



Secure Taiwan Monthly

安全臺灣月報

April 2025

STA | 安全臺灣學會
SECURE TAIWAN ASSOCIATE

RCDA Research Project on
China's Defense Affairs
中國防務研究計畫

Secure Taiwan Monthly: April 2025

Secure Taiwan Monthly is written by members of Research Project on China's Defense Affairs (RCDA) at the Security Taiwan Associate (STA). It analyzes key military developments in China and the Indo-Pacific region relevant to Taiwan's security over the past month, available in both Traditional Chinese and English versions.

STA is a nonprofit public organization. Its mission is to unite the intellectual resources of Taiwan's academic community with the energy of civil society, focusing on security issues that are crucial to Taiwan's survival and development.

The English name, Secure Taiwan "Associate," rather than the typical term "association," highlights that we are a group of partners, rather than just being an organization.

RCDA conducts research on Chinese military affairs and issues related to People's Liberation Army's aggression against Taiwan, while engaging in exchanges with experts around the globe.

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I . Great Power Competition: The U.S.-China Strategic Confrontation Intensifies, with Rising Military Deployment in the Asia-Pacific

Since President Trump assumed office, the United States and China have continuously demonstrated a comprehensive strategic confrontation through increased military deployments, targeted military exercises, and the unveiling of next-generation weapons.

1. Situation

1.1 U.S. Increases Military Deployments in Japan

Following the announcement that the United States would deploy [MQ-4C](#) Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles to Kadena Air Base on Okinawa to enhance intelligence collection and reconnaissance activities around Japan, a squadron of four [B-1B](#) Lancer bombers from the U.S. Air Force also deployed to Misawa Air Base in Japan. [A U.S. statement](#) clarified that this deployment supports a series of exercises conducted by Pacific Air Forces alongside allies, partners, and joint forces, carrying out strategic deterrence missions to strengthen stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Additionally, the U.S. Marine Corps' 12th Marine Littoral Regiment, based in Okinawa, will receive [the Naval Expeditionary Missile System](#) (NMESIS), enhancing anti-ship capabilities.

Additionally, on April 24, the United States and Japan conducted [a joint air training](#) in the airspace southeast of Okinawa and the Western Pacific. The U.S. sent 16 aircraft, including one B-1 bomber, six F-15E fighters, two F-35 fighters, two EA-18G electronic warfare aircraft, RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft, and KC-135 air-to-air refueling aircraft. Japan contributed four F-15 fighters from the 9th Air Wing stationed at Okinawa. Given the ongoing deployment of [the Chinese aircraft carrier Shandong](#) in the waters northeast of Luzon in the Philippines, this joint training was also intended to send a clear deterrence signal from the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Moreover, [Japan reported](#) that Chinese aircraft, including a Y-9 electronic reconnaissance plane, TB-001 drones, and GJ-2 reconnaissance and strike UAVs, were observed operating between Okinawa and Miyako Island, indicating a strong focus on the U.S.-Japan joint military drills.

1.2 U.S. Increases Military Deployments in South Korea

[The United States has announced](#) that, this summer, it will establish the second F-16 "Super Squadron" at Osan Air Base in South Korea, further expanding and extending last year's deployment of the first "Super Squadron," originally planned for one year. This move is aimed at enhancing deterrence capabilities against North Korean threats and ensuring peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and across the Indo-Pacific region. The new deployment will strengthen the U.S.-South Korea alliance's readiness to respond to potential threats, reaffirming the U.S. commitment to the defense of its allies.

1.3 U.S. Increases Military Deployments in the Philippines

During [the U.S.-Philippines Balikatan joint military exercises](#), the U.S. deployed the Navy/Marine Corps Expeditionary Missile System (NMESIS) equipped with naval strike missiles to the Batan Islands in the Philippines. This marks the first time the U.S. has deployed anti-ship missiles to the Batan Islands, a strategically significant location controlling access to the Bashi Channel. Last year, during the same exercise, the U.S. also deployed the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) to the northern tip of Luzon Island.

Additionally, the U.S. military used this exercise to deploy [the Marine Air Defense Integrated System](#) (MADIS) on Luzon Island facing the South China Sea, enhancing the complementary coastal defense capabilities of both forces. This marks the first deployment of MADIS in the Philippines.

1.4 China Reveals Specifications of the Type 094 Submarine

The Chinese military has publicly disclosed [the specifications of its Type 094 strategic nuclear-powered submarine](#) for the first time. The Type 094 is approximately 135 meters long, 13 meters wide, with

a surface displacement of about 8,000 tons and a total displacement of around 11,000 tons. Its maximum submerged speed reaches 30 knots, and it can dive to a depth of 400 meters. These figures differ significantly from previous widely accepted data, which indicated a displacement of 9,000 tons, a maximum speed of 20 knots, and a maximum dive depth of 300 meters. The discrepancies suggest that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) may have upgraded the capabilities of this class of submarine.

2. Implication

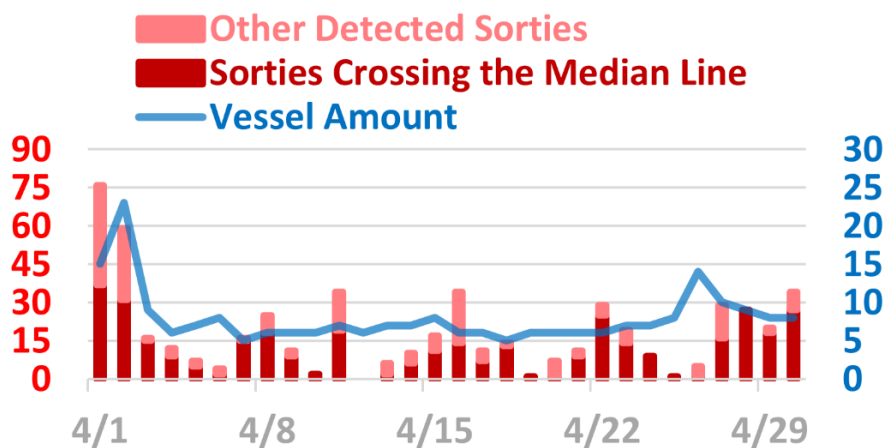
Currently, the Chinese military's Type 094 and Type 094A nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines possess the capability to carry out strategic nuclear strikes against the U.S. mainland. The Chinese military's release of the Type 094's specifications is likely part of the broader strategy, similar to the earlier release of images of the sixth-generation fighter and the new stealth reconnaissance-strike unmanned aerial vehicle, aimed at sending a strategic deterrence message to the United States. The U.S. and China have now entered a phase of comprehensive strategic confrontation encompassing technology, trade, diplomacy, and military aspects. The first island chain remains the frontline of military strategic confrontation between the two countries, with security in the East Asia region becoming increasingly tense. Amid this broader U.S.-China strategic rivalry, China may escalate its military pressure on Taiwan, signaling its firm stance on Taiwan as a core national interest and its unwillingness to back down on the issue.

II. PLA's Monthly Trend of Harassment Against Taiwan: China May Be Preparing for Large-Scale Military Action Against Taiwan in May

©Source: ROC (Taiwan) Ministry of National Defense Press Release

1. Trends

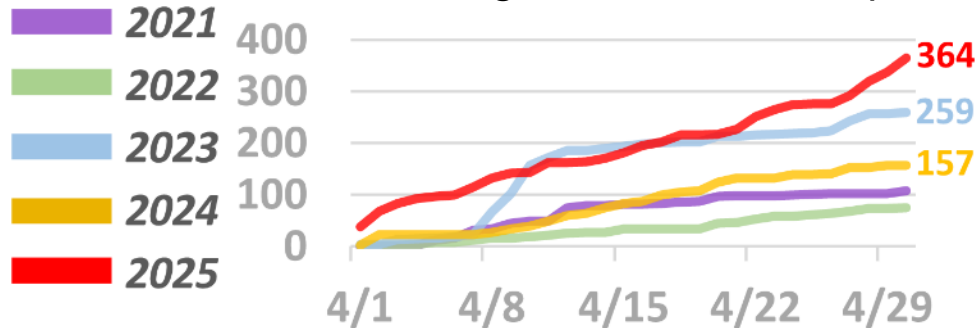
In April 2025, a total of 38 Chinese military vessels and 546 aircraft sorties were detected, with 364 of those aircraft crossing the median line. The data is provided in the chart below.



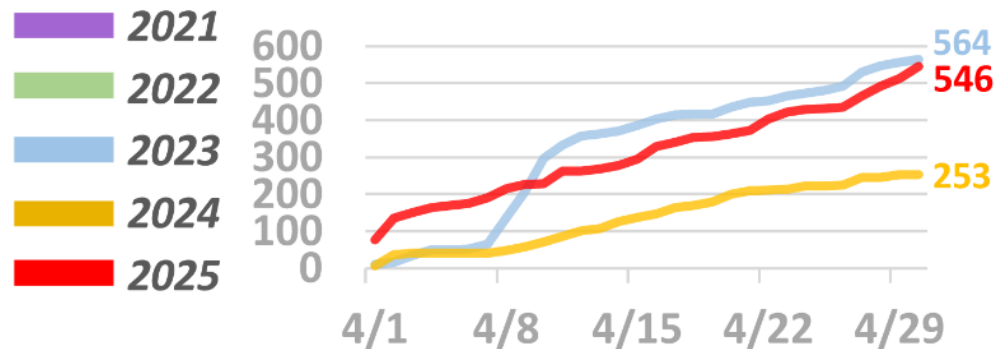
1.1 Comparison of This Month with Previous Aprils: Aircraft Activity Levels Not Significantly Higher Than Previous Years

In April of this year, a total of 364 sorties crossed the median line, the highest number recorded for any April. However, the total number of detected sorties was 546, slightly fewer than the 564 sorties in April 2023. This contrasts with the first three months of this year, where the number of sorties was notably higher compared to the same period in previous years.

PLA Aircraft Sorties Crossing the Median Line in April

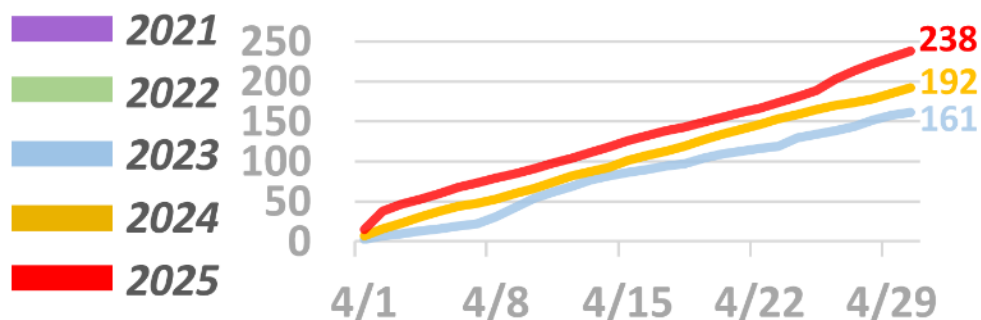


Total PLA Aircraft Sorties Detected in April



The total number of Chinese military vessels operating around Taiwan in this April reached the highest for any April on record.

Number of PLA Vessels in April



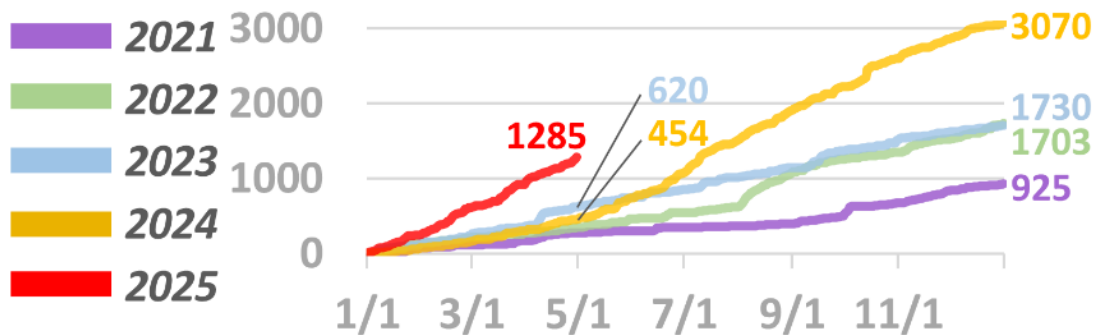
1.2 Annual Trend Comparison: April Activity Levels Comparable to Previous Years' Exercise Peaks

Regarding aircraft, the total number of sorties crossing the median line has accumulated to 1,285, the highest on record, approximately double the 620 sorties in 2023. However, the total

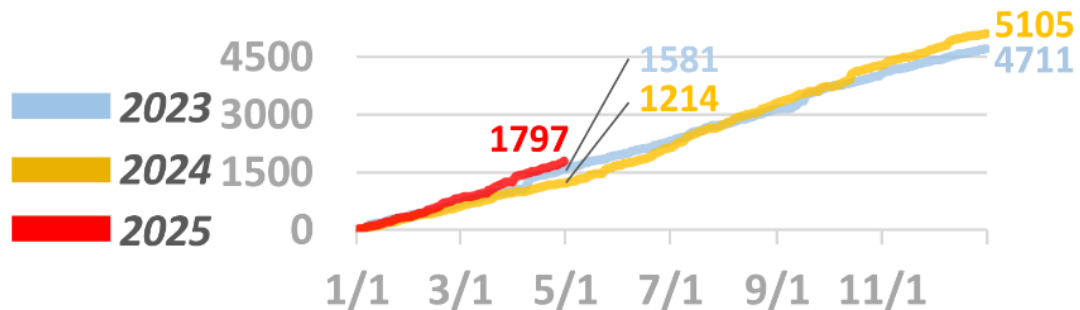
number of detected aircraft sorties is 1,797, just 1.14 times the 1,581 sorties in 2023.

As for military vessels, the total number has reached 892, the highest on record, approximately 1.26 times the 708 vessels recorded during the same period in 2024.

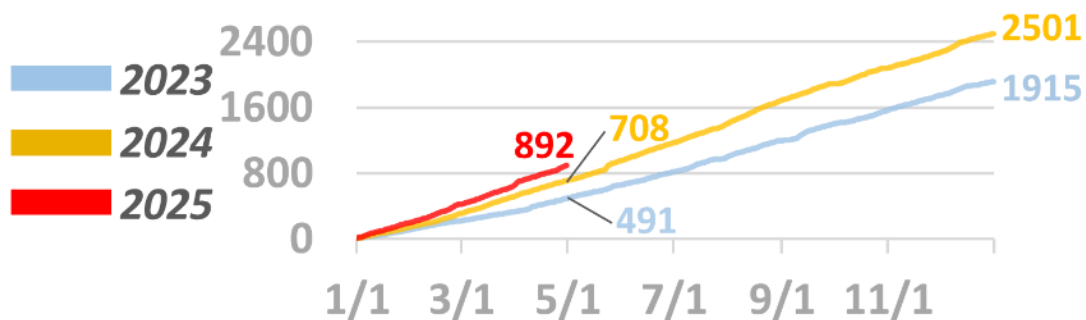
Annual PLA Aircraft Sorties Crossing the Median Line



Annual PLA Aircraft Sorties Detected



Annual Number of PLA Vessels



A closer examination of the monthly data reveals that the total number of detected aircraft sorties, aircraft crossing the median line,

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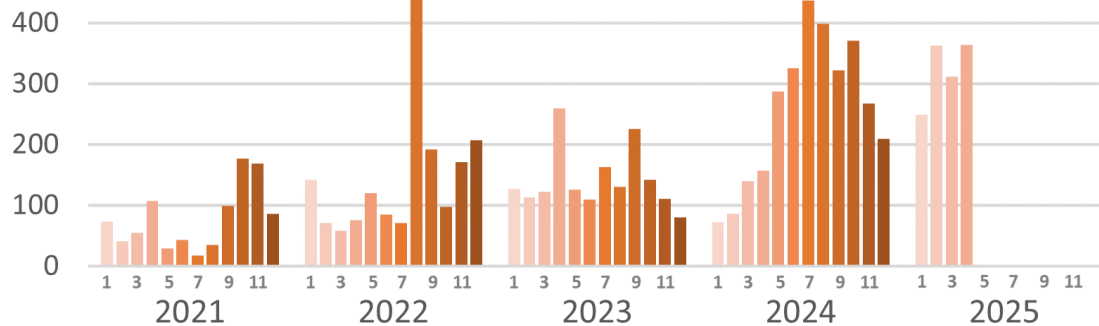
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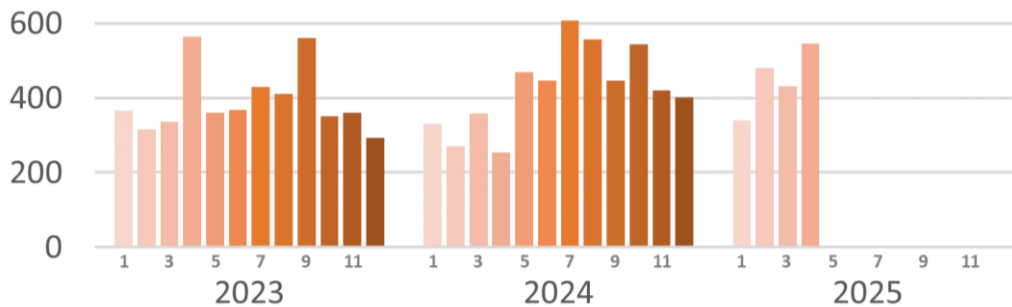
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and military vessels operating around Taiwan in April this year are comparable in scale to the peak period of military exercises from June to October 2024.

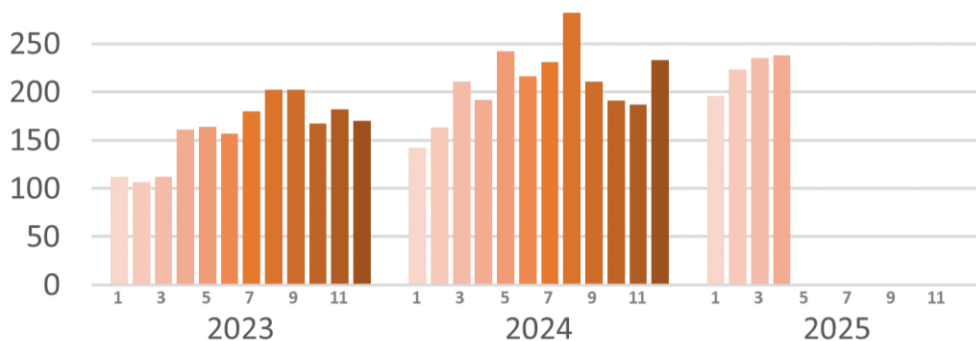
Monthly PLA Aircraft Sorties Crossing the Median Line



Monthly PLA Aircraft Sorties Detected

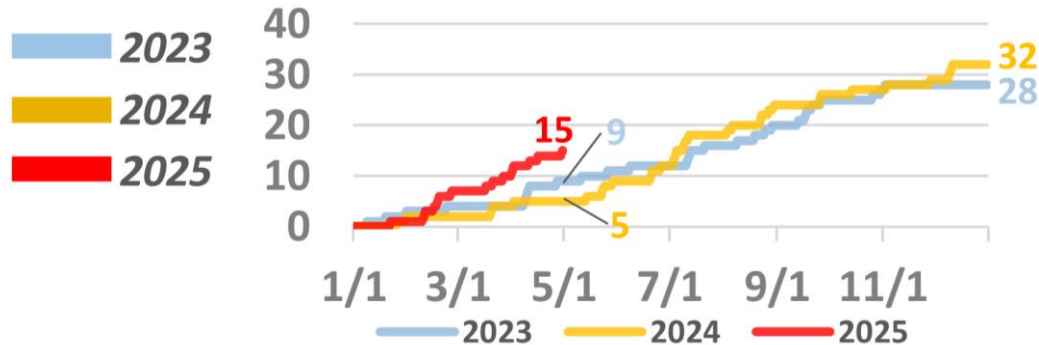


Monthly Number of PLA Vessels Near Taiwan

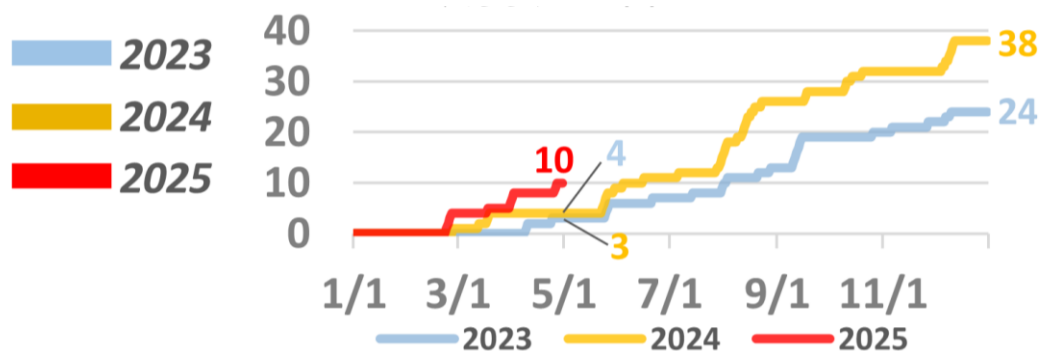


Additionally, the number of days during peak periods in which more than 30 aircraft sorties and over 10 military vessels were detected on the same day has accumulated at a higher frequency this year compared to the totals for the same period in 2023 and 2024.

Accumulated Number of Aircraft Peak Periods



Accumulated Number of Vessel Peak Periods



2. Implication: PLA Aircraft Activity May Be Lower This Month Due to Preparations for May's Large-Scale Military Operation

The lower activity levels in April this year may be attributed to preparations by the PLA for a large-scale military operation. Precedent 1: On March 17, the PLA conducted two joint readiness patrols on the same day, and activity levels in the days leading up to this were notably reduced. Precedent 2: From April 1 to April 2, the PLA conducted large-scale military operations targeting Taiwan, and similar reductions in PLA activity were observed in the days prior.

President Lai Ching-te's speech on May 8, marking the victory in the European theater of World War II, and his possible speech on May 20 to commemorate his first anniversary in office, may serve as pretexts for China to launch large-scale military operations against Taiwan. This could involve major drills like those in early April or operations similar to exercises such as the "Joint Sword" exercises.

III. Gray Zone Harassment Intensifies: Depleting Taiwan's Defense Resources and Assessing the Response Patterns of Taiwan's Military

1. Situation

On April 27, fishermen in the vicinity of [the southwest waters off Qimei Island in the Penghu Archipelago](#) reported observing two Chinese vessels, one gray and one white, crossing in front of them. Shortly thereafter, another vessel, suspected to be a military ship, followed behind. Based on photos taken by the fishermen, it is believed that these vessels were likely the Xiangyanghong series research vessels, the Tianlangxing electronic reconnaissance vessel, and a Type 055 destroyer. At 8:08 AM the same day, the Chinese vessel Gulangyu, a Bermuda-flagged vessel, [once again turned off its Automatic Identification System](#) (AIS), making its movements unknown. The signal was restored at 10:38 AM. The vessel continued its course toward the coast of Kenting, approximately one nautical mile from shore, prompting Taiwan's Coast Guard to issue a broadcast urging it to maintain a safe distance. The Gulangyu primarily operates the route between Miyako Island, Japan, and Hong Kong but has been frequently spotted near the coast of Kenting, Pingtung, since April.

Whether it's the passage of PLA Navy ships or research vessels passing 35 nautical miles southwest of Qimei Island in the Penghu Archipelago (east of the median line of the Taiwan Strait), or the intentional shutdown of the Gulangyu's AIS while navigating just one nautical mile from shore, these actions represent a new form of gray zone harassment against Taiwan. They demonstrate China's ongoing innovation in gray zone tactics aimed at exerting pressure and provoking Taiwan.

2. Characteristics

2.1 Depleting Taiwan's Defense Resources

Gray zone harassment significantly depletes the resources of

Taiwan's military, including aircraft, vessels, and the combat readiness of frontline personnel. The PLA's routine harassment of Taiwan with its aircraft and naval vessels will force the Taiwanese military to continuously deploy forces in response, leading to wear and tear on equipment and a decrease in operational availability. This will also constrain the daily training of Taiwan's naval and air forces, directly impacting combat effectiveness. Furthermore, Taiwan's service members must respond swiftly to these gray zone actions, often operating under high pressure for extended periods. The psychological and physical strain on personnel is substantial, and over time, this could lead to a higher rate of early retirements within Taiwan's military.

2.2 Assessing Taiwan's Military Response Patterns

The PLA's harassment of Taiwan with its aircraft and naval vessels not only serves as a demonstration of attrition and cognitive warfare but also functions as a test of Taiwan's government responses. This allows China to gather intelligence on Taiwan's military reactions and countermeasures. By analyzing the real-time military updates issued by Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense, the PLA could infer the range and capabilities of Taiwan's joint intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) systems, as well as assess Taiwan's response times and operational patterns.

3. Implication

The PLA's gray zone harassment subtly depletes Taiwan's military resources, and will eventually lead to military fatigue. Over time, Taiwan's military will adapt to this rhythm, significantly lowering the vigilance of both the public and the military towards the PLA. This could create a "boiling frog" effect, where the gradual erosion of readiness makes it harder to respond effectively. When the PLA eventually shifts from exercises to actual military action against Taiwan, Taiwan may fail to make accurate threat assessments, providing the PLA with the opportunity to transition from training to combat operations. The Taiwanese military could be caught off guard and will need to be prepared to address this challenge appropriately.

IV. Strait Thunder 2025A: Military and Political Coercion Against Taiwan

1. Situation

On the morning of [April 1 at 7:30 AM](#), the PLA Eastern Theater Command suddenly announced that Starting on April 1, the PLA Eastern Theater Command will organize forces from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force to conduct multi-directional maneuvers near Taiwan, focusing on operations such as maritime and air combat readiness patrols, integrated control of key domains, strikes against both sea and land targets, and the blockade of critical regions and routes. These drills are designed to test the joint operational capabilities of the theater forces. This is a severe warning and a strong deterrent against the separatist forces seeking Taiwan independence and a legitimate, necessary action to safeguard national sovereignty and maintain national unity.

Subsequently, [the East China Sea Subbureau of the China Coast Guard](#) issued a statement on April 1, stating, Multiple Coast Guard vessels conducted law enforcement patrols around the waters near Taiwan, engaging in drills such as boarding and seizure, interception, and detention operations. The statement emphasized that Taiwan is a province of China, and this is an action to enforce the management of Taiwan under the one-China principle, in accordance with the law.

The following day, [at around 8:00 AM](#), the PLA Eastern Theater Command announced, On April 2, the PLA Eastern Theater Command organized the Strait Thunder-2025A drill in the central and southern waters of the Taiwan Strait. The drill focused on conducting verification and identification, warning and expulsion, and interception and seizure drills, testing the forces' capabilities in regional control, joint blockade, and precision strike operations. Later, [at approximately 10:00 AM](#), it was further announced, On April 2, the PLA Eastern Theater Command's ground forces, in accordance with the Strait Thunder-2025A drill plan, conducted long-range live-fire artillery drills in the East China Sea, executing precision strikes on

simulated targets such as key ports and energy facilities, achieving the desired effects."

On April 2 at 7:00 PM, the PLA Eastern Theater Command announced, From April 1 to April 2, the PLA Eastern Theater Command successfully completed all tasks of the military drills, thoroughly testing the integrated joint combat capabilities of the forces. The theater forces maintained a high state of alert at all times, continuously strengthening training and preparation for combat, and resolutely thwarting any actions seeking Taiwan independence and separatism. This statement indicates that the PLA's two-day military drills surrounding Taiwan have temporarily concluded.

The Taiwan Affairs Office of China stated, The PLA Eastern Theater Command's military drills around Taiwan are a firm reprimand against the provocative actions of the Lai Ching-te administration in its reckless pursuit of Taiwan independence. This is a stern warning to the Taiwan independence separatist forces, who are deliberately undermining peace in the Taiwan Strait, and a necessary measure to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs further stated, the military drills serve as a serious warning and strong deterrence against the Taiwan independence separatist forces. The Democratic Progressive Party administration's obstinate stance on Taiwan independence and its misguided attempts to rely on foreign support to achieve independence will ultimately fail, like an ant trying to stop a moving cart.

2. Characteristics

2.1 Main Objectives: Military Targeting Taiwan, Political Targeting President Lai Ching-te

From the statements issued by the PLA Eastern Theater Command, the Taiwan Affairs Office, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is evident that the PLA's military drills around the Taiwan Strait were primarily military actions targeting Taiwan itself, with

political motives directed at countering [President Lai's March 13 announcement](#) of 17 national security strategies and his designation of the China as a foreign hostile force. Therefore, the objectives of the drills differ significantly from those of [the February 26 offshore operations](#) in the Kaohsiung-Pingtung waters, as well as [the two joint maritime and air readiness patrols conducted on March 17](#), which were primarily aimed at the United States.

2.2 The Only Message to the U.S.: Taiwan Is Not a Topic for U.S.-China Negotiations

From the strategic level of U.S.-China competition, the military drills around the Taiwan Strait send a clear message from China to the U.S.: The issue of Taiwan's sovereignty is a core national interest of China, with no room for negotiation. China will not include this issue in U.S.-China discussions. Since President Trump took office, the U.S. and China have not engaged in substantial strategic-level communication and negotiations across various policy areas. There is a widespread belief that the Taiwan issue will become one of the key leverage points in the U.S.-China rivalry. However, based on the numerous military actions taken by China regarding Taiwan, it is clear that China has no intention of making concessions on the Taiwan issue. This can be seen in [the April 2 editorial](#) published on the front page of PLA Daily, which criticized President Lai's comments about flattering foreign powers for honor and transferring Taiwan's key industries abroad. Despite China's inability to prevent TSMC's investment in the U.S., further strengthening the U.S.-Taiwan chip supply chain cooperation, China is likely to continue its firm stance on its sovereignty claim over Taiwan.

2.3 U.S. Response: The Trump Administration Has No Intent to Escalate the Situation

It is noteworthy that the White House's response to the PLA's military drills around the Taiwan Strait was significantly more measured compared to the Biden administration's response to

previous PLA military drills around Taiwan. [The White House merely stated](#), "The president is emphasizing the importance of maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait, encouraging the peaceful resolution of these cross-strait issues, reiterating our opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion." This appears to signal that President Trump has no intention of further escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

3. Implication

It is important to closely monitor the potential developments regarding the Taiwan issue following U.S.-China negotiations. As TSMC invests in the U.S., UMC considers a potential merger with Global Foundries, and semiconductor-related suppliers follow suit with U.S. facilities, China may perceive a diminished value of Taiwan to President Trump. This could encourage Beijing to adopt a more aggressive military approach toward Taiwan, potentially forcing Taiwan to accept the unification arrangements proposed by China. If China develops this perception, the situation in the Taiwan Strait could further deteriorate.

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