic gas production has expanded, rising from 128 bcm in 2014 to 232 bcm in 2024. This is in line with a directive from General Secretary Xi Jinping to “vigorously enhance domestic oil and gas exploration and development to safeguard national energy security” (大力提升勘探开发力度，保障国家能源安全 ([Qiushi](#), December 16, 2020; [NDRC](#), April 27, 2018). Rising production has also been aided by the “liberalize the two ends, control the middle” (放开两头、管住中间) reforms. This strategy encourages market competition while maintaining government oversight across the entire energy sector. In practice, investors and firms handle the production and sales ends of the energy chain, while transmission and distribution remain under government regulation. This has enabled the PRC to maintain a self-sufficiency rate

of around 60 percent despite increasing imports (illustrated in figure 2 above). The PRC will allow natural gas consumption to grow as long as this level of self-sufficiency remains above 50 percent ([Petroleum University Press](#), July 21, 2023). In late 2021, Xi emphasized that “the energy ‘rice bowl’ must be firmly held in our own hands” (能源的饭碗必须端在自己手里) ([People’s Daily](#), January 7, 2022).

Table 1: PRC imports of LNG and pipeline natural gas have increased in recent years

	2023 Imports (billion cubic meters)	YoY percentage change (2022–2023)	Estimated cost per metric million British thermal units (MMBtu)
LNG Imports	98.4 (59.5 percent)	+12.6 percent	\$13
Pipeline Imports	67.1 (40.5 percent)	+6.2 percent	\$8–10
Total Imports	165.6 (100 percent)	+9.9 percent	

(Source: [Petroleum University Press](#), August 23, 2024; [Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis \(IEEFA\)](#), April 10)

Dominance in LNG Provides Geopolitical Leverage

The PRC is the world’s top buyer of LNG, which gives it considerable leverage. Most of its LNG comes from Australia (34 percent), Qatar (24 percent), and Russia (11 percent). Only a small portion comes from the United States (5.4 percent) ([Baijiahao/Logistics Revelation](#), February 2).

The country’s LNG infrastructure is extensive. It is home to the world’s largest LNG storage tank in Qingdao, and boasts an LNG carrier fleet that has increased from four ships in 2015 to 59 in 2022 ([Xinde Marine News](#), March 15, 2022; [Sinopec](#), August 25, 2023). This growing capacity boosts supply security, as it helps ensure that domestic needs are met. But it also indicates that the PRC will remain reliant on LNG imports, even if it also allows for flexibility in purchasing and receiving LNG based on market fluctuations. Its capacity is further evident via reports of LNG stockpiling in 2024, during periods when the market was favorable. Intentions to resell likely were the cause of this stockpiling activity ([Oil Price](#), October 7, 2024). In parallel, reports of the PRC’s oil stockpiles indicate a similar strategy of buying when prices are low, but the motivations for oil stockpiles appear to be in order to maintain supply rather than to resell ([Reuters](#), October 4).

Beijing’s ability to take advantage of arbitrage enhances its influence over the LNG market, but it also positions the country within a global shift. Players are increasingly intervening in the LNG market via opportunistic spot purchases. Although the PRC’s LNG portfolios consist primarily of long-term contracts, there has been an increase of spot market activity among LNG buyers, with Sinopec becoming a major LNG spot trader in the Asia-Pacific region ([Baijiahao/Chaoji Shihua](#), November 6, 2024).

The PRC also has been increasing its LNG re-exports. Between January and October 2023, Chinese companies re-exported 14 LNG cargoes, up from eight in the same period in 2022 ([ICIS](#), November 26, 2023). In 2024, re-exports surged to nearly 770 percent from 2023, which PRC analysts attributed to weak domestic demand and an anticipated U.S.-PRC tariff war ([Baijiahao/Sanlang Macro](#), April 29). While the PRC did not impose new tariffs on U.S. LNG during this period, President Trump's potential return to the White House—and his campaign promise to impose large tariffs once in office—likely motivated PRC buyers ([Reuters](#), October 30, 2024). Some energy experts believe that the PRC is emerging as an LNG reseller in part because the country's demand is decreasing and all of its supply is contracted up until 2035 ([The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies](#), September 1). New U.S. LNG contracts, such as a 15-year deal between ConocoPhillips and Guangdong Pearl River Management Group (珠江投管), further confirm this strategy ([Sohu](#), June 6). U.S. contracts are known for their flexible destination clauses, and shorter-term agreements also indicate a desire for flexibility. The PRC might be limiting near-term U.S. LNG intake, but it is also locking in future supply, likely seeing long-term access as insurance against future volatility.

This suggests that the PRC uses LNG procurement to balance its energy needs while signaling it can currently meet this demand without U.S. LNG. Its decision to purchase U.S. sanctioned LNG from Russia similarly sends a message that the PRC's purchasing decisions will not be influenced by U.S. actions ([Reuters](#), September 15). Whatever the PRC's LNG ambitions may be, its robust infrastructure and diverse LNG portfolio coupled with its complex energy mix places it in an advantageous position. It can meet its energy demands while also capitalizing on LNG market opportunities.

Pipelines Partnerships Strengthen Eurasia Ties

International cooperation is an important facet of Beijing's energy diplomacy. As of 2022, the PRC had energy cooperation agreements with over 90 countries and 30 international organizations and regional platforms across Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe ([People's Daily](#), January 7, 2022). Through these agreements, the PRC aims to shape international energy governance and extend geopolitical influence. Strategic partnerships also form part of Beijing's approach. This is part of its "Four Revolutions and One Cooperation" (四个革命、一个合作) approach, a new energy security strategy that promotes revolutions in energy consumption, supply, technology, and systems, alongside strengthening international cooperation ([People's Daily](#), April 9). Partnerships help fill the country's domestic supply shortfall, provide diversification as a hedge against geopolitical disruptions, and enable the PRC to invest in overseas infrastructure that can absorb future demand surges or unexpected discoveries of additional natural gas deposits.

Energy infrastructure are central to this strategy. Pipelines tie the PRC more closely to its neighbors, while LNG's maritime flexibility creates a different kind of geopolitical leverage. In 2024, the PRC imported 71 bcm of natural gas via pipeline from five countries: Turkmenistan (estimated 46 percent), Russia (estimated 40 percent), Kazakhstan (estimated 7 percent), Uzbekistan (estimated 4 percent), and Myanmar (estimated 3 percent) ([Baijiahao/Logistics Revelation](#), February 2). These imports arrived via three pipeline projects: the China-Central Asia Gas Pipelines A, B, and C, the Power of Siberia pipeline, and the Sino-Myanmar gas pipeline ([Petroleum Knowledge](#), December 1, 2024). Details of these projects are outlined in table 2 below.

Beijing views Turkmenistan as one of its “strategic energy partners” (能源战略伙伴) due to its prominent role as a supplier of pipeline gas to the PRC ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs \[MFA\]](#), January 6, 2023). Importing pipeline gas via Central Asia mitigates the risks entailed by maritime LNG imports. Shipments could be disrupted in any conflict scenario. Beijing has positioned its energy relationship with Turkmenistan as part of its One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. The China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline often features in OBOR propaganda ([Xinhua](#), August 18, 2023). The country’s rise as a destination for Central Asian resources also boosts the PRC’s economic and political influence in a region traditionally dominated by Russia, while it hopes to leverage deepening cross-border infrastructure to promote regional stability. At a recent meeting with Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedow, President Xi called for the two countries to scale up natural gas cooperation and further increase OBOR cooperation ([MFA](#), June 17). No reference was made, however, to pipeline D, which according to proposals would run through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan and have an expected capacity of 30 bcm per year. Speaking at the second China - Central Asia summit in June, Xi called for the acceleration of the construction of pipeline D ([People’s Daily](#), June 18). According to agreements signed in 2013 and 2014, the pipeline will run through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan and has an expected capacity of 30 bcm per year ([CNPC](#), 2014). While progress on the pipeline has stalled, the completion of the Chinese West-East Gas Pipeline 4 this year - which ends in Kuqa, Xinjiang, the planned terminus of pipeline D - suggests the project may receive renewed attention ([Yicai](#), September 29, 2024; [GEM Wiki](#), accessed October 29)

The PRC’s other key pipeline gas partner, Russia, needs to urgently shift its gas exports to Asia to mitigate the decline in European demand following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Alongside the existing Power of Siberia project, the China-Russia Far Eastern route is under construction and expected to be operational in 2027 ([Oxford Institute for Energy Studies](#), March 1, 2022). During the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in early September, Russia and the PRC reportedly agreed to increase Power of Siberia gas deliveries from 38 to 44 bcm per year and Far Eastern gas deliveries from 10 to 12 bcm per year ([Oxford Institute for Energy Studies](#), September 1).

As with Turkmenistan, PRC pipeline projects with Russia appear to have stalled. A second Power of Siberia pipeline has been mooted by both sides for a number of years. This would allow Russia to transport up to 50 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually to the PRC via Mongolia for 30 years. Alexey Miller, CEO of Gazprom, announced that Russia and the PRC have signed a memorandum of understanding on the construction of the pipeline. But Beijing has been silent on the matter. The PRC’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun (郭嘉昆) refused to provide any specific details on the project at a press conference in September ([The Paper](#), September 2). Further details of the project are yet to be released. Pricing is expected to be a key sticking point ([Oxford Institute for Energy Studies](#), September 1). For now, Moscow appears more eager to see progress as it attempts to secure new non-European buyers for its gas. While the announcement reaffirms support of Moscow through strengthening bilateral energy cooperation, Beijing’s priority is maintaining a flexible and diversified gas supply chain to avoid over-reliance on any single supplier.

Table 2: The PRC's gas pipeline projects and respective routes.

Pipeline Project		Route	Start Year	Transport capacity/year
China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline	Lines A/B/C	Turkmenistan →	2009 (A)	30 bcm (A/B)
		Uzbekistan →	2010 (B)	25bcm (C)
		Kazakhstan → China (Khorgos, Xinjiang)	2014 (C)	
Power of Siberia		Russia (eastern Siberia) → China (Heihe City, Heilongjiang)	2019	38 bcm (Plans to increase to 44bcm)
Sino-Myanmar gas pipeline		Myanmar (Kyaukphyu) → China (Ruili, Yunnan)	2013	12 bcm (Actual deliveries: 3.8bcm)

(Source: Reuters, [May 24, 2023](#), [August 29](#); [Petroleum Knowledge](#), December 1, 2024)

Conclusion

Pipelines play an important role in the PRC's pragmatic approach to gas policy. They mitigate its exposure to LNG market fluctuations and maritime chokepoints and likely give Beijing an advantage in pricing negotiations, strengthening its role as an LNG reseller.

The PRC's recent suspension of U.S. LNG imports demonstrates that it is increasingly weaponizing its leverage over resources. Its moves to expand domestic capacity to receive and store LNG shipments while strengthening international energy cooperation with specific partners through pipeline deals also indicates geopolitical—not just economic—motivations. By limiting domestic supply issues and maintaining competitive pricing, Beijing's approach to natural gas gives it room for maneuver in trade conflict with the United States, allows it to strengthen regional partnerships, and influence global energy systems.

The views expressed here are the authors' alone and do not represent DSET or the Taiwanese government.

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Illicit PRC-linked Finance Enables Arms Diversion in Africa

By Adam Rousselle



Three PRC nationals were convicted for charges related to illicit mining and money laundering in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in January. (Source: Central News)

Executive Summary:

- Judicial cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Nigeria confirm that citizens from the People's Republic of China (PRC) are active in both resource extraction and digital offshore laundering networks, connecting illicit resource economies and stablecoin settlement into value chains that sustain conflict.
- Gold, timber, and crypto flows move through the same corridors that carry PRC-manufactured weapons into embargoed zones. This integration creates a shadow liquidity system in which capital and material reinforce one another, allowing African militant economies to become self-financing and resilient to external pressure.
- Existing regimes treat arms diversion and money laundering as separate issues. They are not. Addressing this challenge requires collapsing the divide between arms embargo enforcement and financial crime intelligence into a single operational continuum.

The circulation of weapons manufactured in the People's Republic of China (PRC) has become an increasingly visible feature of African conflicts. Earlier research by this author traced how Chinese small arms and light weapons appear in the hands of militant groups across the continent, often in ways that reveal the fragility of existing control mechanisms ([China Brief](#), November 1, 2024; [U.S. Senate](#), July 2025). That research underscored the scale of material leakage from licit trade into irregular markets. Since then, more evidence has come to light to suggest that the story does not end with the physical movement of arms.

Alongside weapons, Chinese illicit finance networks are spreading across Africa's conflict zones and beyond. These networks have the capacity to enable militant actors to not only acquire weapons but also to sustain self-financing economies of violence and extraction. They tie the diversion of arms to capital flows that are deliberately routed through opaque offshore structures, informal value transfer systems, and state-aligned facilitators.

Illicit finance is not a peripheral concern. It is a structural enabler of militant economies and arms transfers. Understanding the fusion of financial and material supply chains is therefore essential for grasping how African conflicts are evolving, and how external actors shape them.

Chinese Criminals Embedded in Conflict Economies

In January, a court in Bukavu, a war-torn community in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, handed down a rare and decisive judgment against three PRC nationals involved in illicit extractive activity. The defendants were convicted for operating illegal mining concessions and laundering proceeds through both cash and precious metals ([South China Morning Post \[SCMP\]](#), January 15). Authorities seized more than \$400,000 in hard currency alongside a quantity of gold bars, establishing a direct evidentiary trail from resource extraction to illicit financial flows ([Central News](#), January 16). Because this conviction was adjudicated in court, it created a judicially verified record of PRC actors engaging in illicit commerce within a conflict zone. The absence of PRC media coverage of this case is telling.

The defendants did not operate in a vacuum. The PRC maintains a visible commercial footprint across eastern Congo's extractives economy, including Chinese-owned buying houses, traders, and small-scale gold operations in war-torn South Kivu ([ECOFIN](#), December 30, 2024). PRC state media has even warned PRC nationals of the legal and security risks of doing such business in the war-torn region, explicitly mentioning mining activities ([Xinhua](#); [Consular Express WeChat Official Account](#), July 28). Congolese officials and local communities have repeatedly objected to illicit practices attributed to Chinese operators ([ACP](#), November 15; [Radio Okapi](#), August 8).

The Bukavu convictions confirm that Chinese illicit financiers are present inside eastern Congo's conflict zones. A panel of UN experts reported to the press that minerals extracted from areas in eastern Congo controlled by the Congolese Rwandan-backed rebel paramilitary group M23 are being smuggled through Rwanda and Uganda before entering global markets ([AfricaNews](#), January 10; [Al-Jazeera](#), July 18). At the same time, M23 rebels have been documented with significant stocks of PRC-manufactured weapons and equipment, consistent with supply via their Rwandan and Ugandan backers ([China Brief](#), November 1, 2024). The PRC is the world's dominant processor of the ore coltan, gold, and other Congolese exports, and both Rwanda and Uganda ship far more of these minerals than they produce ([Enact](#), May 3, 2022; [Haitong](#), April

23, 2023; [CASS West Asia and Africa Research Institute](#), March 2024; [AllAfrica](#), December 18, 2024). Taken together, these facts make PRC end-use not speculative but structurally inevitable: illicit finance on the ground, smuggling through neighbors, and end-user demand in the PRC form a single chain that helps sustain this conflict economy.

These dynamics are not confined to eastern Congo. Across Africa, PRC nationals are embedded in commodity corridors that move value and provide logistics. In 2022, roughly 435 tonnes of gold were smuggled out of Africa, 93 percent of it bound for the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with PRC buyers active at both ends of the chain ([SCMP](#), November 16, 2023; [Swissaid](#), May 30, 2024; [Africa Report](#), October 24, 2024). PRC-linked syndicates also dominate timber and rosewood exports from the Sahel, Central, and East Africa, often sourcing directly from insurgent-affected areas ([African Development Bank](#), 2021). These gold and timber corridors easily provide the financial and logistical backbone for broader illicit trade, establishing flows of capital and transport capacity that could be redirected toward arms procurement or militant financing.

Chinese Criminals Laundering Crypto

In July, a federal court in Lagos, Nigeria ordered the forfeiture of approximately 223,000 Tether (\$223,000)—the U.S. dollar-pegged stablecoin—from two PRC nationals convicted of fraud and money laundering ([EFCC](#), July 21). The case was notable not only for the scale of the seizure but also for its judicial confirmation that PRC nationals were operating through crypto networks in Nigeria. It followed an earlier wave of enforcement in December 2024, when Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) carried out mass raids that led to the arrest of 792 suspects. Among those implicated were 148 PRC nationals accused of participating in coordinated crypto fraud and laundering schemes ([Toutiao](#), April 27; [African Mirror](#), December 19, 2024). Together, these cases establish a pattern of sustained involvement by PRC nationals in illicit digital finance across West Africa.

The pattern is clear: PRC illicit finance networks have embedded themselves into West African stablecoin rails. These rails enable frictionless cross-border settlement that can be directed toward extractive rents, arms procurement, or conventional fraud. Stablecoin rails in West Africa now provide the same frictionless settlement capacity increasingly favored by PRC-linked financiers in Southeast Asia ([Sina Finance](#), May 26). In effect, stablecoins have become a structural enabler of transnational illicit finance tied to PRC nationals, providing cross-border transfer capacities beyond the reach of current regulatory controls.

Weapons Trafficking Completes the Supply Chain

In May, Amnesty International verified the presence of PRC-manufactured weapons in both Khartoum and Darfur, despite a standing United Nations arms embargo on Sudan. The investigation traced the weapons' path through the UAE, confirming that PRC-manufactured weapons had been re-exported into an active conflict zone ([Amnesty International](#), May 8; [SCMP](#), May 9). The UAE—already identified as a primary destination for smuggled African gold and a key entrepôt for trafficked resources such as timber and wildlife—is now linked to weapons leakage into embargoed territories. A 2023 report by the PRC's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) highlights the country's central role as a commodity logistics hub, while international investigations document its function as a distribution point for illicit flows ultimately bound for the PRC ([The Sentry](#), February 2021; [GITOC](#), December 2022; [MOFCOM](#), 2023).

Extractive commodities and arms flows are not separate streams but parts of a single transnational infrastructural system. Gold and timber exports provide the financial base, often routed through opaque networks tied to PRC buyers. Stablecoin rails in West Africa supply frictionless cross-border digital settlement, as increasingly favored by PRC-linked illicit financiers in Southeast Asia ([Sina Finance](#), May 26). The re-export of weapons through commodity hubs completes the circuit, bringing material support back into conflict zones. The convergence is the critical risk: financial, logistical, and military flows run along the same corridors, reinforcing each other and expanding the resilience of militant economies.

This configuration functions as a shadow liquidity system. Value extracted from African resources is continuously re-expressed as kinetic capability, ensuring that liquidity itself becomes a weaponized asset class. Each transaction in this system, whether a gold shipment, stablecoin transfer, or weapons re-export, amplifies the others, producing a feedback loop that stabilizes illicit power structures where governance fails.

Conclusion

The evidence now available establishes that the illicit involvement of PRC nationals in African conflict economies is neither incidental nor peripheral. Judicial convictions in Bukavu and Lagos confirm the presence of criminal actors from the PRC engaged in both extractive laundering and stablecoin-based fraud, while reporting from Sudan illustrates how weapons manufactured in the PRC reappear in embargoed theaters.

These cases reveal a common pattern. Illicit finance and logistics linked to PRC nationals run through the same corridors that sustain militant supply chains. Gold, timber, digital assets, and arms move along overlapping routes, creating a resilient system in which capital and material flows reinforce one another.

Recognizing this convergence is essential. The challenge is not simply weapons leakage or financial opacity in isolation but the way disparate supply chains combine to strengthen insurgent and criminal economies. PRC end-user demand and facilitation give the system scale and durability, tying local extraction and digital laundering directly to global markets. Addressing this challenge requires collapsing the divide between arms embargo enforcement and financial crime intelligence; and treating both as elements of one integrated system.

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Beijing's Latest Global Leadership Bid

By W.Y. Kwok



President Xi Jinping addressed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit, introducing the new Global Governance Initiative. (Source: Xinhua)

Executive Summary:

- The Global Governance Initiative (GGI), announced by Xi Jinping at the 2025 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit, marks a strategic evolution from sectoral cooperation to competition for global governance leadership. It critiques the so-called “global governance deficit” (全球治理赤字), which lead to the underrepresentation of the Global South, and calls for a more equal global governance system.
- The GGI advocates reform in international institutions while attempting to establish emerging international mechanisms in various aspects, calling out frontiers such as artificial intelligence (AI), space, and deep sea. It also references current measures, such as the newly established International Organization of Mediation (IOMed), as the pathway for implementation.
- This new initiative completes the previous three Chinese-led initiatives, covering security, civilization, and development, providing an overarching framework that challenges the Western-led global order. While specific measures remain announced, the GGI reveals Beijing’s ambition to reshape international governance structures and establish alternative institutional arrangements, even as officials frame it as enhancing existing institutions and upholding UN principles.

The Global Governance Initiative (GGI), which General Secretary Xi Jinping unveiled in September, aims to provide “Chinese solutions” (中国方案) to what Xi describes as a “global governance deficit” (全球治理赤字). It uses inclusive rhetoric of improving existing governance mechanisms obscures a parallel institution building effort, which follows Xi’s articulated vision of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as leader—not merely participant or advocate—in global governance.

GGI Discourse Criticizes the West

It seeks to confront three perceived weaknesses in contemporary global governance, including the underrepresentation of Global South countries in international institutions, the erosion of authority within existing governance frameworks, and what Beijing terms the “effectiveness deficit” (有效性赤字) in addressing transnational challenges. The GGI operates through five core principles: sovereign equality, international rule of law, multilateralism, people-centric governance, and action-oriented results. In his explanation of the initiative, Xi urged the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to become a “participant, advocate, and leader” (参与者、推动者、引领者) during this period of “revolutionary” (革命性) change in international power, and to actively participate in the formulation of international rules ([PLA Daily](#), September 13; [People’s Daily](#), September 26).

Official commentaries and opinion pieces released alongside the initiative explicitly criticize unnamed powers for withdrawing from United Nations treaties, cutting international funding, obstructing Security Council resolutions, and undermining WTO mechanisms. Calling out “hegemonic, domineering, and bullying tactics” (霸权霸道霸凌行径), including abuse of national security pretexts for sanctions, “long-arm jurisdiction” (长臂管辖) practices and creating exclusive “small cliques” (小圈子), these articles clearly refer to the West in general and the United States in particular ([Qiushi](#), September 11; [Xinhua](#), September 12; [People’s Daily](#), September 15; [Xinhua](#), September 16). Commentaries also emphasize that the GGI does not aim to “start a new venture” (另起炉灶), but to uphold multilateralism and strengthen global governance, especially addressing the underrepresentation of the Global South within international institutions ([Wenhui Daily](#), September 14).

New Mechanisms to Shape Emerging Sectors

The GGI framework remains rather vague for now, but PRC diplomats have identified several domains within which to seek reform. In a speech, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Geng Shuang (耿爽) called upon more countries to join the International Organization for Mediation (国际调解院, IOMed), a newly established by the PRC institution based in Hong Kong. Geng positioned the organization as a valuable supplement to existing mechanisms for resolving global conflicts. PRC experts note that both reforming existing international mechanisms (改制) and building emerging international mechanisms (建制) such as the IOMed represent specific paths to improve the effectiveness of the GGI. They argue that the establishment of the IOMed aligns with the five core principles of the GGI by enhancing the representation of developing nations, adhering to international law, and providing a peaceful resolution to international disputes. The IOMed will also strengthen the capabilities of developing countries to enforce mediation and develop a work plan to promote its use, providing funds, scholarships, and training ([The Paper](#), September 28; [Xinhua](#), October 10).

In emerging domains such as artificial intelligence (AI), the GGI also aims to prevent the emergence both of technology monopolies and of risks such as algorithmic bias and autonomous weapons. According to official statements, this is to ensure that AI's benefits become "public goods shared by all mankind" (全人类共享的“公器”). The GGI echoes the Global AI Governance Initiative (全球人工智能治理倡议), previously advocated for by Beijing, which called for the establishment of a Global AI Cooperation Organization (世界人工智能合作组织) to encourage cooperation, technology exchange, setting standards for data protection and security, and the establishment of a mutual recognition mechanism for model audits in key sectors such as finance, healthcare, and national defense ([China Brief](#), September 5; [Qiushi](#), September 28).

The GGI also includes ambitious financial governance reform targeting the dollar-dominated international monetary system and Western-controlled financial infrastructure. The governor of People's Bank of China, Pan Gongsheng (潘功胜), stated that the GGI aligns with the need to reform the international monetary system and improve the cross-border payment system, noting that more countries are now using Renminbi (RMB) for settlement. Pan also called for governance reforms to international financial organizations like the International Monetary Fund to reflect the rising economic status and voice of emerging markets ([Qiushi](#), September 16).

In late October, Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) and PRC Permanent Representative to the United Nations Fu Cong (傅聪) reiterated the PRC's unwavering support for the United Nations. They claimed the GGI aligns with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and provides a pillar of support at a time when the foundation of the United Nations is faltering. Wang cited examples of PRC support, including the establishment of a new "China-UN Global South-South Development Facility" (联合国全球南南发展支持机制) and the reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC) ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), October 27; [Xinhua](#), October 25).

The GGI's rhetoric of enhancing existing global governance structures obscures a more fundamental strategic objective. While officials claim these PRC-led entities complement existing frameworks, their governance structures, membership composition, and operational mandates suggest parallel systems designed to route around Western-dominated institutions where Beijing claims to be underrepresented. This institutional proliferation pattern contradicts the explicit claim of not creating a new venture, instead revealing Xi's articulated vision of the PRC as the leader, not merely a participant or advocate in global governance.

Past Initiatives Fuel Beijing's Confidence

The success of Beijing's earlier global initiatives suggests that GGI has the potential to reshape global governance structures. The Global Security Initiative (GSI), for instance, has demonstrated remarkable traction in Africa, where Beijing has systematically embedded its security institutions into African partner countries through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Since 2022, Beijing has secured official endorsements from African governments, established joint law enforcement operations in multiple countries, and committed to training 6,000 senior African military officers by 2027. The GSI's concrete implementation, including the creation of bilateral law enforcement centers like the Ethiopia-China Law Enforcement Center and joint operations protecting Belt and Road infrastructure, shows how PRC initiatives can move beyond

rhetoric to demonstrate regional influence. But concerns were also raised against Beijing's increasing export of domestic police wares, technology, and surveillance systems that have interfered in African governance, undermined democratic norms, and impacted civil liberties ([China Brief Notes](#), September 30, 2024).

The GGI has garnered rapid endorsement from Russia, Malaysia, Slovakia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, and dozens of other countries and international organizations. Russian President Vladimir Putin noted the GGI aligns closely with Russia's view on Eurasian security ([Kremlin](#), October 2). Even the UN's leadership has welcomed the initiative's multilateral focus ([People's Daily](#), September 15; [China Daily](#), September 17).

The launch of the GGI coincides with the UN's 80th anniversary and leverages the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) platform—an explicitly anti-Western institution—to signal Beijing's solutions for alternative multilateral frameworks over Western-dominated institutions ([Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs](#), September 4; [Xinhua](#), September 12). This timing, along with the 80th anniversary of the Second World War, allows Beijing to position itself as the defender of multilateralism precisely when the United States appears to be retreating from global institutional leadership.

Conclusion

The GGI constitutes a fourth pillar of Beijing's current global initiative framework, though additional global initiatives may be unveiled in future. Together, these pillars address what Beijing identifies as humanity's fundamental needs: material development, security, cultural dialogue, and institutional governance ([Shanghai Observer](#), September 14; [China Daily](#), September 15). By positioning itself as putative leader, this approach demonstrates unprecedented strategic ambition across all dimensions of international relations.

Beijing persistently encourages other countries to verbally sign on to its initiatives. It has had comparatively little success to date, however, in incorporating its preferred language into UN resolutions or treaties. Desires to contribute “Chinese solutions” are therefore manifesting much more clearly through parallel institutions where the PRC exercises much greater control.

By appealing to the Global South, Beijing hopes to build a coalition that could alter international power dynamics. Its experience with GSI's implementation demonstrates how these initiatives function as mutually reinforcing stepping stones for expanding influence across regions and sectors, providing tangible regional support in exchange for broader support on global governance. Grievances about the underrepresentation of the Global South have given traction to these PRC-led initiatives to become a competing pole of governance authority, ultimately challenging the more democratic institutions that exist today.

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Beijing's War on 'Negative Energy'

By Shijie Wang



The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) has refocused on cultivating “positive energy” on the internet. (Source: VCG)

Executive Summary:

- The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) has launched a new “clean and bright” campaign that redefines online frustration over youth unemployment, gender conflict, and social anxiety as “negative energy” that threatens People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) national security.
- Expressions that contradict the Party’s harmonious self-image are recast as foreign manipulation or malicious behavior, empowering platforms and regulators to erase alternative narratives from public discourse.
- Framing censorship as resisting Western ideological colonization, Beijing promotes its discourse-control framework as a legitimate, exportable form of digital authoritarianism.

On September 22, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) announced that this year's "clean and bright" (清朗) campaign would focus on the theme of "rectifying the problem of maliciously inciting negative emotions" (整治恶意挑动负面情绪问题). [1] The campaign targets four categories of online speech: "inciting extreme group antagonism" (挑动群体极端对立), "promoting fear and anxiety" (宣扬恐慌焦虑), "stoking cyber violence and hostility" (挑起网络暴力戾气), and "excessively amplifying pessimism and negativity" (过度渲染消极悲观) (CAC, September 22). By cracking down on speech that falls under these categories, the Party's discourse apparatus seeks to alleviate social antagonism and the "lying flat" (躺平) subculture, and more specifically fan culture, online fraud, and conspiracy theories.

The CAC announcement followed closely after the release of a Xinhua Institute report arguing that U.S. cognitive warfare was colonizing the minds of people around the world, as well as the CAC's decision to penalize social media platform Xiaohongshu (known overseas as Rednote) on the grounds that it was "undermining the online ecosystem" (破坏网络生态) (Xinhua, September 7; CAC, September 11; China Brief Notes, September 12). The specific targets of the "clean and bright" campaign are not identical to those detailed in the "colonization of the mind" (思想殖民) report, but they are similar. Official media in the People's Republic of China (PRC) often frame these phenomena along similar lines as manifestations of Western cultural infiltration.

Beijing Articulates an 'Authorized Reality'

Beijing is defining and defending an "authorized reality," securitizing certain social governance issues in the process. It codes online expressions inconsistent with the state's perception of society as "malicious behavior" (恶意行为) and "negative energy" (负能量) manipulated by external forces. This offers a pretext to mobilize administrative enforcement under the framework of the "total national security concept" (总体国家安全观). The Xinhua Institute report explicitly defines "external cognitive warfare/ideological infiltration" (境外认知战/意识形态渗透) as a national security threat. This framing provides both the explanatory context and the legitimacy for the current "clean and bright" campaign.

The new campaign's criteria for online content that must be removed remains vague, leading platforms to adopt the safest approach to enforcement. Rather than making careful distinctions, platforms have opted to indiscriminately throttle posts, or to delete them outright. In this sense, the campaign is designed not to offer objective standards but to redefine which forms of expression are recognized as "real" and which must be suppressed.

In the People's Republic of China (PRC), political mechanisms for expressing frustration are largely absent. People often turn to the Internet to vent and voice their concerns. A vivid example is the ongoing "gender war" (性别对立) in which women complain about unfair treatment both at home and at work, while men express grievances over perceived inequities in marriage, dating, and public opinion. Although much of this discussion is expressed in extreme terms, the underlying conflicts cited by both sides are rooted in their respective lived social experiences. [2] These experiences, however, stand in tension with the "authorized reality."

The PRC portrayed in official propaganda is positive, harmonious, and orderly. Under the Party's "scientific leadership" (科学领导), society should not be plagued by social conflicts, which it frames as phenomena unique to Western societies. Even when such conflicts do appear, they are to be understood as isolated or exceptional cases, and are sometimes attributed to the infiltration of Western ideas ([Xinhua](#), December 4, 2021; [China Digital Times](#), April 12, 2022). When empirical reality clashes with the state-sanctioned version of reality, the former is recast as the effects of Western cognitive warfare or the malicious incitement of negative energy.

For example, on the very first day of the campaign, Zhang Xuefeng (张雪峰), an education influencer with a total following of 65 million across major social media platforms, had all of his accounts banned. Although the authorities did not specify the reason for his cancellation, his frequent discussions about the difficulties college graduates face finding jobs likely were the primary cause ([Nanfang Daily](#), September 25). [3] On the same day, another influencer, Hu Chenfeng (户晨风), a political commentator with over 10 million followers, was also banned across all platforms. Again, no official explanation was provided. Many observers believe the ban stemmed from his frequent remarks contrasting what he called the PRC's "base" (基本盘)—poorer, nationalist, and socially conservative users who prefer domestic android phones—with the urban petite bourgeoisie of coastal cities, who tend to use iPhones and espouse more liberal, cosmopolitan values. In Beijing's view, such ideological divisions are acceptable only in societies that practice "Western-style democracy" (西式民主). Hu's commentary was therefore seen as crossing a political red line under the "clean and bright" campaign ([China News](#), September 20).

Securitization Represses 'Negative Energy'

Three of the four targets of this "clean and bright" campaign—"inciting antagonism," "promoting anxiety," and "excessive negativity"—correspond directly to three major issues that are frequently discussed among today's youth. These are the so-called gender war, high unemployment, and overwhelming societal pressure. The CAC document does not confront these issues directly. But it reframes them in ways that make it easier to externalize their causes. This practice has appeared sporadically in recent years ([Guancha](#), May 14, 2021; [The Paper](#), November 2, 2021; [Global Times](#), August, 22; [iFeng](#), September 23). But its deployment in two documents released by separate parts of the Party's discourse apparatus at roughly the same time indicates that Beijing is now institutionalizing the securitization of domestic social governance challenges.

By reframing "negative energy" as a national security issue, the government empower platforms and regulators to employ far more forceful measures to erase "non-authorized reality" from public view. Xi Jinping's concept of "total national security," first announced in 2014, extends the scope of security to encompass the political, cultural, social, and cyber domains ([Xinhua](#), April 15, 2014). The pairing of the Xinhua Institute report (which defines an extant threat) with the CAC's "clean and bright" campaign (which calls for eliminating that threat) is downstream of this framework. All forms of social sentiment that deviate from Beijing's authorized view of reality can now be labeled as malicious negative energy that is harmful to national security. In this framework, social governance aimed at alleviating tensions is transformed into national security work.

Conclusion

Beijing's developing approach to social governance at home is likely to be promoted abroad. By emphasizing “resisting the external colonization of the mind” (抵御外部思想殖民) by the West and “purifying cyberspace” (净化网络空间), it is likely to gain traction among authoritarian regimes in the Global South, especially when attached to PRC technology exports. For these countries, Beijing offers a legitimizing discourse in which social discontent and antagonistic sentiment are not the result of domestic policy missteps but the result of external infiltration. This allows the PRC to position itself as a champion of “decolonization” while profiting from the sales of a toolkit for digital authoritarian governance.

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Notes

[1] The “clean and bright” campaign (清朗行动), formally known as the “clean and bright” series of special operations (清朗系列专项行动), is a nationwide cyberspace governance initiative led by the CAC, with joint participation from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the State Administration for Market Regulation, and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television. The first “clean and bright” campaign was launched in 2016, primarily targeting illegal content, including child pornography, fraud, and gore ([Xinhua](#), December 31, 2016). The next campaign did not occur until 2020, when Beijing announced an eight-month operation focused on protecting the online environment for minors ([CAC](#), July 13, 2020). Since then, Beijing has conducted multiple “clean and bright” campaigns every year, each framed around themes such as combating so-called “online chaos” (互联网乱象), “harmful information” (不良信息), “false information” (不实信息), and “malicious behaviors” (恶意 XX 行为), categories that are often subjective in nature and open to broad political interpretation.

[2] Liao, S. (2024). Unpopular feminism: Popular culture and gender politics in digital China. *Communication and the Public*, 10(2), 86-93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20570473241268066>

[3] On October 22, Zhang Xuefeng's accounts were unblocked, again without any official explanation. In his first livestream after being reinstated, Zhang stated that every university major “has great potential” (大有可为) and that graduates from any field can find satisfying jobs after graduation ([Dahe Daily](#), 26 October).