

## CHAPTER 3

# U.S.-CHINA SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

## SECTION 1: YEAR IN REVIEW: SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

### Abstract

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) responded to a turbulent year by hardening its foreign and domestic policy approaches. In foreign policy, China's leaders chose to preserve close ties with Russia even after the country's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, increased the brazenness of China's confrontations in the South China Sea and around Taiwan, and made more aggressive pushes for overseas basing options. At home, the CCP continued to lock down cities in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and suppress all potential political dissent in an effort to ensure stability for the "victorious convening" of the 20th Party Congress and presumed extension of General Secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping's rule. Many governments including members of the EU, NATO, and the Quad publicly condemned China's actions as threatening the norms-based international order and universal values; however, in other countries, especially in the developing world, China faced limited pushback. As the People's Liberation Army (PLA) continued to upgrade the quality of its weapons and military equipment, Beijing unilaterally withdrew from all military-to-military interactions with the United States.

### Key Findings

- The CCP wanted a stable year for the convening of the 20th Party Congress and presumptive extension of General Secretary Xi's rule. They did not get it. Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and internal discontent from outbreaks of COVID-19 strained China's foreign and domestic policy. Instead of rethinking his approaches, Xi has doubled down on his policy agenda.
- Russia and China in 2022 announced a "no limits" partnership, the culmination of a years-long effort to strengthen ties. This was immediately followed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Beijing provided diplomatic and economic support to Russia, all while promoting itself as "objective and impartial." The CCP, diplomats, and media amplified Russian talking points and attempted to shift blame to the United States and NATO for Russia's war of choice.

- NATO, along with South Korea, Japan, and New Zealand, declared China to pose a “systemic challenge” to a norms-based international order that upholds universal values. China’s diplomats dismissed these concerns and continued to promote the “Global Security Initiative,” a still vague security framework that endorses the interpretation of “indivisible security” that Russian diplomats cite in their statements concerning Ukraine.
- The Chinese government took steps toward securing additional overseas access and basing opportunities for its armed forces. In April, China concluded an agreement with the Solomon Islands granting access and transit rights for its military and paramilitary forces in the country. This agreement accompanied a broader push for increased influence in the Pacific Islands region in 2022. In June, a Chinese official confirmed PLA access to a Cambodian naval base. The PLA also appears to be considering sites for a base on the western coast of Africa.
- China’s aggressive activities in the South China Sea led to dangerous encounters between Chinese and other countries’ ships and aircraft in the region. In November 2021, China began blocking access to the Automatic Identification System (AIS) signals of its ships in the region to obscure their location, breaking an international standard practice for maritime safety. A Chinese Coast Guard ship maneuvered within an unsafe distance of a Philippine patrol vessel in March, and in May the PLA conducted at least two dangerous maneuvers against Australian reconnaissance aircraft operating in international airspace.

## Introduction

In 2022, the CCP faced unexpected external and internal turbulence as it sought a stable environment for a triumphant 20th Party Congress and the presumed extension of General Secretary Xi’s rule. Chinese leaders were determined to make the Beijing Winter Olympics in February an international success despite their struggles to contain COVID-19 and to deflect international condemnation of their repression in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. Xi set the CCP’s course for the year by declaring along with Russian President Vladimir Putin that the two countries would together “ensure peace, stability, and sustainable development across the world,” and domestically he continued to insist on China’s “Zero-COVID” pandemic control strategy.<sup>1</sup> Chinese diplomats and media dismissed international concerns about Russia’s buildup of troops along the Ukraine border as disinformation and attempts to “create panic.”<sup>2</sup> But just days after the Olympics closing ceremony, which *People’s Daily* described as embodying Xi’s “community of common human destiny,” jarring images emerged of China’s “no limits” Russian partners initiating a brutal invasion of Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> Within weeks, China’s most significant outbreaks of the pandemic led to its longest and largest Zero-COVID lockdowns since early 2020 for millions of residents in major economic centers, including Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Beijing.<sup>4</sup>

In response to these challenges, Xi has recommitted to his foreign and domestic agendas. China’s diplomatic missions in Europe sought to minimize reputational damage from association with President

Putin's unprovoked assault without explicitly condemning Russia and have consequentially been considered "deaf" to the region's security concerns.<sup>5</sup> China now faces uncomfortable comparisons between Russia's actions and its own designs for Taiwan. Observers in Asia and across the world have voiced concerns that, as Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida warned, "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow."<sup>6</sup>

At home, the CCP tightened its grip on all political discourse in advance of the 20th Party Congress in October\* through strict ideological guidance to all CCP officials, endless promotion of Xi's doctrines, and an ongoing anticorruption campaign, among other measures.<sup>7</sup> In response to protests against lockdowns and resulting food shortages, Xi reiterated that Zero-COVID is his policy and the correct one for all Party members to uphold.<sup>8</sup> Although 2022 was not the stable year Xi may have preferred heading into the 20th Party Congress, he made it clear to domestic and international audiences that the CCP under his leadership is not changing course.

This section examines key developments in China's domestic affairs, foreign relations, and military posture across the year from October 2021 through October 2022. It begins by examining the Party's increasing domestic oppression as it tightens its grip across society in preparation for the 20th Party Congress. Then, it assesses CCP leaders' continued push for global influence amid concerns over China's support for Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. Finally, the section assesses recent developments in the PLA as it continues to develop into a global force. The section draws on the Commission's 2022 hearing cycle, consultations with experts, and open source research and analysis.

## **CCP Efforts to Lock Down Domestic Stability**

In advance of the 20th Party Congress, General Secretary Xi's primary objective for 2022 was to maintain an image of stability. To this end, Xi mobilized the Party from central to local authorities to ensure that all political messages were in line and any dissent neutralized. As China faced a new phase of the COVID-19 pandemic with new and more contagious variants, the CCP also redoubled its zero-tolerance approach. Instead of revisiting its unsuccessful vaccine efforts, the Party used its growing testing and surveillance apparatus for quicker, more dynamic lockdowns of cities for up to months at a time.

### **The CCP Amplifies Xi and Mutes Criticism ahead of the Party Congress**

Throughout 2022, the CCP mobilized central and local efforts to promote Xi and "welcome the victorious convening" of the 20th Party Congress.<sup>9</sup> Beginning with the February Politburo meeting, CCP leaders emphasized that this year the Party "must persist in putting stability first" and that efforts to "maintain society's overall stability" were crucial preparations for the Party Congress.<sup>10</sup> In April, the CCP's Central Propaganda Department issued national guidelines

\*As of this report's writing, the CCP's 20th Party Congress is scheduled to begin on October 16, 2022. *Xinhua*, "Meeting of CPC Central Committee Political Bureau Proposes Convening 20th CPC National Congress on Oct. 16 in Beijing," August 30, 2022.

on how to prepare the public for the Party Congress through political education activities, which influenced the production of similar guidance at provincial and local levels.<sup>11</sup> Li Zhanshu, Standing Committee member and chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's legislature, stated that the NPC's work must "comply with the overall requirement of serving and safeguarding the convening of the Party's 20th National Congress."<sup>12</sup>

The promotion of Xi's personal leadership over the CCP has featured prominently in propaganda preparations for the Party Congress. (For more on Xi Jinping's political elevation, see Chapter 1, "CCP Decision-Making and Xi Jinping's Centralization of Authority.") At the CCP Central Committee's Sixth Plenum in November 2021, Xi achieved a major political victory by becoming only the third CCP leader after Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping to oversee the passage of what is known as a "historical resolution," an official summary of CCP history used to address important political issues of the time and cement that leader's authority within the CCP system.<sup>13</sup> The resolution is the most authoritative Party document to date that portrays Xi as influential as Mao Zedong.\*<sup>14</sup> It also contains a summary of Xi's personal contribution to CCP doctrine, known as "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era."<sup>15</sup> Party media outlets repeatedly presented this summary, known as the "Ten Clarifies,"† as a case for his continued leadership.<sup>16</sup>

The CCP leadership also engaged in several targeted measures to enforce political unity and preempt criticism from individuals and groups within the Party-state. As the CCP kicked off another round of discipline inspections on March 24, Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Zhao Leji emphasized that inspections of the bureaucracy must be conducted "under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" with an eye toward supporting the success of the Party

\*The document divides CCP history into periods initiated by Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Xi Jinping himself, with Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao downplayed as secondary leaders of the Deng era. Sixth Plenum of the 19th CCP Central Committee, *Full Text: Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century* (全文:《中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议》), November 11, 2021. Translation; Sixth Plenum of the 19th CCP Central Committee, *Full Text: Resolution of the CPC Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century*, November 11, 2021.

†The "Ten Clarifies" are a series of ten lengthy declarations about CCP policy in the Xi era. Chinese media collectively frame them as evidence that Xi has made significant theoretical contributions to Party doctrine and that he has identified the correct approach for China's policy in the future. They include statements about the centrality of the Party's leadership; China's modernization and national rejuvenation; the principal challenge facing Chinese society; the methods by which China must develop its system of socialism with Chinese characteristics; the goals for China's economic, military, and diplomatic policy; and the importance of improving the Party's internal organization and conduct. The Ten Clarifies, announced in November 2021, replace an earlier iteration of this same summary list, originally known as the "Eight Clarifies," which Xi put forward in his speech at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. Party sources frame the expansion from eight to ten as an important refinement of Xi's theoretical contribution. Chinese Communist Party Member Network, "Study Platform: Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (学习平台: 习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想). Translation. *Qushi*, "From 'Eight Clarifies' to 'Ten Clarifies'" (从“八个明确”到“十个明确”), January 10, 2022. Translation; *Qushi*, "Ten Clarifies: A Further Summary of the Core Content of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (十个明确: 习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想的核心内容的进一步概括), November 11, 2021. Translation; Xi Jinping, "Xi Jinping: Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era" (习近平: 决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告), *People's Government of the People's Republic of China*, October 27, 2017. Translation.

Congress later in the year.<sup>17</sup> A week later, then Minister of Justice and Deputy Minister of Public Security Fu Zhenghua was expelled from the Party, his ostensible crimes notably including deviation from the Xi-centric “Two Safeguards”<sup>\*</sup> and “improper” discussion of the major policies of the CCP Central Committee.<sup>18</sup> In early May, Xi used a high-profile speech at the ceremony for the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the Communist Youth League to emphasize his political control over the organization.<sup>19</sup> The Communist Youth League previously served as a political power base for CCP leaders such as Hu Jintao and Li Keqiang but has been systematically sidelined by Xi since he took power in 2012.<sup>20</sup> In May 2022, the CCP Central Organization Department<sup>†</sup> issued new guidelines for retired Party officials to shield Xi from criticism by elders in the upcoming Party Congress.<sup>21</sup> The regulations require retired cadres to “maintain a high degree of ideological, political, and action alignment with the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core” and forbid them from “arbitrarily discuss[ing] major policies” or “spread[ing] negative political remarks.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Tightening of Domestic Repression**

The past year has seen a continued tightening of restrictions on China’s cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities. At a conference on religious work in early December 2021, Xi stated that “China must adhere to the direction of the sinicization<sup>‡</sup> of religion [and] insist on uniting the masses of religious believers around the Party and the government.”<sup>23</sup> In his remarks, he emphasized that religions in China must “adapt to the socialist society” and be “Chinese in orientation” and called for stricter control of religious content online.<sup>24</sup> On December 20, five Chinese government departments delivered on this requirement by releasing a jointly drafted resolution entitled Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services, which took effect on March 1, 2022.<sup>25</sup> The new regulations forbid foreign organizations and individuals from spreading religious content online and ban all live broadcasting or recording of religious ceremonies in China.<sup>26</sup> While visiting religious sites in April, the director of the CCP’s United Front Work Department further revealed the leadership’s concern over religious control by emphasizing that United Front work plays an important role in upholding Xi’s leadership and creating a good environment for the 20th Party Congress.<sup>27</sup>

Specific measures also emerged that targeted individual minority populations. In December 2021, a study by the Tibet Action Institute in the United States revealed that an estimated 78 percent of schoolchildren in the Tibet Autonomous Region

<sup>\*</sup>The so-called “Two Safeguards” are the requirements first to “safeguard General Secretary Xi Jinping’s position as the core of the CCP Central Committee and the core of the whole Party” and second to “safeguard the CCP Central Committee’s authority and centralized, unified leadership.” The formulation promotes greater control by Xi over the Party and the Party over all aspects of China’s governance and politics. For more on the Two Safeguards, see Chapter 1, “CCP Decision-Making and Xi Jinping’s Centralization of Authority.”

<sup>†</sup>The Central Organization Department is a highly influential and secretive agency of the CCP and is responsible for staffing and personnel assignments throughout the national system.

<sup>‡</sup>“Sinicization” refers to the Chinese government’s efforts to transform religious beliefs and practices in accordance with CCP standards for Chinese culture and society.

### **Tightening of Domestic Repression—*Continued***

have been separated from their families and forced into state-run boarding schools as part of an effort by Beijing to alienate them from Tibetan culture.<sup>28</sup> In a speech at the NPC held on March 7, 2022, Xi warned Inner Mongolian delegates that ethnic disunity would “destabilize” society and made use of euphemistic language the CCP has generally used to describe ongoing repression in Xinjiang.<sup>29</sup> During a visit to Xinjiang in April, Politburo Standing Committee Member and Chairman of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference Wang Yang called for the further “sinicization of Islam in Xinjiang.”<sup>30</sup> In May, a consortium of U.S., European, and Japanese media organizations released an extensive cache of photographs and documents from inside detention facilities in Xinjiang, further illuminating the scale and methods of the CCP’s genocide against the Uyghur population and other minorities in the Special Administrative Region.<sup>31</sup> The documents reveal that in a single county in Xinjiang, more than 12 percent of the adult population was interned in either a detention camp or prison between 2017 and 2018.<sup>32</sup> They also contain evidence of Xi’s personal knowledge and direction of the human rights abuses in Xinjiang.<sup>33</sup>

In August 2022, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released an assessment of human rights concerns in Xinjiang, which concludes that “serious human rights violations have been committed in [Xinjiang] in the context of the Government’s application of counter-terrorism and counter-‘extremism’ strategies.”<sup>34</sup> The OHCHR report finds that “allegations of patterns of torture or ill-treatment, including forced medical treatment and adverse conditions of detention, are credible, as are allegations of individual incidents of sexual and gender-based violence.”<sup>35</sup> The report’s 13 recommendations to China’s government include the release of detained individuals, a review of the government’s legal framework governing national security, reparations for victims, and clarification of the whereabouts of missing individuals and allowing their families to reunite.<sup>36</sup> For the international business community, the report recommends “enhanced human rights due diligence” and risk assessments for companies involved in China’s surveillance and security sector.<sup>37</sup>

### **Zero-COVID Lockdowns Threaten Domestic Stability**

The CCP’s assertion that its Zero-COVID policy demonstrates the superiority of its governance model came under strain as COVID-19 outbreaks led to lockdowns of major Chinese cities. Rather than admit the policy’s shortcomings, the CCP refused to give ground on its narrative and the strict containment measures that underpin it—at the expense of China’s citizens, their livelihoods, and the Chinese economy. Since 2020, China has trumpeted a strict zero-tolerance approach to fighting COVID-19 as a successful model worthy of emulation by other countries. Government reports for both foreign and domestic consumption in 2020 credited efficient top-down mobilization of resources and a policy of completely cutting off transmission

within China's borders as the keys to China's relatively quick recovery from the initial wave of COVID-19.<sup>38</sup> Xi, other officials, and state media continued to repeat similar themes throughout 2021, arguing that these features pointed to the Chinese governance system's inherent advantage over other countries.<sup>39</sup> In early 2022, China hosted the Beijing Winter Olympics without abandoning its approach to pandemic control by adopting a "closed loop" approach with strict restrictions on the movements of athletes and international visitors.<sup>40</sup> Beijing advertised this as another major success for its pandemic model.<sup>41</sup>

Long-term adherence to what became known as the "Zero-COVID" and later "dynamic Zero-COVID" strategy combined with China's ineffective vaccination effort left Chinese society particularly vulnerable to disruption by the more highly transmissible Omicron variant.<sup>42</sup> (For more on China's COVID-19 response, see Chapter 2, Section 1, "Year in Review: Economics and Trade.") By March 2022, several cities in China began experiencing outbreaks of the Omicron variant.<sup>43</sup> After initially attempting a more flexible approach to the lockdown, Shanghai emerged in late March as the epicenter of China's worst outbreak since 2020.<sup>44</sup> The financial and economic hub roughly three times as populous as New York City went into what would ultimately become a two-month lockdown.<sup>45</sup> Poor coordination of the longer-than-anticipated lockdown led to serious shortages of food, medicine, and other supplies and generated significant public discontent with China's Zero-COVID approach.<sup>46</sup> On March 23, "Why can't China lift safety measures just like foreign countries?" was a top trending topic on Weibo before being muted by censors.<sup>47</sup> Throughout April and May, numerous video and audio recordings circulated online revealing the suffering of the residents of Shanghai and local officials' complete inability to do anything to ameliorate the situation.<sup>48</sup>

The CCP did not change course as a result of the Shanghai debate and instead continued to promote Zero-COVID even more forcefully as the only appropriate policy response. Throughout the lockdown in Shanghai, Chinese media promoted the Zero-COVID policy to both domestic and international audiences, criticized opponents of the policy, cautioned that changing course would cause an unacceptable number of deaths,\* and warned readers to stay vigilant against

\* China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Chinese state media have repeatedly pointed to a study by U.S. and Chinese scientists published in *Nature Medicine* in May 2022 that models the projected transmission of Omicron in China. The study projects up to 1.55 million deaths over a six-month period if China were to lift strict Zero-COVID controls without simultaneously increasing pharmaceutical measures such as vaccination and antiviral treatments. A hybrid approach that combined increased vaccination and other treatments with less strict distancing measures, however, was also predicted to cause significantly fewer deaths and be able to prevent overwhelming China's healthcare system. When referring to the study, China's MFA and state media have simply repeated the estimate of 1.55 million deaths without providing the context or referencing any potential role for vaccinations or other policy adjustments. Chinese authorities also do not repeat the study's assessment that relying solely on strict nonpharmaceutical measures such as lockdowns and distancing would likely cause highly delayed epidemics that continue beyond the six-month window studied in the model. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Dynamic Zero-COVID: a MUST Approach for China," *Chinese Consulate General in Durban*, July 15, 2022; China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on May 11, 2022*, May 11, 2022; *Xinhua*, "Dropping Dynamic Zero-COVID Approach in China Could Cause 1.55 Million Deaths: Study," *China Daily*, May 11, 2022; Jun Cai et al., "Modeling Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 Omicron in China," *Nature Medicine* 28 (May 10, 2022): 1468–1475; David Stanway and Jennifer Rigby, "Dropping Zero-COVID Policy in China without Safeguards Risks 1.5m Lives—Study," *Reuters*, May 10, 2022.

“slander” from abroad.<sup>49</sup> Reporting deemed negative to China was also relentlessly censored.<sup>50</sup> Drones flying overhead warned citizens of Shanghai, “Control your soul’s thirst for freedom. Do not open your windows and sing.”<sup>51</sup> In April, Xi gave the policy the full weight of his authority in a speech calling for persistence with Zero-COVID, which Party media faithfully described as having “swept down from the commanding heights” and “set the tone for all.”<sup>52</sup> Long articles published in Party media by National Health Commission Director and Party Secretary Ma Xiaowei in April and May further restricted space for political dissent by highlighting Xi’s personal endorsement of Zero-COVID, describing the policy as being “determined by the nature and purpose of the Party” and linking it to the successful convening of the Party Congress.<sup>53</sup> In May, Xi chaired a meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee that demanded absolute policy compliance on Zero-COVID.<sup>54</sup> Whether primarily motivated by confidence in its ability to weather the short-term political and economic costs, unwillingness to backtrack on its longstanding political narrative of superiority, or concerns over its ability to manage such a major policy change before the upcoming Party Congress, the top CCP leadership sent a clear message that the Zero-COVID policy was not up for debate.<sup>55</sup>

### **Local Leaders Use COVID-19 Mitigation Tools to Suppress Unrelated Protests**

Local leaders in China used mass surveillance tools intended for COVID-19 mitigation to suppress unrelated protests and augment social control. China’s government uses a system of “health codes” on citizens’ phones to manage entry into public spaces based on individuals’ risk of COVID-19 exposure.\* Officials in charge of “social control” for the city of Zhengzhou, Henan Province, abused this national health code system to prevent residents from engaging in large-scale protests completely unrelated to the pandemic. Beginning in May, Chinese citizens participated in protests in Zhengzhou over frozen bank deposits.<sup>56</sup> (For more on the banking issue, see Chapter 2, Section 1, “Year in Review: Economics and Trade.”) In June 2022, the Zhengzhou anticorruption authority punished officials for “decid[ing] without authorization” to change over a thousand citizens’ health codes, effectively prohibiting those citizens from accessing public transportation or hotels.<sup>57</sup> Despite widespread concern by Chinese netizens over local officials’ demonstrated ability to suspend citizens’ movements arbitrarily, China’s government appears unlikely to increase the system’s accountability or reduce its sweeping surveillance capabilities.<sup>58</sup> In July, Hong Kong officials announced that the city’s health chief, Lo Chung-mau, is considering expanding the national health code system into Hong Kong.<sup>59</sup>

\*The Chinese government uses “Health Code,” a platform developed by Alipay and WeChat to identify people potentially exposed to COVID-19. The platform determines people’s exposure risk to COVID-19 based on factors including travel history, duration of time in specific areas, and relationships to potential carriers. A green health code is mandatory for visiting public spaces, including public transit, airports, schools, and grocery stores. A yellow or red code indicates potential exposure to COVID-19 and that the user should self-quarantine, effectively restricting all travel. Fan Liang, “COVID-19 and Health Code: How Digital Platforms Tackle the Pandemic in China,” *Social Media + Society*, July 2020.



## China's Global Diplomacy

Entering 2022, the CCP's primary objective was to project confidence abroad and continue efforts to reshape processes and norms of the liberal international order. The Winter Olympics in February would be a preplanned high note of success, and preparations for the 20th Party Congress would point to an orderly political model for the world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's support fundamentally reset the tone of the year. A number of governments voiced opposition and concerns about China's disregard for Ukraine's sovereignty and regional stability as well as China's own designs for Taiwan, Asia, and the world. This has complicated China's continuing economic, diplomatic, and security outreach to countries around the world.

### China's Reaction to Russia's Unprovoked Invasion of Ukraine

Throughout Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the CCP prioritized China's recently elevated strategic partnership with Russia over ties with Europe and its espoused foreign policy principle of respecting the sovereignty of other countries. On February 4, President Putin and General Secretary Xi jointly declared their resolve to work together to build a new international order and declared their partnership to have "no limits."<sup>60</sup> At the Beijing Winter Olympic games,\* which many state representatives boycotted on grounds of China's human rights violations,† the two heads of state signed a joint statement titled New Era Strategic Partnership of Coordination that marked an explicit shift from building mutual trust and cooperation to jointly countering the U.S.-led international system.<sup>61</sup> The joint statement included Russia's support for China's position on Taiwan but did not mention Ukraine specifically.<sup>62</sup> The declaration came after a year of deepening security ties, during which time China hosted Russia for their first-ever joint military exercise on Chinese soil, declared "no end to the China-Russia military cooperation," and announced that Russia is "better than an ally."<sup>63</sup>

### *Initially in Denial and Unprepared to Evacuate Chinese Citizens from Ukraine*

As Russia amassed more military forces on Ukraine's border throughout the second half of 2021 and early 2022, Chinese diplomats and state media outlets openly dismissed warnings by the United States and Europe over the pending invasion.<sup>64</sup> A day before the invasion, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to

\* President Putin attended as an individual and head of state but did not represent a Russian team at the Olympics because the International Olympic Committee banned Russia from participating after repeated violations of rules against performance-enhancing drugs. *BBC News*, "Beijing Winter Olympics Boycott: Why Are the Games So Controversial?" February 4, 2022. Motez Bishara, "Russian Doping: 'An Unprecedented Attack on the Integrity of Sport & the Olympic Games,'" *CNN*, July 21, 2016.

† Citing China's human rights violations, including its policies in Xinjiang and Tibet, countries that participated in an international diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics included Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Other countries, including Austria, India, Latvia, and New Zealand, did not send diplomatic officials citing concerns about COVID-19. Gerry Shih, "India Joins Diplomatic Boycott of Beijing Olympics over Role of Chinese Soldier from Border Clash," *Washington Post*, February 3, 2022; *BBC News*, "Beijing Winter Olympics Boycott: Why Are the Games So Controversial?" February 4, 2022; John Feng, "Which Countries Are Boycotting China's Winter Olympics? Full List," *Newsweek*, December 8, 2021.

deny evidence of the pending Russian invasion and claimed that U.S. warnings were only exaggerating and “hyping up the possibility of warfare.”<sup>65</sup> China dismissed intelligence shared by the United States regarding Russian military actions and did not take any actions to protect Chinese students and citizens in Ukraine.<sup>66</sup>

When Russia launched its invasion on February 24, 2022, China had not evacuated any of its 6,000 citizens from Ukraine.<sup>67</sup> On the day of the invasion, China’s embassy in Ukraine advised Chinese nationals to remain at home, while other nations had already begun implementing plans to evacuate their citizens.<sup>68</sup> According to Yun Sun, director of the China Program at the Stimson Center, many Chinese students in Ukraine had few options because “by the time they knew [the war was to break out], it was already too late to evacuate.”<sup>69</sup> China’s embassy then told its citizens to display the Chinese flag on their cars for protection.<sup>70</sup> Two days later, the embassy walked back its guidance, urging Chinese citizens not to disclose their nationality after it became clear that China’s failure to condemn Russia’s invasion led to hostility from Ukrainians toward Chinese nationals.<sup>71</sup> By March, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that over 5,200 Chinese citizens had been evacuated from Ukraine to neighboring states.<sup>72</sup>

### ***Beijing Tries to Balance Competing Interests with Europe and Russia***

After Russia invaded Ukraine, China muddled its diplomatic position as it tried to balance competing priorities.<sup>73</sup> The invasion pitted its strategic partnership with Russia against its interests in preserving ties with Europe, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as its espoused commitment to foreign policy principles of “territorial integrity” and “noninterference.”<sup>74</sup> Unwilling to choose, China’s diplomats simply declared that the invasion did not change any of its positions and refused to condemn Russia’s invasion while insisting on using the Kremlin’s preferred term, a “special military operation.”<sup>75</sup>

In the initial stages of the conflict, Chinese leaders tried unsuccessfully to position themselves as the preferred mediators between Russia and Ukraine.<sup>76</sup> On the first day of the war, China’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi called Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to set up peace talks, and in March he said China would be ready to play a constructive role “when needed to carry out necessary mediation.”<sup>77</sup> Chinese diplomats and Xi himself tried to establish China as a natural choice by discussing the idea with Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.<sup>78</sup> Speaking to the U.S. public, Chinese Ambassador to the United States Qin Gang argued that China’s good relations with Russia put it in a “unique” position to mediate a peaceful settlement of the crisis.<sup>79</sup> Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Andriy Yermak, urged China to take a more active stance in ending the war.<sup>80</sup> Turkey—a NATO member and strategic partner of Ukraine—hosted the second round of talks between Russia and Ukraine instead of China, and discussion of China as a mediator faded.<sup>81</sup>

The Chinese government has ignored numerous opportunities to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy directly. At a summit with EU leaders in April, Xi made no response to an invitation from the President of the European Council Charles Michel.<sup>82</sup> In an interview in August, President Zelenskyy said, “I would like to talk directly. I had one conversation with Xi Jinping that was a year ago.... Since the beginning of the large-scale aggression on February 24, we have asked officially for a conversation, but we (haven’t had) any conversation with China even though I believe that would be helpful.”<sup>83</sup> By contrast, as of September Xi has called or met with President Putin on at least four occasions since the Russian invasion began, including once in person at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in September.<sup>84</sup> (For more on the SCO and September 2022 SCO summit, see Chapter 3, Section 3, “China’s Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia.”)

### ***China Amplifies Russia’s Talking Points***

Throughout 2022, the Chinese government openly supported Russian positions on Ukraine while claiming to be “impartial and objective.”\* In official statements on the war, Chinese officials refused to call Russia’s actions against Ukraine an “invasion” or a “war” and instead repeated Russia’s label of “special military operation.”<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Chinese media and diplomats parroted Russia’s criticism of post-Soviet states joining the NATO alliance as NATO’s “five consecutive rounds of eastward expansion” and regularly cited Russia’s so-called “legitimate security concerns.”<sup>86</sup> They also adopted the phrase “indivisible security,” which Russia cited in its December 2021 demand letter to NATO regarding the Russian military buildup around Ukraine but was also construed as an argument for China’s objection to any arms sales to Taiwan.†<sup>87</sup> China and Russia both used this term to denounce their neighbors’ purchase of weapons by framing other states’ nonaggressive self-defense as within China or Russia’s remit to end.<sup>88</sup> Whereas the concept of “indivisible security” declares that one state should not strengthen its security at the expense of another, it does not grant one state the authority to limit another’s freedom to choose its own alliances or purchase legal weapons.<sup>89</sup> At the UN, Chinese diplomats shielded Russia from criticism by consistently voting in Russia’s favor or abstaining from any resolution to criticize or punish Russia or to call for an independent inquiry into human rights abuses by the Russian military.<sup>90</sup>

Chinese media outlets and platforms consistently circulated and amplified Russia’s disinformation about the war, the United States, and its European allies. Two days before the invasion, leaked Chi-

\* Ambassador Qin tried to differentiate China’s position of “objective and impartial” from one of “neutrality” during an interview with Phoenix TV, a pro-CCP Chinese-language station. Ambassador Qin argued that there is a subtle difference between the words “neutral” and “impartial,” saying China’s policy is “impartial” because it considers the full historical context of Russia’s grievances against the West in addition to the realities on the ground. By this logic, China treats both Ukraine and Russia fairly, even while it clearly aligns with Russia. For Qin Gang: Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States, *Ambassador Qin Gang Was Interviewed by Phoenix Satellite TV’s “Dialogue with the Wind and Clouds” Column* (秦刚大使接受凤凰卫视《风云对话》栏目采访实录), March 27, 2022. Translation.

† The term “indivisible security” first appeared in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, with later mentions in the 1990 Charter for a New Europe and in the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security. Patrick Wintour, “Why Does Russia Focus on ‘Indivisible Security’ in Ukraine Standoff?” *Guardian*, February 3, 2022.

nese media guidance purportedly dictated that Chinese media not publish anything “unfavorable to Russia or pro-Western,” a directive Chinese media seems to follow.<sup>91</sup> Chinese censors have also removed academic publications and online writings that question China’s support for Russia.<sup>92</sup> In support of Russia’s information warfare, Chinese news and social media repeated false Russian conspiracy theories that Ukrainian Nazis committed crimes against Russian-speaking Ukrainians.<sup>93</sup> China also supported disinformation about the war that helped its own agenda, most notably by spreading long-debunked rumors that the United States has biological weapons labs in Ukraine.<sup>94</sup> These narratives dominate Chinese and Russian media coverage of the war and consequently have increased their spread through media around the world.

### ***CCP and Chinese Military News Outlets Seek to Discredit NATO and the United States***

In March and April 2022, *People’s Daily* and *PLA Daily* published a series of articles critical of NATO and the United States under pen names used to signal significant diplomatic positions and concerns.\*<sup>95</sup> Key themes in the pieces include shifting blame for the war in Ukraine to NATO, accusing the United States and NATO of having a “Cold War mindset,” alleging that the United States is conducting “financial terrorism” against Russia, and, in sum, seeking to undermine U.S. leadership and moral authority.<sup>96</sup> Notably, these commentaries lack any discussion of national sovereignty or territorial integrity, two of China’s long-espoused foreign policy principles that have been violated in Ukraine.<sup>97</sup> The pen names Zhong Sheng and Jun Sheng, which are homophones for “Voice of China” and “Voice of the Military,” respectively, are traditionally used for infrequent commentaries on major international affairs that are approved at the highest levels of the publications’ leadership.† The unusually high frequency of such commentaries likely indicates these articles are part of the CCP’s broader strategy to avoid criticizing Russia’s invasion and undermine the credibility of the United States and NATO.<sup>98</sup>

### ***China Looks for Limits in the Coalition for Ukraine as It Restrains Its Own “No Limits Partnership”***

Chinese leaders and analysts are examining the coalition of countries supporting Ukraine to assess its limits and gain insights into any potential response to China’s use of force against Taiwan.<sup>99</sup> As the United States and the world’s largest economies sanctioned Rus-

\*The *People’s Daily* series was titled “Viewing American Hegemony from the Ukraine Crisis” and blamed NATO for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The *PLA Daily* issued ten commentaries under the title “The Hypocrisy and Dangers of U.S. Diplomacy in Perspective,” which attempted to portray the United States as culpable for human rights violations, breaking international rules, and bullying. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *China’s Position on Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine*, August 17, 2022; Jun Sheng, “Narrow and Selfish ‘Hegemonic Diplomacy’ that Tramples on the Rules,” (钟声：狭隘自私，践踏规则的“霸权外交”) *PLA Daily*, April 29, 2022; Zhong Sheng, “Smearing Other Countries will Only Make One’s Own Strategy Increasingly Out of Focus,” (抹黑他国只会让自己战略日益失焦 (钟声)) *People’s Daily*, April 27, 2022.

† Zhong Sheng pieces are commentaries on major international affairs by editors and staff at *People’s Daily*. The Jun Sheng pen name authors are believed to be associated with the Central Military Commission’s Political Work Department. Jacqueline Deal, “Disintegrating the Enemy: The PLA’s Info-Messaging,” *US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 50:3 (Autumn 2020): 8; David Gitter and Leah Fang, “The Chinese Communist Party’s Use of Homophonous Pen Names: An Open-Source Open Secret,” *Asia Policy* 13:1 (January 2018): 69–112, 86–89.

sia, Beijing has been looking for evidence of declining U.S. influence and cracks in unity.<sup>100</sup> In addition to economic effects, Beijing is likely monitoring the effectiveness of U.S. and other weapons in bolstering Ukraine's defense.<sup>101</sup> Chinese diplomats have equated military assistance to Ukraine with U.S. political and military support for Taiwan, and they used the phrase "adding fuel to the fire" to describe both.<sup>102</sup> (For more on the implications of Russia's invasion of Ukraine for China and Taiwan, see Chapter 4: "Taiwan.")

While China's leadership continued to tout its "no limits" relationship with Russia since the invasion began, thus far it has appeared to limit its strategic support to the information domain, as discussed previously, and to the economic realm. China continues to provide Russia with an economic lifeline, becoming its predominant trading partner and its primary customer for discounted commodities like agricultural products and energy.<sup>103</sup> (For more on China's economic ties with Russia, see Chapter 2, Section 1, "Year in Review: Economics and Trade.") At the same time, Ambassador Qin has explicitly stated that China is not providing weapons and ammunition to Russia's military.<sup>104</sup> In early March, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen said there was no evidence China was "providing Russia with any significant workaround for [U.S.] sanctions."<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, several Chinese entities have allegedly supported Russia's military efforts, and by June the U.S. Department of Commerce added five Chinese companies to the Entity List for their support to Russia's military efforts.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the Russian Embassy in Beijing publicly praised the warfighting utility of the Mavic drone produced by the Chinese company DJI Technology Co.\*<sup>107</sup> Although DJI Technologies rejected this praise and insisted that its drones are for civilian purposes only, reports of Russian soldiers using DJI drones led the Ukrainian government to request that DJI deactivate its drones operating in Ukraine.<sup>108</sup> In response,† DJI announced the suspension of sales to both Russia and Ukraine, though any change to sales has not been independently confirmed.<sup>109</sup>

China has continued to engage with Russia's military in annual training exercises that Russia hosts separately from its ongoing war against Ukraine. China participated in Russia's International Army Games in August, an event China has attended since its first iteration in 2015.<sup>110</sup> From August 30th to September 5th, the PLA participated in Russia's annual strategic level military exercise, VOSTOK-2022, which took place in Russia's Eastern Military District.<sup>111</sup> This year marked the first time China sent units from the army, navy, and air force as PLA Navy and Russian warships conducted joint exercises, including a live fire anti-aircraft drill in the Sea of Japan.<sup>112</sup> The PLA has participated in the previous four iterations of Russia's annual strategic exercise, which rotates between four regions: VOSTOK in the east, TSENTR in Central Russia, KAVKAS in the Caucasus, and ZAPAD in the west.<sup>113</sup> Although China's Ministry of National Defense claimed the PLA's participa-

\*The United States sanctioned DJI technology Co. in 2020 for facilitating repressive regimes and human rights abuses. Scott Simmie, "DJI Lands on Entity List: Analysis and Industry Reactions," *DroneDJ*, December 18, 2020.

† DJI stated that the company was not able to deactivate the drones or provide flight data but suggested establishing geofencing throughout Ukraine. This imperfect system would be able to block some but not all DJI drones from entering specified airspace. Ishveena Singh, "What DJI Said in Response to Ukraine's Request to Block Russians," *DroneDJ*, March 17, 2022.

tion in VOSTOK-2022 “is unrelated to the current international and regional situation,” Russia has used these exercises to pre-position troops before an invasion. ZAPAD-2021 positioned up to 190,000 Russian troops on the border with Ukraine in late 2021.<sup>114</sup>

### China Promotes Its “Global Security Initiative”

In 2022, China began promoting Xi’s “Global Security Initiative,” which is an effort to create a new international security paradigm that is more favorable to China.<sup>115</sup> Xi introduced the initiative at the Boao Forum for Asia in April, and it has since become a common refrain in China’s diplomatic interactions around the globe.<sup>116</sup> Among the initiative’s key tenets are opposition to military alliances as a mechanism for achieving security and to the use of international sanctions.<sup>117</sup>

#### The “Six Commitments”

Beijing summarizes the core content of the Global Security Initiative using a formulation known as the “six commitments.”<sup>118</sup> The six commitments are “staying committed” to: “the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security”; “respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries”; “abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter”; “taking seriously the legitimate security concerns of all countries”; “peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation”; and “maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains.”<sup>119</sup>

Official descriptions of the Global Security Initiative consistently highlight China’s underlying opposition to U.S. alliances and use of international sanctions. Xi’s original presentation of the six commitments stipulates that countries must “say no to group politics and bloc confrontation” and “oppose the wanton use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction.”<sup>120</sup> Foreign Minister Wang’s official explanation of the initiative in *People’s Daily* insists that “regional security cannot be guaranteed by strengthening or expanding military blocs” and argues for China’s leadership of the global security order based partially upon it having never participated in such a bloc.<sup>121</sup> It also criticizes other countries for enacting sanctions, despite Beijing’s own use of sanctions.<sup>122</sup> Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng further clarified in a speech in May that the long-term goal of the Global Security Initiative is to build a “security community” without confrontation or alliances.<sup>123</sup>

Beijing hopes to use the initiative both to defend itself and to raise its profile as a global leader in the security field.<sup>124</sup> The Global Security Initiative is framed in explicit opposition to the current norms of international security and as a concept that can transcend so-called “Western” geopolitical security theories.<sup>125</sup> In her testimony for the Commission, Sheena Chestnut Greitens, associate professor at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, cautioned that the Global Security Initiative is also associated with Xi’s regime security-centric Comprehensive

National Security Concept, and as such it should be viewed as an attempt “to make the rules of the international system compatible not just with [China’s] external security interests, but [also] its desire for internal regime security.”<sup>126</sup> (For more on the Comprehensive National Security Concept and the development of the Global Security Initiative, see Chapter 1, “CCP Decision-Making and Xi Jinping’s Centralization of Authority.”) She further predicted that the initiative is likely to include an emphasis on nontraditional security tools such as the projection of law enforcement and police power outside of China.<sup>127</sup> This direction was confirmed at the September 2022 SCO Summit when Xi pledged China’s willingness to train 2,000 law enforcement personnel for SCO member states over the next five years as part of implementing the Global Security Initiative.<sup>128</sup> (For more on the SCO and recent SCO summit, see Chapter 3, Section 3, “China’s Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia.”)

Beijing has used the Global Security Initiative as a formal platform to elevate and promote its existing grievances against the United States and its allies. As Dr. Greitens pointed out in her testimony, the Global Security Initiative concept “includes considerable repackaging of past Chinese complaints about the inadequacy of the global security order” as well as its dissatisfaction with the United States’ international leadership in the security field.<sup>129</sup> For example, explanations of the Global Security Initiative consistently include harsh criticism of the so-called “Cold War mentality.”<sup>130</sup> Since the 1990s, CCP leaders and media have used the term “Cold War mentality” to deflect international criticism by framing opposition or challenges to China’s political system, human rights abuses, and military and economic ambitions as ideologically motivated and belonging to a past era of zero-sum competition.<sup>131</sup> Although the term has previously been applied in the security space to oppose U.S. coordination with other countries, its use this year in support of the Global Security Initiative represents a more explicit focus on alliances and international sanctions.<sup>132</sup> While opposition to the United States and its allies is in some cases left thinly veiled by the criticism of an unspecified “some,” “few,” or “many” countries, it has also occasionally been made explicit in both internal- and external-facing statements.<sup>133</sup> For example, in a *People’s Daily* article on the Global Security Initiative in April, Foreign Minister Wang stated that China “firmly oppose[s] the use of the ‘Indo-Pacific Strategy’ to split the region and create a ‘new Cold War,’ [and] oppose[s] the use of military alliances to piece together an ‘Asian NATO.’”<sup>134</sup> In May, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Le Yucheng made similar remarks while giving a speech on the Global Security Initiative at an international dialogue event for think tanks from 20 countries.<sup>135</sup>

Although the concept and the international security environment it seeks to foster are broader than the Ukraine crisis, the Global Security Initiative has served as an integral part of China’s efforts to both navigate and benefit diplomatically from Russia’s war on Ukraine.<sup>136</sup> Beijing has made extensive use of Russia’s war as an opportunity to promote the Global Security Initiative abroad, and official explanations of the Global Security Initiative have frequently included commentary on the Ukraine crisis as supporting detail

for the initiative's key points.<sup>137</sup> For example, Beijing has seized upon NATO's concern over the war in Ukraine to back up its attack on military alliances.<sup>138</sup> It has similarly used the firm response by the United States and its allies to hold Russia accountable for the invasion as a platform to denounce international sanctions as what it calls unilateral "long-arm jurisdiction."<sup>139</sup> Beijing's statements on the Global Security Initiative and Ukraine also include parallel emphasis on respecting other countries' so-called "legitimate security concerns," which demonstrates that the language Beijing uses in support of Russia is also aimed at encouraging other countries to respect China's priorities.<sup>140</sup> Beijing has never acknowledged that Russia's unilateral invasion of Ukraine violates several of the Global Security Initiative's supposed core commitments, such as "respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries," "peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries," and "upholding the purposes and principles of the UN Charter."<sup>141</sup>

## China Faces Increased International Backlash

### *China's Support for Russia Exacerbates Tensions with Europe*

Preexisting areas of tension between China and countries in Europe over human rights, Taiwan, and other issues persisted over the past year and deepened significantly in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. After Lithuania opened a representative office to Taiwan in November 2021, Beijing retaliated against the perceived slight by downgrading diplomatic relations with Lithuania and launching a campaign of economic coercion against the Baltic country, blocking all imports of Lithuanian goods and even threatening multinational corporations with exclusion from the Chinese market if they did not partake in China's efforts to cut off Lithuania from international trade.<sup>142</sup> In response to China's coercive actions, the EU took measures to support Lithuania, including by filing a complaint against the trade restrictions with the WTO.<sup>143</sup> The dispute provided additional impetus to the EU's ongoing consideration of a new anti-coercion instrument,\* which, if adopted, will for the first time afford the EU the ability to take countermeasures in the event a Member State becomes the target of deliberate economic coercion.<sup>144</sup> The new German government elected in September 2021 also took a more forceful line on China policy over the past year, framing its relationship with China as one of "competition and systemic rivalry" and committing to a more robust presence in the Indo-Pacific.†

\*The anti-coercion instrument was formally proposed on December 6, 2021, and is anticipated to be subject to a vote in the European Parliament by fall 2022. European Parliament Think Tank, "Proposed Anti-Coercion Instrument," June 16, 2022.

†In November 2021, the chief of the German Navy committed to sending vessels to the Indo-Pacific every two years with the intention of cooperating with like-minded states to advocate for freedom of navigation and the maintenance of a rules-based international order. In December 2021, the newly elected coalition government of the Social Democratic Party, Greens, and Free Democrats released its coalition agreement. The text of the agreement states that Germany is in competition and systemic rivalry with China; calls for a comprehensive China strategy for Germany within the framework of a common EU-China policy; states an interest in reducing strategic dependencies on China in cooperation with like-minded countries; identifies the international law of the sea as the basis for resolving territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas; insists that any change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait be peaceful and mutually agreed upon; supports Taiwan's participation in relevant international organizations; and calls attention to China's human rights violations. The agreement also mentions Germany's commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. Vanessa Geidel, "Germany Ramps Up Indo-Pacific Engagement,"



China's strident anti-NATO rhetoric and unwillingness to condemn Russia's assault on European stability in its invasion of Ukraine have placed additional strain on the already tense diplomatic relationship between China and European powers.<sup>145</sup> The annual EU-China summit originally scheduled to take place in December 2021\* finally convened on April 1, 2022, but it did not produce a joint statement due to persistent differences on trade and human rights as well as new frustrations over China's conduct regarding Ukraine.<sup>146</sup> President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen reported that the two sides "exchanged very clearly opposing views" on the war in Ukraine, and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell described the meeting as a "dialogue of the deaf" in which China's representatives refused to engage substantively on the topics of most concern to their EU counterparts.<sup>147</sup> China has also increased pressure on European states through both bilateral and multilateral channels to distance themselves from the United States.† In June, High Representative Borrell expressed frustration with China's unwillingness to consider the perspective of European countries, stating, "We condemn the Russian aggression against Ukraine and support this country's sovereignty and democracy... not because we 'follow the U.S. blindly,' as sometimes China suggests, but because it is our own position, our genuine position."<sup>148</sup>

China also faced intensified pushback in central and eastern Europe. In August 2022, Latvia and Estonia ended their participation in the cooperation framework China had established with central and eastern European countries in 2012, known as the "16+1," following the example set by Lithuania in May 2021.‡<sup>149</sup>

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*Strategist*, January 10, 2022; Insight EU Monitoring, "Dare More Progress: Unofficial English Translation of German Coalition Agreement Added," January 5, 2022; *Deutsche Welle*, "Coalition Talks in Germany," 2022; Jens Kastner, "Germany's New Government Is Set to Take a Tougher Line on China," *Nikkei Asia*, December 8, 2021.

\*The EU-China summit was originally scheduled to take place in December 2021 but was pushed back over concerns that the two parties would fail to make substantive progress on key issues. The decision to postpone the meeting was made amid confrontation surrounding China's economic coercion of Lithuania and additional Chinese retaliation over the EU's November 2021 renewal of preexisting sanctions against Chinese officials and a Chinese entity for human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Kinling Lo, Jun Mai, and Finbarr Bermingham, "China-EU Annual Summit 'Pushed Back until Next Year' as Trade and Human Rights Disputes Fester," *South China Morning Post*, December 16, 2021; *Reuters*, "EU Extends Human Rights Sanctions, Including on Chinese Officials," November 24, 2021.

† During the EU-China summit in April, Xi invoked the EU policy of "strategic autonomy" in an effort to convince the EU to distance itself from the United States, instructing the EU to "form its own perception of China [and] adopt an independent China policy." In a call with Chancellor Scholz in May, Xi reiterated his approval of Europe's "strategic autonomy" and insisted that "the security of Europe should be kept in the hands of Europeans themselves." He repeated this sentiment in a call with President Macron immediately thereafter, stressing that "China supports European countries keeping the security of Europe in their own hands" and warning Macron against so-called "bloc confrontation." In a response to remarks by then UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss calling on China to "play by the rules" internationally, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson claimed that "NATO had messed up Europe." China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *President Xi Jinping Speaks with French President Emmanuel Macron on Phone*, May 10, 2022; Finbarr Bermingham, "In Call with Macron, Xi Again Tells Europeans to Take Security, 'In Their Own Hands,'" *South China Morning Post*, May 10, 2022; Liu Zhen, "Xi Tells Scholz that Europe's Security 'Should Be Kept in the Hands of Europeans,'" *South China Morning Post*, May 10, 2022; Helen Davidson, "China Says Nato Has 'Messed Up Europe' and Warns over Role in Asia-Pacific," *Guardian*, April 29, 2022; Finbarr Bermingham, "EU-China Summit Was a 'Dialogue of the Deaf,' Says Top Brussels Diplomat," *South China Morning Post*, April 6, 2022; Laura Zhou, "China-EU Summit: Hopes Fade for Investment Deal as Ukraine War Dominates Talks," *South China Morning Post*, April 2, 2022.

‡ The cooperation framework was established in 2012 and originally known as the "16+1." The 16 original European member states were Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Ro-

The departure of the two Baltic states brings the membership to only 14 European countries. Decisions to leave reflected both countries' growing dissatisfaction with the mechanism's ability to deliver on promised economic benefits as well as a desire to prioritize EU platforms for interaction with China.\*<sup>150</sup> China's behavior in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine also contributed to the decision, and both countries' official announcements explicitly mentioned their support for the "rules-based international order."<sup>151</sup> On August 14, Estonia's foreign minister confirmed that China's refusal to condemn Russia's unilateral invasion "was definitely a factor" in the decision, echoing a similar statement he had made on August 11.<sup>152</sup> Latvia had also previously called on China to use its leverage to stop Russia's aggression.<sup>153</sup> After Estonia and Latvia's decision, Chinese state media engaged in damage control domestically by calling it "shortsighted" while downplaying its future impact on the cooperation framework.<sup>154</sup>

### ***NATO Calls Out "Systemic Challenges" from China***

The NATO summit in June was notable both for singling out threats posted by China and for including for the first time leaders from Australia, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand.<sup>155</sup> NATO's strategic concept, revised for the first time in 12 years, declared that China's "stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security, and values."<sup>156</sup> The list of threats and "systemic challenges" is comprehensive, ranging from "malicious hybrid and cyber operations" to seeking "to control key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure, and strategic materials and supply chains."<sup>157</sup> NATO's strategic concept also expresses alarm at the growing partnership between China and Russia and their "mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order."<sup>158</sup> The attending Asia Pacific countries are global partners of NATO. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol warned of "the threat to universal values at a time of new conflict and competition," and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida argued "the security of Europe is inseparable from that of Asia."<sup>159</sup> China's mission to the EU dismissed the summit and concept as being "filled with Cold War thinking and ideological bias."<sup>160</sup>

### ***The Quad Takes Bolder Steps against China's Coercive Behavior***

At the Quad summit in Tokyo in May 2022, heads of government from the United States, Australia, India, and Japan released a joint

mania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. With the addition of Greece in 2019, the framework was renamed the "17+1." Lithuania's departure from the group in May 2021 returned the number of European members to 16. Milda Seputyte and Ott Tammik, "Baltic States Abandon East European Cooperation with China," *Bloomberg*, August 11, 2022; Emilian Kavalski, "China's '16+1' Is Dead? Long Live the '17+1,'" *Diplomat*, March 29, 2019.

\* Both countries had also already decreased their involvement in the forum. Latvia and Estonia were among the six countries to send lower-level representatives rather than heads of state to meet with General Secretary Xi at the group's summit in February 2021. An August 2022 statement from Estonia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that Estonia had also not attended any meetings after the 2021 summit. Estonia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Estonia Will No Longer Participate in the Cooperation Format of Central and Eastern Europe and China*, August 11, 2022; Milda Seputyte and Ott Tammik, "Baltic States Abandon East European Cooperation with China," *Bloomberg*, August 11, 2022; *Baltic Times*, "Latvia's Decision to Leave Cooperation Framework of Central and Eastern European Countries and China Not to Change Much—Expert," August 8, 2022.

statement condemning “coercive, provocative, or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo” as well as “the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia.”<sup>161</sup> The statement, the first of its kind for the Quad, does not explicitly name China but does send a strong message against China’s illegal maritime claims and coercive efforts by the China Coast Guard and China’s maritime militia to enforce those claims. To better identify and support the interdiction of such illegal maritime activities, Quad leaders also revealed the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness. A White House fact sheet described the partnership as a “near-real-time, integrated, and cost-effective maritime domain awareness picture” that will “transform the ability of partners in the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean region to fully monitor the waters on their shores and, in turn, to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific.”<sup>162</sup> Quad countries will purchase and distribute commercial maritime tracking data, which the partnership will distribute through existing multilateral maritime monitoring institutions such as the U.S. Navy’s SeaVision platform or India’s Indian Ocean Region Information Fusion Center.<sup>163</sup> Notably, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness is able to support monitoring of China’s coercive behavior while simultaneously supporting non-traditional security objectives by identifying illicit activities such as seaborne smuggling and illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing in the Indo-Pacific.

Quad countries also deepened their information-sharing practices and military exchanges. The recently launched Quad Satellite Data Portal will link the four countries’ national satellite data resources, enabling Quad countries to openly share space-based civil Earth observation data.<sup>164</sup> The portal will initially focus on climate change, disaster response, ocean and marine resource sustainability, and other peacetime applications to support capacity building in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>165</sup> Prior to the May 2022 Quad summit, Prime Minister Kishida and then Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison signed a landmark Reciprocal Access Agreement between Japan’s Self-Defense Forces and the Australian Defense Force.<sup>166</sup> The agreement will allow each country to station troops in the other and provides procedures for joint training exercises, effectively empowering the countries to militarily support one another in what some observers have called a “quasi-alliance.”<sup>167</sup>

### ***Japan Bolsters Its Military and Economic Security***

In June 2022 during the Shangri-La Dialogue annual international defense summit held in Singapore, Prime Minister Kishida said Japan will strengthen its defense capabilities and is considering the development of counterstrike capabilities. He expressed security concerns, saying, “Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow” and pointed to tensions in the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, East China Sea, and Korean Peninsula.<sup>168</sup> Japan’s growing concern with China’s military provocations has led the government to double its defense spending goals, making them more in line with NATO defense spending targets.<sup>169</sup> In response to Japan’s hardening defense stance, China has demonstrated its own insecurities with a strong U.S.-Japan alliance by warning against any efforts to intervene in

the region's "hard-won peace and stability" and cautioning the United States and Japan to "heed rational voices from the region as gunboats will not subject China to their will."\*<sup>170</sup>

After assuming power in 2021, the Kishida government established the position of minister of economic security and subsequently passed a new economic security law in May 2022 to combat concerns regarding Japan's dependence on China and other foreign suppliers for critical materials and parts.<sup>171</sup> Japan's leaders worry that China may weaponize its trade reliance, leaving the supply chains on which Japan depends vulnerable to disruption.<sup>172</sup> The Japanese government has offered subsidies to incentivize companies to move their production out of China and back to Japan in an effort to reduce supply chain dependencies. China continues to push back and demonstrate its fears of Japan strengthening its defense posture while decoupling, at least in part, from the Chinese economy, and it has accused Japan of following the United States in promoting economic decoupling in the name of "national security."<sup>173</sup>

### ***Elections in South Korea May Signal a Shift away from China***

South Korea's presidential elections in March 2022 may indicate a policy shift in South Korea-China relations as new President Yoon Suk-yeol takes a harder line on China and seeks greater cooperation with the United States. During the campaign, Yoon Suk-yeol accused then President Moon Jae-in of being too friendly with China and failing to deepen the U.S.-South Korea relationship. Despite or perhaps because of the campaign rhetoric, China's Vice President Wang Qishan, a longstanding Xi ally who previously led the anticorruption effort, attended Yoon Suk-yeol's inauguration in May 2022 as Xi's "special representative."†<sup>174</sup> Since his inauguration, President Yoon has expressed his intent to strengthen the country's diplomatic, security, and economic relations with the United States, shifting away from the last administration's approach of delicately balancing relationships with both the United States and China. He has also indicated that he would be interested in expanding South Korea's deployment of the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system, a clear warning to Beijing of President Yoon's intent to pursue Korean interests even in the face of pressure from the CCP.‡<sup>175</sup>

\*This mention of gunboats likely refers to the nearly 100-year period in which U.S. gunboats patrolled the Yangtze River. The Yangtze River Patrol began operations in 1854 to protect U.S. interests in the Yangtze River's treaty ports. Kemp Tolley, "Yangtze Patrol: The U.S. Navy in China," *Naval Institute Press*, 2000; Frank S. Taylor Family and Royal Navy History.net, "American River Gunboats."

†In 2013, then Vice Premier Liu Yangdong attended President Park Geun-hye's inauguration. Prior to that, in 2008 State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan attended President Lee Myung-bak's inauguration. Ji Da-gyum, "Chinese President's Right-Hand Man to Attend Yoon's Inauguration," *Korea Herald*, May 6, 2022.

‡Following South Korea's initial agreement in 2016 with the United States on THAAD deployment, China implemented a number of measures to retaliate economically. State-run media encouraged the boycott of South Korean goods, and the government denied visas to South Korean bands. China also prohibited tourism to South Korea and blocked popular South Korean dramas from streaming online. In a more targeted move, China closed down a number of South Korean Lotte stores within China; the company was responsible for supplying the land used for THAAD. Adriana Diaz and Shuai Zhang, "Angered by U.S. Anti-Missile System, China Takes Economic Revenge," *CBS News*, April 7, 2017; Christopher Woody, "China Is Going After South Korea's Wallet in Their Dispute over the THAAD Missile System," *Business Insider*, March 20, 2017; Steven Borowiec, "Yoon's Pledge to Boost THAAD Missile System Risks China Reprisal," *Nikkei Asia*, March 16, 2022.

South Korea's economic relationship with China and domestic political opposition may constrain how far the Yoon Administration can go with its more aggressive defense measures. The country is largely dependent on China as an export market and is also highly reliant on China for imports, particularly semiconductors, medical supplies, and rare earth elements.<sup>176</sup> During a May summit with U.S. President Joe Biden in South Korea, President Yoon announced that he would lead South Korea in joining the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), the U.S. economic initiative and multilateral strategy to strengthen partnerships in the region that includes supply chain resilience as one of its four pillars.\*<sup>177</sup> Earlier that same month, South Korea also joined NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence, which provides training to member states for defending against cyberattacks.<sup>178</sup> Some within South Korea, including Woo Sang-ho of the Democratic Party, have expressed concern that China will interpret this action as too aggressive and signal a "willingness to prepare for a military confrontation with China and Russia in the future."<sup>179</sup> While the new Yoon Administration may intend to implement a hardened policy toward China, it must also balance its approach with the views of the opposing Democratic Party. The party still holds the majority in South Korea's National Assembly, which is not up for election until March 2024.<sup>180</sup>

### ***China's Tensions with Australia Continue***

After taking office in May 2022, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his government signaled some openness to improving the Australia-China relationship, contingent on China's removal of sanctions it imposed on Australia's agriculture and energy commodities last year.<sup>181</sup> In a June 2022 interview, Prime Minister Albanese stated, "China needs to remove the sanctions. And that will go a long way toward restoring improved relations."<sup>182</sup> Similarly, in July 2022 Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong noted Australia's interest in "stabilizing the relationship" with China and described the Albanese government as "open to engagement," though she reiterated "the importance of those coercive [trade] measures being removed" for any improvement in the bilateral relationship.<sup>183</sup> Chinese leaders appeared to suggest China-Australia ties had a path toward rapprochement, as Chinese Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian noted an "opportunity of possible improvement of [China's and Australia's] bilateral relations" with the new Australian government.<sup>184</sup>

China's government continued to stoke military tensions with Australia despite its stated interest in improved relations. In May 2022, a PLA Air Force fighter jet intercepted an Australian P-8 reconnaissance aircraft operating in international airspace in the vicinity of the South China Sea. The Chinese fighter jet maneuvered at dangerously close range, cut across the nose of the P-8, and released flares and chaff, or scrap metal designed to act as a countermeasure against incoming missiles.<sup>185</sup> Australian Defense Minister

\*The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework's four pillars are trade; supply chains; clean energy, decarbonization, and infrastructure; and tax and anticorruption. White House, *Statement on Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity*, May 23, 2022.

Richard Marles confirmed that chaff entered at least one of the Australian P-8's engines, posing a threat to the aircraft and to the Royal Australian Air Force pilots.<sup>186</sup> When asked about the incident, China's Ministry of National Defense spokesperson Senior Colonel Tan Kefei urged Australia to "strictly restrict the operations of its naval and air forces, or it will bear all the serious consequences airing therefrom."<sup>187</sup> This episode continues a pattern of dangerous PLA behavior around Australian aircraft. In February 2022, Australia's government reported that one of its P-8A aircrafts was hit by a laser shot from a PLA Navy vessel, which similarly threatened damage to the plane's systems and which the Australian Defense Department noted could "endanger lives."<sup>188</sup>

### ***China's Relationship with India Continues to Deteriorate***

In 2022, China's relationship with India continued to deteriorate as the stalemate on the Sino-Indian border dispute dragged on and Indian government officials claimed China's leadership showed no intention of working toward a resolution. Throughout the year, Chinese and Indian corps-level commanders met three times at the Chushul-Moldo border point of the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) for talks without any breakthrough.<sup>189</sup> While engaging in these dialogues, the PLA continued to develop infrastructure\* near the LAC and fortify its position in disputed territories.<sup>190</sup> These developments improve the PLA's ability to operate in contested regions along the border and undermine prospects for a diplomatic solution.<sup>191</sup> Despite India's concerns over the border dispute, China's diplomats described the situation on the disputed border as "generally stable," even as the standoff† in the Ladakh region continued.<sup>192</sup> India's then Ambassador to China Vikram Misri called out a contradiction between Beijing's diplomatic statements and lack of actions, saying there was "a tendency in some quarters to sweep the border situation under the carpet."<sup>193</sup> (For more on China's border dispute with India, see Chapter 3, Section 3, "China's Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia.")

Although neither India nor China have condemned Russia's invasion, this similar stance does not indicate Indian alignment with China.<sup>194</sup> Instead, India seeks to maintain its relationship with Russia as a strategic source of support‡ in India's rivalry with China while also growing its ties with the United States.<sup>195</sup> During the 2022 Annual SCO Summit in Samarkand Uzbekistan, Indian

\* In 2022, the PLA continued building military infrastructure on both sides of the LAC, which will improve PLA troop mobility. For example, the PLA is building a strategic bridge across Pangong Lake, which will reduce the time it takes to move troops from Tibet to the center of the disputed Ladakh region from 12 hours to three or four hours. China has also improved its road networks, helipads, and access to warm water to increase the quantity of troops the PLA can sustain during the winter in the Himalayas. The PLA also fortified its position in all three sectors of the border by fielding upgraded equipment such as the lighter CSK-series vehicles, truck-mounted howitzers, and the HQ-9 long-range air defense system. Matthew P. Funaiolo, Brian Hart, and Joseph S. Burmudez Jr., "Big Military Upside to China's New Bridge across Pangong Lake," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, March 10, 2022; Liu Zhen, "China-India Border Dispute: PLA Troops Feel the Heat... of a Nice Warm Shower," *South China Morning Post*, November 2020; Dinakar Peri, "China Upgraded Firepower on LAC: Original Source," *Hindu*, June 27, 2022.

† Neither the Indian Army nor the PLA have disengaged the estimated 50,000 troops and heavy equipment each side sustains in the contested region. Dinakar Peri, "Stalemate in India-China Talks to End Eastern Ladakh Standoff Continues," *Hindu*, July 18, 2022.

‡ Russia has historically supported India through weapons sales and use of votes and vetoes in the UN Security Council that are favorable to India. Ashley J. Tellis, "What Is in Our Interest? India and the Ukraine War," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 25, 2022.

President Narendra Modi did not meet with Xi and publicly chastised Russia's behavior, stating that this is "not an era for war."<sup>196</sup> Indian officials have avoided statements that reinforce China's narrative blaming Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the United States and NATO, and they disagreed with Chinese efforts to use the SCO to oppose international sanctions on Russia.<sup>197</sup> When Foreign Minister Wang encouraged the secretary general of the SCO that the organization should play an active role in the conflict, former Indian diplomat Yogesh Gupta responded that the SCO, driven by China and Russia, does not have "a useful role in the resolution of the Ukraine conflict."<sup>198</sup> The Indian military and the PLA met at Russia's annual strategic military exercise VOSTOK-2022, though India limited its participation by only sending a single regiment and restricting their activities.<sup>199</sup> Most notably, the Indian Armed Forces did not participate in the Naval Exercises (which included Chinese and Russian warships), an abstention that Indian media claims was a sign of support for Japanese opposition to the exercises.<sup>200</sup> Prior to the military exercises, Lt. General Prakash Menon, a former military advisor to the Government of India in the National Security Council Secretariat, suggested that by limiting its participation, India may "retain its presence while signaling distance" from China and Russia.<sup>201</sup>

## **China's Efforts in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands See Mixed Results**

### ***China Continues to Be Assertive in Southeast Asia***

In November 2021, Xi chaired a summit to commemorate the 30th anniversary of China-ASEAN relations and announced the relationship's upgrade to a "comprehensive strategic partnership," the highest level of partnership in China's diplomatic parlance.<sup>202</sup> Foreign Minister Wang capitalized on this designation in June 2022 with a five-nation Southeast Asia tour urging ASEAN countries to expedite long-ongoing negotiations over a South China Sea Code of Conduct.\*<sup>203</sup> Despite Foreign Minister Wang's emphasis on open regionalism and prioritization of ASEAN in China's foreign policymaking, China undermines its supposed commitment to a rules-based code of conduct for the South China Sea with a growing naval presence buttressing its illegal maritime claims.<sup>204</sup>

### **Compromising Maritime Safety in the South China Sea**

In November 2021, China began blocking public access to shipping location data, known as Automatic Identification System (AIS) signals, citing national security concerns that "the intelligence extracted from [AIS] data endangers China's economic se-

\*Negotiations over a proposed South China Sea Code of Conduct began in 1992 as a way to manage tensions and reduce the likelihood of conflict in the resource-rich waterways of the South China Sea. The proposed Code of Conduct's role has naturally been an important talking point in Sino-ASEAN relations for many years, although its realization likely remains far off despite such pledges. Sebastian Strangio, "Chinese FM Pledges Progress on South China Sea Code of Conduct," *Diplomat*, July 13, 2022; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative: South China Sea Expert Working Group, "A Blueprint for a South China Sea Code of Conduct," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 11, 2018.

## **Compromising Maritime Safety in the South China Sea— Continued**

curity and the harm cannot be ignored.”\*<sup>205</sup> According to data cited in a November 2021 *Financial Times* piece, AIS signals transmitted from ships in Chinese waters fell dramatically from a peak of over 15 million per day in October to just over one million per day in early November.†<sup>206</sup> Global shipping data provider VesselsValue corroborated similar trends, reporting “an industry wide reduction in terrestrial AIS signals in China,” according to Charlotte Cook, head trade analyst at VesselsValue.‡<sup>207</sup> Broadcasting AIS data is an international standard that ensures maritime safety and transparency, and commercial services aggregate the data to monitor commercial ship traffic and analyze economic activity.§<sup>208</sup> By blocking public access to its AIS broadcasts, China’s government further obfuscates its commercial maritime activities and increases challenges to identifying and publicizing destabilizing activities such as enforcing illegal maritime claims in the South China Sea.¶

AIS screening is also an effective method to ensure compliance with international sanctions, particularly for monitoring ships involved in ship-to-ship transfers or trading in areas perceived to be high-risk near sanctioned jurisdictions. A U.S. government advisory issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control in May 2020 reveals that AIS switch-offs (or “gaps”) are key red flags that might be indicative of illegal ac-

\*Former staff writer and contributor for the *War Zone* military and defense online circulation Brett Tingley describes AIS as the “global standard for tracking and identifying ships at sea.” Brett Tingley, “Scores of ‘Dark Vessels’ Belonging to China’s Maritime Militias Are Operating in Contested Waters,” *War Zone*, February 22, 2022.

†In 2000, the International Maritime Organization adopted a requirement for AIS systems to be carried on most ships. The requirement took effect in 2004. Certain provisions within the mandate stipulate that a flag state may exempt certain ships from this requirement. International Maritime Organization, International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, Chapter V; Regulation 19—Carriage Requirements for Shipborne Navigational Systems and Equipment, London, 1974.

‡Terrestrial AIS data refers to signals that are transmitted to coastline stations from ships. Coastline stations and satellites work in tandem to combine AIS coverage in order to create a more detailed and accurate vessel tracking system. In the event AIS data are not transmitted via coastline stations, information can be still exchanged via satellite; however, a press release by Unseenlabs, a European radio frequency signal processing firm, stated that “most ships are not visible from traditional surveillance systems once they get close to Chinese shores.” Unseenlabs, “Unseenlabs Reveals Ships That Vanished from Conventional Geolocation Systems,” February 18, 2022.

§Although originally designed to prevent collisions between ships and support rescue efforts in disasters, AIS has also developed into a tool governments can use to measure activity in overseas ports and enhance supply chain visibility. China’s new data protection regime restricts the transfer of sensitive data overseas. Firms wishing to do so must first undergo a security assessment by China’s information protection body, the Cyberspace Administration of China. Eleanor Olcott, Harry Dempsey, and Steven Bernard, “China Blocks Access to Shipping Location Data,” *Financial Times*, November 23, 2021; Gavin Maguire, Muyu Xu, and Xie Yu, “Investors in the Dark on China Industrial Transport as Data Curbs Bite,” *Reuters*, April 25, 2022.

¶According to the U.S. Department of Defense, China is able to leverage unique maritime militias—People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militias, or PAFMM—which, in addition to the PLA Navy (PLAN) and China Coast Guard (CCG), have “played significant roles in a number of military campaigns and coercive incidents over the years, and also supported PRC fishing fleets operating in disputed waters.” More specifically, the Department of Defense further notes that these “armed reserve force of civilians available for mobilization . . . perform tasks including safeguarding maritime claims, often conducted in conjunction or coordination with the PLAN and the CCG.” Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2021, 75; Brett Tingley, “Scores of ‘Dark Vessels’ Belonging to China’s Maritime Militias Are Operating in Contested Waters,” *War Zone*, February 22, 2022.



### **Compromising Maritime Safety in the South China Sea— Continued**

tivity such as the evasion of sanctions.<sup>209</sup> The Yellow Sea, which lies between mainland China and the Korean peninsula, has been identified as one such high-risk area for illicit ship-to-ship transfers involving North Korean goods, primarily coal and metal ore, in violation of UN sanctions. Former Data and Analytic Director at NK News Leo Byrne assesses the legal implications of China's actions to mask AIS signals, stating, "If [the hidden AIS] data contains information on U.N. designated vessels moving through Chinese territorial waters—which it almost certainly does—then Beijing would likely be violating the wording of Resolution 2397 by not reporting such information to the U.N. and what action it took concerning it."<sup>210</sup> China has employed this same approach to import oil from Iran and Venezuela while evading U.S. sanctions.<sup>211</sup> (For more on China's energy imports from authoritarian countries, see Chapter 2, Section 3, "China's Energy Plans and Practices.")

#### *China Looks to Usher In a "New Golden Era" with the Philippines*

On July 6, Foreign Minister Wang met with Philippine counterpart Enrique Manalo in Manila for bilateral talks, during which Wang expressed China's intention to work with newly elected Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and usher in a "new golden era" between the two countries.<sup>212</sup> President Marcos was generally considered to be favorable to Chinese interests by many analysts, but he insists close ties with Beijing will not compromise Philippine sovereignty.<sup>213</sup> Foreign Minister Wang's visit follows ongoing friction between the two countries in the South China Sea, where, according to the Philippine government, a Chinese Coast Guard ship maneuvered within an unsafe distance of a Philippine patrol vessel near Scarborough Shoal on March 27, 2022, the fourth such reported incident between March of 2021 and 2022.<sup>214</sup> The Philippines condemned this action as a violation of the 1972 Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea.\*<sup>215</sup> In June, Chinese Coast Guard vessels allegedly made "direct threats" against Philippine supply boats attempting to replenish a contingent of marines stationed at a Manila-held outpost in the waters around the Spratly Islands where China has advanced illegal claims.†<sup>216</sup>

\*The Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 (COLREGs) were published by the International Maritime Organization and define the "rules of the road" among other terms and conditions by which ships are required to abide when at sea to prevent collisions. The convention remains the current standard for navigation rules among seafaring nations globally. International Maritime Organization, Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 (COLREGs), October 20, 1972; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Coast Guard, *Amalgamated International & U.S. Inland Navigation Rules*.

†China Coast Guard ships No. 4302 and No. 5304 tailed supply boats headed for the *Sierra Madre* outpost, a former U.S. Navy landing ship that was deliberately run aground near the Second Thomas Shoal in 1999. The boat has since been used as an outpost for the Philippine Navy and is routinely supplied by various fishing boats and other vessels. According to Philippine media, China Coast Guard ship No. 5304 verbally warned the crew of *Sierra Madre* via radio of "consequences" should the Philippines "insist on making trouble." John Feng, "China Warns Philippine Ships 'Making Trouble' as Island Dispute Escalates," *Newsweek*, July 6, 2022.

## ***China's Increasingly Brazen Push for Influence in the Pacific Islands***

A series of Chinese engagements and agreements with Pacific Island countries over the past year cast new light on China's interest in deepening ties and growing its security presence in the region. In April, China signed a bilateral security agreement with the Solomon Islands that greatly expands access to the region for China's armed forces.<sup>217</sup> Motivations for the government of the Solomon Islands pursuing the agreement with China likely include a desire for Chinese assistance protecting against internal threats in light of significant recent unrest and opposition to Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare's regime.<sup>218</sup> For China, the deal could provide not only an ability to protect its own interests in the Solomon Islands but also maritime access to a strategically important region from which it can monitor the activities of U.S. and allied air and naval forces and potentially complicate their attempts to intervene in a Taiwan scenario.<sup>219</sup> Although it is unclear what this portends, the government of the Solomon Islands subsequently refused to grant permission for routine visits by U.S. and UK naval vessels.<sup>220</sup> (For more on Beijing's deal with the government of the Solomon Islands, see "The PLA Seeks Overseas Basing Opportunities.") During the U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit in September, the government of the Solomon Islands reportedly refused to sign the U.S.-Pacific Partnership agreement until even indirect references to China were removed from the draft.\*<sup>221</sup>

In May, Foreign Minister Wang traveled to the region to meet with Pacific Island governments both in bilateral meetings and as a group at the Second China-Pacific Island Countries' Foreign Ministers Meeting.†<sup>222</sup> Ahead of the visit, he circulated prewritten drafts

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\*The Biden Administration hosted the first ever U.S.-Pacific Islands Summit in Washington, DC on September 28 and 29, 2022. At the summit, the governments of the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and the United States signed the U.S.-Pacific Partnership agreement committing to deepening cooperation and partnerships in the region. According to reporting by *Reuters*, a note signed by the Embassy of the Solomon Islands in Washington before the summit expressed the intention of the Solomon Islands government not to sign the proposed declaration of the U.S.-Pacific Partnership. Solomon Islands Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele later told reporters that indirect references to China in the draft declaration "put [the Solomon Islands government] in a position where we'll have to choose sides." Foreign Minister Manele is further reported to have stated, "In the initial draft, there were some references that we were not comfortable with, but then with the officials, after discussions and negotiations, we were able to find common ground." Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sogavare did ultimately sign the declaration, which does not mention China but does include general reaffirmations of the importance of international law, territorial integrity, and sovereignty in the region. Reporting does not reveal what indirect references were taken out. Nick Perry, "Solomon Islands Insisted China References Be Removed Before Signing US-Pacific Partnership Declaration," *Diplomat*, October 5, 2022; White House, *Declaration on U.S.-Pacific Partnership*, September 29, 2022; Kristy Needham et al., "Solomon Islands Tells Pacific Islands It Won't Sign White House Summit Declaration -Note," *Reuters*, September 28, 2022; U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Pacific Island Country Summit*, 2022.

†The first China-Pacific Island Countries' Foreign Ministers' Meeting had met virtually in October 2021. Foreign Minister Wang met with the foreign ministers of Pacific Island countries that recognize Beijing. Pacific Islands countries that recognize Taiwan, namely the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, and Tuvalu, did not participate. Participants agreed to support one another on "issues involving each other's core interests and major concerns," and participating Pacific Island countries agreed to abide by China's "One China" principle. The joint statement from the meeting endorsed the Belt and Road Initiative and Xi's community of common human destiny as well as his Global Development Initiative. It also contained language aimed at bolstering China's image, such as formal congratulations to the CCP on the celebration of its centennial, commendations to China's government for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and an expression of support for Beijing hosting the 2021 Winter Olympics. Participants agreed to develop a regular meeting mechanism and established several topically based subforums on specific topics. Embassy of The

of two agreements—which China hoped to pass at the Foreign Minister’s Meeting—entitled China-Pacific Island Countries Common Development Vision and China-Pacific Island Countries Five-Year Action Plan on Common Development (2022–2026).<sup>223</sup> The two documents summarized plans for extensive Chinese involvement not only on economic issues but also in security fields such as police training, cybersecurity, border security, and criminal investigation.<sup>224</sup> The documents, along with the leaked Solomon Islands agreement, sparked concern in the region. President David Panuelo of the Federated States of Micronesia wrote an open letter to his counterparts in other Pacific Island governments stating his intent to reject the prewritten agreements and urging them to consider doing the same.<sup>225</sup> “The details suggest that China is seeking... to acquire access and control of our region,” he wrote, “with the result being the fracturing of regional peace, security, and stability, all while in the name of accomplishing precisely that task.”<sup>226</sup>

Overall, the impact of Foreign Minister Wang’s May tour through the region was decidedly mixed for China. When the Foreign Minister’s meeting convened on May 30, Pacific Island countries did not approve the draft documents or any security cooperation.<sup>227</sup> The meeting produced only limited agreement on mainly economic topics, while Foreign Minister Wang was seemingly left on the back foot seeking to reassure his counterparts of China’s good intentions.<sup>228</sup> The debacle suggests that China both overestimated its ability to set the agenda in the Pacific Islands and underestimated the willingness of Pacific Island states to work together for their own interests.<sup>229</sup> Notwithstanding this setback on the multilateral agenda, Foreign Minister Wang’s tour yielded 52 bilateral agreements with individual Pacific Island governments on a range of topics.<sup>230</sup> China’s interest in the region also remains undiminished, and there are signs that lessons learned from the tour will guide China’s approach moving forward.<sup>231</sup> A position paper released by China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the meeting and subsequent comments from Foreign Minister Wang demonstrate an attempt to refocus attention toward the economic and political areas where China has received less pushback in support of more incremental advances in the region.<sup>232</sup>

## **China Continues to Make Inroads in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean**

### ***In Africa, China Continues to Expand Its Economic, Diplomatic, and Security Presence***

In Africa, China continued promoting economic and peacekeeping initiatives to establish itself as a trusted partner in the region. China’s economic ties in Africa are expanding as additional countries join its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). At the end of 2021, both Eritrea and Guinea-Bissau joined BRI ahead of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).<sup>233</sup> Eritrea’s participation in BRI is

People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Kiribati, *Wang Yi Talks about the Six-Point Consensus and Specific Results of the First China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers’ Meeting*, October 21, 2021; China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Joint Statement of China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers’ Meeting*, October 21, 2021; China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Wang Yi to Chair the First China-Pacific-Islands Countries Foreign Minister’s Meeting*, October 20, 2021; Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Allies*, October 5, 2022.

particularly attractive to China, giving it additional access to the Horn of Africa where its interests include infrastructure projects and military installations. In January 2022, Morocco became the first North African country to sign a BRI implementation plan.\*<sup>234</sup>

China is also pursuing larger peacekeeping roles in the Horn of Africa, proposing the Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa in January 2022 and appointing a special envoy to the Horn of Africa.†<sup>235</sup> Xue Bing, a longtime diplomat, was assigned to the new role in which he has emphasized China's soft power efforts, saying, "China will send out engineers and students. We don't send out weapons."<sup>236</sup> Despite Special Envoy Xue's claims, from 2017 to 2021 China supplied 10 percent of Africa's arms imports, which included rocket launchers sent to Ethiopia.<sup>237</sup> One of Special Envoy Xue's primary challenges will be the civil war in Ethiopia, the recipient of billions of dollars in loans from China and home to the African Union headquarters building built by China.<sup>238</sup> Tanzania, Seychelles, and Namibia each receive over 90 percent of their arms transfers from China.<sup>239</sup>

While promoting itself as a peace broker, China seeks opportunities to expand its military presence and promote its role as a strong yet helpful partner in Africa. There were no reported major developments for China's military base in Djibouti, but U.S. government reports indicate China may be weighing its options of where to build its next base. The U.S. Department of Defense's (DOD) 2021 report on China's military power notes China has ambitions for additional military facilities on the continent and has "likely considered" Angola, Kenya, Seychelles, and Tanzania for its next base site and has "probably made overtures to Namibia."<sup>240</sup> Additionally, in a House Armed Services Committee hearing on March 17, 2022, General Stephen Townsend, commander of U.S. Africa Command, explained that China is actively seeking a naval base in West Africa, particularly in Equatorial Guinea, where it has already built a commercial but potentially dual-use port.<sup>241</sup> China has interests on the eastern half of the continent, where it can access the Indian Ocean, as well as interests in western Africa, giving it access to the Atlantic Ocean—both critical access points for China's trade and military ambitions. (For more on China's ambitions in the Indian Ocean, see Chapter 3, Section 3, "China's Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia.") Similar to Djibouti's port infrastructure, which serves commercial and military functions, the facilities in Angola, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, and Namibia all have existing ports that would fit well with China's dual-use basing model.‡ Angola also provides

\*While five North African countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco, had already signed BRI memoranda of understanding, Morocco is the first among them to sign an implementation plan. The plan outlines China's commitment to invest in Morocco's agricultural, health, and financial industries as well as joint ventures in the energy sector. Ben Zhao, "Morocco Belt and Road Deal Could Give China Gateway to Mediterranean, Experts Say," *South China Morning Post*, January 8, 2022; China's National Development and Reform Commission, "Implementation Plan of Jointly Building the BRI between China and Morocco Signed via Video Conference," January 5, 2022.

†The special envoy position is a separate diplomatic position from an ambassadorship. China also has a special envoy for the Middle East, Zhai Jun, who meets with top leaders in the region to discuss bilateral relations and promote Chinese interests. He has played a particular role in discussions on the Israel-Palestine situation. *Beijing Review*, "New Special Envoy on Middle East Affairs," September 12, 2019.

‡Dual use refers to ports owned or invested in by Chinese firms that serve both commercial and military activities. As a report by the Brookings Institution explains, the "mixing of com-

7.5 percent of the imported crude oil to China, making it China's fifth-largest crude oil supplier and its top African supplier as of 2021.<sup>242</sup>

### ***China Pushes Vaccine Diplomacy, Belt and Road in Latin America and the Caribbean***

In Latin America and the Caribbean, China's economic investments and humanitarian initiatives coincided with its diplomatic push for countries to drop official diplomatic ties with Taiwan. In December 2021, Nicaragua ended its diplomatic ties to Taiwan to recognize China, with Nicaragua's Foreign Ministry claiming in an official statement that Taiwan is an "inalienable part of Chinese territory."<sup>243</sup> That same month, China donated one million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Nicaragua.<sup>244</sup> Additionally, China is taking steps to build vaccine manufacturing sites in Latin America and has already reached agreements to build factories in Ecuador, Chile, Colombia, and Brazil.<sup>245</sup> In April 2022, Foreign Minister Wang announced a new disaster relief fund for Caribbean countries to provide economic and technical aid "without any political strings attached."<sup>246</sup> Coverage of the announcement, however, cites Caribbean countries' support for safeguarding China's "sovereignty and territorial integrity" and its efforts in "realizing national reunification."<sup>247</sup>

China continued to promote its interests in the region through the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Forum, as most recently outlined in the CELAC Forum Joint Action Plan (2022–2024) released in late 2021. Highlights from this plan include China's promotion of BRI projects, cooperation in the aeronautical and space sectors, and China's interests in the Latin American and Caribbean agriculture sector.<sup>248</sup> The plan also discusses expanding Confucius Institutes in the region and adding Mandarin to state curricula.<sup>249</sup>

### **China Bolsters Security Ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran**

The first quarter of 2022 saw significant Chinese diplomatic and security engagement with Saudi Arabia and Iran, two of Beijing's major partners in the Middle East. While primarily economic and symbolic in nature, the tenor of the bilateral dialogues reinforced a number of troubling trends, particularly regarding "arms transfers; drones, dual-use, and missile technology; and cyber and intelligence capabilities."<sup>250</sup> China's Minister of National Defense, General Wei Fenghe, met with Saudi Arabia's Deputy Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman on January 26 and expressed China's willingness to "promote the continuous development of bilateral relations," accord-

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mercial and strategic agenda—a feature of Beijing's state model—suggests the PLA could leverage or upgrade these facilities for military purposes if the need arose." China's construction of deep-water ports with extended piers easily accommodates aircraft carriers and other warships. For example, prior to 2016 China denied any plans for building a military base in Djibouti and promoted its port construction plans as purely commercial. China's multipurpose port was then expanded to include the naval base, making it China's first overseas military outpost. According to the National Bureau of Asian Research, "There are 61 African ports in which Chinese firms have or had a verifiable role as builder, financier, owner, or operator of all or part of the facility." Paul Nantulya, "Considerations for a Prospective New Chinese Naval Base in Africa," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, May 12, 2022; Nadège Rolland, "(In)Roads and Outposts, Critical Infrastructure in China's Africa Strategy," *National Bureau of Asian Research*, May 2022, 11; Zach Vertin, "Great Power Rivalry in the Red Sea: China's Experiment in Djibouti and Implications for the United States," *Brookings Institution*, June 2020, 8.

ing to reporting by China's Ministry of National Defense.<sup>251</sup> These meetings came one month after a CNN report revealed what U.S. intelligence officials believe to be potential Chinese assistance to Saudi Arabia in its ballistic missile production.<sup>252</sup> In mid-January, Foreign Minister Wang hosted his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, to discuss the 25-year cooperation agreement the two countries signed on March 2021.\*<sup>253</sup> While no specific projects were announced, the Iranian foreign minister asserted that the meeting ushered in the implementation stage of the comprehensive agreement between the two countries.<sup>254</sup>

Most notable, however, was a senior Chinese military delegation to Iran in late April headed by Minister Wei.<sup>255</sup> In Tehran, Chinese delegates met with a handful of Iran's leading officials, including President Ebrahim Raisi.† According to a readout of the April 27 meeting by *VOA News*, President Raisi expressed "his government's desire for closer cooperation with China," stating that Iran and China "share weal and woe."<sup>‡</sup><sup>256</sup> In the midst of stalled negotiations this year to revive Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers, closer cooperation with China could help counteract what the Iranian president described as U.S. "unilateralism, hegemony, and external interference."<sup>257</sup>

According to a Chinese defense ministry statement, Minister Wei affirmed the PLA's "willing[ness] to maintain strategic communication" with Iran's armed forces in an effort "to push the development of military-to-military relations to a higher level."<sup>258</sup> In the end, both sides committed to enhancing bilateral cooperation across all spheres by conducting high-level strategic dialogue, increasing military exchanges, and organizing joint exercises.<sup>259</sup> Former Chinese Ambassador to Iran Hua Liming called the military communication between China and Iran "unprecedented."<sup>260</sup>

## North Korea Benefits from China-Russia Partnership

As China and Russia's relationship grows closer, North Korea aims to benefit from their combined force and push back against U.S. and regional pressure on its missile and nuclear programs. Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un congratulated China on the Beijing Olympics and vowed to strengthen cooperation with the country to "frustrate" threats from the United States and its allies.<sup>261</sup> North Korea has also been vocal about its support for Russia and China's claims that the United States is the

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\*Chinese Foreign Minister Wang and his counterpart, then Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, signed the China-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in Tehran on March 27, 2021. Under the agreement, which seeks to further develop the Iranian-Chinese relationship over a 25-year timeframe, China will reportedly invest \$400 billion in Iran's economy in exchange for a steady supply of Iranian oil at heavily discounted prices. Experts and observers have been skeptical of the deal's scope and feasibility since details of the pact first surfaced in 2020. Farnaz Fasshi and Steven Lee Myers, "China, with \$400 Billion Iran Deal, Could Deepen Influence in Mideast," *New York Times*, March 27, 2021; Ariel Cohen, "China-Iran \$400 Billion Accord: A Power Shift Threatens Western Energy," *Forbes*, April 5, 2021; Keith J. Krach and Brian H. Hook, "Iran and China, the Totalitarian Twins," *Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 2020.

†Other senior Iranian officials included Armed Forces General Staff Chief of Staff Mohammad Bagheri and Defense Minister Mohammad Reza Ashtiani. Officers of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were also pictured in the meetings. Tuvia Gering and Jason M. Brodsky, "Not 'Business as Usual': The Chinese Military's Visit to Iran," *Middle East Institute*, May 16, 2022. State Council of the People's Republic of China, *Iranian President Meets with Chinese Defense Minister*, April 28, 2022.

‡"Sharing weal and woe" is an expression meant to signify "both in times of happiness and success and in times of sadness and difficulty." *Farlex Dictionary of Idioms*. S.v. "In Weal and Woe."

“root cause of the Ukrainian crisis,” citing Russia’s “reasonable and just demand... for security.”<sup>262</sup> On May 26, China and Russia vetoed a draft UN Security Council resolution that would tighten sanctions against North Korea in response to its ballistic missile launches. It was the first time a draft resolution condemning North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs failed to pass the UN Security Council since the UN started punishing Pyongyang with sanctions in 2006 after its first nuclear test.<sup>263</sup> In June, commercial satellite imagery suggested North Korea may be preparing for a seventh nuclear test.<sup>264</sup> In September and October, Pyongyang conducted missile tests, including a launch over Japan, and flew warplanes near the South Korean border.<sup>265</sup>

The extent of North Korea’s reliance on China to evade international sanctions remained opaque in 2022, but reporting based on satellite imagery indicates North Korea continues to conduct illicit trade with China. In spring 2022, North Korean cargo ships arrived at China’s Longkou Port in Shandong Province, likely unloading coal in exchange for goods like fertilizer or rice, despite being banned by UN sanctions.<sup>266</sup> As a 2022 UN report notes, this bartering system allows North Korea and China to avoid “the use of the international financial system to further evade sanctions.”<sup>267</sup> While information offered by Chinese authorities provides little visibility into these port transactions, UN reporting outlines a number of cases where banned cargo appeared to be offloaded or loaded at Chinese ports. For example, AIS tracking found that a North Korean vessel had previously carried coal to China’s Yantai and Longkou ports in August 2021, but Chinese officials reported that the cargo ship entered the ports empty-loaded and left with agricultural supplies.<sup>268</sup> Investigations into these cases continue as China refuses to provide any assistance.

## China’s Military Advancements

The PLA received great attention in the runup to the 20th Party Congress and saw steady improvements in its capabilities, although it continued to struggle with weaknesses in its military personnel. Despite anticipating slower economic growth in 2022, the CCP increased the PLA’s official defense budget\* by 7.1 percent this year, an increase greater than last year and higher than the government’s economic growth target.<sup>269</sup> As a result, the percentage of gross domestic product China now devotes to defense has begun to increase. The PLA’s official budget is also growing at a faster rate than it has in the last two years: CCP leaders increased the PLA’s official budget by 6.8 percent in 2021 and by 6.6 percent in 2020.<sup>270</sup> According to an independent analysis by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, as of the end of 2021 China’s real military spending had grown for 27 consecutive years.<sup>271</sup>

China also ramped up its displays of military force against Taiwan as part of a more aggressive stance that included diplomatic and economic coercion.<sup>272</sup> Throughout the year, the PLA escalated its

\*China’s government does not report all defense spending in its official budget. Its official figures are inconsistent and cannot be verified. In 2021, for example, Janes experts assessed that China’s defense spending was 25 percent higher than officially reported. Jon Grevatt and Andrew MacDonald, “China Announces 6.8% Increase in 2021 Defense Budget,” *Janes Defense Weekly*, March 5, 2021.

intimidating and frequent operations in the air and waters around the island, violating Taiwan's air defense identification zone on an almost daily basis to normalize its presence in the area.<sup>273</sup> In August, China conducted large-scale live-fire exercises after Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.<sup>274</sup> (For more on China's changing stance on Taiwan, see Chapter 4, "Taiwan.")

### **Emphasis on Xi's Personal Authority over the PLA**

Throughout 2022, General Secretary Xi has taken subtle steps to emphasize his personal authority over the PLA. This year, the annual training mobilization order, typically issued by the Central Military Commission under Xi's name, was noticeably briefer and more personal than the orders issued from the Central Military Commission in prior years. The order is unusual for stating "I order" and for its encouraging tone that called on the PLA to "greet the opening of the 20th Party Congress with high spirits and the results of first-class military training," directly tying military capabilities to Xi's continuation of power.<sup>275</sup> In contrast, the PLA training mobilization orders in 2019 through 2021 were issued from the Central Military Commission and were longer documents laden with language on the PLA's need for improvement.<sup>276</sup>

On June 17, 2022, the PLA Navy launched its third aircraft carrier, *Fujian*, even though the carrier will not be combat ready for at least another five years.<sup>277</sup> The timing of the carrier's launch is likely a political decision rather than a military one, in which signaling progress had more value than achieving completeness.<sup>278</sup> The ship's manufacturer, China State Shipbuilding Corporation, missed the initial launch date for the carrier on June 3, and by the ship's launch its radar and weapons systems were still visibly not in place.<sup>279</sup> Instead of delaying the launch a second time, China State Shipbuilding Corporation held a premature ribbon-cutting ceremony for *Fujian*. In the leadup to the 20th Party Congress, CCP leaders' desire to demonstrate the PLA's growing capabilities may have created political pressure to accelerate the ship's launch and likely outweighed the technical requirements of construction and outfitting.<sup>280</sup>

### **Steady Improvements in the PLA**

The PLA Air Force has continued to improve its fighter pilot training to keep pace with the record quantities of new warplanes produced in 2021.<sup>281</sup> In July, the head of the PLA Navy's pilot recruitment office stated that he had enough pilots in training to meet the demands\* of the new carrier-based fighter jets.<sup>282</sup> In late 2021 and 2022, the PLA Air Force eliminated intermediate flight training on less capable aircraft to accelerate pilot training on advanced platforms.<sup>283</sup> Derek Solen, senior researcher at China Aerospace Studies Institute, described the process of replacing jet engine trainers with the JL-10 jet as providing a "more effective bridge between the PLAAF's [PLA Air Force] primary trainers and its fourth and fifth

\*With the addition of a third aircraft carrier, the PLA will require more pilots and pilots that can fly a wider variety of air frames. *Fujian* is the first of China's carriers to use an electromagnetic catapult to launch aircraft from the deck. This will enable *Fujian* to launch larger and heavier aircraft than previously required. Jack Lau, "China Launches Fujian, PLA Navy's 3rd Aircraft Carrier," *South China Morning Post*, June 17, 2022.



generation aircraft.”<sup>284</sup> This increase in aircraft quality follows continued increases in training quality as exercises include more flying in conditions of low visibility and inclement weather and at higher speeds.<sup>285</sup> U.S. Air Force General Kenneth Wilsbach, commander of Pacific Air Forces, assessed noticeable improvements to PLA Air Force pilots’ flying ability, particularly in the J-20, a fifth-generation fighter jet designed to contend with the United States’ F-22 and F-35.<sup>286</sup>

In addition to improving pilot quantity and quality, the PLA is at times encouraging\* dangerous flying behavior and intercept tactics. At the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2022, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin condemned the “alarming increase in the number of unsafe aerial intercepts and confrontations at sea by PLA aircraft and vessels.”<sup>287</sup> In 2022, PLA Air Force aircraft deployed metal chaff in front of Australian surveillance planes in the South China Sea and repeatedly buzzed a Canadian plane that was monitoring North Korea to enforce UN sanctions.<sup>288</sup> PLA aircraft have also intercepted U.S. aircraft over the South China Sea using unsafe and unprofessional tactics inconsistent with the 2015 agreement between the U.S. Department of Defense and the Chinese Ministry of National Defense on safety guidelines for military air encounters, including mandatory communication rules and minimum required distances for disengagement.<sup>289</sup> The rise in PLA pilots’ dangerous behavior increases the risk of midair collisions or crashes for U.S. and allied pilots.

### ***The Central Military Commission Issues Trial Guidelines for Non-War Military Activities***

On June 13, 2022, the Central Military Commission issued its Outline for Non-War Military Activities (For Trial Implementation), which Chinese state media notes primarily systematizes and provides a legal basis for the PLA’s existing practice of conducting non-war military actions.<sup>290</sup> The 2022 trial guidelines are another step toward codifying a PLA mission set that includes peacetime operations that are far from China’s shores and occur without authorities such as a UN mandate. Senior Colonel Tan Kefai, a spokesperson for China’s Ministry of National Defense, reaffirmed that the purpose of the trial outline is to “standardize the organization and implementation of non-war military activities.”<sup>291</sup>

Although they signal that the PLA is growing into its global mission set, the 2022 trial guidelines further regulate an existing PLA capability and do not necessarily signal an immediate change in PLA force employment. The PLA has been developing the concept of non-war military activities since before the term’s first appearance in the 2006 textbook *Science of Campaigns*.<sup>292</sup> The concept was first

\*According to Collin Koh, research fellow at the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies in Singapore, the PLA teaches pilots to emulate dangerous practices while venerating pilots like Lt. Cmdr. Wang Wei to inspire the next generation of fighter pilots. Wang Wei died in 2001 after performing dangerous maneuvers leading to a collision between his fighter jet and a U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft over the South China Sea. He is commemorated each April 1 as a protector of China and elevated as an example of courage for new pilots to follow. Austin Ramzy, “Chinese Pilots Sent a Message. American Allies Said They Went Too Far,” *New York Times*, June 9, 2022; *Naval History and Heritage Command*, “EP-3 Collision, Crew Detainment, Release, and Homecoming,” August 18, 2021; *China Military Online*, “Wang Wei: A Heroic Guardian of China’s Territorial Airspace and Waters | Outstanding CPC Members in the PLA,” August 4, 2021.

announced to the world in China's 2008 Defense White Paper following several years of the PLA's research into U.S. military operations other than war (MOOTW).<sup>293</sup> The 2022 trial guidelines may not be final, and the defined missions and types of missions under this umbrella PLA concept may continue to evolve.<sup>294</sup>

### **The PLA's "Non-War Military Activities"**

The PLA's concept of non-war military activities is influenced by but not equivalent to DOD's concept of military operations other than war (MOOTW). The U.S. Army first defined MOOTW in 1993, and by 1995 the Joint Force accepted the concept, which focuses on "detering war, resolving conflict, promoting peace, and supporting civil authorities in response to domestic crises" involving "elements of both combat and noncombat operations in peacetime, conflict, and war situations."<sup>295</sup>

In contrast, the PLA's concept of non-war military activities is intended to actively and preemptively shape China's external strategic environment.<sup>296</sup> The PLA's 2013 *Science of Military Strategy*, an authoritative study of applied military theory published by the PLA's Academy of Military Sciences, describes non-war military activities as "using a price lesser than war and a mode more flexible than war to obtain greater strategic benefit" and includes the newly defined subcategory of "confrontational non-warfare military activities" under this umbrella concept.<sup>297</sup> Similarly, the 2020 *Science of Military Strategy* published as a teaching manual for the PLA by China's National Defense University describes non-war military activities as "the political will of the Party in peacetime and in critical moments."<sup>298</sup> According to research by Roderick Lee and Marcus Clay, respectively research director and analyst with the U.S. Air Force's China Aerospace Studies Institute, one leading PLA officer assesses that "under the guise of 'peacetime confrontational military operations,' [non-war military] activities can escalate into a state of military friction, military confrontation, armed conflict, and then local war."<sup>299</sup>

Although these forms of confrontation may be smaller in scale and scope than what the PLA would consider a large war on a use-of-force spectrum, they may still be significant acts that would require a crisis management response from the United States.<sup>300</sup> An expanded scope of authorized peacetime use of force may also facilitate the PLA's operational concept of "using force to prevent war," in which a high degree of military force is used to warn others not to cross a red line that would lead to a higher-intensity conflict.<sup>301</sup> According to this concept, the PLA may have a lower threshold for use of military force intended to protect their red lines instead of using red lines as a trigger for subsequent use of military force.

### ***The PLA Seeks Overseas Basing Opportunities***

The PLA gained ground in its pursuit of greater base access across Eurasia and the Pacific that could support its sustained military operations farther from its shores. In April 2022, Australian offi-

cially leaked an agreement between China and the Solomon Islands to authorize the presence and operation of Chinese military and paramilitary forces in the country.<sup>302</sup> Although the final text of the agreement has not been released, the leaked draft established that the Solomon Islands may “request China to send police, armed police, military personnel and other law enforcement and armed forces” to the Solomon Islands to assist in “maintaining social order” or for other mutually agreed-upon purposes.<sup>303</sup> It also established that China may, “according to its own needs” and with the consent of the Solomon Islands, carry out ship visits, logistical replenishment, and stopovers in the Solomon Islands and use relevant forces “to protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects.”<sup>304</sup> This agreement follows Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sogavare’s late 2021 acceptance of Chinese riot equipment and expert trainers to help protect his regime from civil unrest.<sup>305</sup>

Similarly, in June 2022 the *Washington Post* quoted a Chinese official confirming that the PLA will use the long-suspected Cambodian naval base Ream on the gulf of Thailand.<sup>306</sup> China and Cambodia broke ground on June 8 to revamp the base with the “undisclosed” cost reportedly being borne entirely by Beijing.<sup>307</sup> Construction of the controversial upgrade to Cambodia’s largest naval base will be carried out by Chinese state-owned company Metallurgical Group Corporation.\*<sup>308</sup> A *Washington Post* report quotes an unnamed “Western” official who assessed the PLA would have “exclusive use of the northern portion of the base, while their presence would remain concealed.”<sup>309</sup> Ream Naval Base would grant the PLA greater access to the South China Sea and enhance China’s military and economic sway in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>310</sup> According to Gregory Poling, director of the Southeast Asia Program and Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Ream Naval Base “would enhance China’s ability for surveillance and intelligence collection around the Gulf of Thailand and even in the eastern Indian Ocean.”<sup>311</sup> (For more on Ream Naval Base as a potential node of PLA power projection, see the Commission’s 2020 Annual Report, Chapter 3, Section 2, “China’s Growing Power Projection and Expeditionary Capabilities.”)

In late 2021, reports emerged of China building a military facility at the Khalifa port in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Chinese intelligence collection ships identified entering the port. The UAE is a strategic partner for the United States in the Middle East in defense and counterterrorism efforts.<sup>312</sup> The presence of Chinese intelligence collection ships and a military facility in the UAE would present risks to the United States as it plans to sell F-35 fighter jets, which contain critical military technology, to the UAE.<sup>313</sup> U.S. officials consider the potential threat of Chinese military access in

\* In August 2019, waste from the Ramu nickel plant in Papua New Guinea that was owned by Metallurgical Group Corporation’s subsidiary Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) spilled into the Basamuk Bay. The plant, built and operated by MCC, produces a mixed hydroxide that is shipped to China for the production of batteries for electric vehicles. According to testimony from Allan Tidwell, professor of practice at the Georgetown University Walsh School of Foreign Service, the Ramu nickel plant is 85 percent owned by MCC and pumps its mining tailings directly into the sea. Melanie Burton and Tom Daly, “Chinese-Owned Nickel Plant Spills Waste into Papua New Guinea Bay,” *Reuters*, August 28, 2019; Allan Tidwell, oral testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on Challenges from Chinese Policy in 2022: Zero-COVID, Ukraine, and Pacific Diplomacy*, August 3, 2022, 194.

the UAE a continuing issue, and U.S. intelligence agencies remain in the process of assessing China-UAE cooperation in defense, technology transfer, and other areas affecting U.S. national security interests.<sup>314</sup> Construction at the Khalifa port has been suspended, effectively halting the military facility's development.<sup>315</sup>

### ***The PLA Invests in Improved Weapons Development***

In late 2021 and 2022, the PLA took discrete steps toward improving the quality of weapons and military equipment delivered by its current development and procurement processes. In October 2021, Xi led a military equipment work conference, the first since 2014, and called on the PLA to improve China's weapons development while "targeting a world-class standard and the ability to take the offensive in key battles."<sup>316</sup> An authoritative commentary published in the *PLA Daily* revealed the official position that although the PLA has shown "great improvement" in its level of weapons and equipment overall, "compared with the world's military powers, there are still many obvious gaps."<sup>317</sup> Between late 2021 and into 2022, Xi issued three regulations to standardize and improve China's weapons development with a focus on quality and efficiency. The first regulation addressed military equipment procurement, the second standardized the testing and appraisal of military equipment, and the third set interim regulations on the supervision and administration of military equipment procurement contracts.<sup>318</sup> In June 2022, the PLA Joint Logistics Support Force also established new regulations to standardize PLA procurement requirements, bid review, and contract management across the entire procurement cycle to improve the speed and quality of systems delivered to the PLA.<sup>319</sup>

### ***China Expands Nuclear Arsenal as It Claims to Uphold Global Nonproliferation Regime***

China continued to modernize, expand, and diversify its nuclear capabilities in 2021 and 2022 (for more on China's nuclear forces, see Chapter 3, Section 2: "China's Nuclear Forces: Moving beyond a Minimal Deterrent" in the *2021 Annual Report to Congress*).<sup>320</sup> In October 2021, the *Financial Times* reported that the PLA had tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic glide vehicle launched from a rocket in low-earth orbit during two separate tests over the summer, prompting U.S. officials and security analysts to speculate that the weapon could evade U.S. missile defense systems.<sup>321</sup> In November 2021, DOD stated in its annual report on Chinese military power that China likely intends to have at least 700 deliverable nuclear warheads by 2027 and 1,000 warheads by 2030, significantly exceeding its previous estimates of its stockpile.\*<sup>322</sup> The department also assessed that China would transition a portion of its nuclear forces to a "launch-on-warning"† posture and questioned whether the ongoing nuclear buildup foreshadows changes to China's nu-

\*In 2020, DOD predicted China would "double" its stockpile of around 200 nuclear warheads over the next decade. U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China: Annual Report to Congress*, September 2020, ix.

†Under a launch-on-warning posture, the PLA would launch nuclear weapons in retaliation for an incoming strike that has been detected by intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) systems but not yet detonated on Chinese territory. For more, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2021 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2021, 361.

clear strategy, including a potential abrogation of its longstanding “no first use”<sup>\*</sup> policy.<sup>323</sup> More recently, *Nikkei* reported in August 2022 that satellite imagery showed evidence China is expanding the infrastructure supporting its nuclear test facilities at Lop Nur, its longtime nuclear weapons testing facility in western China.<sup>324</sup>

Throughout the year, Chinese officials and commentators portrayed China as a staunch defender of the global nonproliferation regime and criticized the United States for its nuclear activities despite China’s own history of sharing nuclear and missile technologies with countries of proliferation concern.<sup>†</sup><sup>325</sup> In January 2022, China was party to a joint statement released by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council that affirmed the importance of reducing nuclear risks and upholding the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).<sup>326</sup> Upon the statement’s release, officials at China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs touted China’s “no first use” policy and relatively smaller stockpile of nuclear weapons as evidence of its “important contribution to global strategic stability,” placing the onus on the United States and Russia to make progress on nuclear arms control talks first.<sup>327</sup> At the NPT Review Conference in August 2022, the head of China’s delegation, Ambassador Fu Cong, expressed China’s support for the treaty and called on attendees to “reject double standards” in the nonproliferation realm, describing the recent trilateral security pact between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia to share nuclear submarine technology as a development that posed “severe nuclear proliferation risks.”<sup>328</sup> Ambassador Fu also called on the United States to withdraw all nuclear weapons from Europe, warning that “any attempt to replicate... NATO’s nuclear sharing model in the Asia-Pacific region would undermine regional strategic stability and would be firmly opposed by the countries in the region and, when necessary, face severe countermeasures.”<sup>329</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>After successfully conducting the country’s first nuclear test on October 16, 1964, the Chinese government pledged in a public statement that “China will never at any time and under any circumstances be the first to use nuclear weapons.” China also issued assurances at the UN in 1978 and 1995 that it would never use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against nonnuclear weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones. For more, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2021 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2021, 345.

<sup>†</sup>China has continued to play a concerning role in the global proliferation of missile and nuclear technologies, though the manner in which this proliferation occurs has evolved over time. Whereas two decades ago the Chinese government and state-owned enterprises were the main source of illicit missile and nuclear technologies as well as fissile material to countries like Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan, the U.S. government now assesses the Chinese government has ceased direct involvement in nuclear-related proliferation and transfers of complete missile systems. Rather, Chinese nonstate companies and private individuals play a dominant role in the illicit proliferation of such goods to countries of concern today. The Chinese government turns a blind eye to, and in some cases tacitly supports, these illicit activities. Chinese state-owned enterprises continue to export technology for nuclear energy programs, but they generally do not export fissile material or fissile material production equipment to countries that do not have International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards in place. However, affiliates or subsidiaries of Chinese SOEs have occasionally been implicated in recent proliferation activities that benefit Iran’s WMD activities. For example, China’s Wuhan Sanjiang Export and Import Co. Ltd. was sanctioned by the U.S. Department of the Treasury in 2017 for selling more than \$1 million worth of technology, including radars and missile guidance equipment, to a subsidiary of Iran’s Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics. Wuhan Sanjiang Export and Import Co. Ltd. is a subsidiary of the large enterprise China Sanjiang Space Group, which is in turn a subsidiary of the SOE China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2021 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2021, 367–370; Valerie Lincy, written testimony for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Nuclear Forces*, June 10, 2021, 1–3, 9; Paul Kerr, “Chinese Nuclear and Missile Proliferation,” *Congressional Research Service*, May 17, 2021, 2.

## PLA Personnel: A Persistent Weaknesses

In 2022, China's military continued efforts to recruit and develop high-quality\* personnel. The first annual recruitment cycle for 2022 emphasized the need to recruit conscripts with a college education† in the fields of science and technology, and local recruitment efforts announced new incentive programs for college-educated recruits.<sup>330</sup> In March, the Central Military Commission announced new regulations to improve noncommissioned officer (NCO) development and professionalism, stating that promotions will now be merit based and solely focused on combat effectiveness instead of time in service.<sup>331</sup> In June, the PLA also introduced NCO development program for high school students based on scores from their college admission exams, with the aim of funneling highly educated graduates into military careers.<sup>332</sup> The PLA is further reforming its postgraduate education system to focus on specialized skills for military intelligence, aerospace, and joint operations.<sup>333</sup> These efforts to improve personnel quality built upon numerous previous initiatives, yet the PLA continues to face persistent problems in personnel retention and training.<sup>334</sup> Ni Lexiong, politics professor at Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, notes the failure of China's military education, which largely came from the Soviet Union,‡ to quickly enable military officers to be sent into real combat.<sup>335</sup> This turnover also affects the quality of PLA training exercises across all services.<sup>336</sup> For example, the annual conscription cycle the PLA employed until 2021 created a lull in the training calendar for three months every year when a large cohort of conscripts decommissioned at once, leaving units severely undermanned before new conscripts finished basic training and joined the unit three months later.<sup>337</sup> In 2021, the PLA implemented a twice-annual conscription cycle to spread the exodus of conscripts§ between two different dates and reduce the degree to which each unit was undermanned.<sup>338</sup> A year after implementation, however, the new system faces structural challenges that the PLA has yet to overcome because the existing institutions to support conscripts' progression through recruitment, pre-enlistment training, and basic training are established for the existing fall recruitment cycle and have been slower to expand in the new spring recruitment cycle.<sup>339</sup>

The PLA also aimed to improve the quality of its training exercises by making them more combat realistic. In February 2022, the Central Military Commission issued new regulations on preventing

\*Chinese media sources use "high quality" to describe a variety of attributes the PLA seeks in its personnel, including well educated, physically and mentally fit, politically reliable, and combat capable. Huang Panyue, "Xi: Build World-Class Military," *China Daily*, July 30, 2022; China's Embassy in Kazakhstan, *Development of China's National Defense and the Armed Forces in the New Era 2012–2022* (新时代国防和军队建设掠影), July 30, 2022; Huaxia, "Xi Focus: Xi Stresses Strengthening Military Talent Cultivation," *Xinhua*, November 28, 2021.

†For PLA recruitment, both current students and graduates are considered college educated, regardless of how long they have been enrolled.

‡China is likely observing the consequence of poorly trained personnel from Russia's poor combat effectiveness in its war on Ukraine. Marek Posard and Khrystyna Holynska, "Russia's Problems with Military Professionalization," *RAND Corporation*, March 21, 2022.

§Dennis Blasko and Marcus Clay, independent PLA analysts, estimate that conscripts comprise 35 percent of the PLA. Each conscript serves a two-year service, so in a once-per-year cycle, the PLA loses 17.5 percent of its personnel at a time every year. In a twice-per-year cycle, the PLA loses 8.75 percent of its personnel at a time every six months. Marcus Clay and Dennis Blasko, "People Win Wars: The PLA Enlisted Force and Other Related Matters," *War on the Rocks*, July 30, 2020.

and treating injuries in response to increased intensity, difficulty, and realism of PLA training exercises.<sup>340</sup> While the PLA has for years stated its intention to transition away from overly scripted and predictable training exercises, these new regulations are one indication the PLA is now adapting to the needs of more realistic training.<sup>341</sup>

### **Despite Moderate Improvements to PLA Personnel, Significant Challenges Persist**

The PLA's leadership has focused on improving personnel quality by increasing professionalism and competence, while at the same time enhancing political reliability following force-wide reorganization in 2016. According to a 2022 report prepared for the Commission by BluePath Labs, the PLA has improved the education level of its recruits and made some effective changes to the training system, yet several key challenges persist.<sup>342</sup> For example, despite efforts to improve commanders' operational decision-making, the PLA assesses its commanders are still inadequately trained and prepared for complex modern and joint operations.<sup>343</sup> Recent initiatives include structural changes such as enlarging the command staff of basic fighting units and increasing responsibilities and training for NCOs.<sup>344</sup> The NCO programs are of note as they seek to improve and expand the role of NCO, including to create unit-level senior NCOs similar to that of sergeants major and master chiefs in the U.S. military.<sup>345</sup> Additionally, concentrated efforts to eliminate rampant corruption throughout the PLA led Xi to declare victory over corruption, yet that declaration may be premature.<sup>346</sup> Finally, military service in China continues to be unappealing to China's youth and their parents due to social challenges like family life balance and a continued perception that military service is less prestigious and lucrative than other careers.<sup>347</sup> As the PLA targets educated youth for recruitment, the increasing difficulty of finding civilian employment after graduation in China may help military recruitment efforts.<sup>348</sup> (For more analysis of the trends and challenges for the personnel in the PLA, please see "Personnel of the People's Liberation Army" by BluePath Labs).

### **China Cancels Already Infrequent Military-to-Military Engagements with the United States**

On August 5, 2022, China canceled three high-level military engagements with the United States in a move that is consistent with Chinese leaders' long-demonstrated reluctance to participate in military-to-military dialogue.<sup>349</sup> As part of its response\* to Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan on August 2, 2022, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the cancelation of the U.S.-China

\*In addition to canceling three defense engagements, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs suspended five nonmilitary engagements: U.S.-China cooperation on the repatriation of illegal immigrants, U.S.-China cooperation on legal assistance in criminal matters, U.S.-China cooperation against transnational crimes, U.S.-China counternarcotics cooperation, and U.S.-China talks on climate change. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Announces Countermeasures in Response to Nancy Pelosi's Visit to Taiwan*, August 5, 2022.

Theater Commanders Talk, the U.S.-China Defense Policy Coordination Talks, and the U.S.-China Military Maritime Consultative Agreement meetings.<sup>350</sup> These talks sought to establish mechanisms to diffuse potential crises and prevent an incident like a collision from escalating into a larger conflict.<sup>351</sup> Despite the importance of military-to-military engagements, the Chinese military has for a long time shown unwillingness to conduct productive bilateral military dialogues by delaying and in some cases declining to attend scheduled meetings, as it did in 2020 with the now canceled Military Maritime Consultative Agreement meetings.<sup>352</sup>

In limited military-to-military exchanges with the United States in the first half of 2022, PLA representatives had paid lip service to improving communications\* but had not demonstrated willingness to make substantive improvements in the quality of dialogue.<sup>353</sup> On June 10, Defense Secretary Austin met with General Wei on the margins of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.<sup>354</sup> A readout from the meeting by China's Ministry of National Defense suggests General Wei promoted Xi's Global Security Initiative as the most appropriate framework for managing the Ukraine crisis and lectured Defense Secretary Austin on how the United States must "refrain from slandering and smearing China."<sup>355</sup> In a video call with Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley on July 7, the PLA's Chief of the Joint Staff Department General Li Zuocheng blamed the United States for escalating tensions by "deliberately creating confrontation."<sup>356</sup> Although Defense Secretary Austin and General Milley urged their PLA interlocutors to contribute to more substantive dialogue on reducing strategic risk, the meetings produced no change in the Chinese side's longstanding refusal to commit to reliable crisis communications.<sup>357</sup> Both General Wei and General Li also placed considerable emphasis on "implement[ing] the important consensus reached by the heads of state,"† suggesting

\*In his June 10 meeting with Defense Secretary Austin, General Wei reportedly agreed to "maintain high-level strategic communication, promote strategic mutual trust," and "manage contradictions and divergences... so as not to escalate them into conflicts and confrontation." China's Ministry of National Defense readout of a July 7 video call between General Li and General Milley similarly states, "The two sides believe that maintaining the stable development of the relationship between the two militaries and avoiding triggering conflicts and confrontations is in accordance with the common interest of both sides, [and] the two sides can maintain communication on this." China's Ministry National Defense, *Li Zuocheng Has a Video Call with the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Milley* (李作成与美军参联会主席米莱视频通话), July 8, 2022. Translation; China's Ministry of National Defense, *Chinese Defense Minister Holds Talks with US Counterpart in Singapore*, June 10, 2022.

†This so-called "important consensus reached by the heads of state" appears to refer to what Beijing calls the "Four No's, One Not Intend" (四不一无意). The formulation is shorthand for a set of five commitments Chinese diplomats insist U.S. President Biden made to Xi in a bilateral meeting, namely that the United States "does not seek a new Cold War, does not seek to change China's system, does not seek to strengthen alliance relations against China, does not support 'Taiwan independence,' [and] does not intend to have a conflict with China." U.S. descriptions of meetings in which the Chinese side references the "Four Nos, One Not Intend" do not use this formulation. China's Ministry National Defense, *Li Zuocheng Has a Video Call with the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Milley* (李作成与美军参联会主席米莱视频通话), July 8, 2022. Translation; U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Readout of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley's Video Teleconference with People's Liberation Army of China Chief of the Joint Staff Department Gen. Li Zuocheng*, July 7, 2022; China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Yang Jiechi Holds a Meeting with the U.S. President's National Security Advisor Sullivan* (杨洁篪同美国总统国家安全事务助理沙利文举行会晤), June 14, 2022. Translation; China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *President Xi Jinping Has a Video Call with US President Joe Biden*, March 19, 2022; White House, *Readout of President Joseph R. Biden Jr. Call with President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China*, March 18, 2022; *Observer Network*, "Wang Yi: U.S. Side's Declaration of the 'Four Nos One Not Intend' Has Been Floating in the Air All Along and Has Never Landed" (王毅: 美方“四不一无意”的表态始终漂浮在空中, 迟迟没有落地), March 7, 2022. Translation.



that even interlocutors selected for dialogue with the secretary of defense and chairman of the joint chiefs of staff may have limited authority to negotiate on issues of strategic communication absent explicit approval from above.<sup>358</sup> (For more on suitable counterparts for U.S.-China high-level exchanges, see Chapter 1, “CCP Decision-Making and Xi Jinping’s Centralization of Authority.”)

### Space and Counterspace Activities

China continued its progress in becoming a “space power” in all respects, including its military capabilities and diplomacy efforts.\* In June 2022, China sent three astronauts on the Shenzhou 14 mission, the third crewed mission to the Tianhe core module, where they will continue construction on the Tiangong space station.<sup>359</sup> Before boarding the Shenzhou 14 spacecraft, Chinese astronaut Liu Yang wrote a letter to her children, telling them, “Mom is going to war” and characterizing herself as a “soldier on duty.”<sup>360</sup> Separately, two of China’s advanced communications satellites, Shiyang-12-01 and Shiyang-12-02, reportedly conducted evasion maneuvers to avoid monitoring from a U.S. surveillance satellite, and one repositioned itself to look back and monitor the U.S. satellite. The exchange highlighted the lack of international rules and norms in the space domain, specifically for how satellites should approach one another in geostationary orbit.<sup>361</sup> In March, U.S. Army General James Dickinson, commander of U.S. Space Command, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that other Chinese satellites, Shijian-17 and Shijian-21, have robotic arm technology that “could be used in a future system for grappling and disabling other satellites.”<sup>362</sup> He went on to note that China also has “multiple ground-based laser systems of varying power levels that could blind or irreversibly damage satellites.”<sup>363</sup>

In their diplomatic efforts, Chinese diplomats grew heated over U.S. concerns about China’s lunar exploration program and continued to promote their own norms for space exploration. In response to the U.S.-led Artemis Accords for establishing a common set of principles for civil exploration and use of outer space, China and Russia are jointly promoting the International Lunar Research Station. On July 4, Spokesperson for China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Zhao Lijian heatedly dismissed National Aeronautics and Space Administration Administrator Bill Nelson’s concerns about whether China would stop other countries from exploring the moon once it has laid claim to it.<sup>364</sup> The same day, during a meeting with Cambodia, Laos, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and Vietnam, Foreign Minister Wang invited them and other Southeast Asian nations to join China’s International Lunar Research Station effort.<sup>365</sup>

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\* For more on China’s ambitions and progress in space, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission’s 2019 Annual Report, Chapter 4, Section 3, “China’s Ambitions in Space: Contesting the Final Frontier.”

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