



Secure Taiwan Monthly

安全臺灣月報

June 2025

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SECURE TAIWAN ASSOCIATE

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

Secure Taiwan Monthly: June 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: Recent Developments in PLA Aircraft Carrier Capabilities Amid Intensifying U.S.-China Strategic Competition

Recent developments surrounding China's aircraft carriers highlight two key trends. First, China has made significant progress in aircraft carrier development. From the commissioning of the Liaoning on September 25, 2012, and the Shandong on December 17, 2019, to the Fujian completing its eighth sea trial and potentially entering service by the end of this year, the People's Liberation Army Navy will probably acquire three carriers in just 13 years. The Fujian is especially notable for its full-length flight deck and electromagnetic catapult system. Second, the PLA is actively projecting naval power into the Western Pacific using carrier strike groups as the core force. Its operational area has expanded from waters around the First Island Chain to the region between the First and Second Island Chains, signaling its ambition to replace the U.S. military as the dominant regional power.

1. Increased Likelihood of the Fujian Aircraft Carrier Commissioning by Year-End

According to recent reports by CCTV, the Fujian is undergoing intensive sea trials. Based on global aircraft carrier development experience, newly built carriers typically go through three phases—outfitting, harbor trials, and sea trials—over a span of three to four years before entering service. The Fujian was launched on June 17, 2022, and has now been afloat for over three years. Its first sea trial began on May 1, 2024, just 13 months ago. Since then, the ship has completed eight sea trials, suggesting that key systems—such as propulsion, power supply, catapults, and the flight deck—have demonstrated sufficient reliability and stability. As a result, the ship has not required lengthy post-trial repairs at the shipyard.

Following the official announcement of the Fujian's recent sea trials by Chinese state media, many observers believe the carrier could be commissioned by the end of this year. Between now and

then, China will mark three major political holidays: Army Day on August 1, Victory over Japan Day on September 3, and National Day on October 1.

As the first Chinese carrier equipped with electromagnetic catapults, the Fujian offers a significant boost in airpower compared to the Liaoning and Shandong, and is better suited for long-range power projection. Its name—Fujian—is also politically symbolic, as it faces Taiwan across the strait. From Beijing's perspective, Taiwan was returned to China after Japan's defeat in World War II and was taken over by the Republic of China government at the time. Given that symbolism, if the Fujian has completed all technical testing and is awaiting orders from the Central Military Commission for formal induction, commissioning the ship in the lead-up to the 80th anniversary of Victory over Japan Day on September 3 would carry the most political weight. Beijing plans a large-scale military parade on that date to mark the anniversary.

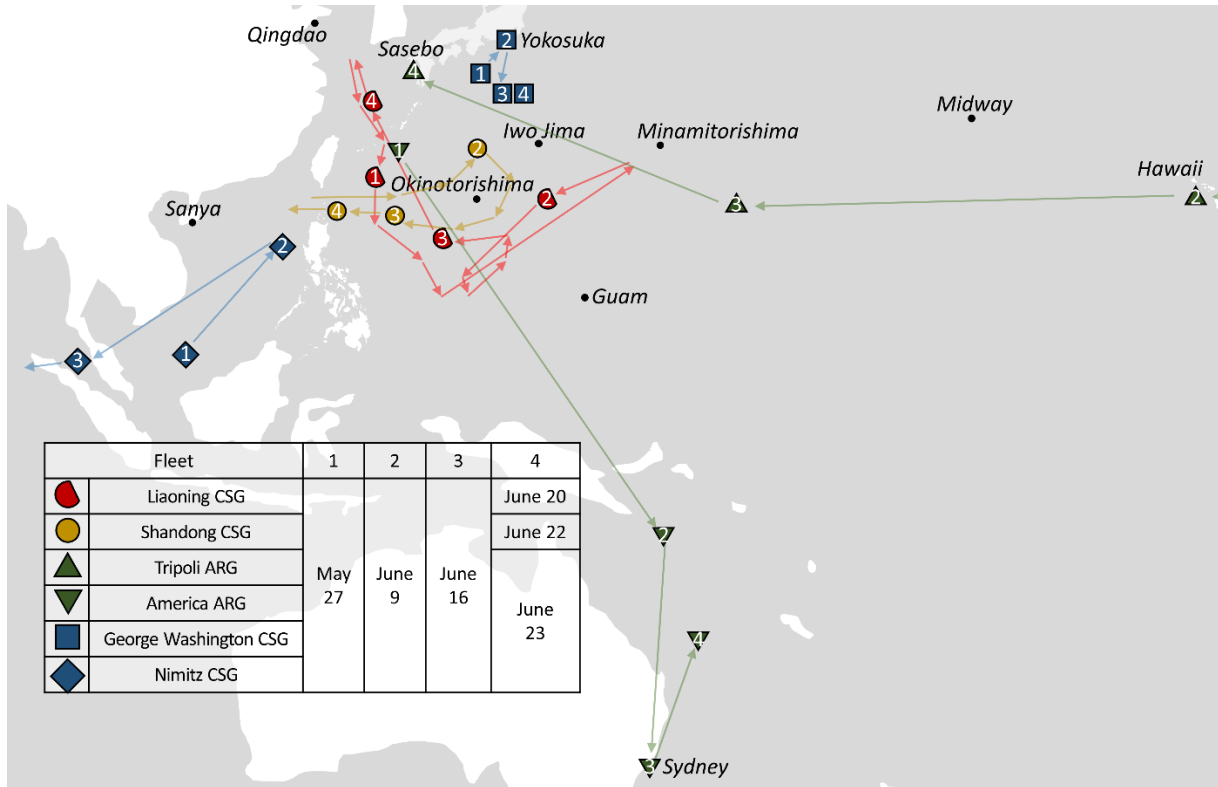
However, whether the Fujian meets all operational requirements remains a technical issue, not a political one. The PLA recognizes the risks of prioritizing political timelines over technical readiness. Any attempt to conceal technical deficiencies for symbolic purposes could carry serious battlefield consequences. If the ongoing sea trials do not meet expectations, the PLA Navy may refuse to accept the carrier until all issues are resolved, which would likely delay its commissioning until next year or later.

2. PLA's Liaoning and Shandong Carrier Groups Conduct First Joint Drills Between the First and Second Island Chains

2.1 PLA's Two Carrier Groups Conduct Simultaneous 27-Day Long-Distance Deployments, Demonstrating Mature Offshore Sustainment Capabilities

The Liaoning departed from its Qingdao base on May 25. On May 27, it transited the Miyako Strait into the Western Pacific and has since conducted various training activities in the waters between the First and Second Island Chains. During this period, the carrier group

maneuvered beyond the Second Island Chain to the southwest of Minami-Tori-shima (Marcus Island). This marks the first time a PLA Navy carrier group has operated east of the Second Island Chain.



The Liaoning transited the Miyako Strait between June 19 and 20 and returned to its Qingdao base on June 21. This recent long-range deployment lasted approximately 27 days. The carrier's previous longest deployment occurred from December 16, 2022, to January 8, 2023, lasting 23 days. This mission extended that duration by four days.

The Shandong conducted joint drills with other PLA vessels in the South China Sea from May 21 to 27. After a brief port visit for resupply, it departed from its Sanya base on May 29 and carried out integrated sea and air training missions in the northern South China Sea. The carrier then transited the Bashi Channel eastward to the waters west of the Second Island Chain. After establishing operational contact with the Liaoning carrier group, the two carrier strike groups conducted maneuvering and counter-maneuver drills in the area.

between the First and Second Island Chains. The Shandong transited back through the Bashi Channel into the South China Sea between June 22 and 23 and returned to its Sanya base on June 24 or 25. This long-range deployment lasted approximately 27 days.

Given that both the Liaoning and Shandong completed long-range deployments of approximately 27 days each, and that their carrier groups operated simultaneously for nearly three weeks in the waters between the First and Second Island Chains, it demonstrates that the PLA Navy's maritime sustainment capabilities for extended offshore operations have matured.

2.2 PLA's Two Carrier Groups Conduct First Simultaneous Sea Denial Drills in the Western Pacific

The Liaoning carrier group maneuvered eastward beyond the Second Island Chain before turning back west, while the Shandong moved eastward to the east side of the Second Island Chain to meet the Liaoning. Their subsequent maneuvering patterns suggest that both carrier groups simulated a wartime scenario in which a U.S. carrier strike group departs from Hawaii heading toward Taiwan. The PLA Navy's carrier groups conducted anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) operations between the First and Second Island Chains. The Liaoning's westward movement from east of the Second Island Chain likely simulated the U.S. carrier strike group, while the Shandong's maneuvers on the west side of the chain coordinated to represent PLA Navy efforts to deny U.S. naval access.

As both carrier groups gradually moved westward, approaching the eastern side of the First Island Chain, the PLA demonstrated a clear understanding that naval power alone can only delay but not fully prevent U.S. forces from advancing to the First Island Chain. This indicates a pragmatic and realistic assessment by the PLA of U.S. maritime capabilities without underestimating them.

2.3 Aggressive Interception of Japanese Surveillance Aircraft by PLA Carrier-Based Fighters

During the Liaoning and Shandong carrier groups' maneuvering

and training between the First and Second Island Chains, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force deployed aircraft to monitor their activities. The PLA carrier groups responded by dispatching carrier-based fighters to trail and aggressively escort the Japanese aircraft away from their operational airspace.

During this period, a PLA J-15 fighter armed with air-to-air missiles flew at the same altitude in dangerously close proximity to a Japanese P-3C reconnaissance aircraft, with a closest distance of only 45 meters. Additionally, another J-15 crossed in front of the P-3C at the same altitude within approximately 900 meters, creating a high risk of mid-air collision.

These incidents demonstrate that during their operations in the Western Pacific, the PLA Navy's Liaoning and Shandong carrier groups have adopted a more assertive posture toward foreign surveillance aircraft and vessels, employing increasingly provocative countermeasures.

3. Threats to Taiwan

Taiwan's military forces operate in the eastern sea and airspace behind the Central Mountain Range, which acts as a natural barrier. As a result, the PLA's coastal surveillance radars cannot monitor these areas in real time. Currently, the PLA relies on its aircraft and vessels operating in eastern Taiwan's waters to collect intelligence on Taiwanese military movements.

Once the Fujian aircraft carrier enters service, the PLA Navy will possess three carriers. It will likely deploy a carrier strike group regularly in the Western Pacific east of Taiwan for combat readiness patrols. At that time, Taiwan's eastern maritime and air operations, including tests of newly developed weapons, will fall under real-time surveillance by the PLA carrier group.

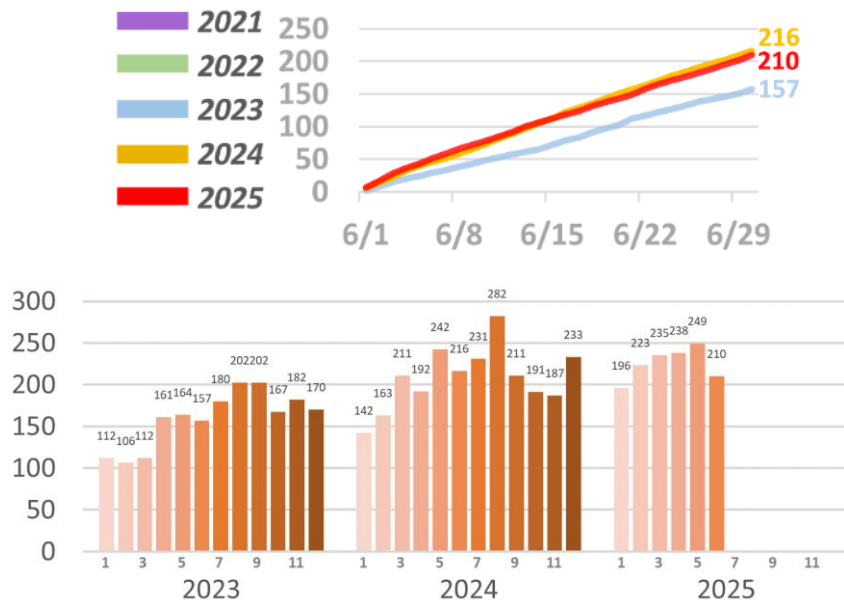
Taiwan's military urgently needs to develop and evaluate tactics for preserving its sea and air combat capabilities in the critical early stages of conflict.

II. PLA's Monthly Trend of Harassment Against Taiwan: PLA Intensifies Joint Sea and Air Denial Exercises Against U.S. Forces

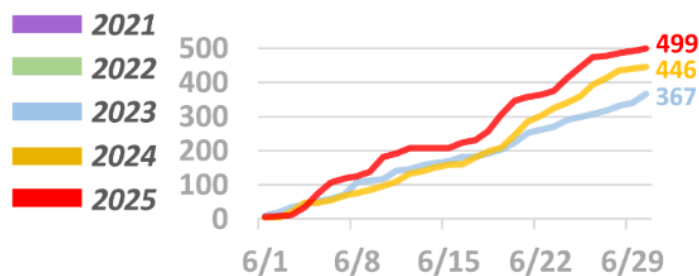
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1. Trends

In June 2025, surveillance detected 210 PLA vessels operating around the Taiwan Strait, a decrease of 39 from 249 detected in May, representing a 16% decline. Compared to June 2024, when 216 vessels were detected, the number dropped by 3% year-on-year.



In June 2025, surveillance detected 499 PLA aircraft operating around the Taiwan Strait, an increase of 41 from 458 detected in May, representing a 9% rise. Compared to June 2024, when 446 aircraft were detected, this marks a 12% increase.



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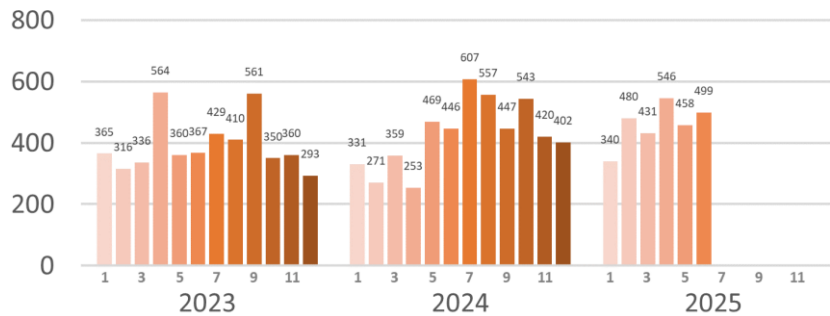
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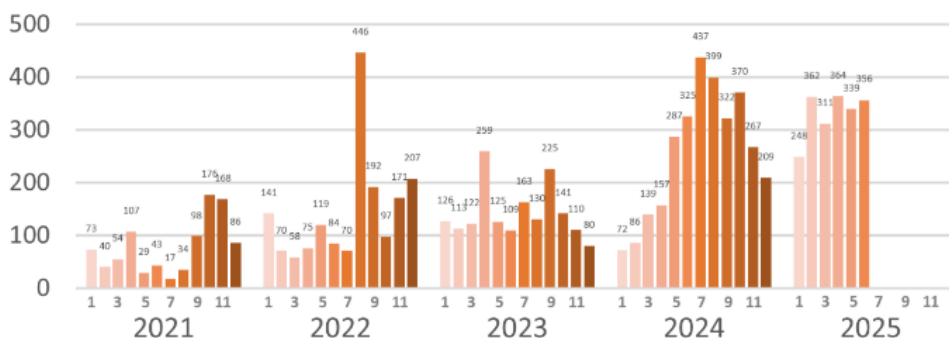
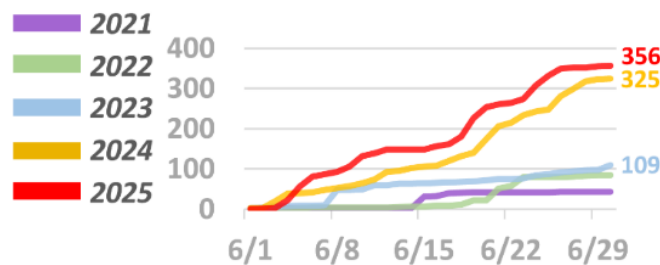
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Among the 499 PLA aircraft detected operating around the Taiwan Strait in June 2025, 356 crossed the median line of the Strait to intrude into Taiwan's surrounding airspace. This figure increased by 17 sorties from 339 detected in May, a 5% rise. Compared to June 2024, when 325 sorties crossed the median line, this represents a 10% year-on-year increase.



From January to June 2025, surveillance detected a total of 1,351 PLA vessels operating around the Taiwan Strait, representing a 16% increase compared to the same period in 2024. During the same timeframe, 2,754 PLA aircraft sorties were detected, marking a 29% rise year-on-year. Of these, 1,980 sorties crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait, an 86% increase compared to last year.

These figures show that although the frequency and number of

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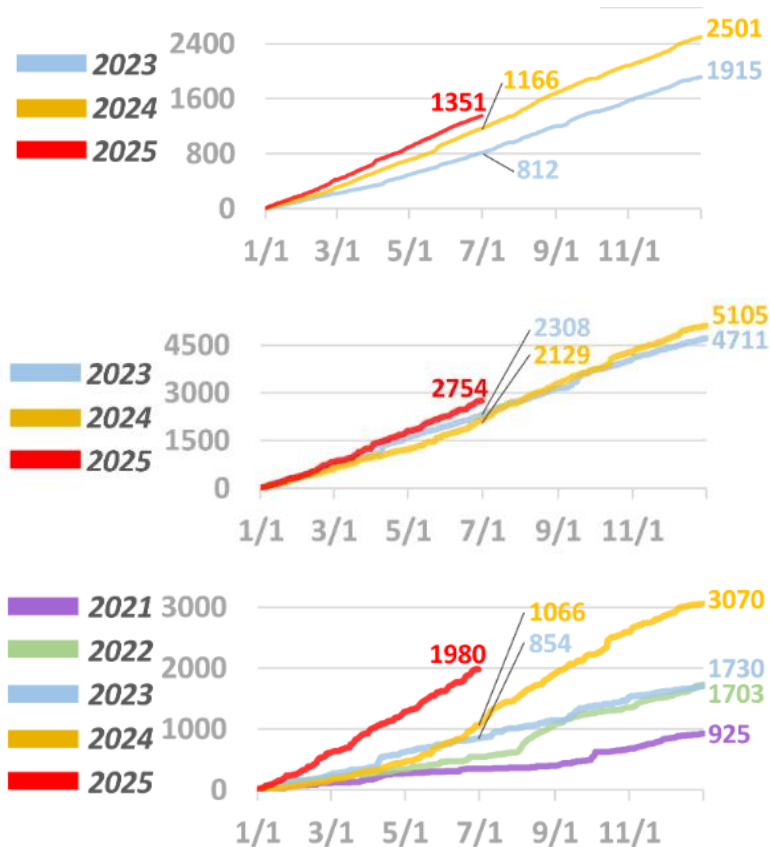
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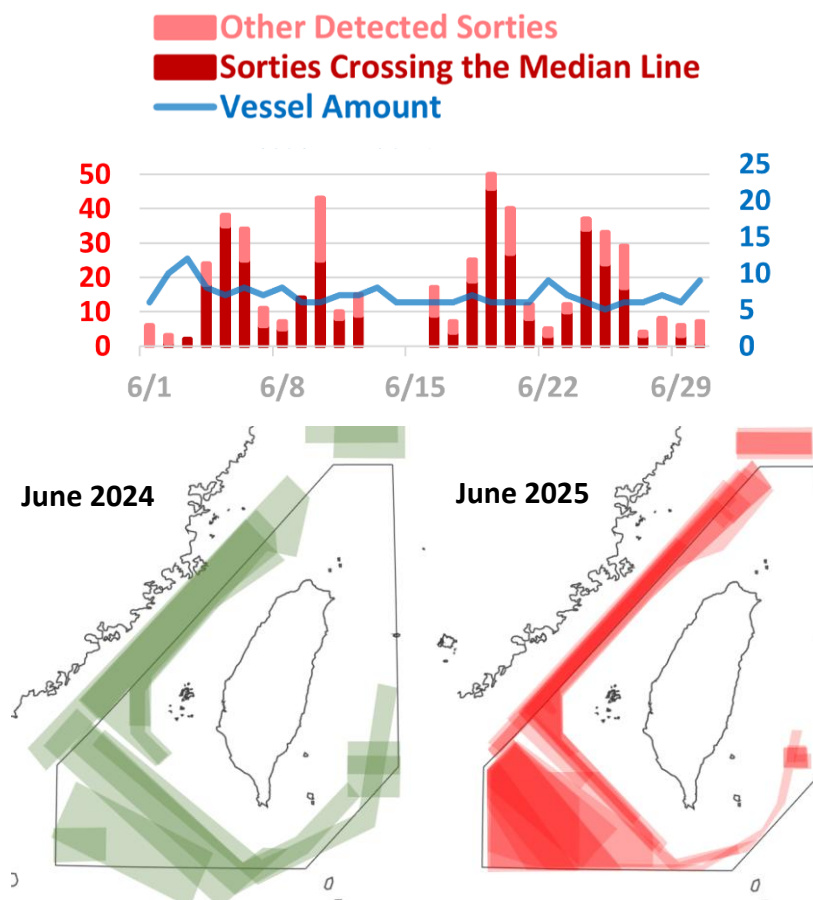
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PLA aircraft and vessels operating near the Taiwan Strait have eased since late May, overall activity remains higher than the previous year. This trend reflects the continued escalation of China's military pressure on Taiwan during the first half of 2025.



In June, PLA aircraft sorties exceeded 30 per day on seven occasions, while PLA vessels exceeded 10 per day on two occasions. Comparing these figures with the Shandong carrier's movements—transiting from the northern South China Sea through the Bashi Channel to the Philippine Sea southeast of Taiwan in early June, maneuvering westward from the Western Pacific back to the Philippine Sea in mid-June, and returning through the Bashi Channel to its Sanya base in late June—indicates that the large-scale PLA aircraft presence near the Taiwan Strait and crossings of the median line are not only a form of combat readiness patrol and intimidation but also closely linked to the Shandong's carrier strike group training operations.

In June, days with over 30 PLA aircraft sorties near the Taiwan Strait increased compared to the same period last year, with heightened activity concentrated in the airspace from southwestern Taiwan to the Bashi Channel. This pattern closely correlates with the Shandong carrier strike group's integrated sea and air denial exercises in the area.



2. Implication

In summary, PLA aircraft and naval activity around the Taiwan Strait in June showed a slowdown in the rate of increase but still remained higher than the same period last year. This indicates that while the number of PLA incursions into Taiwan's immediate airspace and waters did not rise significantly, China's overall military pressure on Taiwan continues to escalate.

The slight easing of PLA activities targeting Taiwan in May and June mainly reflects a strategic shift. The PLA has moved its focus

from pressuring Taiwan directly to conducting joint sea denial exercises aimed at the U.S. military in the Western Pacific between the First and Second Island Chains. Additionally, land-based PLA aircraft have coordinated with carrier groups during their transits through the Bashi Channel to conduct integrated sea and air denial drills targeting U.S. carrier strike groups.

The activity patterns show that the area from the northern South China Sea to the Bashi Channel represents a critical control zone for PLA sea denial operations against U.S. forces during military actions related to Taiwan.

III. Gray Zone Harassment Intensifies: Gray-Zone Harassment Persists, Balancing Law Enforcement and Realistic Military Training

1. Situation

The Lianhe Hai Gong 5001 tugboat, operated by China's Fujian United Marine Engineering Company, departed the Jiulongjiang waters near Zhangzhou, Fujian, at 5 a.m. on June 18, 2025. It circumnavigated Taiwan, passing through the Penghu area to the southern coast of the island, then proceeded to waters east of Hualien, continued along Taiwan's northern coast, and finally docked at Pingtan Island, Fujian, around 10 a.m. on June 22. The purpose of this circumnavigation remains unclear.

On the morning of June 19, 2025, the Fujian Maritime Safety Administration dispatched a law enforcement patrol fleet composed of the China Coast Guard vessels 14609, 14606, and patrol boats 14529 and 14521. The vessels operated in pairs and simultaneously entered the waters east and west of Kinmen Island from Liaoluo Bay and the southern Zhishan area. They conducted activities in the nearshore waters south of Kinmen until approximately 11 a.m., then withdrew. At 2:50 p.m., the same fleet re-entered the Kinmen area following the same pattern and patrolled until around 5 p.m., when they withdrew to return.

On the afternoon of June 20 at approximately 2:50 p.m., the fleet, now in a line formation of four vessels, entered the eastern waters off Tianpu, Kinmen, and conducted law enforcement patrols moving westward through Kinmen's nearshore waters. The patrol concluded around 5 p.m., after which the vessels withdrew via the southern Zhishan area.

On June 23 at 2:45 p.m., the Fujian Maritime Safety Administration again deployed a law enforcement patrol fleet composed of vessels 14606, 14609, and patrol boats 14515 and 14527. Operating in pairs, the vessels simultaneously entered the east and west waters around Kinmen and conducted activities until

approximately 5 p.m., when they withdrew. This marks the 77th law enforcement patrol by the China Coast Guard in the Kinmen waters since February 19, 2024.

At 6 a.m. on June 22, 2025, the China Coast Guard vessel 3302 conducted law enforcement patrols around Dongsha Island, circling the island at least twice. The vessel departed the Dongsha waters at 8 p.m. and continued patrol and regulatory duties approximately 85 nautical miles west of Nanweilai Reef in the Dongsha Islands.

On June 27 at 6 p.m., fishermen from Penghu reported the presence of the PLA Navy's Northern Theater Command's destroyer flotilla's Type 054A missile frigate Yancheng (hull number 546) operating near the median line of the Taiwan Strait. The ship appeared at coordinates 119°11'E, 24°16'N—west of the median line, about 37 nautical miles northwest of Mudu Islet and less than 3 nautical miles northwest of the median line—significantly disrupting Penghu fishermen's operations.

2. Characteristics

2.1 Use of Civilian Vessels for Intelligence Gathering and Harassment Against Taiwan

Since China began conducting "gray-zone harassment" against Taiwan, it has continuously adapted its tactics. Beyond using PLA forces for military intimidation in waters around Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait, China has coordinated with coast guard vessels, government ships, and maritime militia to simulate "quarantine" operations against Taiwan's ports. At the same time, China masks its military activities under the guise of "civil-military integration," using civilian vessels to carry out military actions. Examples include using civilian ferries to sever Taiwan's submarine cables connecting to the outside world and between offshore islands, as well as deliberately turning off AIS systems while sailing within about one nautical mile of Taiwan's coast.

This month, the Lianhe Hai Gong 5001 tugboat, operated by China's Fujian United Marine Engineering Company, circumnavigated

circumnavigated Taiwan. Although Taiwan's Coast Guard suspects this voyage had ulterior motives, the vessel is not a military ship and can only be monitored and warned not to enter restricted waters. In other words, China openly conducts gray-zone harassment under civilian cover.

Given China's continuously evolving harassment tactics, Taiwan's national security agencies should conduct wargaming and develop countermeasures against potential new forms of harassment.

2.2 Dongsha Island Waters Emerge as New Target for Chinese Coast Guard Harassment

On June 22, 2025, the China Coast Guard vessel 3302 conducted patrol and law enforcement operations near Dongsha Island, circling the island. In fact, from January to the end of June 2025, Chinese coast guard ships entered the Dongsha area 11 times, with six vessels conducting circumnavigation harassment. Some of these ships even turned off their Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) to conceal their movements, carrying out gray-zone harassment.

The Dongsha Islands, located at the northernmost part of the South China Sea, consist of three coral atolls: Dongsha Atoll, Nanwei Reef Atoll, and Beiwei Reef Atoll. Dongsha Island lies on the west side of Dongsha Atoll. In 2007, the area was designated the Dongsha Atoll National Park, which prohibits all fishing and angling activities. However, as fish stocks have depleted in China, Chinese fishermen have increasingly crossed boundaries to fish illegally, especially during China's fishing moratorium period. The Taiwan Coast Guard has detained vessels and dismantled unauthorized fishing structures built by Chinese fishermen in the waters.

Chinese coast guard vessels, citing "fisheries protection," repeatedly harass the Dongsha Islands. China likely targets Dongsha as a gray-zone harassment focus because of the islands' location along critical international sea lanes controlling access to the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. This control could severely affect PLA wartime naval operations. Consequently, China continues harassment under the pretext of fisheries protection to collect

intelligence on island deployments and countermeasures.

2.3 Chinese Coast Guard Harassment of Kinmen Coordinated with PLA Joint Combat Readiness Patrols

From January to the end of June 2025, the PLA conducted 24 joint combat readiness patrols in the airspace and waters around Taiwan. Based on this pace, the total number of patrols in 2025 is likely to exceed the 40 recorded in 2024. Notably, on March 17, the PLA conducted two such patrols on the same day for the first time.

In June, Chinese coast guard vessels conducted harassment operations around Kinmen and the Dongsha Islands. The timing of these coast guard actions coincided with four PLA joint combat readiness patrols near Taiwan on June 6, 10, 20, and 26. This coordination suggests that the Chinese coast guard likely supported PLA harassment efforts.

In other words, China's gray-zone harassment serves multiple purposes: asserting sovereignty, conducting realistic military exercises, and testing Taiwan's responses to simultaneous crises on the main island and offshore islands.

2.4 Irregular PLA Naval Patrols Conduct Harassment Operations in Waters Around Penghu

On April 27, 2025, fishermen from Penghu observed three PLA naval vessels approximately 35 nautical miles southwest by west of Qimei Island, Penghu. On June 27, Penghu fishermen again reported the presence of the PLA Northern Theater Command Navy's Type 054A missile frigate Yancheng (hull number 546) near coordinates 119°11'E, 24°16'N.

Based on these observations, PLA naval vessels—including warships, submarines, dredgers, research vessels, unmarked fishing boats, and maritime militia—have continuously operated in these waters. Their activities appear to constitute maritime surveys intended to disrupt Penghu fishermen's operations, incite local resentment, and assert that the Taiwan Strait is not international waters but part of China's territory.

3. Implication

Although China's gray-zone harassment against Taiwan has become routine, any discourse, diplomatic interaction, arms sales, or Taiwanese military training and exercises related to the Republic of China can trigger unannounced gray-zone harassment and military intimidation from China. Gray-zone harassment has become a key tool in China's current approach toward Taiwan, continuously deploying various tactics—some expected, others unpredictable.

In other words, China's gray-zone harassment not only serves as a means of deterrence but also functions as realistic combat training and exercises for the PLA, showcasing its capabilities and intentions externally. China views gray-zone harassment as an effective tool for coercion against Taiwan that combines law enforcement with practical military training. Consequently, China will continue to conduct such operations, increasing their frequency and innovating new tactics. However, Beijing will strive to avoid unintended escalation or accidental conflict.

IV. Potential Impacts of the U.S. Bombing of Iran on the Taiwan Strait Security Environment

On June 21, the U.S. military launched Operation Midnight Hammer, bombing Iranian nuclear facilities and directly engaging in Israel's conflict with Iran. The possible impacts of this operation on the security situation around the Taiwan Strait are as follows:

1. Positive Impacts

The U.S. military's Operation Midnight Hammer successfully destroyed most of Iran's underground nuclear facilities, demonstrating America's firm stance against Iran's nuclear ambitions and its formidable military capabilities. This action produced two key positive impacts internationally:

Firstly, it directly eliminates the potential nuclear threat from Iran in the coming months. According to intelligence held by Israel, Iran could have produced weapons-grade uranium enriched to 90% concentration within weeks, sufficient for building a nuclear bomb. The U.S. surprise strike destroyed Iran's underground uranium enrichment facilities, halting its nuclear weapons development progress.

Secondly, it demonstrates the United States' formidable military capability to conduct precision strikes against any target worldwide. The Israeli military has acknowledged that it lacks the capability to destroy Iran's underground nuclear facilities. The successful U.S. strike showcases military power unmatched by any other nation. This inevitably serves as a strong deterrent to potential adversaries such as China, Russia, and North Korea, discouraging them from provoking military conflicts with the United States.

2. Negative Impacts

However, the U.S. military action also produced several negative effects on the international community. Although the U.S. and Iran have no formal diplomatic relations and have not engaged in direct

armed conflict, the U.S. conducted an undeclared strike by sending aircraft deep into Iranian airspace to bomb three nuclear facility sites. This military operation carries three significant implications for international politics and state behavior:

Firstly, the authority of international law and norms will further weaken, accelerating the erosion of the international security order centered on the United Nations. With the U.S. itself no longer adhering to international norms, existing UN conflict resolution mechanisms will lose credibility among states. The three Iranian nuclear facilities involved in uranium enrichment have been subject to regular monitoring by UN agencies. Despite a recent UN report finding no evidence that Iran had completed nuclear weapons development, the U.S. bombing of these facilities effectively undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN monitoring regime.

Secondly, the principle of national sovereignty and territorial integrity faces renewed challenges as national interests take precedence. Since President George W. Bush's administration, the United States has maintained a firm stance against Iran possessing nuclear weapons, viewing such a development as a fundamental shift in the Middle East power balance that threatens global energy supplies, including those of the U.S. However, successive U.S. presidents have pursued diplomatic channels to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear program, reflecting respect for Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This time, amid ongoing negotiations over Iran's nuclear issue, the U.S. conducted an undeclared surprise airstrike on Iranian nuclear facilities. This action signals that the Trump administration prioritizes U.S. national interests over the

territorial sovereignty of other states. When U.S. interests conflict with another country's sovereignty, the United States will prioritize its national interests.

Thirdly, the importance of diplomatic negotiations diminishes as states increasingly rely on military power to achieve national objectives. The U.S. military's recent operation penetrated deep into Iranian territory to bomb three underground nuclear facilities, successfully destroying one target buried nearly 100 meters underground, before safely returning. The Israeli military has acknowledged its inability to destroy such deeply buried facilities. This operation demonstrated that only the United States currently possesses the conventional military capability to strike such targets.

Following the mission's success, President Trump publicly demanded that Iran cease hostilities and pursue peace, warning of greater tragedies otherwise. This reflects the Trump administration's approach to international conflicts—favoring reliance on U.S. military power over diplomatic engagement. Such a stance may encourage other states involved in interstate disputes to adopt a “fight first, negotiate later” strategy, using military force to coerce peace.

3. Impacts on Taiwan Strait Security

Amid the U.S. deployment of three carrier strike groups to the Middle East in response to Iran, the security situation around the Taiwan Strait is affected as follows:

Firstly, the U.S. has reduced its force deployment in the Asia-Pacific region. After Israel launched Operation Rising Lion against Iran on June 12, 2025, the U.S. canceled the planned visit of the Nimitz carrier strike group to Vietnam on June 16 and urgently redirected it to the Middle East. Subsequently, the U.S. deployed the Gerald R. Ford carrier from the mainland, consolidating three carrier strike groups—the Carl Vinson, Nimitz, and Gerald R. Ford—in the Middle East. Following the U.S. strike on Iran on June 21, these three carriers are expected to remain in the region for the short term, with partial troop withdrawals only after the situation stabilizes. As a result, U.S.

naval forces in the Western Pacific have decreased from two carrier strike groups (CSGs) plus one amphibious ready group (ARG) to one CSG plus one ARG, representing the lowest level of maritime force deployment by the U.S. in the region in recent years.

Secondly, the PLA took the opportunity to expand its military presence. In contrast to the U.S., the PLA deployed a large number of naval and air assets to conduct various exercises near the First and Second Island Chains during this period. Both the Liaoning and Shandong carrier groups operated in this area throughout June, with the Liaoning even crossing the Second Island Chain into waters east of it.

Following Israel's strike on Iran on June 12, the Liaoning circled in the waters between Guam and the Philippines, while the Shandong strike group patrolled the same area, demonstrating coordinated operations aimed at containing the Philippine Sea. However, after the U.S. abruptly redeployed the Nimitz carrier strike group from the South China Sea to the Middle East on June 16, the Liaoning and Shandong groups ceased their coordinated actions and slowly moved toward the Miyako and Bashi Straits, respectively.

Notably, when the U.S. launched its strike on Iran on June 21, both carriers were clearly on return missions—the Liaoning had entered the East China Sea, and the Shandong was approaching the Bashi Channel. This suggests that China neither possessed prior intelligence of the U.S. surprise attack nor anticipated direct military action against Iran. Consequently, the PLA did not order its two carrier groups to remain in the Western Pacific to respond to potential regional developments.

Thirdly, countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia are seeking to improve their relations with China. The U.S. strike on Iran

reflects President Trump's decision-making style characterized by unilateralism that relies on hard power to pursue national interests, often disregarding established international laws and diplomatic mechanisms. This approach risks eroding global trust in the United States and encourages other countries to reduce their dependence on the U.S. in foreign policy.

Within the Asia-Pacific region, countries facing pressure from China's military expansion are adjusting accordingly. Since taking office, South Korean President Lee Jae-myung has expressed willingness to improve relations with Xi Jinping through direct communication. Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba wrote to Xi Jinping following the initiation of U.S. trade tariffs in early April, seeking to maintain stable trade relations unaffected by the U.S. tariff war. Recently, Japan canceled its longstanding Defense and Foreign Affairs "2+2" talks with the U.S., citing dissatisfaction with U.S. demands to raise defense spending to 3.5% of GDP. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has continued efforts to improve ties with China since taking office.

In light of the Trump administration's unilateral foreign policy stance, countries like Japan, South Korea, and Australia are likely to seek improved relations with China to establish a more balanced position between the U.S. and China.

4. Implications of U.S. and Israeli Strikes on Iran for Taiwan

From Israel's Operation Rising Lion to the U.S. Operation Midnight Hammer, both countries employed advanced aerial firepower to conduct long-range precision strikes against Iran. These operations successfully degraded Iran's air defense capabilities, decapitated Iranian military leadership, and destroyed underground

nuclear facilities. Israel and the United States' successive use of air power effectively stalled Iran's nuclear development. This sequence of events carries the following implications:

Firstly, air defense capability is the primary condition for ensuring combat resilience in modern warfare. At the outset of the conflict between Israel and Iran, both sides engaged heavily with missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Israel's Iron Dome air defense system successfully intercepted the majority of incoming missiles, protecting Israel's political and military command centers, critical strategic military assets, and civilian infrastructure from destruction. This ensured that Israel's combat effectiveness remained intact.

In contrast, Iran's insufficient air defense capabilities left it unable to counter Israeli air and missile attacks. As a result, during Israel's initial air strikes, key Iranian air defense radar sites, military facilities, military leadership, and nuclear scientists were destroyed or killed. This degradation facilitated subsequent Israeli and U.S. air operations.

Secondly, Israel has long maintained a high defense budget to support a modern and robust military capability. As the United States' only reliable ally in the Middle East, Israel has benefited from U.S. assistance in building its modern military forces. In addition to its universal conscription system, Israel consistently allocates over 5% of its GDP to defense annually. In response to recent conflicts, this figure has increased to more than 8.5% in the past two years.

Thirdly, Taiwan should emulate Israel by increasing its defense budget and developing a Taiwan-specific Iron Dome air defense system. Taiwan should gradually raise its defense spending to 5% of GDP and allocate part of the budget to seek U.S. assistance in developing a local version of the Iron Dome. This system would

ensure that missiles launched by the PLA during wartime cannot destroy Taiwan's critical political, military, economic, and social targets, thereby maintaining the overall resilience of Taiwan's defense.

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