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China & Taiwan Update, June 18, 2026

Toplines

The PRC welcomed the US-Iran preliminary peace agreement while highlighting its own diplomatic efforts to end the war. The PRC may have provided arms to Iran while openly rejecting United Nations (UN) sanctions, however, despite portraying itself as a defender of peace and international institutions.

PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson Lin Jian said on June 15 that the PRC welcomed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the United States and Iran to cease military operations and reopen the Strait of Hormuz.[1] Lin stated that the PRC has worked tirelessly to stop the fighting, noting CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's four-point proposal for peace in the Middle East, and said that the PRC will work to maintain peace in the region.[2] Xi's four-point proposal, which he first presented in April, was not a peace plan but a broad statement supporting the principles of peaceful coexistence, national sovereignty, the international rule of law, and coordination in security and development.[3] It is unclear whether the PRC played a role in negotiating the US-Iran MoU.

PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke by phone on June 16 with Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and highlighted the PRC's support for Pakistan's mediation during the war, as well as Beijing's own engagement with the United States and Iran.[4] Wang said that the international community should support the negotiations, which will likely be more difficult in the second phase. Wang reiterated Beijing's stance that the UN Security Council (UNSC) should play a greater role in the peace process and that Middle Eastern countries should work together to explore a new regional security architecture.[5] Wang repeated Beijing's support for peace talks and a new regional security architecture in a call with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on June 17.[6] The PRC likely prefers a Middle Eastern security architecture that reduces US influence in the region.

PRC Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Sun Lei denied the legitimacy of active UN sanctions on Iran on June 9, days before the peace agreement.[7] Sun stated that the UNSC ceased its review of Iran's nuclear program when a ten-year UNSC sanctions regime on Iran expired on October 18, 2025.[8] The United Kingdom, France, and Germany (the 'E3') triggered a 'snapback' mechanism to restore previously lifted sanctions on Iran, citing Iran's non-compliance with requirements to curtail its nuclear program.[9] Sun denied that the snapback sanctions are in effect, however, arguing that the UNSC never agreed that the E3 were qualified to trigger the snapback mechanism.

The PRC may be using its non-recognition of UNSC sanctions on Iran, including an arms embargo, to justify arms sales to Iran even as it argues for greater UNSC involvement in resolving the conflict. The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned nine PRC individuals and entities on June 10 for supporting Iran's weapons procurement, building on similar sanctions from May 8.[10] OFAC accused the targets of the sanctions of facilitating payments for weapons for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Center for Innovation and Technology Cooperation (CITC).[11] Lin said the PRC opposes OFAC's 'illegal unilateral sanctions'. [12] Iran was reportedly in discussions with the PRC in early 2026 to acquire man-portable air defense system (MANPADS) and may have used a PRC-made MANPADS to shoot down a US F-16 fighter jet on April 3, though it is unclear when Iran acquired the system used to shoot down the jet.[13] The PRC also provided Iran with satellite imagery that aided its targeting, chemicals to manufacture missile fuel, and possibly an advanced radar system during the war, in addition to purchasing between 80 and 90 percent of Iran's oil in recent years.[14]

The PRC is blaming the Philippines for deteriorating PRC-Philippine relations and imposing costs on Philippine officials for asserting Philippine sovereignty over disputed features in the South China Sea. The PRC sanctioned Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro on June 11 for repeatedly making 'erroneous' remarks about the PRC, undermining PRC sovereignty, and damaging bilateral relations between the Philippines and the PRC.[15] The sanctions ban Teodoro and his family from entering or doing business in the PRC. Teodoro has consistently criticized PRC aggression in the South China Sea and denied Beijing's 'nine-dash line' claim over most of the sea's islands and seabed resources.[16] Teodoro most recently criticized a PRC offer of aid to the Philippines as 'disingenuous' and stated in an interview with

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on May 30 that the PRC was a -severe threat territory-wise- to the Philippines.[17] The PRC's sanctioning of Teodoro marks the first time the PRC has sanctioned a sitting ministry official of a nation it recognizes.[18] The PRC's unprecedented sanctions suggest that it is increasingly concerned with Philippine resistance to its efforts to exert sovereignty in the South China Sea and is seeking to punish select government officials for these actions.

The PRC appears to be framing the deterioration of PRC-Philippine relations as the fault of a small group of anti-PRC government officials who do not represent Philippine interests. A PRC MFA spokesperson said on June 2, in response to Teodoro's

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interview, that the Philippines should not let -a few clowns- undermine PRC-Philippine relations.[19] A PRC MFA spokesperson further claimed on June 12 that Teodoro represented -a small group of anti-China elements- whose actions would harm the interests of the Philippine people.[20] PRC state-owned media sites used similar language to criticize Teodoro.[21] The rhetoric resembles PRC narratives about Taiwan's current -separatist- government, such as the PRC's designation of a handful of -die-hard separatists- that it claims pursue policies contrary to the interests of the Taiwanese people.[22] The PRC likely seeks to impose costs on the Philippines for resisting PRC aggression in the South China Sea without alienating more PRC-sympathetic Filipinos.

The PRC's sanctioning of Teodoro also aims to deflect from the PRC's contributions to deteriorating relations with the Philippines. The PRC placed a temporary manned structure within the disputed Scarborough Shoal for the first time in late May, which it removed on June 16.[23] The PLA Navy (PLAN) has deployed a carrier strike group to waters east of the Philippines since May 19 and deployed significant naval assets in response to the Philippine-led Balikatan exercises in April and May.[24] These activities are part of a broader PRC effort to exert de facto control over Scarborough Shoal since 2012 by maintaining a consistent maritime presence around the shoal.[25] The PRC has consistently sought to solidify its position in the South China Sea by asserting de facto control over key areas, including contesting the Philippine presence on Second Thomas Shoal until July 2024 and increasing its military infrastructure on the features it already maintains a presence on.[26]

Key Takeaways

PRC Responses to the US-Iran Peace Agreement:

The PRC welcomed the US-Iran preliminary peace agreement and called on the UN to do more to support the peace process. The PRC presents itself as a defender of international peace, but may have provided military equipment to Iran in violation of UN sanctions.

PRC-Philippine Tensions:

The PRC sanctioned Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro on June 11 for -damaging PRC-Philippine relations-. The PRC is working to present a small group of anti-PRC Philippine officials as the cause for recent tensions, downplaying PRC aggression in the South China Sea, and attempting to ensure PRC-friendly Filipinos do not feel alienated.

Cross-Strait Relations

Taiwan

Taiwan's opposition parties have significantly delayed the 2026 General Budget, which could have deleterious effects on Taiwan's defense readiness. Passing Taiwan's general budget without significant cuts to defense is critical for demonstrating Taiwan's willingness to provide for its own defense. Taiwan's Executive Yuan (EY) submitted its budget proposal for fiscal year 2026 in August 2025, which is separate from the special defense budget that passed in May.[27] Taiwan's opposition parties, which collectively hold a majority in the Legislative Yuan (LY), have delayed reviewing the budget for over nine months and are threatening to cut significant portions, including funds for Taiwan's international outreach.[28] The general budget allocates NT \$ 561.4 billion (approximately \$17.8 billion) to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense that includes funding for personnel, logistics, and maintenance support for key weapons systems such as the Harpoon anti-ship missile.[29] The defense funding in the 2026 general budget is an approximately 20 percent increase from the 2025 allocation, and is a key part of Taiwanese President William Lai Ching-te's efforts to increase Taiwan's annual defense spending to 3.3 percent of GDP.[30] Taiwan currently spends approximately 2.4 percent of its GDP on defense.[31] Taiwan's opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) have blocked the Lai administration's efforts to increase funding for critical defense measures, particularly in developing a domestic drone industry, when it passed a special defense budget in May.[32] President Lai vowed

on June 16 to search for other methods to develop Taiwan's unmanned systems capabilities, including allocating additional funding in the general budget to do so.[33] The KMT and TPP have so far shut down efforts to increase funding for Taiwan's domestic drone industry. The Lai administration will likely face challenges pushing for increased funding in a general budget that is already stalled in the legislature.

Taiwan's failure to pass the general budget promptly and without significant cuts to defense funding could negatively impact international perceptions of Taiwan's defense readiness. US President Donald Trump has called on US allies to increase defense spending to as much as 5 percent of GDP in the next decade.[34] US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth stated during the Shangri-la defense dialogue in May that the US expects its allies to spend 3.5 percent of GDP on defense and that the US would prioritize cooperation with such model allies.[35] President Lai's efforts to increase Taiwan's defense spending is critical both to Taiwan's ability to secure essential military hardware and the maintenance of Taiwan's most important defense partnerships.

A PRC government research ship conducted a survey in disputed waters east of Taiwan under escort by the China Coast Guard (CCG). The PRC has aggressively asserted its maritime claims in the area since June 1 and may be trying to normalize its presence there.

The PRC Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) East China Sea Bureau deployed the research vessel Xiang Yang Hong 22

to conduct a marine environmental survey east of Taiwan from June 16 to 18, which it claimed was to determine baseline ecosystem health for conservation efforts.[36] Ship-tracking data from Starboard Maritime Intelligence shows that two CCG ships escorted

Xiang Yang Hong 22

during its survey operation.

The marine survey is the PRC's latest line of effort to enforce its maritime claims east of Taiwan since Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., said on May 28 that they would discuss delineating boundaries between their countries' Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), which currently overlap east of Taiwan.[37] The PRC also has EEZ claims in the area through its claim of sovereignty over Taiwan, and strongly objected to the delimitation talks.[38] The PRC deployed at least two CCG ships to patrol the area continuously since June 1 and sent four civilian law enforcement ships to conduct a special maritime law enforcement operation under CCG escort from June 6 to 10.[39] The data

Xiang Yang Hong 22

collected on undersea conditions, such as marine chemistry and hydrometeorology, have important applications for submarine navigation and undersea detection. The waters east of Taiwan are near the Bashi Channel, the Miyako Strait, and other key maritime chokepoints that the PRC will likely seek to control during a blockade or invasion of Taiwan. The MNR's announcement that the survey provides a basis for future conservation efforts may suggest that the PRC will carry out future operations in the area. The PRC has often used environmental conservation as a pretext for asserting its territorial claims, including using survey vessels to block energy exploration by other countries in the South China Sea, establishing a nature reserve around the Philippine-claimed Scarborough Shoal, and accusing the Philippines of causing environmental damage at Philippine-occupied features that the PRC claims.[40]

Taiwan is continuing to work to combat PRC espionage and intelligence operations, particularly those targeting the Taiwanese military. Taiwan's Control Yuan impeached and sentenced a former Air Force Academy colonel to 11 years in prison for his connections to a Chinese spy network.

The Control Yuan impeached former Air Force Academy Colonel Chang Ming-che after the Supreme Court finalized an 11-year prison sentence against him for joining an organization developed by a Chinese spy network.[41] The Control Yuan stated that Chang's actions undermined military discipline, dishonored official conduct, and damaged the image of the national armed forces, and passed an additional impeachment case and referred it to the disciplinary court.[42] The Control Yuan said Chang accepted NT\$1.341 million (about \$42,000) in payments from a PRC spy surnamed Chung from September 2019 to November 2024 and handing over sensitive information, including briefings on Taiwanese Air Force exercises, information on the scope of Taiwan-US cooperative missions, information on military personnel, and information on Taiwanese political parties and public sentiment.[43]

This case is part of an extensive PRC espionage campaign targeting the Taiwanese military and the

ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).[44] Taiwan's National Security Bureau launched a secure online portal on June 14 for PRC nationals to share information about the political, military, economic, and social conditions inside the PRC.[45] PRC espionage operations targeting the Taiwanese military could undermine Taiwanese security and reduce public trust in the ability of the Taiwanese military to defend against PRC aggression.

The PRC promoted cross-strait integration measures and shared 'Chinese identity' at its annual Straits Forum.

The PRC held the main conference of its 18th Straits Forum on June 13 in Xiamen, PRC with an unknown number of participants from both sides of the Taiwan Strait.[46] Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Chairman Wang Huning and Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Director Song Tao, the PRC's top two officials for Taiwan policy, spoke at the conference and repeated standard PRC rhetoric in support of cross-strait 'unification'. [47] KMT Vice Chairman Chang Jung-kung met with Wang and gave a speech promoting a shared cross-strait ethnic and cultural identity, while KMT legislator Chen Yu-jean called for increased tourism and trade links between the PRC and her home county of Kinmen.[48] The forum featured a ceremony where PRC enterprises signed contracts to purchase Taiwanese agricultural and fish products. PRC state media presented the signing ceremony as an instantiation of the ten cross-strait cooperation measures that the TAO announced on April 12 following KMT Chairwoman Cheng Li-wun's meeting with CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping.[49]

The PRC uses cross-strait exchanges such as the Straits Forum to promote shared cross-strait identity, economic linkages, and pro-unification messaging. PRC state media claimed that guests from both sides of the strait called for peaceful development and closer exchanges while rejecting Taiwanese 'separatism'. [50] Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) banned Taiwanese central or local government personnel from attending the forum this year, calling the event a platform for the CCP to 'infiltrat[e] Taiwanese society under the pretext of cross-strait exchange'. [51] Taitung County Magistrate Yao Ching-ling nonetheless addressed the forum through a pre-recorded video to promote agricultural products from her county, prompting a Taiwanese government investigation.[52]

China
The PRC arrested a US national on espionage charges.

PRC MFA spokesperson Lin Jian stated on June 12 that PRC authorities detained U Min Zin, a US scholar who writes about Myanmar and PRC foreign policy.[53] U Min Zin is currently a Ph.D. candidate at U.C. Berkeley as well as a founder and executive director of the Myanmar Institute for Strategic and Policy (ISP-Myanmar).[54] PRC authorities detained U Min Zin on June 3 'on suspicion of conducting espionage and endangering China's national security' and placed him under 'criminal coercive measures' as he traveled to Kunming for a meeting.[55] U Min Zin had reportedly travelled to China multiple times before and was due to speak at a conference in Kathmandu, Nepal, later in June.[56] PRC arrests of US citizens on national security grounds are rare, with two of the most recent examples being the 2021 arrest of John Shing-Wan Leung and the 2016 arrest of Kai Li.[57] U Min Zin's arrest is unlikely to be a form of retaliation against the United States, as the summit between US President Donald Trump and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping in May has largely set a positive tone for US-PRC relations in recent weeks.[58] US officials have not publicly responded to U Min Zin's arrest at time of writing.

Xi and PRC Premier Li Qiang met with Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing on June 16, reinforcing PRC-Myanmar close-knit
pauk-phaw

, meaning fraternal but asymmetric, ties and furthering 'comprehensive strategic cooperation'. [59] The PRC takes a significant interest in Myanmar due to its rare earth minerals and precious gemstone mines, natural gas pipelines, and its port accessing the Indian Ocean.[60] The PRC has further provided significant political and military support to the Myanmar junta in Myanmar's ongoing civil war.[61] There is currently no information indicating whether Min Zin's arrest is related to PRC-Myanmar relations, however.

The United States is working to close loopholes that may allow PRC companies to circumvent export controls to procure advanced chips.

PRC firms have been moving AI model training facilities overseas to circumvent US export controls that were enforced on PRC-based companies.[62] The firms have leased non-PRC-affiliated data centers abroad, particularly in Southeast Asia, to access restricted hardware. [63] The US

Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) closed this loophole on May 31 by issuing a clarification that export license requirements to sell advanced computing items to entities headquartered in a list of countries including the PRCs also apply to subsidiaries located in a third country.[64]

US Senators Jim Banks and Andy Kim sent a letter to BIS chief Jeffrey Kessler on June 8 urging the BIS to close a second loophole in US regulations that allows PRC entities to use shell companies to order custom chips from companies such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC).[65] Banks sent a letter to Kessler on May 6, raising concerns that BIS lacks timely access to valuable commercial data that would allow it to trace adversaries' chips and detect potential violations earlier.[66] The PRC has been acquiring advanced semiconductor chips to train its artificial intelligence (AI) despite US export controls. PRC entities have been exploiting the export control loopholes and acquiring chips through smuggling. The US Department of Justice in March 2026 charged three employees of US company Super Micro, one of the largest manufacturers of advanced servers, for smuggling servers integrated with Nvidia chips worth billions of USD to the PRC in violation of export control regulations.[67] Taiwan's Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs Ho Chin-tsang stated that Taiwan will work with the United States to tighten controls on advanced chips and semiconductor equipment, as TSMC is estimated to produce roughly 90 percent of the world's most advanced chips.[68] The United States Department of Defense (DoD) expanded its list of PRC entities the DoD believes to be affiliated with the PRC military, the 1260H list, to include 65 new entities, including tech companies such as Alibaba and Tencent.

[69]

Companies on the list are not explicitly sanctioned, but the DoD will be prohibited from contracting with them effective June 30, 2026.[70] DoD contractors will also be prohibited from sourcing from listed companies effective June 30, 2027.[71] These restrictions follow the Xi-Trump meeting in May 2026, highlighting US security concerns over the risk PRC technology firms pose.[72] The US DoD added 65 new entities to the list of Chinese military companies and removed 10 entities on June 8, targeting sectors including big tech firms, drone and robotics, biotech, and battery manufacturing.[73] The DoD stated that this update is important to highlighting and countering the PRC military-civil fusion strategy.[74] Restrictions on the DoD and DoD contractors from doing business with these PRC entities will prevent them from receiving DoD investment for military and dual-use technologies and prevent supply-chain reliance on the PRC. There are now 188 entities on the list.[75] The PRC Ministry of Commerce expressed firm opposition to the DoD announcement, stating that it runs counter to the consensus reached by Xi and Trump in May 2026 and undermines bilateral interests.[76]

Reuters

reported on June 16 that the Trump administration decided to hold off adding over 100 PRC firms to the BIS Entity List, a trade blacklist for individuals, businesses, and organizations suspected of acting against US national security and foreign policy interests, to avoid escalating tensions with the PRC.[77]

PRC intelligence agencies are attempting to acquire sensitive information on advanced US technology and US military strategy in the Indo-Pacific through cyber espionage. The PRC aims to support the PLA's modernization and discover vulnerabilities in US military equipment and strategy that it can exploit.

Authorities from the US Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) seized 13 web domains linked to PRC cyber espionage operations on LinkedIn and other online job boards on June 10.[78] PRC intelligence agencies have used fake consulting job listings to aggressively target government and military personnel in the United States, NATO member countries, and US partner nations for espionage recruitment in recent years.[79] Max Lesser, a researcher at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, identified a list of over 100 other web domains likely linked to the PRC's online espionage recruitment in 2025.[80]

Google's Threat Intelligence Group reported on June 15 that a PRC hacking group targeted US and Canadian military, medical, and academic research institutions from September 2023 to November 2025.[81] The PRC hackers likely worked on behalf of PRC intelligence and used keyword-matching techniques to search compromised emails and steal sensitive information on US geostrategic policy, US Indo-Pacific Command and military strategy in the Indo-Pacific, drone and AI technology, and other specific topics of interest to the PRC.[82]

PRC cyber espionage operations target sensitive military and technological information in fields such

as drones, AI, and advanced propulsion systems to support the PLA's high-tech modernization and to identify vulnerabilities in US, NATO, and partner military forces that the PRC could exploit in a potential conflict.[83] PRC cyber espionage also targets policymakers, their staff, and others with access to sensitive policy information to gain insider knowledge on US and NATO strategy and ongoing economic negotiations.[84] PRC online espionage recruitment and state-linked hacking are likely to remain a serious threat to the United States' military, technological, and diplomatic dominance unless effectively disrupted and prevented.

The PLA may be using existing conflicts to aid its understanding of the role of AI in the future of warfare. The PLA likely remains tied to long-standing assumptions of how AI will impact the future battlefield that are not completely congruent with battlefield realities, however.

Official PLA newspaper

PLA Daily

and PRC state media outlet CCTV recently published several observations on warfare in the age of AI. A May 26

PLA Daily

article on the subject emphasized the role of AI in enhancing battlefield transparency, shortening kill chains, and accelerating the wartime innovation cycle.[85] A June 11 CCTV article emphasized the future role of AI in synthesizing battlefield information into a common operating picture to facilitate PLA joint warfighting capabilities.[86] Another CCTV article from June 10 argued that medium-altitude long-range drones, such as the United States' MQ-9 reaper, will remain relevant on the battlefield through upgrades to autonomy and AI-driven data integration that will transform such systems into key information nodes in a modern military's operational awareness network.[87] These articles share an assumption that the quality of a military's algorithm and data management will become the center of gravity of future military operations.[88]

PRC state media commentary on military AI may reflect efforts within the PLA to learn from developments in modern warfare in Ukraine and the Middle East. Both Russia and Ukraine have sought to integrate AI into unmanned systems warfare to increase drone resilience to electronic countermeasures, which may have aided Ukraine's intermediate-range strike campaign in recent months.[89] AI has also played a role in US target acquisition and selection during Operation Epic Fury in Iran.[90] The PLA's discussion of AI's role in enhancing the efficacy of its kill chains could stem from its observation of the emerging role of AI on the modern battlefield.

The PLA has long placed significant emphasis on the role of emerging technologies such as AI in reshaping key battlefield dynamics through a process that it calls 'intelligentization'. [91] ISW-CDOT has assessed that the PLA's understanding of modern conflicts is likely refracted through its preexisting notions of the future of warfare, including the central role that AI may have in this future.[92] Some PLA discussions asserting that algorithms and data processing constitute the center of gravity of an operational system have not yet been corroborated by developments on the modern battlefield, although they may prove correct with time.[93] The PLA, as a result, may view present conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East as an imperfect phase in the intelligentization of war that will gradually increase AI's battlefield role until it contributes to key functions, including logistics, data collection and synthesis, and predictive analysis.[94]

Southeast Asia

Philippines

See Toplines.

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