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China Brief	Notes
Foreign Policy 3 CNP Part IV: Calculation Holds Keys to Strategic Competition Erik R. Quam	Military & Security 29 Xi Purges Six More PLA Generals Brandon Tran & Gerui Zhang
Military & Security 10 Maritime Pressure Expands to Pratas and Taiping Yu-cheng Chen	Foreign Policy 34 Australia’s Defense Diplomacy Amid PLA Missile Test Samantha Hoffman & Blake Johnson
Foreign Policy 17 Beijing Tightens Control Over Outbound Investment Christopher Nye & Charles Sun	
Politics & Society 23 Xi’s Leninist Selectocracy has Cemented Party Dictatorship Filip Jirouš & Ralph Weber	



A sculpture of the Chinese Communist Party logo is seen in the Batu Bay scenic area on July 12, 2023 in Wushen Banner, Ordos City, Inner Mongolia. (Source: Lintao Zhang/Getty Images)

CNP Part IV: Calculation Holds Keys to Strategic Competition

Erik R. Quam
July 9, 2026

Executive Summary

- The Party pins its legitimacy to success in developing “comprehensive national power” (CNP). Understanding how it conceptualizes CNP may enable the United States to identify effective ways for integrated deterrence to target vulnerabilities the Party has identified and drive perceptions that reduce the leadership’s confidence across constituent elements of CNP.
- CNP growth in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) will not be linear in the coming years, and Beijing’s approach to measuring CNP could lead to dangerous miscalculation. For instance, U.S. and Western policies that force the CCP to overinvest in science and technology at the expense of other elements of national power could be destabilizing; and political sensitivities within the Party could lead to mistakes in how CNP is measured, leading to policies that could unintentionally worsen CNP.
- The PRC has significant staying power and will remain a formidable challenger to the United States over the coming decades. It could even achieve preeminent status in CNP rank globally without ever passing the United States in terms of total GDP.

Executive Summary (continued)

- As confidence in the PRC's comparative position grows, growing dissatisfaction with the international order will likely change what deters Beijing over time. If ongoing attempts to enhance the country's discourse power fail to translate its accrued national strength as measured by CNP into a more powerful position globally, Party leaders may turn to more assertive methods.
- Deterring the PRC at the strategic level over the coming decades would require undermining Chinese confidence in its assessments of the “two trends” (两个大局)—national rejuvenation and changes unseen in a century—that Chinese analysts and CCP leaders assess reflect a shift in the global balance of power as measured by CNP.
- This deterrence will depend in part on understanding that Beijing sees its “gray zone” actions in the context of CNP competition, as attempts to undermine U.S. power and improve the PRC's relative position without crossing thresholds that would trigger responses in ways that damage its pursuit of CNP.

Editor's note: This is the final article in a four-part series. The previous three articles can be read [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

For decades, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has placed the development and expansion of comprehensive national power (CNP; 综合国力) at the center of both Party ideological frameworks and its understanding of international competition. [1] Its current general secretary, Xi Jinping, has repeatedly tied CNP to core issues of Party legitimacy. In 2018, he explained that “liberating and developing social productive forces and enhancing the [CNP] of socialist countries is socialism's essential demand and fundamental task” (解放和发展社会生产力，增强社会主义国家的综合国力，是社会主义的本质要求和根本任务), echoing a formulation

established by Deng Xiaoping nearly 30 years earlier ([Xinhua](#), December 18, 2018). [2] In 2021, he framed success in the Party's core aim of achieving national rejuvenation in terms of winning the advantage in CNP competition, linking this directly to another pillar of the Party's legitimacy ([Xinhua](#), September 26, 2021). [3]

In the coming years, efforts to build CNP in the People's Republic of China (PRC) will increasingly emphasize dominating technological innovation. Recent statements by leading CCP figures and in top Party publications make a clear link between CNP as the key metric by which the leadership assesses PRC national strength and advances in strategic and emerging technologies. Politburo standing committee member Ding Xuexiang (丁薛祥) recently described computing power as “an important manifestation of a nation's CNP” (国家综合国力的重要体现); and shortly thereafter a People's Daily article described leading science and technology talents as “a concentrated reflection of a country's ... CNP” (一个国家的 ... 综合国力的集中体现) (People's Daily, [May 19](#), [May 30](#)).

Pinning success in developing CNP on the Party's legitimacy narratives makes the stakes very high, particularly as its pursuit of CNP faces challenges, including from competition with the United States. A decline in the country's comparative CNP and lost ground in its efforts to change the international order would reflect negatively on the Party leadership, perhaps in dangerous ways for either the leadership core or the Party more broadly. While the CCP continues to assess that it is on a long-term positive trajectory, that trajectory will not be linear. Bad policy choices could damage CNP growth, and provide openings that the United States or others could exploit.

Foreign Policy

Growing CNP Could Lead to More Aggressive Behavior

Evolving out of the 19th Party Congress in 2017, the CCP leadership has expressed increasing dissatisfaction with efforts to translate its accrued national strength as measured by CNP into a more powerful position globally. Efforts to date have focused on enhancing the country's discourse power, but if this fails then Chinese leaders may turn to more assertive methods in the coming decade, perhaps leading to a far more dangerous PRC ([China Brief](#), January 6). The combination of increased confidence in its comparative position globally, continued expansion of CNP across core elements of national strength, and growing dissatisfaction with the international order will likely change what deters Beijing over time, increasing the risk for those working to ensure that the CCP remains deterred from destabilizing military action in the region or coercive economic or political actions globally.

PRC behavior internationally has already changed as Chinese analysts and CCP leaders have become more confident in the PRC's relative power in the international system. This shift will complicate how the lessons learned from Chinese behavior over the period 1978–2010 informs and enables prediction of how the country may act in the future. For example, a common perspective among China analysts is that Chinese leaders are so concerned with their international reputation that they will not take aggressive actions or can be shamed into “responsible” behavior as the West might define it. As Chinese confidence in its position globally continues to grow, however, Beijing instead will be less concerned with reputational costs. This has played out in recent years in the South China Sea, where significant public attention to destabilizing and aggressive Chinese actions against the Philippines has had little discernable impact on PRC behavior to date ([China Brief](#),

[April 28, 2008](#), [June 21, 2013](#), [June 21, 2024](#), [June 11](#)). This publicity may even reinforce Beijing's efforts to deter other actors in the region by demonstrating strength and will against potential adversaries.

Miscalculation Would be Dangerous

The PRC's approach to measuring CNP could lead to dangerous miscalculation and overconfidence. Its current strategic buildup risks reaching a point at which the Chinese military finally assesses that it has accrued enough national defense power to deter the United States and/or U.S. allies from entering a conflict over Taiwan or elsewhere. Overconfidence in the deterrence capabilities of the People's Liberation Army's strategic forces, especially in combination with a rapidly expanding conventional force, risks leading to aggressive actions and miscalculation of the PRC's own ability to deter the United States and others. Assessments made in 2020 noted that national defense strength was lagging behind economic strength, science and technology (S&T) strength, and CNP, all of which leaped ahead during the 13th five-year plan period (2016–2020) ([Xinhua](#), November 26, 2020). This was despite the 2020 edition of the Science of Military Strategy discussing the critical importance of military strength to national defense strength within CNP as the “backbone of ... war strength” (战争实力 ... 的骨干力量) (Xiao, ed., 2020). [4]

Flaws in its approach to measuring CNP could at the same time lead to opportunities for the United States and its allies. For instance, the CCP believes that a lack of even and coordinated distribution of development across individual CNP subsystems will lead to instability ([China Brief](#), September 26, 2025). Under this view, overinvestment in one area could come at the cost of other critical elements of CNP. This was a key factor in the downfall of the Soviet Union,

Foreign Policy

which the United States drove to pursue unbalanced investment across its system. The CCP's continued focus on the importance of balance across its subsystems suggests that a similar strategy could be applied to U.S.–PRC competition should competition grow that intense in the coming decades.

Another flaw in CNP calculations may lie in political sensitivities that could impact the measurement of CNP. This would lead to bad policies, which in turn could unintentionally worsen the country's CNP. For instance, “soft power” elements of CNP—such as political strength, diplomatic strength, and culture and education strength—can be assigned negative values when calculating CNP, according to the theorist Huang Shuofeng (黄朔风). These elements are all far more politically sensitive than economic or S&T strength and are less easy to measure, though they also face degrees of political sensitivity (Huang, 2006). [5] A negative score in political strength would be reflective of poor leadership, poor management of the system, or policies and strategies that are not working. Although Huang's is only one scale offered and may not reflect the current methodology used, any internal methodology would have trouble accurately measuring political strength due to the sensitive considerations involved. The same goes for national cohesion as described within CNP literature, which continues to be reinforced by the coercive power of the state. [6]

CNP Calculation Presents Avenues for Competitive Action

Soft spots in the PRC's approach to calculating CNP are potential targets for competitive actions that undermine the Chinese leadership's confidence in its assessments. [7] These could complicate its pursuit of CNP growth by forcing it to take policy and strategy decisions that derail its progress. For instance, if the CCP is

unable to resolve current economic challenges, the country may never achieve the leading position in the international system as measured by CNP, which is a clear strategic objective. Moreover, if its economic slowdown continues for a decade or more, strict export controls, reduced access to the Western S&T ecosystem, and continued de-risking of U.S. and European S&T-focused enterprises could force the PRC to overinvest in S&T at the expense of other CNP elements. This ultimately could undermine top leadership confidence in its status and suggest that the CCP, or at least relevant Party officials, are responsible for mismanagement.

Setbacks will not automatically spell the end of the PRC's CNP growth, however, whether from a slowing economy or otherwise. If the system can find ways to effectively manage its problems, other drivers will ensure that the country's rise can be maintained. The PRC as a result may be able to achieve preeminent status in CNP rank globally across all core elements of CNP without ever passing the United States in terms of total GDP. This is because CNP depends on how different constituent elements are weighted in the calculation of CNP and how they interact within the CNP system (and react to variables outside of the open system) (*China Brief*, September 5, 2025). Understanding Chinese calculations of comparative CNP should shed light on where CCP leaders perceive the PRC to be positioned in competition and how CCP approaches to risk may be evolving.

Deterring the PRC at the strategic level over the coming decades would require undermining Chinese confidence in its assessments of the “two trends” (两个大局)—national rejuvenation and changes unseen in a century—that Chinese analysts and CCP leaders assess reflect a shift in the global balance of power as measured by CNP. Deterrence is a critical element of national defense power, both for the PRC's expanding capabilities, and for the United States and its

Foreign Policy

allies and partners to continue deterring destabilizing Chinese actions.

In projecting the future of Chinese thinking on CNP competition, two critical elements will be important to assess. First, past experience does not predict future performance. The PRC's impressive rise over the past 40 years does not mean that its rise will continue or that it will achieve its goals without any decline in power. Chinese scholars have discussed within the CNP literature the dangers of being the number two CNP power behind the United States, examining how both the Soviet Union and Japan stalled out and failed to surpass the United States during the 20th century. In this vein, Yan Xuetong (阎学通) warned in 2015 that bad policy decisions by the Chinese leadership can cause economic and military strength to decline (Yan, 2015). [8]

Second, challenges to certain CNP elements do not automatically entail an overall decline in CNP. The PRC has overcome significant challenges to date, or at least addressed them in ways that have enabled continued growth of CNP and modernization. Similarly, its path over the next 20 years is unlikely to be linear. The country has significant staying power and will remain a formidable economic, military, technological, and ideological challenger to the United States over the coming decades. Its emergence as a globally-leading innovation country will further impact its regional and global power in the coming decades, underpinning the CCP's ability to continue challenging the international order.

Conclusion

CNP measurements play an important role in the PRC's policymaking process but are poorly understood. This directly impacts how countries might respond to the PRC's continued aggressive actions short of armed conflict. Often described as "gray zone tactics," these actions are better

considered within the context of CNP competition. Wu Chunqiu (吴春秋), a scholar at the Academy of Military Sciences, pointed out in 1998—in analysis that was reiterated over the years in other Chinese documents—that CNP competition focuses across core constituent strength elements of CNP, such as economic competition, political competition, and S&T competition. In that context, the PRC is waging strategic competition in the "gray zone," trying to undermine U.S. power and improve the PRC's relative position without crossing thresholds that would trigger the United States (or others) to respond in ways that damage Chinese pursuit of CNP. In 2002, Wu explained that "victory without war does not mean that there is not any war at all. The wars one must fight are political war, economic war, technological war ... a war of comprehensive national power." [9] This notion was also prevalent in the 2020 Science of Military Strategy. [10]

Understanding how the CCP and PRC scholars conceptualize CNP offers valuable insights into how Chinese leaders, policy makers, and strategists understand competition with the West, the PRC's role in the world, and how the country is progressing toward rejuvenation. Tracking these estimates over time may enable the United States to be more strategic and targeted in its approach to competition.

Examining the PRC's approach to CNP holistically should identify effective ways for integrated deterrence to target the PRC's own identified vulnerabilities and drive perceptions that reduce CCP leadership confidence across all constituent elements of CNP. While a CCP that realizes it may fall short, or even go backwards in global CNP rank, suggests the potential for Beijing to lash out, the CCP's ambitions and the world it seeks to develop are far more dangerous should they succeed in their mission to become the world leading CNP power by 2049.

Foreign Policy

All views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government, Department of War, or U.S. Pacific Command.

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Notes

[1] The PRC's approach to building CNP should not be overstated. Although Chinese leaders and elites have long held the goal of making the country strong and rich, this is not to say they have always had a singular vision of what that means or how to get there. Despite CNP being a common frame over the past 40 years, bureaucratic infighting, contradictory self-interest of officials and government entities, and the complication of moving a system as large as the PRC's in one singular direction is an enormous challenge. In addition, as is always the case within Chinese bureaucracy, while CNP is referenced and pointed to in documents across the system, it is often difficult to discern whether this is because of its central importance, or whether it is a code word of sorts that helps justify resource requests.

[2] This quote also appears in a volume published by the United Front Work Department of the Party Committee of China University of Mining and Technology, United Front Information, 2018 (2), p. 6–7.

[3] Xi is quoted as having said, “gaining the upper hand in [CNP] competition is key to national rejuvenation. It is precisely because we possess the greatest advantage of the Party's leadership that we have become the greatest positive force shaping changes unseen in a century.” It remains difficult to discern how CNP measures influence CCP decision-making, whether they allocate resources based on CNP examination, as scholars in the 1990s

emphasized, or the extent to which changes in foreign policy can be attributed to CCP assessments of comparative CNP. The body of literature examined in this series suggests they do change policy based on comparative CNP, but how that happens is less clear. The 2013 reassessment of the PRC's development status as “unbalanced and uneven” (不平衡、不协调) and the formulation of the new “primary contradiction in Chinese society” (社会主要矛盾) outlined in 2017 would suggest that they are in fact using such measures to inform decisions, especially with the launching of new development strategies to address those assessments. Foreign policy behavior after 2010 would also suggest that Chinese assessments of having achieved the status of the second largest CNP-power in the world did in fact change Chinese foreign policy. CNP measures may simply be used to assess where the PRC is within global competition and to assess trend lines in comparative power.

[4] Lt. Gen. Xiao Tianliang, ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* (2020 Edition), January 2020, National Defense University Press, 2020, p. 26–32. The full sentence reads: “因此，综合国力是制定和实施战略的客观物质基础。它不仅是战略手段的基本依托，而且对战略目标的确定有着直接影响。一个国家的综合国力主要包括以下要素 ... 其中军事能力是战争实力与潜力中的骨干力量，对战略具有直接影响和制约。”

[5] Huang Shuofeng, *Rivalries Between Major Powers: A Comparison of World Powers' Comprehensive National Power* [大国较量：世界主要国家综合国力国际比较], (Beijing: World Affairs Press, August 2006), p. 103–104. Huang is a former scholar at National Defense University who published the first major study on the country's CNP in 1984 and devised ways to calculate it. He explained in this 2006 work that the “soft power” elements of CNP are ranked on a sliding scale starting from negative one.

Foreign Policy

[6] Messaging, information, and education campaigns have worked for 30 years to craft a national and nationalistic identity. It remains unclear if cultural strength, which relies on national identity and cohesion, can be artificially created by the state, as the CCP hopes to engineer within the PRC. It also remains difficult to see how Chinese measures of CNP can accurately reflect cultural power and national cohesion without dangerously pointing to flaws within the CCP.

[7] The PRC is confident that information operations can undermine social cohesion. In 2020, cybersecurity firm Mandiant and Google reported that Chinese disinformation related to the killing of George Floyd sought to mobilize U.S. citizens to protest against their government. The Party likely assesses that similar operations against the PRC would pose a significant threat to the Party.

[8] Yan Xuetong, *The Transfer of World Power: Political Leadership and Strategic Competition* (Beijing: Peking University Press, September 2015). Yan was highlighting bad decisions made during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, but the point would still apply to today's leadership and would fall under the core CNP element of political strength. Yan also wrote in 2013 that if the PRC stayed the course of reform and opening that had been the hallmark of Chinese policy from 1978–2013, it undoubtedly would continue to grow its CNP and close the gap with the United States. It is unclear both whether the significant policy changes over the last ten years have changed his assessment or whether he would be able to offer an accurate assessment of the effect of those changes on CNP.

[9] Wu Chunqiu, "Dialectics and the Study of Grand Strategy: A Chinese View," *Chinese Military Science*, 2002 No. 3, p. 152.

[10] Supra [4].

To read this article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).



Taiwan Coast Guard vessel Changhua monitors China Coast Guard vessel 3501 near Pratas in June 2026. (Source: Taiwan Coast Guard Administration)

Maritime Pressure Expands to Pratas and Taiping

Yu-cheng Chen
July 10, 2026

Executive Summary

- Beijing is expanding its “Kinmen model” of gray-zone maritime pressure to other Taiwan-controlled offshore islands and maritime positions. For over two years, it has used political or maritime triggers to challenge Taiwan-administered boundaries, deploy the China Coast Guard (CCG), and normalize its law-enforcement presence in waters under Taiwan’s effective control, but that Beijing claims as its own jurisdiction.
- Activity in June and July has involved a combination of CCG vessels, maritime safety ships, research vessels, rescue assets, and Sansha-linked public vessels. These vessels have operated across waters east of Taiwan, Pratas Island, and Taiping Island—a multi-axis pattern that suggests a broad campaign focused on Taiwan’s outlying islands.
- Pratas Island, at the northern edge of the South China Sea, has become the clearest next testing ground, with CCG and Maritime Safety Administration presence rising from 25 activity days in 2024 to 60 in 2025.
- Pratas is closer to the operational area of the People’s Liberation Army’s Southern Theater Command than other offshore islands. It is also strategically significant and politically symbolic as one of Taiwan’s most important outposts in the South China Sea, and would be more difficult for Taiwan to support in a crisis.

Military & Security

On June 27, China Coast Guard (CCG) vessel 3101 entered Taiwan's restricted waters around Pratas Island (also known as Dongsha). Taiwan responded by dispatching its Coast Guard Administration (CGA) vessel CG1002 Taichung to intercept. As the two faced off, the CCG vessel broadcast a message to the CGA vessel: "the Republic of China does not exist" (中华民国不存在). The CGA vessel responded in both Mandarin and English, stating that the Republic of China (Taiwan) is a sovereign state and is not subordinate to the People's Republic of China (PRC) ([Taiwan Ocean Affairs Council \[OAC\]](#), June 27). Two days later, four CCG vessels entered Taiwan's restricted waters around the island of Kinmen, prompting the CGA to deploy four vessels in response ([Xinhua](#); [OAC](#), June 29).

These incidents are part of an ongoing pressure campaign that is often referred to as the "Kinmen model" (金门模式). Under this model, the PRC seeks to advance its strategy of annexing Taiwan through the incremental normalization of law enforcement activities and the assertion of maritime jurisdiction in Taiwan's "restricted and prohibited waters" (禁限水域) ([China Brief](#), June 18). Its latest activities should be seen as part of this broader pattern of behavior and not, as the PRC claimed, as a response to Japan and the Philippines initiating talks on the delimitation of their exclusive economic zones and continental shelves. As a July 4 statement warned, the CCG "will continue to strengthen" (将持续加强) patrols in waters east of Taiwan, likely indicating a more regularized pattern of maritime law enforcement activity ([CCTV](#), July 4).

Kinmen Incident Creates New Model for CCG Incursions

The term "Kinmen model" was coined in May 2024 by Yuyuan Tiantian (玉渊谭天), a WeChat account affiliated with China Central Television (CCTV) ([Yuyuan Tiantian](#), May 12, 2024). The

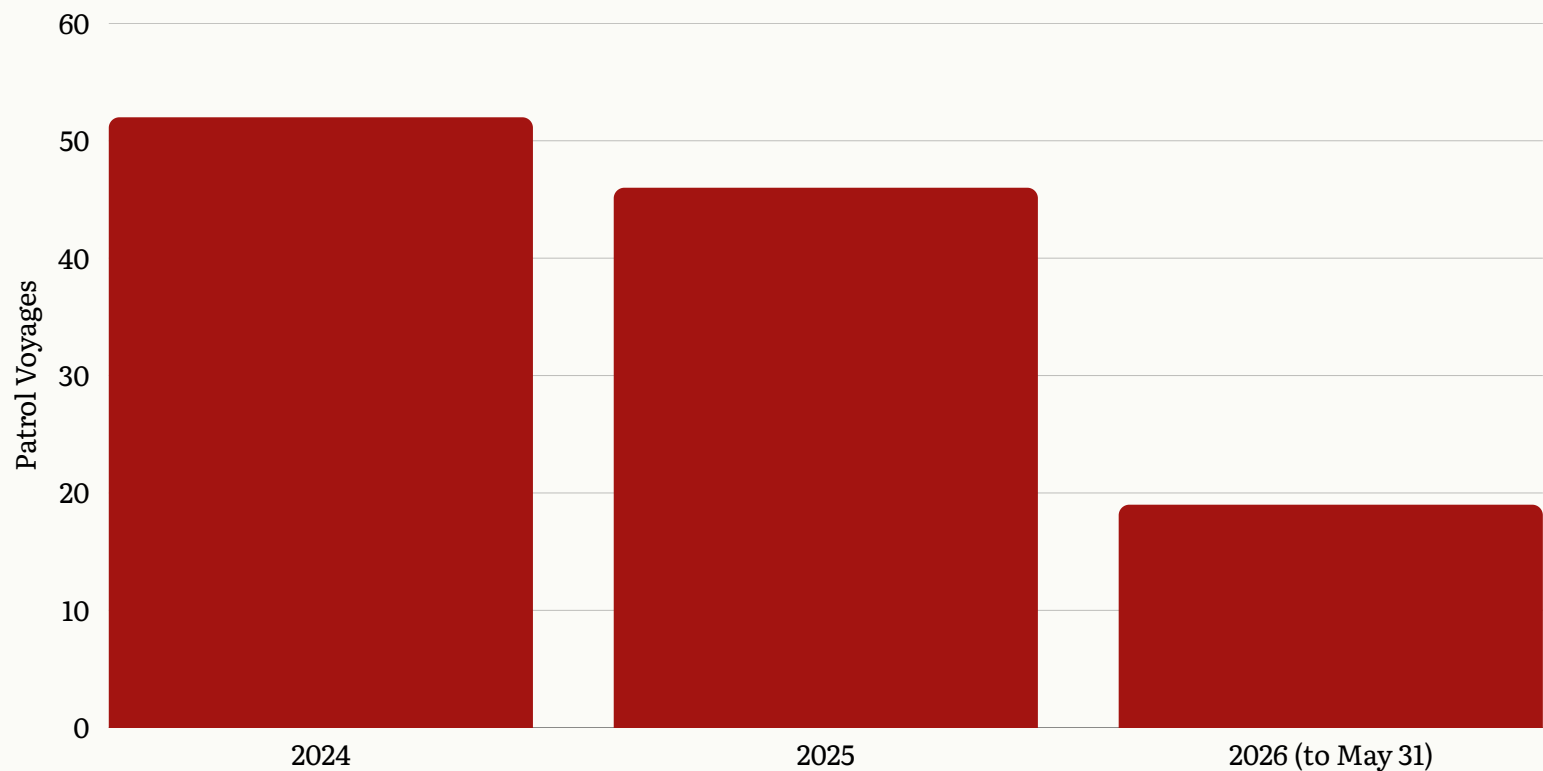
article referred to CCG actions surrounding Kinmen as "law enforcement patrols" (执法巡查). While the article traced the term's origins, it neglected to mention the immediate trigger for a more assertive posture in the Taiwan Strait.

On February 14, 2024, a Chinese motorboat entered Taiwan's restricted and prohibited waters around Kinmen, fled a CGA inspection, and capsized, leaving two PRC nationals dead ([China Brief](#), March 29, 2024). Beijing responded by disregarding Taiwan's territorial rights and increasing CCG patrols in the area ([Taipei Times](#), February 28, 2024; [AMTI](#), December 6, 2024). By February 2025, the CGA reported that CCG ships had entered Kinmen's restricted waters 60 times in the year following the incident ([CGA](#), February 25, 2025). Subsequent Taiwanese reporting indicates that the pattern remained persistent, with 117 patrol voyages from 2024 through May 31, 2026, including 52 in 2024, 46 in 2025, and 19 in the first five months of 2026, as shown in Figure 1 ([Liberty Times](#), May 31).

Analysis of CCG activity suggests that the Kinmen model has four components: incident, enforcement, propaganda, and normalization. First, Beijing uses an incident or diplomatic trigger to argue that Taiwan's existing maritime boundaries are illegitimate. Second, it deploys coast guard, maritime safety, research, or other government vessels into Taiwan-administered waters under an innocuous pretext. Third, PRC official and state-media narratives frame these deployments as legitimate efforts to safeguard Beijing's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests. Fourth, Beijing repeats the activity until the previous boundary begins to look contestable, subsequently making its incursions part of normalized law enforcement operations.

The CCG's official language indicates that its behavior is tied to a broader state strategy.

Figure 1: CCG Patrol Voyages into Kinmen Restricted Waters, 2024–May 31, 2026



(Source: Liberty Times)

In a February 2026 article marking five years since the China Coast Guard Law (中国海警法) took effect, the CCG stated that it had conducted law-enforcement patrols around “Taiwan island and its affiliated islands” (台岛及其附属岛屿), and said it was shaping a new maritime rights protection posture and building a new framework for managing the Taiwan Strait under its one-China principle ([Xinhua](#), January 23, 2021). The article went on to characterize the CCG’s actions as “strongly deterring the path of ‘Taiwanese independence’ and separatism” (有力震慑“台独”分裂行径) ([CCG](#), February 1). Claims that it is merely policing fisheries or maintaining maritime safety are thus belied by actions explicitly designed to help Beijing

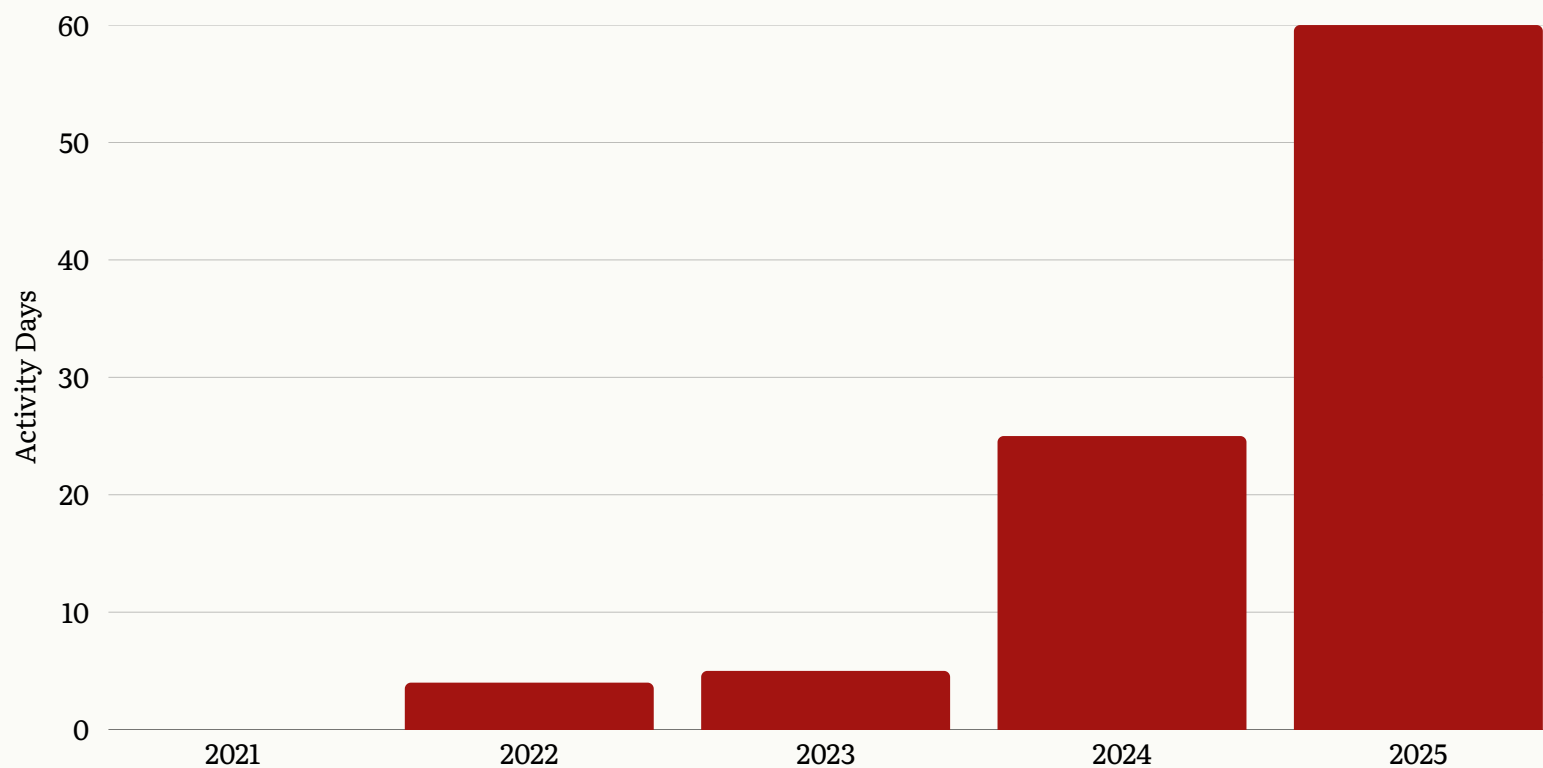
advance sovereignty claims through the routinization of administrative practice.

Pratas is the Next Testing Ground

The original Yuyuan Tiantian article that coined the term “Kinmen Model” quoted an expert as saying that the model “could also be applied to Matsu, Penghu [referring to other outlying islands of Taiwan], and even the entire Taiwan Strait” (也可以适用于马祖、澎湖，乃至是整个台湾海峡). Two years on, CCG activity suggests that it is now extending this model further from Taiwan’s nearshore waters.

Pratas, located at the northern edge of the South

Figure 2: Observed CCG/MSA Activity Days around Pratas Island



(Source: AMTI)

China Sea, is administered by Taiwan but is far more distant from its main island than Kinmen or Matsu. It is also closer to the southern PRC coast and to the operational area of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command. These features make the island valuable as a pressure point: it is strategically significant, politically symbolic as one of Taiwan’s most important outposts in the South China Sea, and would be more difficult for Taiwan to support in a crisis.

Chinese law-enforcement activity around Pratas has ramped up dramatically since 2024. The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative’s analysis of automatic identification system (AIS) data and

CGA reporting found no observed activity in 2021 and only limited activity in 2022 and 2023. Activity rose after 2023, with 25 days in 2024 in which activity was observed, and 60 in 2025, as shown in Figure 2 below (AMTI, March 30). This article uses AMTI’s activity-day data to show the broader trend of growing PRC presence around Pratas, not as a separate count of restricted-waters incursions.

The nature of PRC activity around Pratas has also changed. Instead of an occasional single CCG ship passing near the island, today Chinese fishing vessels enter restricted or prohibited waters, ships loiter nearby, and CCG vessels appear during Taiwan’s enforcement actions or

Military & Security

turn off their AIS trackers.

When a Chinese fishing vessel entered waters around Pratas in March 2025, for instance, the CGA sought to expel them. The CCG intervened, however, with personnel from CCG vessel 3101 boarding the fishing boat. Taiwanese authorities assessed that the CCG may have been using the Chinese fishing vessel to map out CGA deployments in the area while its CCG deployments “aimed to manufacture an appearance of law enforcement” (企圖製造執法假象) (CGA, November 9, 2025). More recently, during a 32-hour encounter near Pratas between the CGA’s Taichung patrol vessel and the same CCG vessel, the CCG stated that it was conducting a routine patrol in addition to language delegitimizing Taiwanese sovereignty (CTS, May 24). These incidents show that Beijing is using its coast guard to maintain a physical presence in Taiwan-administered waters while engaging in lawfare to normalize its right to conduct law enforcement activities (CGA, May 27).

Pratas shows how Beijing can mix maritime law enforcement with militarized gray-zone activity. On January 17, Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) reported that a PRC reconnaissance drone had entered the Pratas airspace for approximately four minutes (MND, January 17). The PLA Southern Theater Command then claimed that the drone was conducting “normal flight training” (正常飞行训练) near “China’s Dongsha Island” (中国东沙岛) and that its actions were “completely legitimate and legal” (完全正当合法) (CCTV, January 17). By coupling PLA training activities with sovereignty erosion, Beijing is able simultaneously to advance its military capabilities and to press its territorial claims. At the same time, the drone incursion represents a literal escalation in its assault on Taiwan’s sovereignty from encroaching on its territorial waters to violating its airspace. Pratas is no

longer just a coast guard issue and is becoming a testing ground for combined legal pressure in both maritime and aerial domains.

Multi-Point Pressure After Japan–Philippines Maritime Delimitation Talks

The events of June 2026 show Beijing moving to exert maritime pressure on Taiwan across multiple locations. The decision of Japan and the Philippines to begin maritime boundary delimitation talks has focused attention on waters east of Taiwan. Beijing has added to this focus, arguing that Japan and the Philippines are infringing on PRC sovereignty and maritime rights (CCG, June 1; China Brief, June 11). Its response, however, has not remained confined to Taiwan’s eastern waters, but has spread across three axes: east of Taiwan, Pratas, and Taiping Island (太平島, also known as Itu Aba).

The institutional support for this multi-axis response emerged in the spring, when the CCG convened the 2026 Maritime Law Enforcement Work Meeting (2026 年海上执法工作会议) in Hangzhou. The meeting, which also involved the ministries of public security, natural resources, ecology and environment, transport, and agriculture and rural affairs, as well as the General Administration of Customs, emphasized improving the legal framework for maritime law enforcement, deepening coordination, sharing information, expanding intelligent monitoring tools, and increasing aviation-force deployment (CCG, April 10).

June operations east of Taiwan and around Pratas reflected this interdepartmental coordination, combining maritime traffic enforcement, survey activity, coast guard escorts, research vessels, rescue assets, and local public vessels. It is likely that, as in previous activities around Taiwan, a diplomatic incident served merely as a pretext for premeditated action.

Military & Security

First, on June 5–6, the vessel CCG 3501 patrolled around Pratas’s restricted waters. On June 6, Taiwan detected the research vessel Hai Silu 6 (海丝路6号) entering waters roughly 33 nautical miles southeast of the island. The CGA dispatched additional vessels, including the Kaohsiung patrol ship (高雄艦), to respond and described the incident as the first case in which a PRC research vessel and CCG vessel appeared to work together in a provocation near Taiwan-controlled waters (CGA, June 6).

Second, from June 6–10, the Ministry of Transport organized the provincial maritime safety administrations of Fujian and Guangdong, the East China Sea Navigation Security Center, and the East China Sea Rescue Bureau to conduct what it called a “special maritime traffic law-enforcement and surveying operation east of Taiwan” (海上交通专项执法和扫测行动). The operation involved four vessels: the Haixun (海巡) vessels 09, 06, and 08, and the search and rescue vessel Donghai Jiu 113 (东海救113) (Xinhua, June 10).

Third, from June 16–18, the East China Sea Bureau under the Ministry of Natural Resources sent a research vessel, Xiangyanghong 22 (向阳红22) to conduct what Beijing described as a “marine environmental survey” (海洋环境调查) in waters east of Taiwan, accompanied by two CCG vessels. This marked an escalation from earlier research-vessel activity around Taiwan, because the research mission was backed by coast guard escorts, providing a law-enforcement shield for nominally scientific activity (Xinhua, June 18).

Fourth, Taiping Island, Taiwan’s only occupied natural island in the Spratly Islands (南沙群島), has become a new observation point, though not yet a pressure point on the same scale as Kinmen or Pratas. On June 11, PRC government vessels Sansha Zhifa 301 (三沙执法301) and Sansha 2 (三沙2号) briefly entered Taiwan’s restricted and

prohibited waters around Taiping Island for the first time (X/@TAIWANoac, June 11). The CGA condemned the action and dispatched vessels to expel them (CGA, June 11).

Unlike the CCG and MSA operations east of Taiwan, Sansha vessels are linked to the Sansha local government system, which the PRC uses to administer parts of its South China Sea claims, allowing it to distance its actions from constituting overt military coercion. If repeated, such activity could gradually raise the cost of Taiwan’s presence through administrative patrols, radio warnings, research activity, or interference with resupply, while allowing the PRC to insist that its actions are routine. The Taiping case should therefore be treated for now as an early warning indicator rather than part of an established pattern.

Conclusion

The PRC’s expanding maritime pressure against Taiwan’s offshore islands is best understood as a campaign of jurisdictional normalization. After activity around Kinmen established an initial model, Pratas has now become a key testing ground, and Taiping may be emerging as the next pressure point.

These recent cases at Taiwan’s periphery show how the PRC is steadily shifting the baseline operating environment without actions as dramatic as declaring a blockade, launching a major exercise, or seizing an island. By using small incidents to justify an enforcement presence, creating a record of activity based on that presence, and then transforming that record into propaganda presenting the activity as legitimate, the PRC can erode Taiwan’s previous baseline, making it much harder to defend (Foreign Affairs, May 8).

Discussions of security in the Taiwan Strait often treat Taiwan’s offshore islands as

Military & Security

peripheral. This makes them attractive targets for gray-zone pressure, and allows the PRC to test Taiwan's law-enforcement capacity, command-and-control procedures, civil-military coordination, and political resolve to defend maritime boundaries without immediately crossing the threshold of war ([China Brief](#), June 18).

The views expressed are solely those of the authors and do not represent the positions of the National Defense University, the Ministry of National Defense, or the government of ROC (Taiwan).

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Regulators are cracking down on Hong Kong-based companies that facilitate PRC residents investing overseas. (Source: Wikipedia)

Beijing Tightens Control Over Outbound Investment

Christopher Nye & Charles Sun
July 11, 2026

Executive Summary

- A new State Council administrative regulation is the first in the People's Republic of China (PRC) to govern outbound investment as a whole. It defines “resident individuals” as outbound investors for the first time, subjecting private overseas investment to the approval, reporting, security-review, and penalty framework that previously only encompassed enterprises.
- The regulation arrived amid an escalating campaign against the offshore brokers through which mainland households bought U.S. stocks. This has led to penalties against the firms Futu, Tiger, and Longbridge in May, and an eight-department plan imposing a two-year, sell-only wind-down of existing mainland accounts.
- The regulation includes a national security security review mechanism that applies not only to new investments but to the transfer, disposal, and offshore reinvestment of assets already held. But implementing rules that would let holders file or regularize are yet to be issued.
- Unlike the prior enterprise regime, which was largely symbolic, new penalties force the disposal of shares and assets within a set period, the confiscation of unlawful gains, fines calibrated to the investment amount, and multi-year prohibitions on outbound investment.
- The new framework is part of Beijing's growing asymmetric closed-door strategy. Private outbound flows face a security screen while inbound foreign investment is courted, and no U.S. or European regime subjects residents' investments in the PRC to comparable ex-ante approval.

Foreign Policy

New Regulations on Outbound Investment (国务院关于对外投资的规定) took effect in the People's Republic of China (PRC) on July 1 ([State Council](#), June 1). First released publicly a month prior, Order No. 837 of the State Council, as the instrument is also known, is the first administrative regulation the State Council has issued to govern outbound investment as a whole. Signaled in the State Council's legislative work plans for both 2025 and 2026, it consolidates a framework that had rested on rules from separate ministries—a step officials from the Ministry of Justice, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), and the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) jointly presented as a milestone in the governance of outbound investment in the country ([NDRC](#), June 1).

The regulations are part of an expanding asymmetric closed-door strategy that Beijing is currently pursuing. This strategy seeks to retain persons, capital, technology, and information inside the PRC, in domains ranging from foreign-investment review to genomic data, under the banner of security ([China Brief](#), [May 15](#); [June 25](#)). Where external engagement is permitted, it is intended ultimately to support the PRC's own self-reliance. As General Secretary Xi Jinping said in 2024, in a phrase that continues to be repeated in Party media today, “the more complex the international environment, the more we must ... achieve self-reliance and self-strengthening through open cooperation” (国际环境越复杂，我们越要 ... 在开放合作中实现自立自强) ([Xinhua](#), June 25, 2024; [People's Daily](#), July 8). [1]

Crackdown on Brokerage Platforms as Prelude to Regulations

Over the past several years, mainland PRC households have moved to invest in U.S. and other overseas securities markets. This has been facilitated primarily by app-based brokers licen-

-sed outside the PRC. Key players include Hong Kong-based Futu Securities International (富途证券), Singapore-based Longbridge Securities (长桥证券), and New Zealand-based Tiger Brokers (老虎证券). These platforms allow investors to circumvent formal capital account rules, which cap individual foreign exchange purchases at \$50,000 per person per year and prohibit their use for overseas securities investment.

Regulators have now moved to close this loophole following increasing outflows in recent months. Futu, the largest broker servicing this segment of the market, reported total client assets had increased nearly 66 percent to over HK\$1.2 trillion (\$160 billion) at the end of 2025, growth the company attributed chiefly to client additions in Hong Kong and Malaysia ([Futu Holdings](#), March 12). Reporting in May also suggested that illegal cross-border brokerage activity aimed at mainland investors had “clearly resurged” (明显抬头) since 2025 ([Securities Times](#), May 22). In 2025, Hong Kong overtook Switzerland in 2025 as the world's largest cross-border wealth center, at nearly \$3 trillion in booked offshore assets, over 60 percent of which was linked to mainland flows ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2025; [BCG](#), May 27). That wealth now falls under the regulations' jurisdiction as outlined in article 32.

The latest action follows earlier attempts to prevent platforms like Futu and Tiger Brokers from facilitating overseas investments. In December 2022, the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) declared that the two companies had conducted illegal cross-border securities business by serving mainland investors without domestic licenses. As a result, it ordered them to stop soliciting mainland investors, acquiring new mainland clients, or opening new accounts ([CSRC](#), December 30, 2022). Despite this directive, the platforms continued to service mainland clients, and on May 22 the CSRC announced investigations and

Foreign Policy

notices of administrative penalties against entities of Tiger Brokers, Futu, and Longbridge, with the proposed penalty of confiscating all unlawful gains ([CSRC](#), May 22).

Regulators also laid out a timeline for winding down the business. In May, the CSRC and seven other departments issued an Implementation Plan for the Comprehensive Rectification of Illegal Cross-Border Securities, Futures, and Fund Business Activities (综合整治非法跨境证券期货基金经营活动实施方案). This sets a two-year rectification period during which offshore institutions may execute only one-way sell orders and outbound transfers for existing mainland clients. After that, mainland-facing websites, trading software, and supporting servers must shut down entirely ([Xinhua](#), May 22). The only remaining lawful routes for outbound investment will then be quota-bound and state-intermediated channels, such as Stock Connect (沪港通及深港通), the Qualified Domestic Institutional Investor (QDII, 合格境内机构投资者) scheme, and the Cross-Boundary Wealth Management Connect (跨境理财通).

The broader context for this crackdown is the government's nascent attempts to stimulate domestic circulation, including through increasing consumption and investment. The March 2025 Special Action Plan on Boosting Consumption (提振消费专项行动方案), for instance, calls for directing household property income toward the stock market, as well as enriching bond products for individual investors ([State Council](#), March 16, 2025).

'Resident Individuals' now Restricted from Outbound Investment

The new outbound investment regime goes beyond existing rules by applying not just to enterprises but also to "resident individuals" (居民个人) ([State Council](#), June 1). This category of investor appears in article 2, which defines those

subject to the regulation and also includes enterprises and other organizations.

It represents a departure from the two rules that previously governed outbound direct investment, which applied only to enterprises, and resident natural persons investing abroad had no corresponding approval or filing path. [2]

Until now, the principal route through which individuals could register to invest overseas was provided by the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) in a circular (汇发) released in 2014. This was limited to PRC residents who controlled an offshore special purpose vehicle (SPV) for financing and round-trip investment, however, rather than a general approval for outbound direct investment ([SAFE](#), July 14, 2014). [3] Around that narrow route, and largely outside it, PRC residents amassed a large stock of private offshore wealth in a tolerated gray zone through brokerage accounts and nominee holdings (代持)—rather than by virtue of the circular, whose registration requirement reached only SPVs used for investment and financing. The new outbound investment regime now covers those individuals, and places structures that route private wealth through Hong Kong under the same mandate. [4]

Publicly available materials do not make clear why the regulatory regime now includes individuals. Official accounts of the drafting background cite rising geopolitical risk and the inadequacy of governing outbound investment through scattered ministry rules, and do not mention individual investors' offshore accounts or private capital outflows ([NDRC](#), June 1). Evidence as to the likely reasons for the addition can instead be found in the text of the regulation itself.

Foreign Policy

A Stricter Security Review and Real Penalties for Non-Compliance

The new regulations establish a stronger security review mechanism than has been in place until now. Article 15 directs the NDRC, MOFCOM, and other departments to conduct reviews of outbound investments, as well as the transfer and disposal of related assets and interests, that “affect or may affect national security” (影响或者可能影响国家安全). Individuals and organizations must assist with the review, must not refuse or obstruct it, and must comply with its decisions (State Council, June 1). This language extends jurisdiction over existing assets: given that an individual may only transfer or dispose of assets already held, many of which are in offshore accounts, existing offshore wealth is subject to review, not only new investments. The legal threshold is also lowered to encompass any conduct that could potentially affect national security, rather than actions that constitute clear violations. The provision’s verb—the state “shall strengthen” (健全) the security review system—indicates that the mechanism does not just consolidate previous practice but goes beyond it by extending coverage to individuals and to the disposition of assets currently held.

The regulations also cover a range of investment activity in overseas financial markets. Unlike previous regulations, which focused on acquisitions of companies and assets abroad, article 33 states that the new rules cover a resident’s investments in overseas financial markets using their own, raised, or entrusted funds. It also covers the reinvestment abroad of assets and interests obtained through outbound investment, such as by rebalancing an offshore portfolio or rolling one offshore structure into another. This complements the crackdown on brokerage platforms by bringing this channel of capital outflows within the scope of the law. As a result, money that is already outside the PRC

does not exit the state’s legal framework.

The lack of detail and nuance in the regulations is noteworthy, leaving a number of questions unanswered. It contains no grandfather clause, no transition arrangement, and no statement that structures predating July 1 are exempt. It also contains no provision declaring existing holdings unlawful. The disposition of the existing stock is therefore unsettled rather than settled against the holder. Article 33 leaves the specific rules for resident individuals’ outbound investment to be made by the NDRC and MOFCOM, but those rules are yet to appear, as is the case for the implementing rules for the security review. For now, individuals holding pre-existing offshore structures are exposed, without a formal channel through which to file, obtain clearance, or otherwise regularize those structures.

Under the prior enterprise rules, the consequences for flawed outbound investments did not materially affect an individual’s property for the most part. Instead, authorities would send an order to correct the action, a warning, or would simply revoke the filing document. That is no longer the case. Article 27 of the new rules mandates clear penalties on infractions of the outbound investment regime. From the date a penalty takes effect, authorities may decline new applications for three years or bar the party from outbound investment for 1–3 years (State Council, June 1). [5] Article 28, meanwhile, places the onus of protecting national security on individual investors, and orders them to dispose of shares and assets within a set period. [6]

For resident individuals this could present issues: not only are potential national security violations not defined, but the new regulatory regime could penalize them for previous compliance failures made at a time in which many treated compliance as optional.

Foreign Policy

Regulation and Crackdown Advance Asymmetric Closed-Door Strategy

The new regulations complement the recent crackdown on brokerage platforms. Just five weeks after the regulations passed on April 17, the CSRC acted against the brokers ([NDRC](#), June 1). Both targeted the same channel for capital outflows, with one removing the intermediaries facilitating outflows and the other attaching obligations and penalties to investors engaged in the activity.

An important difference between the two actions is how they impact investments themselves. The brokerage crackdown targeted intermediaries, but that did not preclude mainland residents from investing overseas—reporting in June described investors traveling to Hong Kong in person to open bank and brokerage accounts with locally licensed firms instead ([Caixin](#), June 5). The regulation, by contrast, attaches to an investor’s residence rather than to the location of their account. As a result, holders of Hong Kong-based accounts are still exposed. Whether that legal exposure translates into enforcement against accounts already abroad is a separate question, however, as it has been for the underground banking and offshore stablecoin channel that outlived the formal prohibition of the cryptocurrency channel ([U.S. Government Accountability Office](#), December 18, 2025).

The regulations can be understood as an additional step in Beijing’s asymmetric closed-door strategy, in which the government prevents resources and assets from leaving the country while it simultaneously attracts them from abroad. In terms of preventing outflows, the new rules work to ensure that, as in the corporate channel, money headed overseas does so in ways that align with state interests, and that categories that mainly carry private money outflows face discretionary refusal. For instance

article 4 commits the state to “high-quality co-building” (高质量共建) of the One Belt One Road initiative and to international industrial and supply-chain cooperation, and while articles 15, 27, and 28 force private and individual flows to undergo a security screening process with the threat of forced disposal.

At the same time, Beijing is encouraging inflows: the 2025 Action Plan for Stabilizing Foreign Investment (2025年稳外资行动方案), for example, pledges the full removal of foreign-ownership limits in manufacturing, national treatment for foreign-invested enterprises, and measures to draw long-term foreign capital into PRC-listed companies ([State Council](#), February 19, 2025). No counterpart regime constrains those inflows: neither the United States nor Europe subjects residents’ investments in the PRC to general ex-ante approval, and the U.S. outbound-investment program in force since January 2025 covers only semiconductors, quantum information technologies, and artificial intelligence (AI) ([U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), October 28, 2024).

Most important for advancing an asymmetric closed-door strategy, the new regulations move beyond the outflow of capital to clamp down on other outflows, too. Article 13 bars transferring prohibited or restricted goods, technology, services, and related data abroad through the cross-border dispatch of technical personnel, the organization of personnel to work overseas, cross-border technical guidance, and cross-border training. This may have been influenced by the recent case of Manus, an agentic AI startup that transferred its assets overseas before being acquired by the U.S. firm Meta in a deal that Beijing ordered Meta to unwind ([China Brief](#), May 15).

Conclusion

The State Council’s new outbound investment

Foreign Policy

regulations work to restrict PRC residents from easily moving capital overseas while placing controls on assets already held outside the country. They are part of a pattern that seen in other domains, in which authorities take a tolerated gray zone, reclassify it as a national security matter, and then close it through enforcement actions and regulation. Whether the latest closure occurs gently or swiftly will be by the pending NDRC and MOFCOM implementing rules, and by whether a review triggered by conduct that may affect national security is read to reach ordinary private wealth or only strategically sensitive assets.

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Notes

[1] This phrase echoes one that appeared in a Qiushi article in early 2022: “Improve technological self-reliance and self-strengthening amid openness and cooperation” (在开放合作中提升科技自立自强能力) (Qiushi, January 28, 2022).

[2] These are NDRC Order No. 11, the Measures for the Administration of Outbound Investment by Enterprises (企业境外投资管理办法), and MOFCOM Order No. 3, the Measures for the Administration of Outbound Investment (境外投资管理办法).

[3] Circular 37 is the State Administration of Foreign Exchange’s Notice on Foreign Exchange

Administration Issues Concerning Overseas Investment and Financing and Round-Trip Investment by Domestic Residents Through Special Purpose Vehicles (关于境内居民通过特殊目的公司境外投融资及返程投资外汇管理有关问题的通知), Huifa [2014] No. 37.

[4] Article 32 also covers investments in Macau and Taiwan, not just Hong Kong.

[5] According to article 27, investing in a prohibited category of outbound investment draws an order to halt the activity, disposal of the shares and assets within a set period, and confiscation of unlawful gains, with fines of renminbi (RMB) 50,000–100,000 (\$7,000–\$14,000) on the responsible individuals (as a consequence for violating the regulation), and, on refusal to comply, a fine of between 0.5–1.0 percent of the investment amount. Failing to complete approval or filing, or applying through false materials or concealment, draws confiscation and a fine of between 0.1–0.5 percent, rising to between 0.5–1.0 percent with forced disposal of shares and assets on a refusal to correct, with fines of RMB 20,000–50,000 (\$2,800–\$7,000) on the responsible individuals (State Council, June 1).

[6] According to article 28, refusing to cooperate with a review, submitting false materials, concealing information, or defying a review decision draws an order to correct, a confiscation, and a fine. If national security is deemed to be harmed, the responsible party is ordered to take necessary measures to eliminate the adverse effect on national security, and they may be barred from outbound investment for one to three years, and, for an investment already made, may be ordered to halt it and dispose of the shares and assets within a set period (State Council, June 1).

To read this article on the Jamestown website, click [here](#).



China National GeneBank headquarters in Shenzhen. (Source: Wikipedia)

Xi's Leninist Selectocracy has Cemented Party Dictatorship

Filip Jirouš & Ralph Weber
July 10, 2026

Executive Summary

- General Secretary Xi Jinping's reforms to the nomenklatura system has built a selectocracy that is best understood as a realignment with Leninist party-building norms after experiments with more democratic bottom-up mechanisms under Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao. Such changes are intended to strengthen the Party as a whole, not just Xi's own power.
- Notable Xi-era reforms, such as eliminating the use of straw polls for cadre selection, simply reverted changed made under Hu Jintao. Those initiatives, which allowed for limited lower-level political engagement, were seen as incompatible with the Party's top-down governance system.
- As chair of the leading small group (LSG) for cadre selection, Xi can personally enforce Party loyalty and incorruptibility in the promotion process. His personal involvement also helps to counter factionalism and the emergence of alternative power structures, thus preserving the centrality and long-term survivability of the Party.
- A cadre selection LSG for the 21st National Party Congress is likely already established, populated by personnel from the Central Organization Department and the Central Secretariat, and will likely follow the procedures used for the last congress in 2022.

On June 15, Politburo Standing Committee members Cai Qi (蔡奇) and Li Xi (李希) chaired a National Conference on Party Building in Beijing (People's Daily, June 15). The conference codified Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building (习近平党建思想) as Party doctrine. [1] This was the first time a leader's Party building policies have been venerated in this way, which indicates a general acceptance within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of General Secretary Xi Jinping's reforms in the key area of Party work (Lianhe Zaobao, June 17). Despite its apparently norm-breaking appearance, Xi's leadership often has been one in which deviation from previous Party practice has occurred within a broader continuation of policies championed by his predecessors.

Analysis of the cadre selection process for the quinquennial National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—the highest leading Party body alongside the Central Committee, which the congress elects—shows that most pre-existing practices either have remained in place or have been only slightly modified under Xi. Analyzing this particular process is significant as the nomenklatura system, which refers to the power to appoint officials, is the most important tool the Party leadership has for controlling positions in the Party-state (Xinhua, October 26, 2022). Understanding changes to its implementation thus provides key insights into the nature of the regime. Xi's Party-building reforms, which have strengthened the Party overall rather than just his own power, are in line with this general approach.

Hu Jintao's Flirtation with 'Democracy'

The selection process applied in the run-up to the last two Party congresses (the 19th and 20th) shares certain similarities with the process followed under General Secretary Hu Jintao. Where Xi has made changes, they have seen a reversion to Leninist principles following a brief

experimentation with more democratic mechanisms. Viewed in this light, Xi is understood less as a norm-breaker and more as an institutionalizer of longstanding Party principles.

The Hu-era cadre selection process was an experiment. Much of it, such as sending out "cadre assessment teams" (考察组) or relying on "democratic recommendations" (民主推荐), was based on regulations only passed in 2002 and first formally applied later that year at the 16th Congress under General Secretary Jiang Zemin (Chinese Academy of Sciences, October 4, 2002; Communist Party News, June 13, 2013).

The first opportunity to conduct this experiment came in June 2006, a year prior to the 17th congress, when the Politburo Standing Committee and then the Politburo formulated a set of principles for cadre selection. These established specialized groups that operated under the direct leadership of the Politburo Standing Committee to "recommend, vet, and nominate" (推荐、考察、提名) candidates to the "two committees" (两委), the Central Committee and the Central Commission for Disciplinary Inspection (Xinhua, October 22, 2007; CCP Members Network, October 23, 2025). Between July 2006 and mid-2007, the Party center then sent out over 60 cadre assessment teams to local jurisdictions across the country. These teams went into central financial institutions, state-owned enterprises headquartered in Beijing, and the military. They consulted with local Party officials and held straw polls at Party committee plenary sessions to suggest candidates, reporting the results to the Politburo Standing Committee. Then, in September 2007, a month prior to the congress, the Politburo Standing Committee drafted the final candidate list. As there were approximately 8–10 percent more candidates than vacant seats, congress delegates elected the two committees and their alternate members using competitive voting (Xinhua,

October 22, 2007). The process for the 18th Congress five years later was similar ([Xinhua](#), November 14, 2012).

This process was lauded by state media as a display of “intraparty democracy” (党内民主) ([Xinhua](#), October 22, 2007; [Shirk](#), 2018). [2] The Party’s experimentation extended straw poll voting to the Politburo in 2007 and to the Politburo Standing Committee in 2012, where members of the Party center voted for candidates in the spring prior to the national congress ([Xinhua](#), October 23, 2007; [Xinhua](#), November 15, 2012). Even at their peak, however, these polls only provided input for the final candidate list, drafted by Party center and approved by the Politburo and its Standing Committee months later.

Xi’s Centralized Selectocracy

Since coming to power, Xi Jinping has left many of the Hu-era selection practices in place. The schedule is similar, the Party still sends out cadre assessment teams to gather the main inputs for drafting candidate lists, and congress delegates elect the two committees in a competitive vote. The experiment with bottom-up democracy, however, was doomed to fail. A Leninist top-down system cannot tolerate independent (or even quasi-independent) agency ([Cabestan](#), 2022). [3]

The most obvious change was the rejection of the straw poll mechanism during Xi’s first term. According to state media, the Party concluded that the mechanism had led to a rapid expansion of factionalism and corruption—both of which the Party views as existential threats. Referring to the practice as “mass recommendation” (海推), [Xinhua](#) claimed in 2017 that it led to malpractices such as “voting at random” (投票随意), “voting through guanxi” (投关系票), and illegal activities including “buying votes and bribery” (拉票贿选), as in the cases of senior

officials purged during Xi’s first term, such as Zhou Yongkang (周永康), Sun Zhengcai (孙政才), and Ling Jihua (令计划) ([Xinhua](#), October 26, 2017).

Starting with the selection process for Xi’s second term, Xi and the Party centralized the system and replaced straw polls with consultations with senior Party leaders and in-depth interviews with potential candidates ([Xinhua](#), October 26, 2017; [China Leadership Monitor](#), December 2025). Following the Two Sessions in 2016, Xi introduced a Cadre Assessment Leading Small Group (干部考察领导小组), personally taking charge of coordinating cadre assessment teams ([Xinhua](#), October 24, 2017; [Zhou Na](#), February 2020). [4] This method, which involved creating an ad hoc body roughly one year prior to the congress, was repeated for the 20th Party Congress ([Xinhua](#), October 22, 2022). Although the Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee still approved the guiding principles for cadre assessment work, the specific leading small group (LSG), chaired by Xi, produced a “comprehensive plan” (总体方案) for the principles’ implementation in July in the year prior to the congress ([Xinhua](#), October 24, 2017; [Xinhua](#), October 22, 2022). Xi then consulted on the “Two Committees” selection process with current Party and state leaders, members of the Central Military Commission, and veteran Party members. The “relevant leading Party center comrades” (中央有关领导同志) then solicited the opinions of leading officials from ministries, provinces, military and the Central Committee ([Xinhua](#), October 26, 2017; [People’s Daily](#), October 25, 2022).

We should expect this cadre selection process to persist for the upcoming 21st congress, likely to take place in late 2027, though it is as sensitive as it is secretive. Open sources only describe the process, including the existence of the cadre assessment LSGs, after a congress has concluded. This is why we know nothing about

the composition of either the assessment teams or the LSGs for previous congresses, and why no such groups have been revealed for the 21st Congress. It is probable, however, that they are composed of personnel from the Central Organization Department and the Central Secretariat. [5]

Political Loyalty and Incorruptibility as the Key

Xi's ambitions for reforming the cadre selection process were already evident in 2014. That year, a revision of the Regulations on the Selection and Appointment of Leading Cadres in Party and Government Organizations (党政领导干部选拔任用工作条例) stipulated that "thorough deliberation" (综合考虑) must be employed to ensure that "recommendation votes are not equated with election votes, and that candidates are not selected solely on the basis of the number of recommendation votes received" (防止把推荐票等同于选举票、简单以推荐票取人) (Xinhua, January 15, 2014, October 24, 2017).

Xi implemented these regulations in 2017 through the Cadre Assessment LSG, which coordinated cadre assessment teams. This involved the LSG following a new process for selecting candidates for the two committees. First, it conducted comprehensive research and analysis to identify organizations with candidates for assessment; second, it engaged in further research, conducted interviews, and solicited recommendations within organizations to identify candidates for assessment; and third, it followed a further internal assessment process to propose a shortlist of candidates. Finally, the Politburo Standing Committee reviewed the proposal and finalized its shortlist, which a Politburo session chaired by Xi approved for submission to the congress for election (Xinhua, October 24, 2017).

During this process, each candidate had to meet

three quality standards. First, anyone not politically aligned with the Party center or lacking political discipline and ideals was to be automatically "vetoed" (一票否决) in accordance with the Several Guidelines on Intraparty Political Life under the New Circumstances (关于新形势下党内政治生活的若干准则), a 2016 document that lamented factionalism and hedonism in the Party while stressing the need to restore belief in socialist ideals (Xinhua, November 2, 2016, October 24, 2017). Second, assessment teams reviewed candidates' profiles and solicited reviews from the disciplinary system to make sure the candidates were "incorruptible" (廉洁) (Xinhua, October 24, 2017). Third, candidates had to be capable. [6] As a media platform under the People's Daily Overseas Edition noted, when deciding between two politically correct and honest candidates, work results would decide (The Press, 2016; WeChat/东郭栽树, October 27, 2017).

State media appreciated that the new method "fully brings out the truthfulness and results-oriented nature of democracy, enhancing the quality and efficacy of intraparty democracy" (要将民主的真实性、有效性充分发挥出, 进一步提升党内民主的质量和实效) (Xinhua, October 24, 2017). According to a 2022 Xinhua report, all members of the Politburo Standing Committee agreed that Xi's new methods proved superior to the system of "mass recommendations" and "open nominations" (海选) with which the Party had previously experimented (Xinhua, October 24, 2022).

Xi's Party-building reforms ensure that political loyalty and Party discipline are the top criteria for cadre promotion. Putting himself at the center of the process through the Cadre Assessment LSG allows him to ensure these are strictly enforced. The new subset of Xi Jinping Thought further demands close alignment with the Party center and strict Party discipline in Party-building work (People's Daily; CCP

Members Network, June 16). The version of this “thought” distilled for practical use, known as the “Fourteen Upholds” (十四个坚持), makes this clear: the first “uphold” states that Party leadership is “the most essential characteristic of socialism with Chinese characteristics” (中国特色社会主义最本质的特征), a phrase that was added to Article 1 of the PRC Constitution in 2018. The remaining 13 upholds include requirements to uphold both the “centralized and unified leadership” (集中统一领导) of the Party center and the establishment of an organizational system that is “vertically integrated and effective” (上下贯通、执行有力), as well as ensuring officials dare not, cannot, and do not wish to engage in corruption (CCP Members Network, June 16).

Conclusion

Under Xi Jinping, the Party’s brief flirtation with bottom-up democracy under Hu Jintao has proven a short-lived exception to tight, top-down control of the nomenklatura. Xi’s preference for a centralized, consultative selectocracy is more in line with Leninist principles, and his Party-building reforms are part of a larger Party-state overhaul that has strengthened the Party, the Party center, and the general secretary through deepening the institutionalization of centralized Party rule. [7]

Tighter control over personnel appointments may seem less legitimate to some, but it significantly decreases the risk of alternate power structures emerging within the system. In the same way, Xi’s constant purges, typical of Stalinism, may indicate a level of insecurity but nevertheless work well in removing political threats (China Brief, January 26). Although Xi has done much to centralize the political system in the PRC, the Party-state’s institutions remain designed such that the Party that Xi leads is the dictator, not the person of Xi himself.

The Party’s upcoming 21st National Congress will see a major reshuffle. According to researchers at the Centre on Contemporary China and the World in Hong Kong, up to two thirds of the members of the next Central Committee will be new. As only a few will have been born before 1960, most of the top cadres will have reached adulthood only after Mao’s death (ThinkChina, March 13). These newcomers will also have been subject to Xi’s selection criteria for over 15 years, so they should be adamantly loyal to the Party, its Center, and its Core. Whatever implications this might have for effective governance of the country, governance of the Party is likely to remain under control.

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Notes

[1] Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building is a component of the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想) already enshrined in both state and Party constitutions in the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

[2] Susan L. Shirk, “China in Xi’s ‘New Era’: The Return to Personalistic Rule”, *Journal of Democracy* (2018) 29(2): 22–36.

Politics & Society

[3] Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “Organisation and (Lack of) Democracy in the Chinese Communist Party: A Critical Reading of the Successive Iterations of the Party Constitution”, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* (2020) 51(3): 364–385.

[4] Zhou Na, “The 19th Central Committee for Xi Jinping’s ‘New Era’: Breaking Conventional Party Rules?”, *China: An International Journal*, (2020), 18(1): 76–94.

[5] For a comprehensive overview of the congress cadre assessment and election process, see [China Leadership Monitor](#), December 2025.

[6] As the Xinhua report succinctly characterized the criteria: “Those who are politically untenable will not be considered; those who have flaws in their integrity will not be considered; and those who lack outstanding abilities will not be considered” (政治上立不住的，不列入考察；廉洁上有瑕疵的，不列入考察；能力上不突出的，不列入考察).

[7] The reforms have included the transfer of ethnic minority, religious and overseas Chinese affairs from the state to the Party’s United Front Work Department ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2019). The procuratorates have, similarly, lost power to investigate corruption, in favor of the CCP Central Commission for Party Discipline. See Li Ling, *Governance of a Party-state: Corruption, Law, and the Modus Operandi of the Chinese Communist Party*, Cambridge University Press (2025) p.190.

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Members of the People's Liberation Army pose in front of a large party flag as they visit the Museum of the Communist Party on the 105th anniversary of the founding of the Party. (Source: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images)

Xi Purges Six More PLA Generals

Brandon Tran & Gerui Zhang
July 6, 2026

Executive Summary

- Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign in the military is far from over. A front-page PLA Daily commentary declared 2026 the “year of decisive battle” against graft in the ranks, and Xi's appointment of a new disciplinary head as he rebuilds the Central Military Commission (CMC) before any other members signals that personnel investigations are his highest priority.
- A new round of purges appears focused on dismantling the patronage network built around the former vice chairman of the Central Military Commission Zhang Youxia. The purges target groups that have been relatively insulated from anti-graft probes to date, namely the PLA Air Force and the Western Theater Command.
- The ongoing disappearance of Wang Haijiang, the sole remaining active PLA general known to have fought in the Sino-Vietnamese War, also underscores Xi's preference for personal loyalty over experience and expertise.

Military & Security

On June 26, the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee announced the removal of credentials of 13 delegates, including six People's Liberation Army (PLA) general officers ([Xinhua](#), June 26). Two days later, a front-page PLA Daily commentary reaffirmed General Secretary Xi Jinping's anti-corruption stance and declared 2026 to be a "year of decisive battle" (攻坚决战之年) against graft in the ranks ([PLA Daily](#), June 28). This latest round of purges is focused on dismantling the patronage network built around the former vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) Zhang Youxia (张又侠), and targets groups that have been relatively insulated from the anti-graft probes, namely the PLA Air Force and the Western Theater Command.

State Media Suggest Anti-Corruption Motivations

Upon the conclusion of the 14th session of the NPC Standing Committee, a proclamation announced that 13 NPC members had been unseated by their respective committees. Among them were six PLA general officers:

- Xu Xueqiang (许学强), head of the Equipment Development Department and director of the Manned Space Program of the People's Republic of China (PRC);
- Wang Kangping (王抗平), deputy commander of the PLA Eastern Theater Command;
- Li Fengbiao (李凤彪), political commissar of the Western Theater Command;
- Yin Hongxing (尹红星), political commissar of the Southern Theater Command;
- Guo Puxiao (郭普校), political commissar of the PLA Air Force; and
- Zhang Minghua (张明华), commander of the PLA Cyberspace Force. [1]

The official statement says only that these members were removed in accordance with the PRC's Law on Delegates to the [NPC] and Local People's Congresses (全国人民代表大会和地方各级

人民代表大会代表法), with no further explanation provided ([Xinhua](#), June 26).

The PLA Daily commentary highlighted anti-corruption, suggesting that the dismissals are a continuation of Xi Jinping's campaign that has decimated the upper echelons of the armed forces. It emphasized the importance of united and persistent efforts to "not dare to be corrupt" (不敢腐), "be incorruptible" (不能腐), and "be unwilling to be corrupted" (不想腐)—a slogan that comes from Xi's "major theoretical innovations" (重大理论创新) on the anti-corruption struggle ([PLA Daily](#), June 28). The article claims that sustained pressure and anti-corruption efforts have led to more than 26,000 individuals voluntarily reporting themselves in corruption cases. Its characterization of 2026 as a "year of decisive battle" for anti-corruption efforts suggests that the campaign is far from over ([PLA Daily](#), June 28).

Purge Expands to New Branches and Theater Commands

The profiles of the six general officers purged in this latest round generally reflect a continued elimination of individuals associated with the patronage network of Zhang Youxia, who was purged in January and is the most senior officer to be taken down during Xi's tenure. Many of the six are officers in aerospace, cyberspace, logistics, and procurement billets ([China Brief](#), March 15, 2025). Xu Xueqiang succeeded Li Shangfu (李尚福) as head of the CMC Equipment Development Department, who himself succeeded Zhang Youxia in the role ([Baidu Baike/许学强](#), accessed July 1). Wang Kangping, commander of the Joint Logistics Support Force, was the commander of the PLA Air Force Weapon Test Base when Li was responsible for the EDD ([The Paper](#), February 9, 2018). Li Fengbiao once commanded the PLA Strategic Support Force after Li Shangfu held the position of deputy commander and before his removal ([Beijing Youth Daily](#), January 28, 2022).

Military & Security

Zhang Minghua was commander of the Cyberspace Force, which was previously a component of the Strategic Support Force before its dissolution in 2024 ([South China Morning Post \[SCMP\]](#), June 27). Though Guo Puxiao was previously the political commissar of the CMC Logistic Support Department, neither he nor Yin Hongxing have a clear connection to Zhang Youxia's faction ([NetEase](#), May 30, 2025).

Beyond potential factional ties, three groups within the PLA stand out as targets of the latest purges: the Air Force, the Western Theater Command, and remaining veterans of the Sino-Vietnamese War.

PLA Air Force

The PLA Air Force had been largely insulated from previous rounds of purges. Western analysts speculated that this was because Xi placed relatively more trust in the PLA Air Force. [2] In this latest round of purges, however, three of the six generals are Air Force officers (Xu Xueqiang, Wang Kangping, and Guo Puxiao). While Li Fengbiao is officially a general in the PLA Army, he built his career as an officer in the Airborne Corps and eventually commanded the formation which is subordinate to Air Force headquarters ([Beijing Youth Daily](#), January 28, 2022). This suggests that Xi intends to make good on his promise to overhaul the PLA's officer corps, and no affiliation carries a promise of safety.

Western Theater Command

The latest disciplinary action may signify a departure from previous rounds of purges in which the Western Theater Command fared considerably better compared to the other four theater commands, especially the hard-hit Eastern and Southern theater commands ([CSIS](#), February 24). Of the six removed from their posts, Li Fengbiao had been serving as the

political commissar of the Western Theater Command, and Yin Hongxing had previously served as the political commissar of the Tibet Military Command, which falls under the direct leadership of the PLA Army but is within the Western Theater Command's area of responsibility ([The Paper](#), May 12, 2016; [China Brief](#), January 13, 2017; [SCMP](#), June 27).

More important is what the removal of these two individuals might indicate about the fate of the commander of the Western Theater Command, Wang Haijiang (汪海江). Missing since 2025, it would not be surprising if Wang himself soon becomes subject to Party discipline, given the fate of his associate Li Fengbiao and his former subordinate Yin Hongxing. Wang's subordinate commanders, Liu Lin (柳林) and Wang Kai (王凯) of the Xinjiang and Tibet Military Commands, respectively, and subordinate commissar Yang Cheng (杨诚) of the Xinjiang Military Command, have also been missing since 2025 ([CSIS](#), February 24).

Remaining Sino-Vietnamese War Veterans

The disappearance of Wang Haijiang is noteworthy. He is the sole remaining active PLA general known to have fought in the Sino-Vietnamese War. If his purge is confirmed, it would be a major loss to the PLA, just as the removals of other veterans of the PLA's last real conflict were. Alongside Wang, Zhang Youxia, Liu Zhenli (刘振立), and Deng Zhiping (邓志) all participated in the Laoshan Campaign of 1984–1986 and received decorations for valor ([Sina](#), April 6, 2021; [SCMP](#), September 13, 2024; [The Diplomat](#), July 21, 2025).

There is no substitute for skills and capabilities that combat confers, and removing these four general officers takes away leaders who know what realistic training looks like and have proven themselves to be effective commanders ([China Brief](#), March 20). For the moment, it

Military & Security

seems as though Xi places greater importance on eliminating corruption and ensuring personal loyalty over any potential contributions to force development and readiness that these veterans bring.

Conclusion

The most recent round of purges indicates that Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign is far from over. In this "year of decisive battle," other PLA general officers who have since gone missing can be expected to be officially purged from their positions and from the Party. Under this overhaul, no affiliation or qualification guarantees security. Xi is prioritizing officers who are loyal and unwilling to engage in graft, even over those who are battle-hardened and militarily proficient.

The recent promotion of Zhang Shuguang (張曙光) to become the Secretary of the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission and Wang Gang (王剛) to become the PLA Air Force Commander only solidifies this interpretation ([Xinhua](#), July 3). [3] By selecting the chief disciplinary officer as the first non-CMC Vice Chairman position to be backfilled, Xi is signaling that personnel investigations are currently his highest priority. [4]

The views expressed are solely personal and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the U.S. Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

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Notes

[1] Both Li Fengbiao and Guo Puxiao held key billets in the PLA Air Force's 15th Airborne Corps (now just the PLAAF Airborne Corps), but Li Fengbiao wears a PLA Army uniform while Guo Puxiao wears an Air Force uniform.

[2] Evidence for this includes the promotion of two Air Force officers, Yang Zhibin (杨志斌) and Han Shengyan (韩胜延), to lead the Eastern and Central Theater Commands, respectively ([CSIS](#), February 24). The fact that they were the only two officers promoted to the rank of general in 2025 adds credence to this notion.

[3] Wang Gang's predecessor as Air Force commander, Chang Dingqiu (常丁求), has been missing since 2025 ([CSIS](#), February 24). It seems more likely that he has been purged rather than simply retiring or aging out of his position as Chang became the PLAAF commander at the age of 54 in 2021 and would not be close to the active-duty officer regulation age limit ([The Diplomat](#), September 24, 2021).

[4] The high-profile investigations of former Ministers of Defense Wei Fenghe (魏凤和), Li Shangfu, former Vice-Chairman He Weidong (何

Technology

卫东), and former director of the Political Work Department Miao Hua (苗华) were reported by PRC state media to have been carried out by the Discipline Inspection Commission. Interestingly, Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli's investigation and purge was not reported to have been conducted by the Discipline Inspection Commission, but rather it was a decision from the CCP Central Committee (党中央) (Ministry of National Defense, January 24).

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The People's Liberation Army Navy strategic nuclear submarine launches a nuclear-capable ballistic missile into the Pacific Ocean on July 6. (Source: Xinhua)

Australia's Defense Diplomacy Amid PLA Missile Test

Samantha Hoffman & Blake Johnson
July 8, 2026

Executive Summary

- The People's Republic of China (PRC) recently launched a nuclear-capable ballistic missile from a strategic nuclear submarine (SSBN) into the Pacific, leading to backlash in the region.
- The missile was Beijing's first publicly acknowledged submarine-launched ballistic missile test into the Pacific, and the second ballistic missile test into the Pacific in under two years.
- The test coincided with the signing of a defense treaty between Australia and Fiji, the latest of an expanding set of defense agreements Australia has signed with Vanuatu, Nauru, Tuvalu, and Papua New Guinea.
- Pacific Island states, who are especially sensitive about nuclear tests, have criticized the PRC's actions, with the prime minister of the Solomon Islands saying that "this is not something a friend does."

Foreign Policy

On July 6, the People's Republic of China (PRC) test-fired a nuclear-capable submarine-launched ballistic missile into the Pacific Ocean. The missile flew over the northern coast of the Philippines and landed in waters near the border of Kiribati or Tuvalu's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) ([USNI](#), July 6). The PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning (毛宁) described the launch as “a routine military training activity” (军事训练的例行性安排) and not directed at any specific country, adding that relevant countries had been notified in advance ([PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs \[MFA\]](#), July 6).

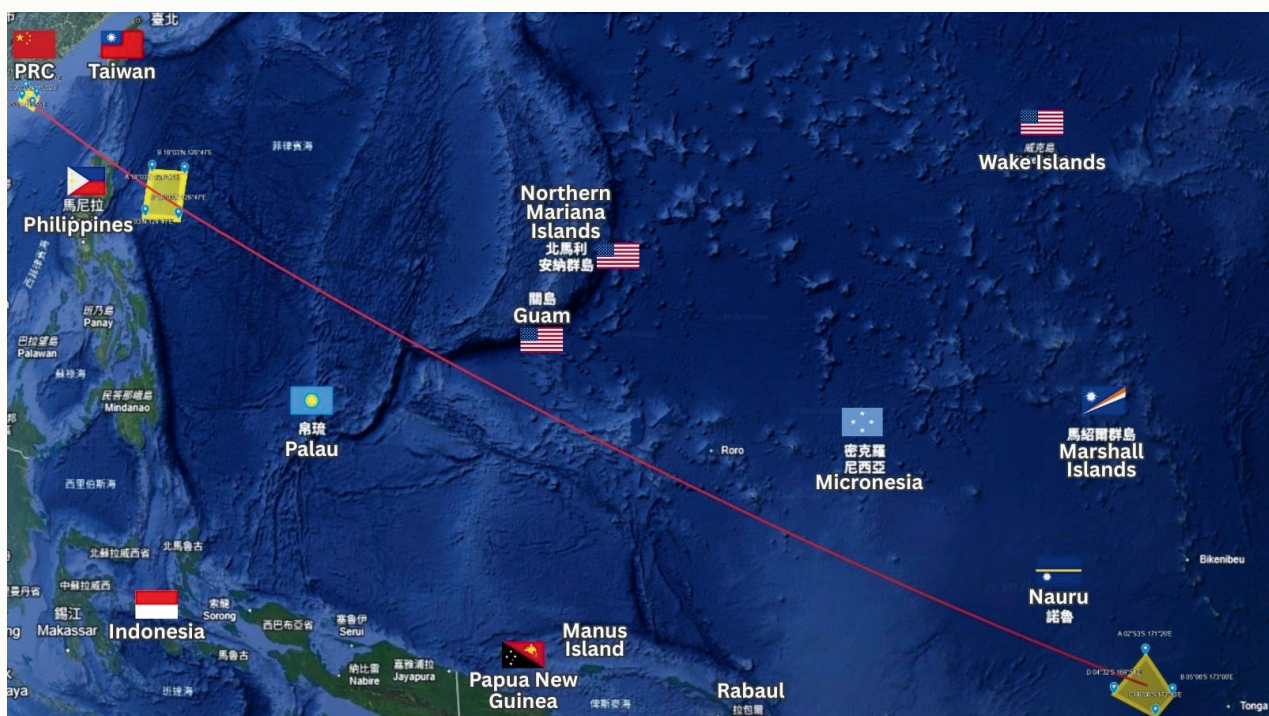
According to Xinhua, the launch was carried out by a “strategic nuclear submarine” (战略核潜艇, or SSBN) ([Xinhua](#), July 6). Although the specific vessel was not identified in public sourcing, it was likely one of six Type-094 Jin Class SSBNs that the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) operates as its ballistic missile submarine fleet. The test was the PRC's first publicly acknowledged submarine-launched ballistic missile test into the Pacific, and its second ballistic missile test into the open Pacific in

under two years following a land-based intercontinental ballistic missile fired from Hainan in September 2024. According to defense analyst Andrew Erickson, the test appears to be the PRC's first publicly acknowledged long-range submarine-launched ballistic missile test since 1982, when the JL-1 was fired from a dedicated trials vessel ([Andrew Erickson](#), July 6).

Beijing Links Test to Regional Diplomacy

The missile launch coincides with two notable events. Beginning on July 6, the PRC and Russia commenced the naval exercise “Joint Sea-2026” (海上联合-2026), which is expected to run until July 13. According to the PRC's Ministry of National Defense (MND), the exercise's stated theme is “jointly responding to maritime security threats” (联合应对海上安全威胁) ([MND](#), July 5). Prior iterations of the series listed responding to maritime security threats as one of several objectives, but since 2024 it has been the exercise's primary stated theme ([MFA](#), May 20, 2014; Xinhua, [May 4, 2019](#), [July 17 2024](#), [August 1, 2025](#); [MND](#), December 29, 2022).

Figure 1: Flight Path of the July 6 Ballistic Missile Test Launch



(Source: [X/Joseph Wu](#))

Foreign Policy

Following the exercise, Chinese and Russian forces are expected to conduct a joint maritime patrol in the Pacific Ocean, as was a feature in 2025 ([Xinhua](#), August 1, 2025; [MND](#), July 5).

The test also coincided with the signing of a defense treaty between Australia and Fiji on July 6, titled “The Ocean of Peace Alliance” ([Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade \[DFAT\]](#), July 6). [1] Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said he did not believe that the test was designed as retaliation for the defense treaty ([ABC](#), July 6). Whether or not the timing was deliberate, the logistical records suggest it was not a spontaneous decision. Starboard Maritime Intelligence analyst Mark Douglas assessed the exercise had been “planned for a while,” noting that two Chinese satellite tracking vessels—the Yuan Wang 3 and Yuan Wang 6, both recently tracked near the Federated States of Micronesia—had departed the PRC on June 25 ([Sydney Morning Herald](#), July 6; [RNZ](#), July 7). [2] This is consistent with the advance positioning required for a missile test.

The timing of the test has not helped the PRC’s reputation in the region, where Pacific Island nations carry a particular sensitivity to nuclear activity in their waters. The Marshall Islands alone was subject to 67 U.S. nuclear detonations between 1946–1958, while France conducted nearly 200 nuclear tests in French Polynesia until 1996 ([ABC](#), July 15, 2023; [The Guardian](#), August 25, 2023).

Several Pacific nations have confirmed that they received some advanced warning from the PRC this time, but were firm in criticizing the country’s actions. Solomon Islands Prime Minister Matthew Wale stated that “China is a good friend of the Solomon Islands, but this is not something a friend does. This is not good in our region.” Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape joined Wale in stating the Pacific region wants to be “free from nuclear testing and from

the testing of harmful weapons and military arsenals of every kind” ([ABC](#), July 7).

Conclusion

The PRC justification for its ballistic missile launch may have inadvertently highlighted Australia’s growing defense diplomacy in the region. In response to what Foreign Minister Penny Wong has repeatedly characterized as a state of permanent contest, Australia in recent years has signed a number of agreements containing security cooperation commitments. In addition to the newly signed treaty with Fiji, these include an agreement with Vanuatu, two treaties with Nauru and Tuvalu, and a mutual defense treaty with Papua New Guinea (DFAT, [November 9, 2023](#), [December 9, 2024](#), [October 6, 2025](#), [June 29](#); [Minister for Foreign Affairs](#), July 6). These may well expand in the near future: New Zealand’s prime minister Christopher Luxon has already voiced interest in joining the mutual defense treaty just signed with Fiji ([Reuters](#), July 6).

The PRC has challenged Australia’s actions and motives in the Pacific. Mao Ning said, “It is hoped that the relevant country will truly respect the independence and autonomy of [Pacific] island nations, focus on their sustainable economic and social development, and avoid targeting any third party or harming the interest of any third party” (希望有关国家切实尊重岛国独立自主，聚焦岛国经济社会发展，不针对第三方，不损害第三方的利益) ([MFA](#), July 6).

Backlash from those Pacific Island nations is unlikely to alter Beijing’s trajectory. Past PRC activity in the region unfolded largely through development aid and infrastructure development, some of which was extended in exchange for countries switching diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the PRC, alongside police and security exchanges. [3] The latest SSBN test is a more open display of power, which is harder to obscure behind the language of partnership; but because

Foreign Policy

the Pacific remains part of Beijing's broader strategic agenda, short-term rebukes will not change that calculus.

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Notes

[1] The Ocean of Peace Alliance, also known as the "Veitacini Treaty," commits both Fiji and Australia to mutual defense and mandatory consultation in response to security threats, with provision for other Pacific states to join. The *Sydney Morning Herald* has reported that the treaty "is expected to be open to the three other Pacific nations with militaries: Tonga, [Papua New Guinea,] and New Zealand," with Papua New Guinea having recently signed a separate security treaty with Australia last year (DFAT, October 2025; Sydney Morning Herald, July 6).

[2] A third tracking vessel, Yuan Wang 5, was docked in Suva, Fiji, at the time of the treaty signing (Sydney Morning Herald, July 6; RNZ, July 7). [3] For expanded discussion on the PRC's activities in the region, see for example: Marc Julienne, "China's Strategy Toward Pacific Island

[2] A third tracking vessel, Yuan Wang 5, was docked in Suva, Fiji, at the time of the treaty signing (Sydney Morning Herald, July 6; RNZ, July 7).

[3] For expanded discussion on the PRC's activities in the region, see for example: Marc Julienne, "China's Strategy Toward Pacific Island Countries: Countering Taiwan and Western Influence," ReConnect China Policy Brief No. 31, Ghent University, January 2026, <https://www.reconnect-china.ugent.be/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ReConnect-China-Policy-Brief-31-Countering-Taiwan-and-Western-Influence.pdf>; Fabrizio Bozzato, "Contours of Influence: China's Expanding Footprint in the Pacific Islands," International Information Network Analysis (IINA), Sasakawa Peace Foundation, July 10, 2025, https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/fabrizio_bozzato_01.html.

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