

CHAPTER 2: U.S.-CHINA SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS (YEAR IN REVIEW)

Abstract

In 2024, China sought to mitigate internal and external risks by continuing to tighten political control at home and exercising a combination of coercive and persuasive strategies abroad. To combat persistent problems of corruption and fears of political disloyalty, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Xi Jinping and a small circle of top leaders tightened their grip on the Party rank and file while continuing to unseat and in some cases disappear high-ranking figures across the government and military. Internationally, China attempted to promote itself as the world leader best positioned to solve and prevent conflicts, represent low- and middle-income countries, and promote economic growth while also making it clear that it opposed U.S. policies and alliance relationships. In its diplomacy with the United States, China sought to use the promise of bilateral dialogues on narrow areas of common interest to derail what it perceives as the United States' policy of strategic competition. It sought to tighten ties with Europe and encourage divisions within the transatlantic alliance but continued to undermine its own credibility through its intensifying economic, military, diplomatic, and political support for Russia. At the same time, China is increasingly providing support and resources to countries involved in military operations against Western allies. China also turned a blind eye as Iran and North Korea act in ways that undermine global stability, and it has demonstrated willingness to exploit tensions in the Middle East for geopolitical gain. Overall, China reacted to other countries' efforts to protect their economic and physical security by portraying them as hostile, exclusionary, and destabilizing. In the case of the South China Sea, China resorted to more dangerous, violent actions. Despite the willingness of some governments to deepen cooperation with Beijing in various domains, many other countries remained deeply skeptical of China's intentions and proposals.

Key Findings

- As part of its efforts to solidify its control across the Party, state, and military, in 2024 the CCP leadership introduced new measures on political discipline and anticorruption, targeting everyone from low-ranking Party members to senior military officers. From the top of the system, General Secretary Xi delivered dire messages to Party and military audiences on the severity of remaining problems, revived some Maoist concepts and slogans, and emphasized the importance of political loyalty and enduring hardship. China's leaders viewed enhanced domestic control

as a key factor in China's ability to accomplish its domestic and international objectives.

- China continues to assert that the United States poses intensifying strategic risk. Despite a bilateral agreement reached in late 2023 to pursue limited cooperation on military communication, climate change, countering fentanyl and other drugs, artificial intelligence (AI), and people-to-people ties, China has continued its efforts to counter or weaken U.S. policies without changing its own behavior. Fundamental divergences on issues such as Taiwan and access to markets, capital, and technology remain.
- In 2024, China accelerated efforts to build international support from as many countries as possible—with a focus on the developing nations of what it calls the “Global South”—for China's claims to global leadership, its continuing efforts to isolate and subjugate Taiwan, and its desired forms of economic cooperation. At the same time, Beijing sought to portray actions taken by the United States and many of its allies and partners to protect their own interests and established global norms as undermining the prospects for peace, stability, and prosperity and the future of collective international progress led by China. (For information on China's activities in the Middle East in 2024, see Chapter 5, “China and the Middle East.”)
- China and Russia committed to further deepening their joint efforts against the United States. China has sustained its economic, diplomatic, political, and material support for Russia's war effort in Ukraine. China also provided satellite imagery and dual-use materials that Russia is using for the reconstitution of its defense industry—such as weapons components, machine tools, and microelectronics—all while claiming to play a leading role in advancing a political solution to the conflict. In exchange for such support, Moscow has reportedly provided submarine, aeronautic, and missile technologies to Beijing as defense cooperation between the two countries continues to strengthen.
- China sought to counteract a deteriorating strategic relationship in Europe, using mainly positive rhetoric and promises of deepened cooperation to persuade the EU and individual European countries to distance themselves from the United States and abandon their efforts to de-risk relations with China. Xi tried to reframe Europe's economic dependencies on China as the byproducts of a beneficial symbiosis, to downplay political differences, and to emphasize supposed shared interests in the creation of a more equal international system.
- China's destabilizing behavior in the Indo-Pacific region continued. China's naval and coast guard presence around the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands and flights near Japanese airspace in the East China Sea represented a significant escalation from previous activity. In the South China Sea, China's aggressive behavior escalated to new levels in 2024 as the China Coast Guard (CCG) took increasingly aggressive, unsafe, and even violent measures to attempt to block the Philippines,

a U.S. treaty ally, from exercising its lawful rights in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). China's officials continued to leverage lawfare tactics to attempt to normalize their efforts to impose their will upon other countries in the region through coercive and illegal actions, superior force, and numbers.

Introduction

This chapter assesses key developments in China's domestic and foreign affairs in 2024. It begins by examining the CCP's domestic measures to enhance control across the Party-state bureaucracy and the military. Next, it describes developments in China-U.S. relations. The chapter concludes with a survey of China's approach to foreign affairs around the world in 2024. The chapter's findings are based on open source research and analysis, Commission hearings, and discussions with outside experts.

Xi Jinping Strengthens Party Control and Oversight

In 2024, General Secretary Xi Jinping continued to tighten his control over the Party, state, society, and military, broadly framing these efforts as essential to improve China's ability to accomplish its most important domestic and international objectives. Xi emphasized the importance of strengthening political discipline and fighting disloyalty while also making use of his signature anticorruption campaign to purge civilian and defense officials alike. He also oversaw further restructuring of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to bring additional domains of warfare under direct control of the political leadership.

Implications of Xi's Power for Succession and Stability

Xi's tight hold on power and apparent disinterest in succession planning creates risk for China's political system. At the CCP's 19th Party Congress in 2017 and again at its 20th in 2022, Xi diverged from what had been previous political practice by not indicating an intended successor as top leader of the Party.¹ Experts have assessed that although Xi's choices to extend his own rule* without selecting a successor may increase his own power in the short term, over the long term they increase the risk that the regime will experience instability.² In the continued absence of a clear succession plan,[†] Xi's unexpected demise or incapacitation

* Xi's positions as CCP general secretary and chairman of the CCP's Central Military Commission (CMC) do not have term limits. His third top position as the head of state of the People's Republic of China (PRC) was previously limited to two terms, but under Xi's leadership this term limit was removed in 2018, paving the way for him to hold all three positions indefinitely. Richard McGregor and Jude Blanchette, "After Xi: Future Scenarios for Leadership Succession in Post-Xi Jinping Era," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 21, 2021, 7.

† Although there are rules on paper about the selection process for each of Xi's top three positions, experts assess that the process of carrying out this selection would nevertheless be highly complex and uncertain. If Xi were to pass away, the CCP Charter suggests the CCP Central Committee would meet to select a new general secretary from the current Politburo Standing Committee and to select a new CMC chairman, although these two leaders need not necessarily be the same person. According to the PRC Constitution, the role of head of state would pass to the sitting vice president of China—who currently is not a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and thus not a candidate for the other two top positions. Informal consultation and bargaining by Party elites would likely play an important role in determining who is ultimately selected, a process that could be particularly fraught or prone to infighting in the event of a sudden power vacuum. *China Daily*, "Brief Introduction of Han Zheng—Chinese Vice President," March 11, 2023; Wanyuan Song and Tessa Wong, "Politburo Standing Committee: Who are the

Implications of Xi's Power for Succession and Stability— Continued

could lead to a disorderly succession.³ The delay in designating a successor also requires any individuals seeking to be considered a candidate in the future to continue demonstrating their loyalty to Xi in the meantime, which may contribute to escalating political tension.⁴

CCP Promotes Greater Societal Alignment with Xi's Vision of National Security

This year marked the ten-year anniversary of Xi's introduction of the Comprehensive National Security Concept, which the CCP sought to leverage to attune China's population to internal and external threats and the importance of rallying around the Party to counter them.⁵ The concept, which when introduced in 2014 heralded a dramatic broadening and elevation of conceptions of national security within China's policy framework, emphasizes that threats to China and to the CCP may originate from any direction, that international and domestic threats can interact with one another, and that coordinated, proactive efforts are thus required to manage them.* (For more on Xi's Comprehensive National Security Concept and the CCP's efforts to prepare China for extreme scenarios, see Chapter 7, "China's News Measures for Control, Mobilization, and Resilience.") The CCP highlighted the anniversary of the concept's introduction during its annual observation of "National Security Education Day"† to further promote it to the general public, attempting to use it to drum up support for the Party's absolute leadership over all domains.‡⁶ Some of the Party's efforts also appeared deliberately targeted at increasing the population's resistance to foreign narratives. For example, an article circulated in Party media by the director of the Political Department of China's Ministry of State Security (MSS)

Men Who Rule China Now?" *BBC*, October 23, 2022; Neil Thomas, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on CCP Decision-Making and the 20th Party Congress*, January 27, 2022, 15; Richard McGregor and Jude Blanchette, "After Xi: Future Scenarios for Leadership Succession in Post-Xi Jinping Era," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 21, 2021, 16–17.

*For more on Xi's efforts to incorporate national security and the Comprehensive National Security Concept into decision-making across all policy domains, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, "CCP Decision-Making and Xi Jinping's Centralization of Authority," in *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022.

†National Security Education Day is an annual event mandated by China's National Security Law of 2015. Aaran Hope, "Learning from National Security Education Day," *Jamestown Foundation*, April 26, 2024.

‡China Central Television circulated a large propaganda graphic over 12 pages in length, which presented a timeline of key developments in the implementation of Xi's concept, summarized the wide range of domestic and international areas the concept applies to, and then prominently emphasized the importance of "Upholding the Party's Absolute Leadership of National Security Work." The graphic was circulated in *China Daily* under a title claiming "It Concerns You and Me!" The Party's official mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*, released a promotional video purporting to show that the Party's faithfulness to this concept over the past ten years had had a profound, positive impact on every domain of people's lives and every element of China's domestic and international success. Alongside the video, it released an 18-line poem painting a positive image of the Party's national security practice as entirely for the people's benefit. *China Daily*, "It Concerns You and Me! One Graphic Completely Explains the Comprehensive National Security Concept" (事关你我! 一图全解总体国家安全观), April 15, 2024. Translation; *People's Daily*, "Comprehensive National Security Concept 10 Year Anniversary Promotional Video | These Ten Years" (总体国家安全观10周年宣传片 | 这十年), April 15, 2024. Translation.

recommended that CCP cadres organize “public opinion struggles against the deliberate provocation of hype and smear attacks by some foreign media,” arguing that this type of educational event would help the public learn that “the world is not peaceful” and strengthen their resistance to foreign messaging.⁷

Amended State Council Organic Law Formalizes CCP Executive Control over the State

The year saw a further consolidation of the Communist Party’s control over the state bureaucracy and a continued concentration of power within the Party into the hands of Xi Jinping. On March 11, China’s National People’s Congress (NPC) passed an amendment to the Organic Law of the State Council, the highest organ of executive power within China’s government, formally enshrining CCP executive control over the body.⁸ Specifically, the revised law included new provisions to clarify that the State Council adheres to Xi’s guiding ideology and “resolutely implements the decisions and arrangements of the CCP Central Committee.”⁹ This represents an additional step in Xi’s more than decade-long effort to strengthen the Party’s control over government institutions and his personal control over the Party.^{*10} The addition of these provisions codifies a Party-state relationship that already exists in practice due to previous political and institutional changes under Xi;† nevertheless, according to an explanation by the vice chairman of the NPC ahead of the meeting, clarifying these points was “the most important political requirement” behind the amendment.‡¹¹

CCP Emphasizes Party Loyalty and Control through Anticorruption Campaign and Intensified Party Discipline

China’s leadership undertook new efforts over the last year to enhance Party control through strengthened measures. Unlike in a rule of law system, combatting corruption under the CCP’s rule by law system can often be concerned as much with ensuring Party loyalty and political control as with traditional notions of preventing malfeasance of public trust and resources. While corruption is a concern in China, and the Party does view corruption as a threat to its legitimacy under some circumstances, Xi’s large-scale and highly institutionalized anticorruption campaign continues to function as an all-purpose governing tool whose purpose is to strengthen his control over the Party and the Party’s control over Chinese society.¹²

* For more on Xi’s organizational changes to strengthen both the CCP’s leading role in China’s decision-making and his own control within the Party, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, “CCP Decision-Making and Xi Jinping’s Centralization of Authority,” in *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022.

† Some observers note that the addition of an article entrenching CCP leadership can be understood as the implementation of a 2018 constitutional provision that the Party’s leadership be regarded as “the defining feature of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” and of a 2019 order by the CCP Central Committee requiring “the Party’s comprehensive leadership” to be written into the organic laws of China’s state institutions. Changhao Wei, “NPC 2024: Annotated Translation of the Revised State Council Organic Law,” *NPC Observer*, March 11, 2024.

‡ The amendment also made other changes to codify the functions of various State Council meetings, specify the duties of vice premiers and state councilors, and formalize other practices that had developed since the law’s introduction in 1982, such as the inclusion of the governor of the People’s Bank of China as a member of the State Council. Cui Fandi, “Revised Organic Law of the State Council Passed,” *Global Times*, March 11, 2024; *NPC Observer*, “NPC 2024: Annotated Translation of the Revised State Council Organic Law,” March 11, 2024; *People’s Daily*, “Explanation of ‘Organic Law of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China (Draft Revision)’” (关于《中华人民共和国国务院组织法(修订草案)》), March 5, 2024. Translation.

Revised CCP Discipline Regulations Raise Demands on Party Rank and File

The CCP continued to tighten political control over cadres and Party members to maintain its power and enhance its responsiveness.* In December 2023, the CCP issued a revised version of the Regulations on Disciplinary Actions of the Chinese Communist Party, which came into effect in January 2024.¹³ First, the revision increased the regulations' emphasis on "political discipline" as the most fundamental element of Party discipline while simultaneously expanding the concept to include several infractions previously considered less serious.[†]¹⁴ Second, the revision increased the regulations' emphasis on the "strictness" of discipline across the board.¹⁵ Another noteworthy adjustment added disciplinary provisions including potential removal from internal Party positions for "grave" cases of "privately reading, browsing, and listening to newspapers, books, audio-visual products, electronic reading materials, and online materials with serious political problems."¹⁶ The CCP additionally launched a formal education campaign, running from April to July, for Party members at all levels to study the revised regulations.¹⁷ The campaign notice emphasized that the Party should combat false loyalty to the Party Central Committee.¹⁸

Xi Warns Party and Military Leadership to Strengthen Political Loyalty while Invoking Anticorruption

Xi called upon China's civilian leadership to adhere to the demands of his politically motivated anticorruption campaign.‡ In January 2024, Xi gave a speech to the CCP's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) on what he called Party "self-revolution," a term he has promoted since at least 2016 to describe the CCP's responsibility to self-govern, self-regulate, and adapt itself to the demands of the times.¹⁹ According to Arran Hope, editor of the Jamestown Foundation *China Brief*, the phrase is one Xi has "resuscitated from the Mao era," representing "spiritually puritanical self-discipline [that] must perpetually underpin the conduct of all cadres."²⁰ Xi's speech and the other CCP materials that expounded upon the term made clear that it would include expanded anticorruption measures while simultaneously emphasizing political loyalty, political discipline, and adherence to Xi's directives.²¹ These materials indicated that "power-concentrated, capital-intensive, and

*As of December 2023, there were approximately 99 million Party members in China, representing about 7 percent of China's population. *Xinhua*, "Chinese Communist Party Statistical Bulletin" (中国共产党党内统计公报), *People's Government of the People's Republic of China*, June 30, 2024. Translation; Statista, "Chinese Communist Party—Statistics and Facts."

†The CCP's discipline regulations differentiate between "political discipline," "organizational discipline," "integrity discipline," "mass discipline," "work discipline," and "life discipline," which they list in this order. Chinese Communist Party, "Regulations on Disciplinary Actions of the Chinese Communist Party (Approved by the CCP Central Committee Politburo on December 23, 2003, Issued by the CCP Central Committee on December 31, 2003, Revised for the Third Time by the CCP Central Committee Politburo on December 8, 2023, and Issued by the CCP Central Committee on December 19, 2023)" (中国共产党纪律处分条例(2003年12月23日中共中央政治局会议审议批准 2003年12月31日中共中央发布 2023年12月8日中共中央政治局会议第三次修订 2023年12月19日中共中央发布)), *China Military Online*, December 19, 2023. Translation.

‡In March 2024, Xi made a proactive attempt to influence the political mindset of young officials, warning in a speech at the CCP's Central Party School that young officials must be prepared to bear particularly "heavy responsibilities" in practicing political loyalty and Party discipline. *Xinhua*, "Xi Urges Young Officials to Take on Historical Task on New Journey," *State Council of the People's Republic of China*, March 1, 2024.

resource-rich fields” such as finance, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), energy, medicine, and infrastructure would be particular targets in upcoming purges.²²

Xi delivered similar messages to the top military leadership in June 2024. Between June 17 and 19, 2024, Xi hosted a military political work conference for leaders from the Central Military Commission (CMC) in Yan’an, a city celebrated as the birthplace of the CCP revolution, where—according to reports of his speech—he emphasized that military power must always remain “in the hands of those who are loyal and dependable to the Party.”²³ Xi contextualized his remarks by warning that China’s military “is facing intricate and complex tests in politics” that will have bearing on its performance in a time of great change for the military, the Party, the country, and the world at large.²⁴ He claimed the continued existence of “deep-seated contradictions and problems” in the areas of “politics, ideology, organization, style, [and] discipline” and argued that their “roots lie in ideals and beliefs, Party spirit cultivation, official ethics, and character.”²⁵ Raising the specter of his anticorruption campaign, Xi also reportedly warned that “there are no hiding places for any corrupt elements in the military” and repeated similar messages as those covered in his speech to the civilian CCP Central Discipline Inspection Commission in January 2024.²⁶

Military and Civilian Leaders Fall to Xi’s Anticorruption Campaign

The CCP continued to intensify ongoing purges of military and defense leaders, especially those with influence over the country’s nuclear and missile arsenals and other advanced equipment. Following the removal of several PLA Rocket Force leaders purged during the summer and fall of 2023,* similar events continued to rock the PLA leadership through late 2023 and the first half of 2024.²⁷ In December 2023, the NPC Standing Committee announced the expulsion of nine military representatives from their positions on the NPC.²⁸ Four of these nine leaders were affiliated with the PLA Rocket Force, two with the CMC Equipment Development Department, and one each from the CMC Joint Staff Department, the PLA Air Force, and the PLA Navy.²⁹ Although no explanation was provided for the dismissals at the time, the body stated in mid-January 2024 that they were attributable to “serious violations of law and discipline.”³⁰ Also in December 2023, China’s People’s Political Consultative Conference removed three leaders from top defense industry firms, including the chairman of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, which oversees the development of China’s spacecraft and missile programs; the chairman of Norinco Group, a leading military equipment manufacturer; and the deputy manager of state-owned China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation.³¹ On June 27, 2024, the Politburo announced that China’s previous two ministers of national defense, Li Shangfu and Wei Fenghe, had both been investigated for corruption, found guilty of several serious violations related to corruption and Party discipline,

*For more on the PLA Rocket Force leadership removed in the summer and fall of 2023, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, Section 2, “U.S.-China Security and Foreign Affairs,” in *2023 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2023.

and expelled from the Party.*³² The revolving door of leadership created by Xi's purges could potentially impact PLA readiness, and the heavy representation of the PLA Rocket Force—which manages China's missile arsenal, including nuclear missiles—and the CMC Equipment Development Department among purged officials makes this risk particularly salient for China's strategic nuclear and missile forces.³³

A wide range of civilian officials were also investigated and disciplined throughout 2024, including central and local officials and leaders from the sectors Xi identified in his January 2024 speech to the CCDI. For example, a large number of state regulators, bankers, and senior financial executives were detained in the first five months of 2024 for ostensibly corruption-related charges.³⁴ In July and August 2024, several local officials, an official from China's Ministry of Emergency Management, and at least three officials from transportation SOEs were placed under disciplinary investigation.³⁵ In other cases, officials who had previously been expelled from the Party were later indicted, tried, or sentenced to life in prison for bribery or embezzlement.³⁶ (For additional details on anticorruption and discipline inspection cases involving civilian officials, see Chapter 7, "China's New Measures for Control, Mobilization, and Resilience.") Also in July 2024, the CCP Central Committee announced that it had accepted the "resignation" of Qin Gang, a high-ranking official and then Central Committee member who had been stripped of his government posts in 2023 amid reports that he had engaged in an extramarital affair in the United States.†³⁷

China Elevates New Warfighting Domains under the CMC

In April 2024, the PLA announced a major reorganization that elevated the importance of space, cyber, and information capabilities and placed all three under the more direct control of the top leadership. The announcement came as a surprise to PLA experts outside of China and could have been undertaken for a variety of operational or political reasons.³⁸ The reorganization included disbanding the PLA Strategic Support Force—which had previously held responsibility for space, cyber, and information domains—and restructuring

* Former Minister Li, who had spent decades of his career in the equipment department that oversees military procurement, was criticized for "seriously pollut[ing] the political ecology of the military equipment field and the atmosphere of the industrial domain" through his corruption, while former Minister Wei was accused of seriously polluting the force in general. The announcements also included discussion of political loyalty, with Li accused of having "lost his Party spirit and principles" and a statement that Wei's "faith [had] collapsed and his loyalty was lost." Both leaders were criticized for having "caused great damage to the Party's cause, national defense and military construction, as well as the image of senior leaders" through their actions. Jun Mai and Liu Zhen, "In a First, China Accuses Former Defense Ministers Li Shangfu and Wei Fenghe of Corruption," *South China Morning Post*, June 27, 2024; *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*. "Li Shangfu, Wei Fenghe Receive Punishment of Expulsion from the Party" (李尚福,魏凤和受到开除党籍处分), June 28, 2024. Translation.

† Qin Gang disappeared from public view in June 2023, and China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs originally claimed that his absence was for "health reasons." He was removed from his position of Minister of Foreign Affairs in July 2023 and from his position of State Councilor in October 2023. According to reporting by the *Wall Street Journal* in July 2023, senior Chinese officials were reportedly informed that he had engaged in an extramarital affair leading to the birth of a child in the United States. Sylvie Zhuang, "China's Ex-Foreign Minister Qin Gang Stripped of Last Remaining State Title," *South China Morning Post*, October 24, 2023; Lingling Wei, "China's Former Foreign Minister Ousted after Alleged Affair, Senior Officials Told," *Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 2023; Lingling Wei, "China Tries to Reassure U.S. amid Speculation around Missing Foreign Minister," *Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 2023.

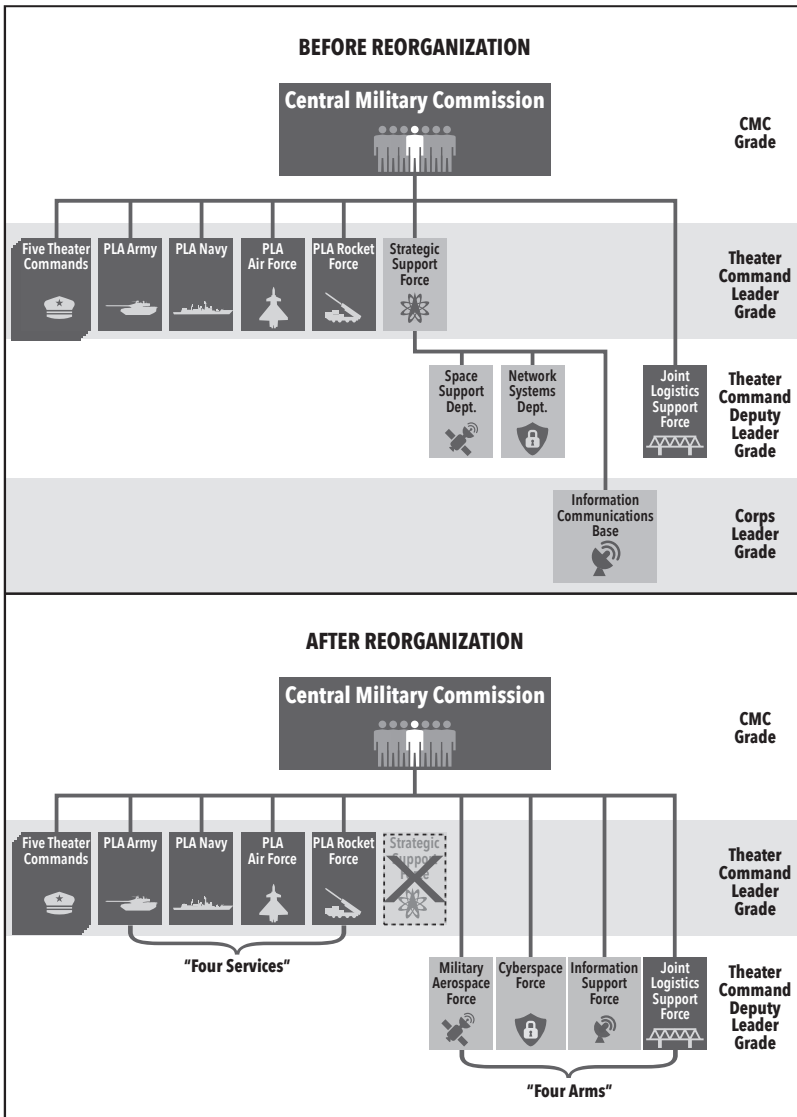
it into three separate forces: the Military Aerospace Force, the Cyberspace Force, and the Information Support Force.³⁹ Prior to the reorganization, the Strategic Support Force was commanded at the theater grade level* directly under the CMC, while its component parts responsible for space, cyber, and information operations were commanded at lower levels.⁴⁰ As a result of the reorganization, the three new forces are now each directly subordinate to the CMC and are commanded at the deputy theater grade level,† similar to the PLA Joint Logistics Support Force.⁴¹ The change also established a new distinction between four PLA “services”—the PLA Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force—which are organized mainly around the traditional domains of land, sea, and air—and four PLA “arms”—the PLA Military Aerospace Force, Cyberspace Force, Information Support Force, and Joint Logistics Support Force—whose operations support military activities across traditional domains.⁴² Joel Wuthnow, senior research fellow at the U.S. National Defense University, assesses that the new structure would “help break down silos in the PLA and improve the functioning of the joint operations systems” because theater commanders would now be able to more easily tap into the support forces’ assets without the complication of dealing with higher headquarters (which was the case when such assets were consolidated under the co-equal Strategic Support Force).⁴³ (For an overview of the structural changes, see Figure 1 below.) The Information Support Force is likely to handle network information system, communications support, and network defense tasks.‡⁴⁴ (For more on the PLA’s views on the importance of information in warfare, see Chapter 8, “China’s Evolving Counter-Intervention Capabilities and the Role of Indo-Pacific Allies.”)

*Officers at the theater command grade typically hold the rank of general or lieutenant general. A Theater Command leader’s rank is a three-star flag officer equivalent to a U.S. four-star flag officer. Ken Allen, Independent Consultant, China Military Analyst, interview with Commission staff, August 28, 2024; Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, “A New Step Forward in PLA Professionalization,” *Jamestown Foundation*, March 15, 2021.

†Officers at the deputy theater command grade typically hold the rank of lieutenant general or major general. A Deputy Theater Command Leader’s rank is a two-star or one-star flag officer equivalent to a U.S. three-star or two-star flag officer respectively. Ken Allen, Independent Consultant, China Military Analyst, interview with Commission staff, August 28, 2024; Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, “A New Step Forward in PLA Professionalization,” *Jamestown Foundation*, March 15, 2021.

‡In a speech at the ceremony establishing the Information Support Force, Xi said the new arm that would strengthen the PLA has an “important position and heavy responsibility” in promoting the development of the PLA and supporting the PLA’s efforts to “wi[n] modern wars.” An April commentary published in the *PLA Daily* claimed the Information Support Force would “improve [China’s] army’s joint combat capabilities and all-domain combat capabilities,” help achieve the PLA’s centenary goal, and facilitate its transformation into a world-class military. According to J. Michael Dahm, senior resident fellow for Aerospace and China Studies at the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, “Empowering the new deputy theater-grade Information Support Force to strengthen and harden information network capabilities may be the PLA’s response to similar U.S. DOD efforts to consolidate and align US military information networks under the umbrella of Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2).” *Xinhua*, “Founding Ceremony of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Information Support Force Held in Beijing. Xi Jinping Awards Military Flag to the Information Support Force and Delivers a Speech” (中国人民解放军信息支援部队成立大会在京举行 习近平向信息支援部队授予军旗并致训词), *People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China*, April 19, 2024. Translation; J. Michael Dahm, “A Disturbance in the Force: The Reorganization of People’s Liberation Army Command and Elimination of China’s Strategic Support Force,” *Jamestown Foundation*, April 26, 2024; *PLA Daily*, “PLA Daily Commentator: Strive to Build a Strong Modern Information Support Force” (解放军报评论员: 努力建设一支强大的现代化信息支援部队), April 20, 2024. Translation; People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, *Xi Jinping Awards Military Flag to the Information Support Force and Delivers a Speech* (中国人民解放军信息支援部队成立大会在京举行 习近平向信息支援部队授予军旗并致训词), April 19, 2024. Translation; Brian Hart, Bonnie S. Glaser, and Matthew P. Funaiolo, “China’s 2027 Goal Marks the PLA’s Centennial, Not an Expedited Military Modernization,” *Jamestown Foundation*, March 26, 2021.

Figure 1: PLA Organizational Structure before and after April 2024 Reorganization



Note: Elements in light gray represent the now-defunct Strategic Support Force, its component parts, and their successor organizations post-reorganization. The PLA's five Theater Commands are the Eastern Theater Command, Southern Theater Command, Western Theater Command, Northern Theater Command, and Central Theater Command. CMC members typically hold the rank of general; Theater Command-grade officers typically hold the rank of general or lieutenant general; Deputy Theater Command-grade officers typically hold the rank of lieutenant general or major general; Corps-grade officers typically hold the rank of lieutenant general or major general.⁴⁵ Theater Command commanders are joint commanders.⁴⁶

Source: Adapted from Frank Miller, Tung Ho, and Kenneth Allen, eds., "People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force: A Post-Mortem Analysis," in *The People's Liberation Army as Organization*, vol. 3, Exovera LLC, forthcoming; J. Michael Dahm, "A Disturbance in the Force: The Reorganization of People's Liberation Army Command and Elimination of China's Strategic Support Force," *Jamestown Foundation*, April 26, 2024.

China Seeks One-Sided Adjustments in Its Relations with the United States

Relatively civil language and modest promises at the beginning of this year reflected a shared desire by the governments of the United States and China to mitigate the recent deterioration in relations through increased dialogue and cooperation. Nevertheless, while the United States sought incrementalism to improve communication and strengthen cooperation in areas of mutual interest amid the continued reality of strategic competition, China called for the United States to cease viewing it as a competitor and refused to take responsibility for the harmful impacts of its own actions. By mid-2024, China's statements and actions with respect to the Philippines in the South China Sea, Taiwan, and Japan, for example, also showed that Beijing remains willing to pursue dangerous levels of escalation on certain policy issues.

Differing Positions Challenge U.S.-China High-Level Dialogue and Narrow Cooperation Initiatives

In 2024, the United States and China increased high-level diplomatic engagements and pursued certain narrow cooperation objectives, but differing views and underlying objectives continued to surface. In a bilateral summit meeting in November 2023, President Joe Biden and General Secretary Xi discussed a range of issues and agreed to limited cooperation amid ongoing strategic competition.⁴⁷ These areas included military communication, countering fentanyl and other drugs, AI, climate change, and people-to-people exchanges.*⁴⁸ Xi and Biden held a follow-up conversation by phone in April, 2024.⁴⁹ Additional meetings between high-level leaders at the secretary and minister level aimed to continue the dialogue and push for progress in these and other areas, with U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen and U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken meeting counterparts in China in April 2024 and U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin meeting China's Minister of National Defense Admiral Dong Jun on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in May 2024.⁵⁰ In addition, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo held a call with China's Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao in January 2024 to press for the inaugural meeting of the U.S.-China Commercial Issues Working Group.⁵¹ On April 4, 2024, the U.S. Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade Marisa Lago and China's Vice Minister of Commerce Wang Shouwen held the first meeting of the Commercial Issues Working Group, where the U.S. side addressed concern for cross-border data flows, regulatory transparency, and the growing overcapacity in a range of Chinese industrial sectors.⁵² Nevertheless, visible progress in these areas remains limited and in some areas progress continues to be challenged by countervailing trends:

*In addition to these agreements, the two leaders agreed their teams would follow up on their discussions in San Francisco with continued high-level diplomacy and interactions, including visits in both directions and ongoing working-level consultations in key areas, including on commercial, economic, financial, Asia Pacific, arms control and nonproliferation, maritime, export control enforcement, policy planning, agriculture, and disability issues. White House, *Readout of President Joe Biden's Meeting with President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China*, November 15, 2023.

- *Military communication:* In November 2023, President Biden and General Secretary Xi agreed to the resumption of high-level military-to-military communication as well as the U.S.-China Defense Policy Coordination Talks, the U.S.-China Military Maritime Consultative Agreement meetings, and telephone conversations between theater commanders.*⁵³ The subsequent meeting between Secretary Austin and Minister Dong on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in May 2024, although limited in scope, did mark a contrast with the previous year in which China's then Minister of National Defense Li Shangfu had refused a U.S. offer to speak and reportedly dismissed even the offer of a handshake.[†]⁵⁴ After years of China ignoring requests to open channels of communication between commanders, on September 9, 2024, U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral Samuel Paparo held a video teleconference with the PLA's Southern Theater Commander General Wu Yanan.⁵⁵ In the meeting Admiral Paparo urged the PLA to reconsider its "dangerous, coercive, and potentially escalatory tactics" in the South China Sea and expressed interest in continued dialogue with other PLA theater commands.[‡]⁵⁶ Between September 14 and 15, 2024, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia Michael Chase met with Deputy Director of the CMC Office for International Military Cooperation Major General Ye Jiang in Beijing for the 18th U.S.-China Defense Policy Coordination Talks.⁵⁷ Dr. Chase raised concerns with China's support for Russia's defense industrial base and underscored U.S. commitment to its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific in light of China's destabilizing actions against lawful Philippine operations.⁵⁸
- *Countering fentanyl and other drugs:* China is one of the major sources of the precursor chemicals used to produce fentanyl, which took the lives of over 74,000 Americans in 2023.⁵⁹ In November 2023, President Biden and General Secretary Xi agreed to the resumption of bilateral cooperation to combat the global illicit drug trade, including fentanyl, and to the establishment of a working group for ongoing communication and law enforcement coordination on issues related to countering

*China suspended high-level military-to-military communications in August 2022 in response to then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. *Reuters*, "China Halts High-Level Military Dialogue with U.S., Suspends Other Cooperation," August 5, 2022.

† Nevertheless, in response to a question about the potential upcoming meeting the day before the event, China's Ministry of National Defense spokesperson stated that although China felt increased communication was important, it also viewed the U.S. side as "the fundamental reason for the ups and downs in the relationship between the two militaries" and accused the United States of "artificially creat[ing] risks of confrontation." These claims ignore the longstanding U.S. efforts to establish better communications with the PLA and the PLA's own tactic of restricting communication access in order to punish the United States for actions it disagrees with. China's Ministry of National Defense, *Transcript of May 2024 Ministry of National Defense Regular Press Conference* (2024年5月国防部例行记者会文字实录), May 30, 2024. Translation; *Reuters*, "China Halts High-Level Military Dialogue with U.S., Suspends Other Cooperation," August 5, 2022; U.S. Taiwan Business Council and the Project 2049 Institute, "Chinese Reactions to Taiwan Arms Sales," March 2012, 24–25.

‡ This was the first call or video meeting between the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and a PLA Theater Commander in years. Admiral Paparo's predecessor Admiral John Aquilino tried for three years and said in March 2023 that China had not responded to his requests to establish communication. Eleanor Watson, "U.S. and Chinese Military Commanders Hold Rare Phone Call to Avoid Miscalculation," *CBS News*, September 10, 2024; Dzirhan Mahadzir, "INDOPACOM: China Has Not Responded to U.S. Attempts to Establish Communication," *USNI News*, March 16, 2023.

fentanyl and other drugs.⁶⁰ Also in November 2023, the United States removed sanctions on China’s Ministry of Public Security’s Institute of Forensic Science,* likely in a bid to elicit further cooperation from Beijing to stem the flow of fentanyl precursor chemicals.⁶¹ On January 30, 2024, the United States and China launched the Counternarcotics Working Group under which Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Homeland Security Advisor Jen Daskal led a U.S. interagency delegation to Beijing to coordinate efforts to counter the global manufacturing of illicit synthetic drugs, including fentanyl.⁶² During Secretary Yellen’s visit to China in April 2024, the two sides launched an exchange to increase cooperation in combating money laundering associated with drug trafficking.⁶³ In August 2024, China’s Ministry of Public Security announced stricter oversight over the production and sale of three chemicals commonly used to make fentanyl, ostensibly as a result of the U.S. decision to remove sanctions in November 2023 and progress made in subsequent working groups.†⁶⁴ Serious concerns nevertheless remain that progress on reducing the flow of fentanyl precursors into the United States from China so far has been limited.⁶⁵

- *Artificial intelligence:* In November 2023, President Biden and General Secretary Xi affirmed the need to address the risks of advanced AI systems and improve AI safety through U.S.-China government talks.⁶⁶ On May 14, 2024, interagency delegations from the United States and China met in Geneva, Switzerland, to discuss AI risk and safety.⁶⁷ The meeting included discussion of issues of common concern but also highlighted areas of remaining difference, including on matters related to the use of AI by China’s government.⁶⁸ (For more on China’s development and use of AI technologies, see Chapter 3, “U.S.-China Competition in Emerging Technologies.”)
- *People-to-people exchanges:* In November 2023, President Biden and General Secretary Xi committed to work toward a further increase in scheduled passenger flights in 2024—in parallel with actions to restore full implementation of the U.S.-China air transportation agreement—to support exchanges between the two countries.⁶⁹ They also encouraged the expansion of

*On May 22, 2020, the U.S. Department of Commerce placed China’s Ministry of Public Security’s Institute of Forensic Science, as well as eight other Chinese entities, on the Entity List for being “complicit in human rights violations and abuses committed in China’s campaign of repression, mass arbitrary detention, forced labor and high-technology surveillance against Uighurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other members of Muslim minority groups in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR).” U.S. Department of Commerce, *Commerce Department to Add Nine Chinese Entities Related to Human Rights Abuses in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region to the Entity List*, May 22, 2020.

†The United States and China are only now beginning to resume the dialogue on this critical issue that China’s leadership suspended in retaliation after then Speaker Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in 2022. China first agreed to cooperate with the United States on tackling the spread of fentanyl in 2019. Chinese officials claim the responsibility for the fentanyl crisis stems from U.S. failures to prevent and treat drug addiction, rather than Chinese precursor regulations. Brian Spegele, “China Is Finally Starting to Do Something about the U.S. Fentanyl Crisis,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 4, 2024; Sharp China, “A Conversation with Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi on TikTok, Tech Investment, and Competition between the U.S. and China,” June 26, 2024; Ricardo Barrios, Susan V. Lawrence, and Liana W. Rosen, “China Primer: Illicit Fentanyl and China’s Role,” *Congressional Research Service*, IF10890, February 20, 2024; *Reuters*, “China, US to Cooperate on Fentanyl, Beijing Hopes for ‘Positive Energy,’” January 30, 2024; *Reuters*, “China Halts High-Level Military Dialogue with U.S., Suspends Other Cooperation,” August 5, 2022; U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, *DEA Intelligence Report: Fentanyl Flow to the United States*, January 2020.

educational, student, youth, cultural, sports, and business exchanges.⁷⁰ In the first half of 2024, China's Party-state media and speeches by China's diplomatic officials to U.S. audiences portrayed deepening people-to-people exchanges as a necessary component of "stable development of U.S.-China relations" and an area of overwhelming opportunity for both sides.⁷¹ Nevertheless, evidence suggests that even during that time, China's government was pursuing a more one-sided set of exchanges by restricting access to its own society. In June 2024, U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns stated in an interview that China's government has been actively working to undermine people-to-people ties within China by interrogating and intimidating citizens who attended or sought to attend U.S.-organized events in China* and by increasing restrictions on the U.S. Embassy's social media posts.⁷² As he stated in his remarks, "They say they're in favor of reconnecting our two populations, but they're taking dramatic steps to make it impossible."⁷³ Rather than addressing the allegations, a spokesperson from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected them outright and insisted that Ambassador Burns' remarks "deviate from the important consensus reached by the two leaders" and "are not in line with the proper way for China and the U.S. to coexist."⁷⁴

Strategic Disputes Continue to Shape U.S.-China Relations

Despite efforts to enhance dialogue and explore possibilities for cooperation, deep strategic disputes continued to play a dominant role in defining the tenor of U.S.-China interactions. This trend was apparent from the time of the November 2023 summit itself. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs readout stated the summit "should be a new starting point for stabilizing China-U.S. relations" while also including language strongly suggesting a belief that the United States was predisposed to "cling to the zero-sum mentality, provoke rivalry and confrontation, and drive the world toward turmoil and division."⁷⁵ After the summit, China's official media continued to portray the meeting as a stabilizer of an otherwise plummeting relationship while placing all of the blame for its necessity on the United States.⁷⁶ In the two leaders' April 2024 phone call, Xi stated that although the relationship was "beginning to stabilize," "negative factors" had also been "growing," and he criticized the United States for not changing its longstanding policy positions on key issues.⁷⁷ Throughout 2024, China's leaders, diplomats, and Party-state media used the language of the November 2023 meeting to criticize significant U.S. policy positions and encourage or demand alternative policies that would benefit China:

- *Strategic Perceptions:* China's leadership insisted that the United States should change its strategic assessment of China and cease treating it as a competitor. The readout of the November 2023 meeting from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs listed "five pillars" China wishes the U.S.-China relationship to re-

*At the time of the interview, Ambassador Burns reported that since the previous November he had counted 61 public events for which China's Ministry of State Security or other government bodies had pressured Chinese citizens not to attend or had attempted to intimidate those who attended. Jonathan Cheng, "In Rare Rebuke, U.S. Ambassador Accuses China of Undermining Diplomacy," *Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 2024.

fect, with the first being “developing a right perception.”⁷⁸ In his remarks at a dinner in San Francisco during this same trip, Xi elaborated on this position by insisting that “to regard China, which insists on peaceful development, as a threat and to engage in zero-sum game... is to go in the wrong direction.”⁷⁹ In November 2023 and January 2024, respectively, both Xi and Liu Jianchao, head of the CCP’s International Liaison Department, claimed that China “has no intention” of “challenging” or “replacing” the United States, with the latter adding that China also “does not seek to change the current international order.”⁸⁰ Some Party-state media commentaries adopted a less diplomatic approach, arguing forcefully that the United States’ “wrong” perception of China inspires it to pursue containment and will bring only a negative future for the relationship.*⁸¹ China’s approach ignores the differing interests and values underpinning U.S. policy and China’s own longstanding pursuit of strategic competition with the United States.⁸² It also ignores Xi’s detailed efforts to reshape the international order to better suit China’s interests.⁸³

- *Taiwan*: Efforts to increase dialogue did not result in any change to China and the United States’ differing positions on Taiwan. According to China’s readout of the November 2023 meeting, Xi called Taiwan “the most important and most sensitive issue in China-U.S. relations” and stated that the United States should support unification between the two sides, meaning on Beijing’s terms.⁸⁴ Chinese state media summaries discussing the impact of the November 2023 summit on U.S.-China relations also continued to invoke Taiwan as a serious issue that remained unaddressed from Beijing’s perspective.⁸⁵ In his April 2024 phone call with President Biden, General Secretary Xi labeled Taiwan as “the first red line that must not be crossed in China-U.S. relations” and warned that “China is not going to sit on its hands” if the United States continued what it argued amounted to supporting Taiwan independence.⁸⁶ Secretary Austin met with Minister Dong on May 31, 2024, following the inauguration of Taiwan’s President Lai Tsing-te, where Minister Dong intensified China’s rhetoric regarding U.S.-Taiwan relations and called on the United States to “correct its errors” and to refrain from “aiding independence by force.”⁸⁷ In a demonstration of its resolve not to compromise, on July 17, 2024, China declared

*For example, a *China Daily* editorial in January 2024 accused the United States of trying “every means to contain China’s rise and development” because it holds a “wrong perception of China,” classifying China as a “major competitor” and even viewing China as a “threat.” For the sake of building a “stable and sustainable” relationship, it then exhorted the United States to “establish a correct perception of China [and] avoid misjudgments.” A *Xinhua* commentary in March attributed strained relations in recent years primarily to an incorrect “strategic perception” of China by some in the United States and argued that correcting these strategic perceptions must be the issue of first importance between them. More explicitly, it described the elimination of the United States’ “seriously erroneous perception of China” as a “prerequisite” for the two countries’ positive mutual coexistence, and it warned that continuing to view China as a competitor would lead to increased “confrontation” and even a “new Cold War.” *China Daily*, “He Pingli: Strengthen Communication Prevent Misjudgments, Promote Positive Development of China-U.S. Relations” (和评理 | 加强交流避免误判 推动中美关系向好发展), January 12, 2024. Translation; *Xinhua*, “Xinhua Commentary | Establish a Correct Strategic Perception—One of a Series of Commentaries on Promoting the Sustained, Stable, and Healthy Development of China-U.S. Relations” (新华社评 | 树立正确战略认知——推动中美关系持续稳定健康向前发展系列评论之一), March 28, 2024. Translation.

the suspension of arms control and nonproliferation talks with the United States over U.S. weapons sales to Taiwan, claiming that “responsibility for this situation lies entirely with the U.S.”⁸⁸ (For more on China’s actions related to Taiwan in 2024, see Chapter 9, “Taiwan.”)

- *Trade, science, and technology:* In November 2023, Xi framed U.S. export controls, investment screening, and sanctions as a key concern for China and an effort to “deprive the Chinese people of their right to development,” completely ignoring expressed concerns about China’s unfair economic practices, punitive actions against U.S. firms, and the use of U.S. technologies to endanger U.S. national security.⁸⁹ China’s readout of the leaders’ April 2024 phone call repeated this framing, accused the United States of “creating risks,” and declared that “China is not going to sit back and watch.”⁹⁰ China’s state-backed media and diplomats speaking to audiences in the United States also pressed for the reversal of U.S. trade, science, and technology restrictions on China—especially the “small yard and high fence” concept and efforts to counteract negative impacts of China’s overcapacity—framing them as “strategic containment” and “overstretching the concept of national security” without acknowledging the role of China’s own behavior in bringing them about or China’s own increasingly broad concept of national security.⁹¹ (For more on science and technology, see Chapter 3, “U.S. China Competition in Emerging Technologies.” For more on economic competition, see Chapter 6, “Key Economic Strategies for Leveling the U.S.-China Playing Field.” For more on the wide range of policy issues Xi advocates as being included in “national security,” see Chapter 7, “China’s New Measures for Control, Mobilization, and Resilience.”)
- *South China Sea:* China’s longstanding and aggressive behavior in the South China Sea became an increasingly salient issue throughout the year as China took escalatory actions that contravened international law and threatened the security of a U.S. treaty ally. Although disagreements over the South China Sea were not mentioned as a key issue in the November 2023 summit meeting, they did feature as negative examples in China’s state media summaries of U.S.-China relations in January and February 2024.⁹² Xi also reportedly raised China’s position on the South China Sea in the phone call between the two leaders in April 2024.⁹³ China continuously escalated its actions against Philippine vessels throughout the spring and early summer, repeatedly threatening their security and personnel and edging dangerously close to a threshold of violence that could trigger U.S. defense commitments to the Philippines under the allies’ mutual defense treaty.* (For more on China’s harassment of and violence toward the Philippines in the South China Sea,

* In their mutual defense treaty, the United States and the Philippines commit to act to meet common dangers in the event of an armed attack against either party in the Pacific, which includes an attack on either state’s public vessels, aircraft, or armed forces (including coast guards) anywhere in the South China Sea. U.S. Department of Defense, *FACT SHEET: U.S.-Philippines Bilateral Defense Guidelines*, May 3, 2023; Avalon Project at the Yale Law School, “Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines; August 30, 1951”; U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Collective Defense Arrangements*.

see “China’s Violence toward the Philippines Escalates” later in this chapter.) During this time, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs nevertheless denied any wrongdoing and falsely accused the United States of providing backing for other countries to infringe upon China’s sovereignty.⁹⁴

Risks to U.S. Critical Infrastructure from China

The United States and allied countries increased their attention to countering China’s threats to critical infrastructure.* In February 2024, the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) released a joint risk advisory with three other U.S. government agencies and the national cybersecurity centers of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (UK), providing new information about the 2023 cyberattack on U.S. critical infrastructure by the Chinese state-sponsored cyber group Volt Typhoon.†⁹⁵ In March 2024, the U.S. Department of the Treasury announced the imposition of sanctions on a China-based Ministry of State Security front company that has served as cover for multiple malicious cyber operations against U.S. critical infrastructure.⁹⁶ Speaking at the Vanderbilt Summit on Modern Conflict and Emerging Threats in Nashville, Tennessee, on April 18, 2024, Director of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation Christopher Wray raised concerns about China’s targeting of U.S. critical infrastructure, which he described as “both broad and unrelenting.”⁹⁷ He placed a particular emphasis on China’s use of cyberattacks to “pre-position” capabilities that could be exploited in a conflict scenario.⁹⁸ On April 30, 2024, the U.S. government released a National Security Memorandum from the leadership of a wide range of executive branch agencies, which acknowledged that the United States “faces an era of strategic competition with nation-state actors who target American critical infrastructure and tolerate or enable malicious actions conducted by non-state actors.”⁹⁹ The memorandum reflected an inter-departmental effort to define policy principles and objectives for protecting U.S. critical infrastructure, assign associated roles and responsibilities within the U.S. Federal Government, and develop a common risk assessment framework.‡¹⁰⁰ On June 20, 2024, the

*Critical infrastructure comprises the physical and virtual assets and systems so vital to the nation that their incapacity or destruction would have a debilitating impact on national security, national economic security, or national public health or safety. China has become a global leader in using technologies and applications to improve infrastructure and government services under “smart cities” initiatives, designed to combine “embedded sensors, metering devices, cameras, and other monitoring technologies with big data processing and artificial intelligence (AI) analyses” to manage city infrastructure and public spaces. White House, *National Security Memorandum on Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience*, April 30, 2024; Katherine Atha, et al., “China’s Smart Cities Development,” *SOS International* (prepared for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission), April 29, 2020, 1.

†In 2023, Microsoft Threat Intelligence released additional information on Volt Typhoon’s campaign to develop capabilities that could disrupt critical communications infrastructure between the United States and the Indo-Pacific region during future crises. Volt Typhoon has been active since mid-2021 and targeted critical infrastructure organizations in Guam and the United States, affecting organizations across the communications, manufacturing, utility, transportation, information technology, maritime, construction, government, and education sectors. Microsoft Threat Intelligence, “Volt Typhoon Targets US Critical Infrastructure with Living-Off-The-Land Techniques,” May 24, 2023.

‡It also formally identified 16 sectors as critical infrastructure sectors, including chemical; commercial facilities; communications; critical manufacturing; dams; defense industrial base; emergency services; energy; financial services; food and agriculture; government services and

Risks to U.S. Critical Infrastructure from China— Continued

Secretary of Homeland Security outlined new strategic guidance for critical infrastructure security and resilience efforts by federal agencies, critical infrastructure owners and operators, and other government and private stakeholders, listing “addressing cyber and other threats” from China as a priority.¹⁰¹ In July 2024, the Australian Signals Directorate, along with U.S. government agencies and national cybersecurity centers and intelligence service from the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, the Republic of Korea, and Japan,* released additional details of malicious cyber operations conducted by APT-40 on behalf of China’s Ministry of State Security that pose threats to government and private sector networks in the Indo-Pacific region.[†]¹⁰²

China’s Foreign Policy Aims to Temper Risk and Expand Opportunities

In 2024, China stepped up its ongoing efforts to build international support for its own leadership and to prevent other countries from pursuing policies harmful to its interests. With a particular emphasis on the low- and middle-income countries of what China now calls the “Global South,” officials from across the Party-state’s foreign policy apparatus—from Ministry of Foreign Affairs diplomats and CCP International Liaison Department officials‡ to PLA representatives conducting military diplomacy§—promoted China’s supposedly beneficial global leadership in opposition to what it portrayed as the harmful international actions of the United States and its allies. In its diplomatic engagements, China highlighted self-declared contributions to solving global challenges, even in areas where its interlocutors did not share the same view of China’s actions. China’s overtures appeared to find willing cooperation from

facilities; healthcare and public health; information technology; nuclear reactors, materials, and waste; transportation systems; and water and wastewater systems. White House, *National Security Memorandum on Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience*, April 30, 2024.

*The advisory was authored by Australian Signals Directorate’s Australian Cyber Security Centre (ASD’s ACSC), the United States Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the United States National Security Agency (NSA), the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the United Kingdom National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC-UK), the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS), the New Zealand National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC-NZ), the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) and Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), the Republic of Korea’s National Intelligence Service (NIS) and NIS’ National Cyber Security Center, and Japan’s National Center of Incident Readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity (NISC) and National Police Agency (NPA). It outlined a People’s Republic of China (PRC) state-sponsored cyber group and their current threat to Australian networks. U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, *People’s Republic of China (PRC) Ministry of State Security APT40 Tradecraft in Action*, July 8, 2024.

†The Chinese state-sponsored actor is alleged to utilize tradecraft that compromises devices, including small-office/home-office devices, as a launching point to attack or further exploit vulnerabilities on broader government and private sector networks. U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, *People’s Republic of China (PRC) Ministry of State Security APT40 Tradecraft in Action*, July 8, 2024.

‡For more on the CCP’s International Liaison Department and its role in overseas influence operations, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 2, Section 2, “Batting for Overseas Hearts and Minds: China’s United Front and Propaganda Work,” in *2023 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2023.

§For more on how the PLA uses military diplomacy to pursue foreign policy objectives, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 4, Section 1, “China’s Relations with Foreign Militaries,” in *2023 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2023.

the governments of some countries such as Cambodia and certain Pacific Island states, while others continued to view China's policies as self-serving.

China's Diplomacy Adopts the Term "Global South"

China has long pursued ties with low- and middle-income countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and parts of Asia to advance its political agenda, secure economic benefits, push for greater influence in global governance, and counter the strength of U.S. alliances and diplomatic partnerships.¹⁰³ China has pursued these ties through bilateral agreements, multilateral groupings such as the intergovernmental organization BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), and China-led regional fora such as the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (China-CELAC) Cooperation, and China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASC).¹⁰⁴ Expanding such ties has served as a focus of China's global foreign policy campaigns such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Xi's three global initiatives—the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative.¹⁰⁵

China's leadership has recently embraced the term "Global South"* as a rhetorical tool in its longstanding diplomatic efforts to further these relationships and use them in strategic competition against the United States. In the latter half of 2023 and in 2024, Chinese official † and academic sources increasingly began to replace or supplement the term "developing countries" with the term "Global South" in discussions of China's diplomacy with the relevant countries.¹⁰⁶ By 2024, China's officials and Party-state media had thoroughly incorporated the term into pre-existing discourse about its foreign policy, attempting to use this affiliation to convince other countries to side with it against the United States.¹⁰⁷ For example, China's longstanding assertion that it—unlike the United States—shares the values and objectives of "developing countries" because it itself is a "developing country" ‡ are now supplemented or replaced with assertions that it does so because it is a "member" of the "Global South." §¹⁰⁸

*The term "Global South" is thought to have emerged in academic analysis in 1969 as a rough equivalent to the concept of the "Third World." It gained prominence in 1980 through the report of a commission established by the president of the World Bank to make recommendations on reducing international economic disparities. Steward Patrick and Alexandra Huggins, "The Term 'Global South' Is Surging. It Should Be Retired," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 15, 2023; Sarwar Hossain, "'Third World' of 'Global South'? It's Time to Redefine," *South Asia Monitor*, December 26, 2022; World Bank Group, "Brandt Commission Releases Report.," Centre for Global Negotiations, "The Brandt Equation: 21st Century Blueprint for the New Global Economy."

† High-level Chinese officials, including, Xi began to use the term "Global South" in the latter half of 2023. Kawashima Shin, "How China Defines the 'Global South,'" *Diplomat*, January 11, 2024; Economist, "China Wants to Be the Leader of the Global South," September 21, 2023; Ted Anthony, "China, at UN, Presents Itself as a Member of the Global South as Alternative to a Western Model," *AP News*, September 21, 2023; *Xinhua*, "Xinhua Commentary: The Global South Shares a Common Destiny" (新华社评: "全球南方"同呼吸共命运), August 23, 2023. Translation.

‡ China's self-designated status as a developing country was also useful in the context of WTO rules that provide special benefits and reduced obligations for developing country members. Mark A. Green, "China Still Gets 'Developing Nation' Preferential Treatment," *Wilson Center*, June 20, 2023; World Trade Organization, "Who Are the Developing Countries in the WTO?"

§ Some Chinese academics—including an author affiliated with a research institution under China's Ministry of State Security—argued in late 2023 that the United States sought to deny

China’s Diplomacy Adopts the Term “Global South”— Continued

Although China’s government has not explicitly stated its motivation for adopting the term “Global South,” there are multiple reasons why doing so may serve China’s interests. First, the term is increasingly used by international organizations and groups (such as the UN, the World Bank, BRICS, and the Group of 77), by think tanks, media, and academia, and by national leaders, and China’s leadership may see adopting it as a way to facilitate promotion of its priorities internationally.¹⁰⁹ Second, the growing popularity of the term resonates with some audiences* as an expression of post-colonial and developing country solidarity and further elevating the voices of low- and middle-income countries in global governance—both themes that China has sought to leverage as justification for its international leadership and to undercut the image of the United States.¹¹⁰ Third, despite the Chinese government’s insistence that China “will always belong among developing countries,” the World Bank has classified China as an upper middle economy since 2011 and the UN Development Program also classifies China as an upper middle income country.¹¹¹ China’s leadership likely views the term “Global South” as a tool to reframe and preserve its international status despite the increasing difficulty of justifying its entitlement to special economic treatment as a “developing country.”†¹¹²

China Frames Its Diplomacy in Opposition to U.S. and Allied Objectives

China’s diplomacy in 2024 reflected CCP objectives to leverage its perceived international influence against the United States and its allies and partners. These objectives were laid out at the CCP’s December 2023 Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference,‡ which as-

China membership in the “Global South” in order to disrupt its relations with developing countries as part of strategic competition against China. Li Yan, “Where Did the Term ‘Global South’ Originate?” *China-US Focus*, September 21, 2023; Zhao Minghao, “The Global South, the Global East, and U.S.-China Rivalry,” *China-US Focus*, August 22, 2023.

*Critics of the term “Global South” and its recent resurgence argue that the term geographically is inaccurate or that it risks reinforcing stereotypes by grouping together countries with a wide range of economic and political conditions and differing interests. The practice of classifying countries as “developing” versus “developed” has also been critiqued for implying a linear standard of technological progress with a Western standard as its endpoint, with the World Bank announcing in 2015 that it would begin to phase out use of this terminology. Erica Hogan and Stewart Patrick, “A Closer Look at the Global South,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 20, 2024; Danile Gerszon Mahler, Alaka Holla, and Umar Serajuddin, “Time to Stop Referring to the ‘Developing World,’” *World Bank Blogs*, January 23, 2024; David Rising, “Everyone’s Talking about the Global South. But What Is It? *AP News*, September 7, 2023; Stewart Patrick and Alexandra Huggins, “The Term ‘Global South’ Is Surging. It Should Be Retired,” *Carnegie Endowment*, August 15, 2023.

†Although the report that popularized the term categorized developing countries as being located largely in the southern hemisphere and developed countries as being located largely in the northern hemisphere, it included China within the remit of the “Global South.” The report included a visual depiction of the north-south divide in per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) in what became known as the “Brandt Line,” which ran across northern border of Mexico, Africa, the Middle East, India, and China and encompasses most of East Asia while avoiding Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. David Rising, “Everyone’s Talking about the Global South. But What Is It? *AP News*, September 7, 2023; Stewart Patrick and Alexandra Huggins, “The Term ‘Global South’ Is Surging. It Should Be Retired,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 15, 2023; Share the World’s Resources, “The Brandt Report: A Summary,” January 31, 2006.

‡A CCP Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference is a major periodic meeting that serves as a strategic guide for the conduct and coordination of China’s foreign affairs. This was the third such

sessed that China has new strategic opportunities in part because it has strengthened its “strategic autonomy and initiative” over the past decade and increased its international influence.¹¹³ At the same time, official summaries revealed concern about the policy adjustments countries around the world are making to mitigate China’s challenges to their own economic and security interests. The readout of the conference in *People’s Daily* argues that China must “resolutely oppose” forces it labeled “anti-globalization,” “pan-securitization,” “unilateralism,” and “protectionism,” most likely referring to measures such as trade restrictions, export controls, and international sanctions by countries including the United States and many European states.¹¹⁴ Top Party diplomat Wang Yi, who also serves as China’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, echoed these concerns on January 9, 2024, when he repackaged the conclusions of the CCP conference into a Ministry of Foreign Affairs presentation on China’s diplomatic goals for 2024, pledging “to firmly oppose all forms of unilateralism, protectionism and anti-globalization” and to “maintain the stability and smoothness of global industrial chains and supply chains.”¹¹⁵ He also stated that China opposes “small circles that seek geopolitical purposes and small blocs that undermine stability,” referring to closer coordination between the United States and its allies in Europe and Asia to address risks from China as well as the U.S. alliance system more generally.¹¹⁶

The Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference presaged an even stronger focus on influencing other countries to align their policy choices with China’s preferences, especially through attempted persuasion and narrative control. Reinforcing the idea that the CCP’s objectives are both global and competitive with those of the United States and its partners, official descriptions of the conference argued that China has an imperative to “unite the majority of the international community” and “unite to win the majority of the world.”¹¹⁷ In support of this goal, the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference sought to codify an equivalence between China’s interests and the interests and challenges of the world, especially those of low- and middle-income countries. It anointed Xi’s concept of a “community of common human destiny” as the “main line” of China’s diplomacy in the future and promoted it as reflecting not only China’s objectives but also the interests and desires of all of humanity.¹¹⁸ The conference also put forward two phrases—“equal and orderly multipolarization” and “beneficial and inclusive economic globalization”—as proposed solutions to the “major issues and challenges facing the world.”¹¹⁹ Although designed to present a positive framing, these

meeting since General Secretary Xi took power in 2012. The meeting codified both a retrospective assessment of the major achievements the CCP claims to have made in its diplomacy under Xi’s tenure as well as forward-looking principles for the conduct of China’s foreign affairs in the future. Neil Thomas, “Xi Signals Firm Strategy but Flexible Tactics at China’s Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference,” *Asia Society Policy Institute*, April 16, 2024; *People’s Daily*, “Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference Held in Beijing: Xi Jinping Delivered an Important Speech. Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Han Zheng Attended the Meeting” (中央外事工作会议在北京举行: 习近平发表重要讲话 李强主持 赵乐际王沪宁蔡奇丁薛祥李希韩正出席会议), December 29, 2023. Translation; *Xinhua*, “Xi Jinping: Strive to Create a New Situation in China’s Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics” (习近平: 努力开创中国特色大国外交新局面), June 23, 2018. Translation; *Xinhua*, “Xi Jinping Attends the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference and Delivers an Important Speech” (习近平出席中央外事工作会议并发表重要讲话), November 29, 2014. Translation.

concepts are monikers for the reversal of actions taken by the United States and its allies to protect their interests in competition with China. As Minister Wang clarified in an elaboration on the conclusions of the conference in the Party journal *Qiushi* in January 2024, “equal and orderly multipolarization” was conceived in opposition to what the CCP calls “hegemony and power politics,” while “beneficial and inclusive economic globalization” stands in opposition to so-called “protectionism,” “unilateralism,” and “anti-globalization.”¹²⁰

Throughout 2024, China’s political, diplomatic, and military representatives used multilateral meetings as platforms to sell messages from the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference. At the Boao Forum for Asia in March 2024, Politburo Member Zhao Leji argued that the international community must choose between China’s positive approach—represented by Xi’s concept of a “community of common human destiny” and its vision of an “equal and orderly multipolar world”—and a negative approach featuring economic restrictions and outdated “bloc confrontation.”¹²¹ At the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Minister’s Council in May 2024, Minister Wang argued that China would work with the SCO to promote “equal and orderly world multipolarization and inclusive economic globalization,” and he criticized “a few countries” for promoting “small circles” and advocating “decoupl[ing].”¹²² Without offering any evidence, he even claimed that these countries are working to “fuel the ‘three evil forces’”—terrorism, separatism, and extremism.¹²³ In remarks at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2024, Minister of National Defense Admiral Dong Jun presented China as a constructive force for the world and stated that Xi’s community of common human destiny and three global initiatives constituted China’s “Global Security Concept.”¹²⁴ Minister Dong also stated China’s opposition to what he called other countries’ “attempts at decoupling, cutting supply chains, or building a small yard with high fences” and attempts to “create conflict and chaos” in the Asia-Pacific region, and China’s state media later openly confirmed that the latter comment was targeted at the United States and its allies.¹²⁵ At an international conference China hosted to mark the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in June 2024, Xi declared his “vision” of a community of common human destiny as the modern embodiment of those principles and rigorously promoted his three major global initiatives.¹²⁶

In a continuation and intensification of China’s longstanding efforts to use low- and middle- income countries as a counterbalance for the United States, China’s leaders in 2024 sought to generate diplomatic support by claiming that China’s foreign policy reflects the wishes and interests of the “Global South.” In a *Qiushi* article in March 2024, Head of the International Liaison Department Liu Jianchao, argued that the “Global South” was “an important force” and “strong support” for these two concepts of “equal and orderly multipolarization” and “beneficial and inclusive economic globalization” introduced at the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference.¹²⁷ He claimed the “Global South” did not support “small yards high fences,” “decoupling and breaking chains,” “confrontation between camps,” “unilateralism,” or “protectionism.”¹²⁸ He also promoted

Xi's global initiatives as solutions for the development challenges facing these countries.”*¹²⁹ In his own speech marking the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in late June 2024, Xi stated that the “Global South” should “take the lead” in building a community of common human destiny and implementing his global initiatives.¹³⁰ He announced the establishment of a “Global South research center” to provide 1,000 scholarships and 100,000 training opportunities for “Global South” countries over the next five years, the establishment of a “Global South youth leaders program,” and a stated interest in concluding new free trade agreements with “Global South” countries.¹³¹

China Advances Strategic Relations and Support for Russia while Presenting Itself as an Advocate of Peace in Ukraine

In the face of mounting criticism from Western governments, China continued to deepen its strategic partnership with Russia as both countries agreed to develop greater cooperation and coordination to counter U.S. and allied policies, including efforts in the Indo-Pacific region and support for Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. During Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to Beijing in May 2024, the two countries signed a Joint Statement that expressed an alignment between Russia and China on shared grievances against the United States and its allies and other areas of convergence, including the following:¹³²

- Both countries agreed to strengthen their coordination and cooperation in response to U.S. and allied military activities in the Asia Pacific, which China and Russia regard as hostile policies of “dual containment.”¹³³
- China and Russia expressed shared concern on threats to their security, such as the United States' missile defense capabilities and its plans to deploy land-based intermediate range missile systems in the Asia Pacific.¹³⁴ The Joint Statement further blamed the United States Indo-Pacific Strategy and NATO activities for negatively impacting peace and stability in the region.¹³⁵
- Russia also joined China in expressing serious concern about the Australia, UK, and U.S. (AUKUS) partnership, and both countries raised opposition to the “intervention of external forces in the South China Sea.”¹³⁶
- Both countries criticized the United States and its allies' policies toward North Korea, calling on them to “abandon [policies of] intimidation, sanctions and suppression” without holding North Korea accountable for continued missile tests.¹³⁷
- China and Russia agreed to expand bilateral trade and investment and to jointly secure their respective industrial supply chain.¹³⁸

*Many of these countries are nevertheless heavily indebted to China. Daniel F. Runde, Rafael Romeu, and Austin Hardman, “Reintroducing Concessional Loans into the Development Toolbox,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, August 20, 2024; Michael Schuman, “Why China Won't Win the Global South,” *Atlantic Council*, October 16, 2023; Bernard Condon, “China's Loans Pushing World's Poorest Countries to Brink of Collapse,” *AP News*, May 18, 2023.

- China and Russia agreed to deepen military cooperation by expanding the scale of joint exercises and training, organizing more regular joint maritime and air patrols, and continuing to improve their ability to respond jointly to risks and challenges.¹³⁹ In 2024, China and Russia have continued to conduct joint exercises. In July, China and Russia's navies participated in a bilateral joint exercise titled Joint Sea-2024, which began at China's southern military port in Zhanjiang and included anti-missile exercises, sea strikes, and air defense drills.¹⁴⁰ In the second week of September 2024, China and Russia coordinated on a large-scale naval exercise called Ocean-2024 reportedly spanning Pacific and Arctic waters, the Mediterranean Sea, the Caspian Sea, and the Baltic Sea.¹⁴¹ Later in September 2024, the two militaries launched a joint naval and air exercise in the Seas of Japan and Okhotsk that reportedly included anti-aircraft and anti-submarine weapons.¹⁴²
- On Taiwan, Russia stated its adherence to the One China principle, recognized Taiwan as "an inseparable part of the People's Republic of China," and "firmly" supported China's measures to pursue unification.¹⁴³

Nonetheless, there are areas of potential friction in the China-Russia relationship.¹⁴⁴ The power asymmetry between Russia and China has increasingly shifted in China's favor since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, resulting in an uncomfortable reality for Russia whereby Moscow is now viewed as the "junior partner" in the bilateral relationship.¹⁴⁵ China has attempted to influence Moscow's decision making. In July 2023, the *Financial Times* reported that General Secretary Xi personally warned Russian President Putin against using nuclear weapons in Ukraine, and Chinese officials privately took credit for convincing Russia to back down from Putin's veiled threats.¹⁴⁶ Zhao Tong, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, assesses that while "China supports the goal of undermining Western influence, it does not agree with some of Russia's tactics [in Ukraine], including the threat of using nuclear weapons."¹⁴⁷ While Russia is focused on its war in Ukraine, China also has an opportunity to expand its influence in areas where interests have historically overlapped, such as in Central Asia and the Arctic region.¹⁴⁸ Another point of potential friction is the terms of a deal on a Russia-China gas pipeline called the Power of Siberia 2, which is owned by Russia's state gas export monopoly Gazprom and is intended to link the Chinese market through Mongolia to gas fields in western Russia that previously supplied Europe.¹⁴⁹ According to the *Financial Times*, Beijing is asking to pay close to Russia's subsidized domestic prices and is only committing to buy a small fraction of the pipeline's annual capacity—demands Moscow views as unreasonable.¹⁵⁰ A mutually acceptable deal on the pipeline was reportedly one of three requests President Putin made to Xi when the two leaders met in May 2024.*¹⁵¹ Russia's continued failure to obtain terms it views as acceptable displays the leverage China

*According to the *Financial Times*, Putin's other two requests were more Chinese bank activity in Russia and for China to snub the peace conference that was organized by Ukraine and held in Switzerland in June 2024. Max Seddon et al., "Russia-China Gas Pipeline Deal Stalls over Beijing's Price Demands," *Financial Times*, June 2, 2024.

holds over Russia, and this dynamic of dependency is likely to deepen in the future.¹⁵²

China's diplomatic and economic support to Russia has been a decisive enabler of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.¹⁵³ In expanding its trade with Russia, China has helped rebuild Russia's defense industrial base and mitigate the effects of Western sanctions and export controls.¹⁵⁴ In testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services on May 2, 2024, U.S. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said that while China has not provided lethal support to Russia in the form of a "fully constructed gun or weapon system," China has provided dual-use materials that have been vital for the "reconstitution of Russia's military strength."¹⁵⁵ During comments made to reporters in Brussels in September 2024, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell assessed China has made substantial efforts to "sustain, build, and diversify" Russia's war machine.¹⁵⁶ He stated that the component pieces China has provided "are not dual-use capabilities," rather they directly help Russia's military.¹⁵⁷ He further stated that in exchange for China's support, Moscow has been helping Beijing develop submarine, aeronautic, and missile technologies.¹⁵⁸ Despite overwhelming evidence, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has continued to reject claims that its activities support Russia's war effort, stating on June 19, 2024 that, "China does not provide weapons to the parties to the conflict and strictly controls the export of dual-use articles."¹⁵⁹ Other new developments in 2024 include:

- An April 2024 report by the *Financial Times* cited senior U.S. officials saying "China had also supplied 90 percent of chips imported by Russia last year which were being used to make tanks, missiles, and aircraft."¹⁶⁰ The U.S. officials note that several Chinese companies such as Wuhan Global Sensor Technology, Wuhan Tongsheng Technology, and Hikvision provided optical components in Russian tanks and armored vehicles.¹⁶¹
- On May 1, 2024, the U.S. Department of State designated several Chinese entities that were found responsible for developing and supplying dual-use aerospace, manufacturing, and technology equipment to entities based in Russia.¹⁶² As an example, one of the Chinese entities included Mornsun Guangzhou Science and Technology Co LTD, which supplied electronic integral monolithic circuits to a Russia-based entity that specializes in the production and marketing of airborne weapons control radars for Russian fighter aircraft.¹⁶³
- On June 12, 2024, the Treasury Department issued new sanctions on entities that support Russia's war economy and military-industrial base.¹⁶⁴ As one example, Treasury sanctioned the China-based Shenzhen Youxin Technology Co Ltd (Shenzhen Youxin), which was said to have provided electronic integrated circuits and other components to Russia-based distributor Elekkom Logistik, which supplies Russia's defense industry with foreign-made electronic components used in the production of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).¹⁶⁵ Shenzhen Youxin also provided microchips found in Russian reconnaissance UAVs.¹⁶⁶

- On September 24, 2024, Ukraine’s presidential advisor Vladyslav Vlasiuk told reporters that roughly 60 percent of foreign-made components found in Russian weapons recovered from the battlefield in Ukraine come from China.¹⁶⁷
- In 2024, the U.S. Department of Commerce placed numerous Chinese entities on the Entity List for supporting Russia’s military. For example, on April 11, 2024, Jiangxi Xintuo Enterprise Co. Ltd., was added to the Entity List for “supporting Russia’s military through the procurement, development, and proliferation” of Russian UAVs.¹⁶⁸ On May 14, Commerce added six additional Chinese entities to the Entity List for being involved in the shipment of controlled items to Russia.¹⁶⁹ On August 23, 2024, Commerce added 42 entities in China, including Hong Kong, for shipping U.S.-origin and U.S.-branded items to Russia, contravening U.S. export controls.¹⁷⁰

China’s Ukraine Peace Diplomacy Falls Short in Europe, Echoes Russia’s Views

In March 2024, China made a show of conducting so-called “shuttle diplomacy”* between Russia, Ukraine, and European countries, but—not surprisingly—efforts by a country in a self-described “no limits” partnership with the aggressor country have not produced any tangible result.¹⁷¹ From March 2 to 11, 2024, China’s Special Representative of the Chinese Government for Eurasian Affairs Li Hui visited Russia, the EU headquarters in Brussels, Poland, Ukraine, Germany, and France to promote a political settlement of the war in Ukraine.¹⁷² These meetings, although highly praised in China’s own Party-state media, appeared to culminate in a single briefing in Beijing for domestic and foreign media and the diplomatic envoys stationed in China.¹⁷³

China continues to advocate for a political and diplomatic settlement to the war with Ukraine that Moscow has endorsed.[†]¹⁷⁴ During discussions between Li Hui and EU representatives, it was reported that Li Hui presented a repetition of Moscow’s talking points.¹⁷⁵ According to officials familiar with the talks, Li Hui reportedly told EU officials that discussion on Ukraine’s territorial integrity would not take place until violence stopped, which he said could only happen when the EU stops sending weapons to Ukraine.¹⁷⁶ The impression Li Hui reportedly left on officials in Brussels was that China simply sought to create the illusion of good faith efforts to end Russia’s war in Ukraine—when in reality the move was likely intended to

*The term “shuttle diplomacy” refers to negotiations especially between countries carried on by an intermediary who goes back and forth between disputants. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs refers to these activities as its “second round of shuttle diplomacy on the Ukraine crisis.” The so-called first round occurred in May 2023. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Eurasian Affairs Li Hui Holds Briefing on the Second Round of Shuttle Diplomacy on the Ukraine Crisis*, March 22, 2024; Rakshith Shetty, “China’s Shuttle Diplomacy with Ukraine and Russia: All Symbol, No Substance,” *Diplomat*, March 2, 2024; China’s Embassy in Iceland, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning’s Regular Press Conference on May 29, 2023*, March 29, 2023.

†According to Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during Li Hui’s meeting with the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin on March 2 in Moscow, both sides discussed the issue that “a settlement in Ukraine is impossible without the participation of Russia and taking into account its security interests.” TASS, “Russian and Chinese Diplomats Noted That Discussing a Settlement in Ukraine Is Impossible without the Russian Federation” (Дипломаты РФ и КНР отметили, что обсуждение урегулирования на Украине невозможно без РФ), March 3, 2024. Translation.

mitigate risks to its own interests as a result of its support for Russia.¹⁷⁷ Li Hui also used his meetings with EU officials to condemn the EU's sanctions—released on February 23, 2024—on three Chinese firms and one Hong Kong-based company due to their role in trading electronic components of EU-origin products to Russia.¹⁷⁸ In a readout of meetings published by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Li Hui urged the EU to unconditionally cancel the listing of Chinese enterprises and return to the “right track” of consultation with China.¹⁷⁹

Despite China's vocal claims that it has “stayed committed to promoting peace talks and played a positive role in efforts to restore peace,” Beijing declined to participate in the Swiss peace summit on Ukraine from June 15 to 16, 2024.¹⁸⁰ China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson said the Swiss peace summit failed to incorporate three elements proposed by China: recognition from both Russia and Ukraine, equal participation of all parties, and fair discussion of all peace plans.¹⁸¹ Instead, China offered a proposal for peace negotiations jointly developed with Brazil in May 2024.^{* 182} Russia has indicated its support for China's proposal, with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov indicating that China should consider arranging a peace conference in which both Russia and Ukraine would participate.¹⁸³ Minister Lavrov said in an interview with *RIA*, a Russian state-owned news agency, that Russia shares China's position that “root causes of the conflict need to be addressed in the first place and legal interests of all parties need to be protected.”¹⁸⁴ Finally, undermining Ukraine's attempts to build international consensus on its approach to resolve the conflict, China increased diplomatic outreach to other global leaders in Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan in a so-called “third round of shuttle diplomacy” to build support for China's Russian-approved peace proposals.¹⁸⁵

China Pushes Europe to View It as a Partner, with Mixed Results

China intensified its European diplomacy in 2024 in an effort to offset European criticism of its support for Ukraine and to discourage closer coordination of U.S. and European policies on trade and other issues, hoping to maintain access to the economic and political benefits that close ties with European countries can provide. In his presentation at the start of the year on China's diplomatic goals for 2024, Minister Wang described China's major objective for its European diplomacy as “increas[ing] high-level exchanges and strategic communication with the EU to promote the steady and sustained

* China and Brazil's joint proposal for peace negotiations with the participation of Russia and Ukraine called for the following six points: (1) All relevant parties observe three principles for deescalating the situation, namely no expansion of the battlefield, no escalation of fighting, and no provocation by any party; (2) All parties should create conditions for the resumption of direct dialogue and push for the de-escalation of the situation. China and Brazil support an international peace conference held at a proper time that is recognized by both Russia and Ukraine, with equal participation of all parties as well as fair discussion of all peace plans; (3) Efforts are needed to increase humanitarian assistance, attacks on civilians and civilian facilities must be avoided, and prisoners of war (POWs) must be protected. China and Brazil support the exchange of POWs; (4) The use of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons and chemical and biological weapons, must be opposed; (5) Attacks on nuclear power plants and other peaceful nuclear facilities must be opposed; and (6) Dividing the world into isolated political or economic groups should be opposed. Government of Brazil, *Brazil and China Present Joint Proposal for Peace Negotiations with the Participation of Russia and Ukraine*, May 23, 2024.

growth of their relations.”¹⁸⁶ Xi pursued this objective in a summit with the EU and a high-profile tour of several European countries, although the mainly positive messages China reported from those meetings present a contrast with the two sides’ deepening disagreements over Ukraine,* electric vehicles (EVs), and other economic issues. (For more on China’s economic tensions with Europe in 2024, see Chapter 1, “U.S.-China Economic and Trade Relations (Year in Review).”)

During a leaders’ meeting with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in December 2023, General Secretary Xi argued that Europe should overlook its differences with China in favor of deeper cooperation.¹⁸⁷ Xi endeavored to challenge European arguments for competition or rivalry between China and the EU, including by downplaying the relevance of its authoritarian political system.¹⁸⁸ He attempted to paint China as a critical strategic partner for the EU on economic and trade issues, on science and technology, and on industrial supply chains.¹⁸⁹ Xi further claimed that China and the EU have a responsibility to cooperate on geopolitical matters, but he did so while invoking China’s own geopolitical priorities† and attempting to discourage EU cooperation with the United States.‡¹⁹⁰ Throughout 2024, China’s diplomats continued to argue that European governments should adhere to Xi’s desired pattern of prioritizing partnership over differences.§¹⁹¹

*In June 2024, the EU imposed sanctions on 19 Chinese companies for being involved in the “circumvention of trade restrictions and engaged in the procurement of sensitive item,” such as the production of drones, or “providing material support for Russian military operations. *France 24*, “EU Hits 19 Chinese Firms with Sanctions over Links to Russian War Effort,” June 25, 2024; *Reuters*, “China Urges EU to Revoke Sanctions on Chinese Firms over Russian Links,” June 25, 2024; European Council, *Russia’s War of Aggression against Ukraine: Comprehensive EU’s 14th Package of Sanctions Cracks Down on Circumvention and Adopts Energy Measures*, June 24, 2024.

†Xi framed his desired partnership state as “two major forces promoting multipolarization,” “two major markets supporting globalization,” and “two major civilizations advocating diversity.” This terminology echoes the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference call for China to promote “equal and orderly multipolarization” and “inclusive and beneficial economic globalization.” *Xinhua*, “First Observation | Why Xi Jinping Emphasizes the ‘Strategic Significance’ and ‘World Impact’ of China-EU Relations” (第一观察 | 习近平主席为何强调中欧关系“战略意义”和“世界影响”), December 8, 2023. Translation; *People’s Daily*, “Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference Held in Beijing: Xi Jinping Delivered an Important Speech. Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Han Zheng Attended the Meeting” (中央外事工作会议在北京举行: 习近平发表重要讲话 李强主持 赵乐际王沪宁蔡奇丁薛祥李希韩正出席会议), December 29, 2023. Translation.

‡Xi argued that if China and Europe focus on dialogue and cooperation, then “camp confrontation will not form.” *Xinhua*, “First Observation | Why Xi Jinping Emphasizes the ‘Strategic Significance’ and ‘World Impact’ of China-EU Relations” (第一观察 | 习近平主席为何强调中欧关系“战略意义”和“世界影响”), December 8, 2023. Translation.

§At China’s NPC in March 2024, Minister Wang insisted that China-Europe cooperation could forestall the development of “bloc confrontation” and “anti-globalization,” and he expressed frustration at the EU’s three-fold view of China as simultaneously a partner, competitor, and systemic rival. Later in March, China’s Consul General in Strasbourg, France, delivered a speech describing China and Europe as two major geopolitical forces advancing “multipolarization” and “globalization,” repeating both Xi’s framing on China-Europe relations and the overall objectives of China’s diplomacy laid out at the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference. He expressed “regret” at what he called “discordant voices” promoting the EU’s partner-competitor-rival characterization of China and openly blamed the United States for having inspired the “rival” aspect. Consul-General of the People’s Republic of China in Strasbourg, *Full Text of the Keynote Speech by Consul General Pan Yumin at the European Circle Association’s ‘China-EU Relations’ Theme Exchange Meeting, ‘China Is a Reliable Partner of France and Europe, and Win-Win Cooperation Is the Key to a Better Future’* (潘昱旻受领事在欧洲圈协会“中欧关系”主题交流会上的主旨发言《中国是法国也是欧洲可信赖的伙伴，合作共赢才是美好未来》全文), March 22, 2024. Translation; *Xinhua*, “China Vows to be Staunch Force for Peace, Stability, Progress,” *State Council of the People’s Republic of China*, March 8, 2024; Li Yi, “Wang Yi: As Long as China and Europe Cooperate for Mutual Benefit, There will be No Confrontation between the Two Camps” (王毅: 只要中欧互利合作，阵营对抗就搞不起来), March 7, 2024. Translation; *People’s Daily*, “Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference Held in Beijing: Xi Jinping Delivered an Important Speech. Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Han Zheng Attended the Meeting” (中央外事工作会

Xi also traveled to Europe in April 2024 in an effort to reinforce his message.¹⁹² Many Western analysts observed that Xi's itinerary of France, Serbia, and Hungary featured what could be viewed as China's stronger relationships in Europe, an argument that Party media also confirmed from Beijing's perspective.*¹⁹³ Outcomes of the trip for China were mixed, however, cementing China's already strong diplomatic position in Serbia and Hungary but also casting remaining differences with France and the EU into sharper relief:

- *France:* Ahead of the visit, Minister Wang reportedly told French President Emmanuel Macron's diplomatic advisor that he hoped Paris could push the EU to pursue a more pragmatic policy toward China.¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, in a trilateral meeting with General Secretary Xi in Paris, President Macron and European Commission President von der Leyen reportedly emphasized China's responsibility to resolve structural economic difficulties, particularly related to trade and its export of overcapacity in new energy products, while China's readout suggests Xi took the contrasting position, claiming that "the so-called 'problem of China's overcapacity' does not exist."¹⁹⁵ Reporting also suggests the two European leaders pushed Xi on China's continued support for Russia's war in Ukraine, a discussion that China's readout omits in favor of a regurgitation of official talking points and self-congratulatory language about China's supposed contributions to ending the conflict.¹⁹⁶ Although short on details, some French media coverage suggests that "several hours" of bilateral talks between Macron and Xi may not have gone entirely as planned for either side, with certain topics such as climate change, human rights, Taiwan, and the South China Sea having "eclipsed" other issues.¹⁹⁷
- *Serbia:* In a victory for Beijing's agenda, Serbia expressed an official commitment to Xi's concept of a "community of common human destiny" and agreed to establish a "China-Serbia community of common destiny," with Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic describing it as "the highest possible form of cooperation between two countries."¹⁹⁸ President Vucic also reiterated support for Beijing's One China principle, referred to tensions

议在北京举行：习近平发表重要讲话 李强主持 赵乐际王沪宁蔡奇丁薛祥李希韩正出席会议), December 29, 2023. Translation; *Xinhua*, "First Observation | Why Xi Jinping Emphasizes the 'Strategic Significance' and 'World Impact' of China-EU Relations" (第一观察 | 习近平主席为何强调中欧关系“战略意义”和“世界影响”), December 8, 2023. Translation.

* For example, the same *People's Daily* article in *Qiushi* argues that China-France relations have always been "at the forefront of China's relations with Western countries" and attributes their recent ability to "maintain good development momentum" to a shared spirit of "independence." This is likely referencing French President Emmanuel Macron's willingness to publicly take positions that differ from those of the United States on certain issues of China policy and France's emphasis on the European concept of "strategic autonomy," a policy concept emphasizing the agency of European powers that China has attempted to push European governments to interpret to mean distancing themselves from policies that challenge China's interests and refraining from coordination with the United States over such policies. The article states that China and Serbia "have a deep ironclad friendship" that "can be regarded as a model of friendly relations between China and European countries." It describes Hungary as an important BRI partner that has "insisted on... eliminating interference and pressure and firmly deepening cooperation with China" even "under the turbulent international situation"—an approach it argues "strongly proves" that China is an opportunity rather than a challenge to Europe. He Yin, "Promote the Healthy and Stable Development of China-Europe Relations" (促进中欧关系健康稳定发展), *People's Daily* in *Qiushi*, May 5, 2024. Translation; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2023 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2023, 526, 550, 528–529; Elizabeth Koch, "European Strategic Autonomy after Macron's Trip to China," *Wilson Center*, May 9, 2023.

across the Strait as China's internal issue, and reportedly drew parallels between Taiwan and Kosovo.¹⁹⁹ Other favorable outcomes for China included a signing ceremony for a free trade agreement on certain agricultural goods and bilateral agreements on cultural and scientific exchanges.*²⁰⁰

- *Hungary*: During the visit, China and Hungary declared an elevation of their relationship to “all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership for the new era,” which observers view as a step up from the previous “comprehensive strategic partnership” they had established in 2017.†²⁰¹ General Secretary Xi and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán oversaw the signing of 17 agreements between the two countries.²⁰² One news outlet reports that they agreed to strengthen high-level exchanges, continue pursuing BRI, and promote deeper cooperation in areas including clean energy, AI, mobile communication technology and nuclear energy, while another lists cooperation in supply chains, culture, media, and other sectors.²⁰³ During the meeting with Xi, Prime Minister Orbán reportedly welcomed more Chinese businesses to invest in Hungary.²⁰⁴ He also notably distanced Hungary from EU positions, stating that Budapest did not agree with EU’s “de-risking” policy or concerns about overcapacity of China’s EVs and batteries.²⁰⁵

A stream of meetings by the director of the CCP’s International Liaison Department with political parties and individual leaders across the continent in the first half of the year also revealed that the Party perceives a very wide range in European governments’ willingness to interact on China’s terms. In a meeting with a German delegation, Director Liu communicated the CCP’s desire for greater “dialogue and cooperation” in strategic relations with Europe broadly and with Germany specifically.²⁰⁶ When meeting with the ambassador from the Netherlands, he encouraged the country to contribute to promoting “stable” China-Europe relations and to “push the EU to adhere to openness” and “oppose ‘de-coupling.’”²⁰⁷ In a meeting with a Finnish diplomat, Director Liu similarly stated a hope that Finland would “push China-EU relations” toward “stable development.”²⁰⁸ While meeting the Polish ambassador, he called for deepened exchanges and emphasized Poland’s importance to China as an EU member with influence in Central and Eastern Europe.²⁰⁹ To Spain’s ambassador, by contrast, Director Liu expressed appreciation for the country’s “adherence to a positive and friendly policy toward China,” and a readout of the meeting with Slovakia’s ambassador focused mainly on promoting BRI and deepening political exchanges.²¹⁰ In a party-to-party engagement with representatives from Hungary, Director Liu praised the two countries’ “traditional friendship” and mutual support on issues concerning “core interests,” argued for compatibility between BRI and Hungary’s foreign

* *China Digital Times* reports that 29 agreements were signed in total, promoting legal, regulatory, and economic cooperation. Arthur Kaufman, “Xi’s Visits to Serbia and Hungary, Pushing Wedge into Europe,” *China Digital Times*, May 10, 2024.

† According to an expert from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences speaking to China’s state media in 2015, the “all-weather” label signifies that China and a country have close relations “regardless of changes in time or global landscape.” Other countries with this “all-weather” label include Belarus, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela. Kelly Wang and Hu Xuan, “China, Hungary Elevates Ties to ‘All Weather’ Partnership,” *Caixin Global*, May 10, 2024.

policy, and promoted expanded exchanges at the local government and enterprise levels.²¹¹ Director Liu's meeting with the ambassador from Belarus—a key Russian partner in Europe but not an EU member—called for deepened exchanges across political, legislative, social, and industrial domains and emphasized the two states' commitment to mutual support for “core interests.”²¹²

Finally, when European actions did not conform to China's preferred pattern for the relationship, China's proclaimed desire for strategic stability did not prevent it from launching harsh criticisms. On July 11, 2024, Germany announced a new two-step plan to ban the use of critical components made by Huawei and ZTE in core parts of the country's 5G network beginning in 2026.²¹³ Rejecting the German government's security concerns, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs framed the policy decision as “politicizing trade and tech issues” and “disrupt[ing] normal exchanges and cooperation in technology.”²¹⁴ The following day, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized the EU for releasing a statement reiterating its support for the conclusion of the legally binding South China Sea arbitration ruling.²¹⁵

NATO Sharpens Its Position on Challenges from China

The United States continued to urge Europe and NATO allies to place increased scrutiny on China's support for Russia's war in Ukraine. During U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell's visit to Brussels in September 2024, he met with Belgian, NATO, and EU officials and urged more forceful condemnation of China's “substantial support” to Russia's military industrial base and deepening defense cooperation.²¹⁶ According to Mr. Campbell, while some countries in the EU and NATO may take differing perspectives, the United States, the EU, and NATO allies are increasingly aligned on policies related to China.²¹⁷ At the conclusion of its July 2024 summit in Washington, DC, NATO released a declaration stating the alliance's strongest position to date on challenges from China, reflecting an escalation of concerns about China's irresponsible international behavior. Most notably, the declaration labeled China “a decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine” and stated that China “cannot enable the largest war in Europe in recent history without this negatively impacting its interests and reputation.”²¹⁸ NATO called on China to “cease all material and political support to Russia's war effort,” specifically citing the “transfer of dual-use materials such as weapons components, equipment, and raw materials that serve as inputs for Russia's defense sector.”²¹⁹ This language represents a significant evolution beyond the communique issued only a year prior at NATO's 2023 summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, which had called upon China to “act responsibly,” “play a constructive role,” and “abstain from supporting Russia's war effort.”²²⁰ Concern about China's “deepening strategic partnership” with Russia and the two countries' “mutually reinforcing efforts” to undercut the rules-based international order was also elevated to a much more prominent section of the document.²²¹ Aside

NATO Sharpens Its Position on Challenges from China— *Continued*

from Russia and Ukraine, the 2024 declaration maintained attention on previously mentioned concerns about China’s “stated ambitions and coercive policies,” including China’s malicious cyber activities and disinformation, and the expansion of its nuclear arsenal.²²²

China seized upon the occasion of the summit to promote disinformation about NATO and also revealed its own heightened concern about the group’s intensifying focus on China’s policies.* China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson spoke publicly against the alliance on every day of the summit, painting it repeatedly as a serious danger to the world and accusing its members of seeking to “incite confrontation and rivalry.”²²³ On July 11, 2024 the spokesperson also accused NATO of “spreading disinformation created by the [United States] and blatantly [seeking] to undermine China’s relations with Europe,” ignoring the agency of the alliance’s other members and mischaracterizing the group as an anti-China tool of the United States.²²⁴ After the conclusion of the summit, the spokesperson reacted to a speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with not only a vociferous denunciation of the remarks themselves, but also ad hominem attacks.²²⁵

China in the Indo-Pacific: Cooperation and Coercion

China intensified its use of all available tools from persuasion to coercion in its attempt to reshape international norms and policies across the Indo-Pacific. China’s aggression in the South China Sea reached new heights as it escalated longstanding harassment of Philippine vessels and personnel within their own EEZ into violent and dangerous clashes. In the Pacific Islands, by contrast, China courted the governments and political parties of both its traditional partners and those of the United States, seeking not only endorsements of its Taiwan policy but also stronger support for China’s role as a key economic player in the region and for its authoritarian system.

*China also spoke out against NATO’s growing relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific, as leaders or deputies from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea attended the NATO summit in Washington DC in July 2024. NATO has taken steps to increase coordination with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific, having invited Australia, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand to participate in ministerial-level meetings and NATO summits since December 2020. In 2023, NATO and Japanese officials acknowledged ongoing discussion during Secretary General Stoltenberg’s January visit about opening a NATO liaison office in Tokyo and Japanese mission to NATO. By June, however, President Macron had voiced opposition, arguing that NATO should not expand its reach beyond the North Atlantic and signaling that the required consent of all 31 NATO members might not be possible. In response to the reports that NATO was considering opening a liaison office in Tokyo, China criticized the plan when its Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Japan should “avoid doing things that could dismantle trust and affect peace and stability in the region.” China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian’s Regular Press Conference on July 11, 2024*, July 11, 2024; Ken Moritsugu, “China Warns NATO Not to Create ‘Chaos’ in Asia and Rejects Label of ‘Enabler’ of Russia,” *PBS News*, July 11, 2024; Justin McCurry, “France Opposed to Opening of Nato Liaison Office in Japan, Official Says,” *Guardian*, June 6, 2023; Demetri Sevastopulo et al., “France Objects to Nato Plan for Office in Tokyo,” *Financial Times*, June 5, 2023; *Xinhua*, “China Cautions against Potential NATO Office in Japan,” May 12, 2023; Ken Moriyasu, Rieko Miki, and Takashi Tjuji, “NATO to Open Japan Office, Deepening Indo-Pacific Engagement,” *Nikkei Asia*, May 3, 2023.

China Ramps Up Pressure on Taiwan's New President

In 2024, China continued to intensify its coercion of Taiwan following the inauguration of Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), whom Beijing has deemed a "separatist."²²⁶ In June, China used "lawfare" tactics to intimidate Taiwan's government and people through the announcement of new guidelines that officially designate "Taiwan independence"—including the denial of Beijing's claim that Taiwan is part of China, the promotion of Taiwan's participation in international organizations, and attempts to change Taiwan's status through legal means in Taiwan—as a crime that is punishable by detention, prison terms ranging from three years to life, confiscation of possessions, and even the death sentence.²²⁷ Beijing also employed economic coercion against Taiwan, announcing in May 2024 that it would suspend some of the preferential trade benefits on 134 products exported from Taiwan, including chemical products, metals, rubbers and plastics, and machinery.²²⁸ Three days after Taiwan's presidential inauguration in May 2024, China conducted a military exercise, Operation Joint Sword 2024A, to demonstrate its operational skills for blockade or invasion.²²⁹ The exercise notably included the China Coast Guard (CCG) and represented an intimidating show of military might in tandem with its increasingly frequent and regular air and naval operations around Taiwan.²³⁰ Beijing also continued diplomatic coercion against Taiwan, for example by making attempts to bully foreign parliamentarians and stop them from attending the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC)* summit, a global coalition of lawmakers aimed at countering threats from China.²³¹ (For a more in depth and comprehensive analysis of China's intensified coercion against Taiwan, see Chapter 9, "Taiwan.")

China's Violence toward the Philippines Escalates

China's attempts to block Philippine activities in the South China Sea, especially resupply missions to the Philippine Navy transport ship *Sierra Madre* grounded on the reef near Second Thomas Shoal in the Philippines' EEZ, have escalated. Chinese forces have gone from using water cannons and lasers to ramming vessels and committing other acts of violence, including the use of bladed weapons.[†]²³² In further attempts to use lawfare to assert China's control over Second Thomas Shoal, Beijing also called on the Philippines to notify China in advance of conducting activities to and from Second Thomas Shoal, a direct violation of the Philippines' rights under international law.²³³ These events, which frequently involved aggression by the CCG, maritime militia, and the PLA Navy, suggest Beijing is seeking to establish a new status quo whereby it can control or deny the Philippines' access to an area within the Philippines'

*IPAC seeks to build a global coalition that unites lawmakers worldwide by promoting democracy and addressing threats to the rules-based and human rights systems posed by China. IPAC held its fourth annual summit in Taipei, Taiwan, which was attended by 50 parliamentarians from 23 countries. Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, "About"; Helen Davidson, "China Used 'Shocking' Bullying Tactics ahead of Taiwan IPAC Meeting, Organiser Says," *Guardian*, July 30, 2024.

†China's escalating aggression against the Philippines follows a series of steps taken by the United States and the Philippines to strengthen military cooperation. White House, *Fact Sheet: Celebrating the Strength of the U.S.-Philippines Alliance*, April 11, 2024; U.S. Department of Defense, *Philippines, U.S. Announce Locations of Four New EDCA Sites*, April 3, 2023.

own EEZ under the guise of law enforcement activities.²³⁴ China’s highly aggressive actions were likely emboldened by a Chinese regulation* that entered into force in June 2024, granting the CCG authority to seize and detain foreign vessels operating within “Chinese jurisdiction”—despite the fact that Second Thomas Shoal does not lie within the lawful jurisdiction of China.²³⁵ Although China and the Philippines agreed to lower tensions following the violent encounters in June 2024 and established a hotline between the two presidential offices to prevent new confrontation from spiraling out of control, none of these efforts have altered Beijing’s aggressive behavior in the South China Sea.²³⁶ (For more on Philippine views of China’s aggressive actions and on U.S. defense commitments to the Philippines in the South China Sea, see Chapter 8, “China’s Evolving Counter-Intervention Capabilities and the Role of Indo-Pacific Allies.”)

- On March 5, 2024, the CCG collided with a Philippine Coast Guard vessel after carrying out “dangerous maneuvers” to block the Philippine Coast Guard vessel from escorting a resupply mission to Second Thomas Shoal.²³⁷ Hours later, two CCG vessels shot water cannons at a Philippine supply boat in the area, reportedly injuring four people onboard and shattering three panes of the boat’s windshield.²³⁸ The CCG released a statement blaming the Philippines for the incidents.²³⁹ In remarks to the media in Australia the following day, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. expressed alarm at the continuing dangerous maneuvers and actions against the Philippines while clarifying that this incident did not necessitate an invocation of the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty.²⁴⁰
- On March 23, 2024, two CCG ships and two militia vessels surrounded a wooden Philippine supply boat on its way to Second Thomas Shoal.²⁴¹ The CCG ships reportedly fired water cannons at the boat for almost an hour, injuring three Philippine crew members and disabling the boat.²⁴² In the following days, the Philippines summoned China’s ambassador in Manila to protest the aggressive actions, and the Philippine Embassy in Beijing lodged a demarche with China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²⁴³ China’s embassy accused the Philippines of “deliberate and provocative” actions that had supposedly “infringed upon China’s sovereignty and maritime rights,” completely ignoring the legally binding ruling of the 2016 Court of Arbitration Tribunal, which invalidated any Chinese claim to special rights around Second Thomas Shoal.†²⁴⁴

*China’s Coast Guard Regulation No. 3 appears to implement the 2021 China Coast Guard Law which contains ambiguous language on the scope of CCG authority to use weapons and its geographic application. In analysis conducted by U.S. INDOPACOM’s Joint Operational Law Team, the regulation, which took effect on June 15, 2024, authorizes CCG commanders to detain foreign vessels and persons in “waters under China’s jurisdiction” for up to 60 days. USINDOPACOM Joint Operational Law Team, *TOPIC: China Coast Guard Regulation No. 3*, May 30, 2024; China Coast Guard, *China Coast Guard Has Issued the “Regulations on Administrative Law Enforcement Procedures for Coast Guard Agencies”* (中国海警局制定出台《海警机构行政执法程序规定》), May 15, 2024. Translation.

†The tribunal ruled that Second Thomas Shoal is a low-tide elevation—a feature that, in its natural state, is above water only at low tide—and thus incapable of generating any maritime zones (such as a territorial sea, EEZ, or continental shelf) of its own. This categorization, combined with the fact that the feature lies outside the legal territorial sea of any state, means it is not subject to “appropriation” (i.e., claims of “territorial sovereignty”) by any state. These rulings

- In April 2024, the Philippines task force on South China Sea issues said the CCG ships had harassed and damaged a Philippine Coast Guard ship and a Philippine fisheries vessel headed to Scarborough Shoal* to assist Filipino fishermen in the area.²⁴⁵ According to the statement, the CCG ships used water cannons against both of the Philippine vessels and repeatedly rammed the fisheries vessel.²⁴⁶
- In May 2024, the CCG attempted to block the Philippine Coast Guard conducting a medical evacuation of a sick member of the country's armed forces from Second Thomas Shoal.²⁴⁷ The blocking maneuvers reportedly continued despite calls from the Philippine Coast Guard explaining the humanitarian nature of the mission.²⁴⁸ The Philippine Coast Guard ultimately completed the mission in spite of China's interference, which it described as "barbaric and inhumane."²⁴⁹
- On June 17, 2024, CCG ships intercepted Philippine vessels attempting to deliver supplies to Philippine troops stationed at Second Thomas Shoal, instigating a violent encounter that left at least eight Philippine Navy personnel injured.²⁵⁰ CCG personnel boarded the Philippine vessels, carrying with them bladed weapons, and seized all Philippine firearms they found onboard.²⁵¹ They also slashed at Philippine rubber boats, reportedly leaving them in tatters.²⁵² Philippine personnel who resisted were reportedly left to do so "with their bare hands," and one Filipino servicemember lost his thumb in the confrontation.²⁵³ The violent encounter led to a debate among Western observers about what threshold of force would trigger the U.S.-Philippine mutual defense clause of the 1951 treaty.²⁵⁴
- On August 19, 2024, vessels of the CCG and Philippine Coast Guard collided near Sabina Shoal,† causing structural damage

invalidate any claim of "territorial sovereignty" over the feature (which China claims over all features in the Spratlys) and any claim to maritime zones around it. The tribunal further ruled that Second Thomas Shoal is located fully within the EEZ of the Philippines, thereby granting the Philippines legal right to explore, exploit, conserve, and manage the natural resources in and around the shoal—rights it found China to have violated. The tribunal determined that China's ambiguous claim to "historic rights" in the South China Sea is baseless, as no such historic rights are recognized under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which China has signed. Additionally, the tribunal clarified that if any of China's ambiguous claims were to amount to a claim over "internal waters" in the area, such claims would also lack any legal basis in UNCLOS. Thus, the only rights that China's vessels are entitled to in the area of Second Thomas Shoal are the standard rights afforded to all foreign vessels within another country's EEZ. USINDOPACOM J06/SJA TACAID Series, *Topic: Sierra Madres, Second Thomas Shoal, and the U.S. Commitment to Defend the Philippines*; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 2, Section 1: "Rule by Law: China's Increasingly Global Legal Reach," in *2023 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2023, 189–190; Permanent Court of Arbitration, *The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of The Philippines v. The People's Republic of China)*, July 12, 2016, 8–10.

*The tribunal ruled that Scarborough Shoal is a high-tide feature rightfully classified as a "rock" under UNCLOS, meaning it is entitled to a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea but not to its own EEZ or continental shelf. The tribunal did not have jurisdiction to take a position on which country has sovereignty over the feature itself. The tribunal ruled that the fisherfolk of both countries retain a degree of "traditional fishing rights" in the area that were not extinguished by the adoption of UNCLOS or by the feature's location within the Philippines' EEZ. It further ruled that China had infringed upon the rights of Filipino fishermen by obstructing all fishing by Philippine nationals. Permanent Court of Arbitration, *The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of The Philippines v. The People's Republic of China)*, July 12, 2016, 9–10.

†Like nearby Second Thomas Shoal, Sabina Shoal is a low-tide elevation in the Spratlys, well inside the Philippines EEZ and only 86 miles from the Philippine island of Palawan. Rebecca Tan and Lyric Li, "Chinese and Philippine Ships Collide at Sabina Shoal, a New Flash Point," *Washington Post*, August 18, 2024; *Radio Free Asia*, "Manila Accuses Beijing of Island Building in

to the Philippine Coast Guard vessels.²⁵⁵ According to Philippine National Security Council director general Jonathan Malaya, the first Philippines coast guard vessel sustained a 13-centimeter hole after “aggressive” maneuvers by the CCG.²⁵⁶ Fifteen minutes later, a second Philippine coast guard ship was reportedly “rammed twice” by a CCG vessel and suffered “minor structural damage.”²⁵⁷ China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs refuted the Philippines’ reports, claimed the Philippine coast guard vessels entered “China’s territory” without permission from the Chinese government, and accused the Philippine coast guard of “deliberately ramming the China Coast Guard vessel that was carrying out law enforcement operation[s].”²⁵⁸

Regional Reactions to China’s Violent Behavior

China attempted to justify its violent actions occurring on June 17, 2024 against the Philippines by illegally claiming jurisdiction over the South China Sea, raising concern from countries in the region. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to act as if China had the ability to enforce its domestic laws within the Philippines’ EEZ and blamed the incident on the Philippines, claiming that the CCG “only took necessary control measures against the Philippine vessels.”²⁵⁹ On the day of the June 17, 2024 incident, the spokesperson for the State Department asserted that the United States “stands with its ally the Philippines and condemns the escalatory and irresponsible actions” by China to deny the Philippines its lawful rights.²⁶⁰ He also reaffirmed that U.S. commitments under the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty apply to armed attacks on Philippine armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft—including those of its coast guard—anywhere in the South China Sea.²⁶¹ The Philippine Department of National Defense, Office of the National Security Advisor, and Department of Foreign Affairs released a joint statement on June 24, 2024, stating that the Philippines views the incident “not as a misunderstanding or an accident” but as “a deliberate act of the Chinese officialdom” and “an act of aggressive and illegal use of force” while also noting that the Philippines “continue[s] to find peaceful solutions” to the issue.²⁶² Japan, South Korea, and Australia have also expressed concerns about China’s dangerous behavior in the South China Sea and its aggressive obstruction of Philippine vessels.²⁶³

Possible Evidence of Chinese Land Reclamation in South China Sea

In May 2024, the Philippines announced it was monitoring Sabina Shoal following signs of suspected Chinese island-building activities on the feature.²⁶⁴ Like nearby Second Thomas Shoal, Sabina Shoal is a low-tide elevation in the Spratlys, well inside the Philippines EEZ.*²⁶⁵ The Philippine Coast Guard commodore

South China Sea,” May 13, 2024; Permanent Court of Arbitration, *The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of The Philippines v. The People’s Republic of China)*, July 12, 2016.

*Under UNCLOS, a coastal state has “the exclusive right to construct and to authorize and regulate the construction, operation and use of... artificial islands” in its own EEZ. *Radio Free Asia*, “Manila Accuses Beijing of Island Building in South China Sea,” May 13, 2024; Permanent Court of Arbitration, *The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of The Philippines v. The*

Possible Evidence of Chinese Land Reclamation in South China Sea—*Continued*

reported that crushed corals had been dumped on the reef, declaring it “highly likely that the maritime features [of Sabina Shoal] were altered” by human activity.²⁶⁶ According to a statement from the Office of the President of the Philippines, the dumping of the corals represented the very early stages of a suspected artificial island-building effort by China.²⁶⁷ The Philippines instituted a rotational deployment of coast guard vessels to monitor the shoal, noting the presence of PLA Navy vessels and helicopters, CCG ships, Chinese Maritime Militia vessels, and Chinese research vessels around the shoal at various times.²⁶⁸ China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs dismissed the reports as “futile” efforts to smear China and “mislead the international community.”²⁶⁹ Not all experts agree on whether the corals indicate an ongoing island-building effort. According to Gregory B. Poling, director of the Southeast Asia program and Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, “There is no evidence in commercially available satellite imagery to suggest any island building or reclamation, with all the sandbars in question remaining the same average size for the last decade or more.”²⁷⁰

China Gray Zone Operations near Japan Intensify

China has steadily ramped up its pressure on Japan around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, which Japan administers but which China claims as its own territory. On a visit to the East China Sea Command Headquarters of the CCG on November 29, 2023, Xi told the CCG to “resolutely” defend China’s sovereignty claims in the area and that China “can only move forward, not backward” on the matter.²⁷¹ According to Japanese media reports, the CCG subsequently drafted a plan to maintain a ship presence near the islands every day of 2024.²⁷² On July 5, 2024, the Japanese Coast Guard spokesman reported that China had sailed near the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands and within Japan’s EEZ in the East China Sea for a record 197 consecutive days.*²⁷³

China’s naval presence around the Senkaku Islands and flights near Japanese airspace represented a significant escalation from previous activity. According to the Japanese Coast Guard, in June 2024, three CCG vessels entered within 12 nautical miles of the Senkaku Islands and appeared to be armed with deck-mounted machine guns.²⁷⁴ Japan’s then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida stated that China’s “unilateral attempts to change the status quo are being intensified,” calling the situation “a grave concern.”²⁷⁵ Senior level exchanges between the two countries have not impacted the tempo of China’s East China Sea activities, as the Japanese Coast Guard detected the four CCG ships a day after then-Prime Minister Kishi-

People’s Republic of China), July 12, 2016; United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, § 60, 1982.

* China’s activities near the Senkakus surpassed the previous record of 157 consecutive days in 2021. *Japan Times*, “Japan Spots Chinese Ships near Senkaku Islands for Record 158 Days,” May 27, 2024.

da held his first formal bilateral meeting with China's Premier Li on May 26, 2024.²⁷⁶ China's military has also begun to utilize UAVs near Japan's territorial airspace, a move without historical precedent.²⁷⁷ On May 27, 2024, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force observed a PLA reconnaissance and attack drone flying over the East China Sea, north of the southwestern Japanese prefecture of Okinawa.²⁷⁸ On June 4, 2024, the Air Self-Defense Force scrambled fighter jets to intercept another PLA reconnaissance and attack drone that flew in international airspace near Okinawa.²⁷⁹ In August 2024, Japan's Defense Ministry said a PLA Y-9 reconnaissance aircraft violated the country's territorial airspace, 12 nautical miles from the coast of Japanese territory on the eastern side of the Danjo Islands in the East China Sea.²⁸⁰ The PLA continued to ramp up its presence the following month when a Chinese aircraft carrier entered Japan's contiguous zone,* reportedly for the first time, by sailing between the southern Yonaguni and Iriomote islands.²⁸¹

China Expands Persuasion Efforts in the Pacific Islands

China continued and expanded its campaign to persuade Pacific Island states to deepen their reliance on China and adopt Beijing's preferred policies on a range of issues, further increasing concerns that China could seek to use its relationships in the region to constrain U.S. security partnerships.† In November 2023, Special Envoy for Pacific Island Countries Affairs of the Chinese Government Qian Bo visited the Cook Islands to participate in the Pacific Island Forum Leaders Meeting and also took the opportunity to meet bilaterally with national leaders from across the region.²⁸² In his speech at the forum, Representative Qian continued to advertise China as an economic partner by announcing new development assistance measures and arguing that "Chinese modernization" and "high-quality" BRI cooperation would bring major opportunities for Pacific Island countries.²⁸³ On the sidelines of the forum, he met with Cook Islands Prime Minister, and Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, Mark Stephen Brown, who reportedly reiterated the government's commitment to Beijing's One China principle.²⁸⁴ According to reporting by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Representative Qian also met with participating leaders from Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, and the Solomon Islands over the course of his stay in the country and conducted "friendly exchanges" with leaders of the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, and Vanuatu.²⁸⁵

China made new efforts to strengthen its relationship with the political leadership of the Solomon Islands in 2024, seeking to maintain the advantageous position it had enjoyed under outgoing Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare. In January 2024, Xinhua news agency

*Contiguous zone as defined by the UN is an area that extends up to 24 nautical miles from a country's coastline within which a coastal state "may exercise the control necessary" to "prevent" or "punish" "infringement of its customs, fiscal, immigration or sanitary laws and regulations within its territory or territorial sea." *Reuters*, "Japan says Chinese Carrier Entered Its Contiguous Waters for First Time," September 18, 2024; United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, § 33, 1982.

†China's pursuit of deepened relations and especially security agreements in the region has generated concern in the past about the leverage it could give China to deny U.S. security access. For example, after signing a security agreement with China in 2022, the government of the Solomon Islands refused to grant permission for routine visits by U.S. and UK vessels in its ports. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022, 380–381.

publicized remarks by then Prime Minister Sogavare, then running for reelection,* in which he not only argued that his government had made the right choice in severing diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 2019 but also parroted China's false narrative that UN Resolution 2758 obligated every UN member state to recognize Taiwan as part of China.²⁸⁶ (For more on China's misrepresentation of UN Resolution 2758, see Chapter 9, "Taiwan.") In early April 2024, Representative Qian visited the Solomon Islands and met with the country's Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Collin Beck.²⁸⁷ In an example of China's use of subnational diplomacy to advance its goals, he also made a dedicated trip to Malaita Province, where he met Premier Martin Fini, visited a community school, and attended the signing ceremony of a memorandum of understanding on establishing a sister province relationship between Malaita and Jiangsu.[†]²⁸⁸ Later in April, China's state-backed media seized the opportunity of the Solomon Islands' parliamentary elections to spread false narratives about U.S. foreign policy objectives in the region and about China's supposed commitment to not interfere in other countries' internal affairs while again touting the development opportunities China would bring to the country.²⁸⁹ Following the election, Solomon Islands lawmakers selected as the new prime minister former Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele, who pledged to continue the Pacific Island country's international policy of close relations with China.²⁹⁰ In early July 2024, China invited Prime Minister Manele to meet with General Secretary Xi in Beijing, where they released a joint statement outlining planned future cooperation.²⁹¹ Notably, the statement included a commitment by China to continue sending "police liaison teams" to the country, likely indicating continuity of the police cooperation agreement that China signed with the Sogavare government in 2023.²⁹²

The CCP in 2024 also undertook substantial efforts to deepen political connections in Vanuatu with an emphasis on solidifying support for China on key political issues such as Taiwan. In April and May 2024, International Liaison Department Director Liu held a series of meetings with representatives from Vanuatu's various political parties.²⁹³ In these meetings and other venues, Director Liu promoted China's economic development opportunities and sought support for China's "core interests and major concerns."²⁹⁴ As a demonstration of one such core interest, readouts from the party-to-party meetings consistently mentioned the commitment of Vanuatu and of each individual political party to Beijing's One China principle, suggesting

*In the runup to the Solomon Islands election, news media reported that incumbent Prime Minister Sogavare unsurprisingly favored closer ties with China, while opposition parties reportedly favored closer ties with Western countries, including Australia, and had even stated that they may scrap or hold a referendum on the security deal that Sogavare's government had signed with China, if elected. *Reuters*, "Explainer: China, Health System Top Issues as Solomon Islands Holds National Election," April 16, 2024; Charley Piringi, "As Solomon Islands' Election Looms, China's Influence on the Pacific Country Draws Scrutiny," *Guardian*, April 14, 2024; Kristy Needham and Lucy Craymer, "Solomon Islands Election Watched by US, China amid Pacific Influence Contest," *Reuters*, April 12, 2024.

†Preexisting sister province relationships between China and the Solomon Islands include between Isabel Province and Shandong Province (established 2023) and between Guadalcanal Province and Guangdong Province (reestablished 2021). According to news coverage of the event by the Solomon Islands government, there were "ongoing discussions" by other provinces interested in establishing similar relationships with China. Solomon Islands Government, *PRC Pacific Envoy Pays Visit to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade*, April 8, 2024.

Beijing may continue finding support for its Taiwan agenda even if the party in power were to change.*²⁹⁵ The meeting readouts also referenced “governance experience” and “governance capacity building,” suggesting efforts by the CCP to promote its authoritarian practices as it has in the Solomon Islands.²⁹⁶ Director Liu described China’s relations with Vanuatu as “a microcosm of China’s relations with Pacific Island countries,” suggesting that China’s government sees Vanuatu as a willing partner for its objectives in the region.²⁹⁷ In early July 2024, China completed the construction of a new presidential palace and finance ministry building in Vanuatu, in addition to renovations to Vanuatu’s foreign affairs department building.†²⁹⁸ Shortly thereafter, China invited Prime Minister of Vanuatu Charlot Salwai to meet with General Secretary Xi in Beijing, where the two leaders released a joint statement.²⁹⁹

China’s efforts in the region seem to be paying off. In 2024, China secured a degree of rhetorical support from its established partners the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, from Fiji, and from the Federated States of Micronesia, one of the three Pacific Island countries with a Compact of Free Association (COFA) agreement with the United States. (For more on the COFA agreements, see Chapter 8, “China’s Evolving Counter-Intervention Capabilities and the Role of Indo-Pacific Allies.”) After separate meetings between Xi and the respective heads of state from these four countries, they released joint statements endorsing a wide range of political and geopolitical priorities for China, including several that are oriented to undercut and discredit the United States and its allies.³⁰⁰

- First, each of the four statements included support for China’s political priorities and sovereignty claims to some degree. Each described Taiwan as “an inalienable part of China’s territory,” and all but Fiji opposed “Taiwan independence” and supported efforts by the Chinese government to “realize national reunification.”³⁰¹ All but Fiji also included mentions of Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet, with the Federated States of Micronesia and the Solomon Islands additionally stating that they “firmly support” China’s position on these issues, and Vanuatu describing them as “internal matters for China to deal with.”³⁰² The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu also mentioned “issues related to...human rights,” with the former stating they “firmly support” China’s position and Vanuatu again describing human rights as an internal matter for China.³⁰³ Finally, both the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu statements added that their government “fully understands and supports” China’s position on the South China Sea.³⁰⁴
- Second, each of the four statements endorsed the set of diplomatic slogans China has emphasized in 2024 to contrast its ostensible international leadership with that of the United States.

* Following the Taiwan election, the government of Vanuatu publicly reaffirmed its position that “Taiwan is an integral part of the People’s Republic of China’s territory” and called on the international community to respect China’s supposed sovereignty over Taiwan. *Daily Post*, “Vanuatu Gov’t Reaffirms Recognition of ‘One China Policy,’” January 16, 2024.

† Some Australian officials expressed concern that the construction project would provide China greater opportunities for surveillance and intelligence gathering in Vanuatu. Leah Lowonbu, “China Hands over Lavish New Presidential Palace to Vanuatu, ahead of PM’s Visit to Beijing,” *Australian Broadcasting Company*, July 3, 2024.

This included support not only for Xi's community of common human destiny and his three global initiatives but also "equal and orderly multipolar[ization]" and "inclusive economic globalization."³⁰⁵ All four statements also stated opposition to "hegemonism and power politics," which China attributes to the United States.³⁰⁶

- Third, while all four statements reiterated a commitment to upholding the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu also included additional language on nuclear issues that could be interpreted as a veiled criticism of both Japan's discharge of treated water from the Fukushima power station* and the operation of nuclear-powered submarines by the United States, the UK, and eventually Australia under the AUKUS agreement.†³⁰⁷ (For more on the AUKUS partnership and the planned pathway for Australia's acquisition of conventionally armed nuclear submarine technology, see Chapter 8, "China's Evolving Counter-Intervention Capabilities and the Role of Indo-Pacific Allies.")

China Downplays Maritime and Territorial Disputes with Vietnam

Over the past year, China and Vietnam have undertaken wide-ranging cooperation and professed to have constructive political relations, despite the two countries' unresolved territorial-maritime disputes in the South China Sea. In December 2023, General Secretary Xi and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong released a joint statement declaring the establishment of a "China-Vietnam community of common destiny."³⁰⁸ The joint statement covered a wide range of issues, including strengthened party-to-party ties; greater military exchanges; expanded cooperation on law enforcement, regime security, and intelligence; deepened economic ties; and support for China's global initiatives.³⁰⁹ It also contained a lengthy section on "better management and settlement of differences" which focused on managing disputes in the South China Sea.³¹⁰ Analysts note that the agreement closely followed the upgrade of U.S.-Vietnam relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership three months prior, and Vietnam's officials reportedly characterize the further development of relations with China as a "strategic choice" and part of a "diversified foreign policy."³¹¹ In early April 2024, General Secretary Xi met with Chairman of the National Assembly of Vietnam Vuong Dinh Hue in Beijing and noted that implementation of the agreement was proceeding well from China's perspective.³¹² Xi and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh then met in Beijing in June 2024, where Xi again stated that cooperation was progressing "smoothly."³¹³ Prime Minister Chinh reportedly voiced opposition for "the politicization of economic, trade, and technolog-

*The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed in April 2024 that the discharge of treated water from the power station has proceeded according to accepted standards of protection from harmful radiation, with tritium concentrations in each batch of treated water to date measuring "far below Japan's operational limit." International Atomic Energy Agency, "Japan's ALPS Treated Water Release Is Progressing as Planned, IAEA Task Force Says," April 26, 2024.

†Former special assistant and press secretary to the president in the government of the Federated States of Micronesia, Richard Clark, has called this provision "concerning" and points out that it fails to acknowledge China's own use of nuclear-powered submarines in the region. Richard Clark, "The Trouble with Micronesia's New China Policy," *Diplomat*, April 19, 2024.

ical issues” and claimed that Vietnam’s relations with China “will not be disrupted by external provocations and interference.”³¹⁴

It is notable that Vietnam has managed to maintain cordial relations with China despite Vietnam’s on-going construction in the South China Sea. Vietnam’s expansion of its occupied features in the Spratly Islands has gone uncontested this year by China’s Navy, Coast Guard, or Maritime Militia, a sharp contrast to Beijing’s response to the Philippines activities at Second Thomas Shoal.³¹⁵ According to the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, between November 2023 and June 7, 2024, Vietnam has created 692 new acres of land across a total of ten features, a significant expansion of its outposts in the Spratly Islands.³¹⁶ Vietnam’s activities in the South China Sea do not appear to have impacted defense and security cooperation with China. In early December 2023, Minister Wang and Vietnamese Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son reportedly agreed to “jointly maintain peace and stability at sea.”³¹⁷ In April 2024, Chinese and Vietnamese coast guards completed a joint patrol in the Beibu Gulf.*³¹⁸ According to Chinese state media reporting, an official statement heralds the joint patrol as a model for “maritime law enforcement in the South China Sea” adding that practical cooperation with the Vietnamese to properly handle maritime emergencies will continue.³¹⁹ Also in April, the defense ministers of China and Vietnam announced the establishment of a hotline between the Vietnamese Navy and the PLA Southern Theater Command, framing the agreement as part of their efforts to improve maritime cooperation under their community of common destiny.³²⁰

China’s state media used the agreement as an opportunity to contrast Vietnam and the Philippines, arguing that Vietnam had rightly judged that its “common interests [with China] far outweigh [its] differences” whereas the Philippines had chosen a so-called path of “radical actions” and provocation backed by the United States.³²¹ Western analysts have assessed that Beijing’s different approaches towards the Philippines and Vietnam may be influenced by the two countries’ different approaches to formal alliances with the United States and publicly shaming China’s coercive behavior.³²² China’s comparably low-key response to Vietnam’s activities in the South China Sea may in part showcase Beijing’s preference for countries to bilaterally manage disputes with China privately and publicly demonstrate support and cooperation for China’s stated foreign policy objectives.³²³

Nevertheless, in late September 2024, law enforcement authorities from China engaged in a violent altercation with a civilian vessel from Vietnam in the South China Sea. On September 29, 2024, according to Vietnamese accounts, two patrol ships from China’s Maritime Safety Administration Sansha City United Law Enforcement Unit were deployed to interdict a Vietnamese fishing vessel near the Paracels.†³²⁴ Local Vietnamese media reported that up to

*The three-day joint patrol included observing and inspecting fishing boats from both countries while patrolling along planned routes. *China Military Online*, “China, Vietnam Coast Guards Complete Joint Patrol in Beibu Gulf,” April 30, 2024.

†China, Vietnam, and Taiwan claim sovereignty over the Paracels; however, China effectively controls them and has constructed 20 outposts in the area. In addition to claiming sovereignty over the features themselves, China also maintains a straight baseline claim around them that is inconsistent with international law, illegally claiming the waters between them as China’s internal waters. Center for Strategic and International Studies, Asia Maritime Transparency Ini-

40 officers from China's Maritime Safety Administration boarded the Vietnamese civilian fishing vessel with metal rods and attacked ten Vietnamese fishermen, resulting in severe injuries to four fishermen, some of whom suffered broken limbs.³²⁵ China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs defended the actions of China's authorities as "professional and restrained," claiming that "no injuries were found" and the Vietnamese fishing boats were illegally fishing in the relevant waters without the permission of the Beijing government.³²⁶ In response, Vietnam's foreign ministry confirmed the incident, lodged a protest with China's embassy in Vietnam, and asserted that Chinese law enforcement officials did in fact beat Vietnamese fisherman and confiscate their fishing equipment.³²⁷ It remains to be seen whether this incident represents a new trend.

China Deepens Exchanges and Military Access in Cambodia

In 2024, China and Cambodia continued to deepen ties following Cambodia's leadership transition from then-Prime Minister Hun Sen to his son General Hun Manet last August.³²⁸ In April 2024, Minister Wang visited Cambodia and met with high-level leadership including the king, prime minister, deputy prime minister, and senate chairman.³²⁹ The two sides reaffirmed their pursuit of a "China-Cambodia community of common destiny," which they had declared in a joint statement in 2023, and Minister Wang described the arrangement between the two countries as "a model for building a new type of international relations."³³⁰ In addition to expanded cooperation on exports, infrastructure, agriculture, and tourism, the two governments reportedly agreed to deepen exchanges in "state governance," to jointly combat transnational crimes, and to "strengthen defense cooperation" through continued joint exercises and training, medical services cooperation, and mine clearing.³³¹ They also declared their intention to cooperate under the framework of Xi's Global Development, Security, and Civilization Initiatives.³³² In May 2024, China and Cambodia also held their annual Golden Dragon military exercise* focused on counter-terrorism and humanitarian relief.³³³

China has expanded on its activities at Cambodia's Ream Naval Base by maintaining a consistent PLA Navy presence there since December 2023.[†]³³⁴ While the Cambodian government has insisted that the presence of the two Chinese Navy corvettes is not "permanent," the two Chinese warships have been the only ships docked at the new Chinese-built pier.³³⁵ The Cambodian Commander of Ream, Mey Dina, told the *New York Times* the

tiative, "Reading between the Lines: The Next Spratly Legal Dispute," March 21, 2019; Center for Strategic and International Studies, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "China Island Tracker"; Sourabh Gupta and Matt Geraci, "China's Claims in the South China Sea," *Institute for China-American Studies*; National Bureau of Asian Research, "Country Profile from the Maritime Awareness Project: China."

*This is the sixth annual China-Cambodia Golden Dragon joint exercise; the first occurred in December 2016. Wu Ke and Meng Peng, "China-Cambodia 'Golden Dragon 2024' Joint Exercise Concludes," *China Military Online*, May 31, 2024; *Associated Press*, "China, Cambodia to Begin Annual Military Drills to Strengthen Cooperation, Fight Terrorism," *Voice of America*, May 13, 2024.

†China's Ministry of National Defense has denied claims that Cambodia has given the PLA exclusive rights to use some facilities at Ream. In 2022, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of National Defense stated the upgrade and renovation project of Ream Naval Base was an aid project undertaken by China. *China Military Online*, "China-Cambodia Ream Naval Base Upgrading Project Completely Legitimate, Neutral: Defense Spokesperson," June 30, 2022.

Chinese warships were docked for “training only.”³³⁶ In June, Cambodia’s leadership reportedly told U.S. Defense Secretary Austin that China’s military activities at Ream were intended to help Cambodia modernize its military, not to establish the location as a permanent base for China’s forces.³³⁷ According to Thomas Shugart, an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, the facilities that have been built by China at Ream look like “a medium-size naval base with facilities to support training, maintenance, personnel support, supply, and other functions,” all of which could make it a resupply station for the PLA Navy similar to that at Djibouti.³³⁸

China Does Little to Hold North Korea Accountable for Escalatory Activities

China avoided condemning North Korea’s provocative military activities* in violation of UN Security Council resolutions.† Instead, China’s UN Ambassador Fu Cong issued generic warnings against raising tensions on the Korean Peninsula, particularly in the form of planned large-scale joint military exercise conducted by other countries.³³⁹ China has also fallen short in fulfilling its international obligations to implement UN Security Council resolutions on North Korea to disrupt its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.³⁴⁰ For instance, Beijing has failed to stop North Korea from evading sanctions measures by using China’s territorial waters to facilitate the trade of sanctioned petroleum products and has downplayed the activities of Chinese companies that have provided, transacted with, or exported goods to North Korea.³⁴¹ China’s military also continues to harass foreign militaries conducting missions in the East China Sea in support of a multinational coalition enforcing UN sanctions on North Korea.³⁴²

Furthermore, China has done nothing to condemn the deepening ties between North Korea and Russia, including North Korea’s willingness to supply Russia with ammunition and ballistic missiles as well as the signing of a defense pact between Russia and North Korea on June 19, 2024.‡³⁴³ Under the terms of the pact, North Korea and Russia “shall immediately provide military and other assistance” to the other party if it “falls into a state of war due to armed invasion,” establish mechanisms to “strengthen defense capabilities to prevent war,” and facilitate Russian assistance to North Korea’s nuclear energy and space programs, all of which violate UN security council resolutions.³⁴⁴ Instead, Beijing has sought to avoid any semblance of association with the Russian-North Korean military relationship.³⁴⁵

* North Korea claimed at the end of June 2024 that it had successfully tested a new ballistic missile capable of carrying a 4.5-ton warhead. Jack Kim, “North Korea Says It Tested Ballistic Missile Capable of Carrying Super-Large Warhead,” *Reuters*, July 1, 2024.

† UN Security Council Resolution 1695 passed in 2006 calls on North Korea to suspend activities related to its ballistic missile program, and subsequent resolutions condemn North Korea for pursuing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles instead of the welfare of its people. Kelsey Davenport, “UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea,” Arms Control Association, January 2022.

‡ In June 2024, a South Korean broadcaster cited an anonymous Republic of Korea government official who claimed that North Korea planned to dispatch military engineers to aid construction efforts in the Russian-controlled Donetsk region. However, these reports appear to be rumors as North Korea has made no such announcement. Shreyas Reddy, “Fact Check: North Korea Has Not Announced Plans to Send Troops to Ukraine—Yet,” *NK News*, June 27, 2024.

China's Transactional Approach in the Middle East Supports Its Interests

In late 2023 and 2024, China pursued a selective and transactional approach to relations in the Middle East and demonstrated willingness to exploit regional tensions for geopolitical gain. Beijing made several diplomatic overtures to paint itself as a conflict mediator between Israel and Hamas, but these have failed to result in substantive steps advancing a resolution to the conflict.³⁴⁶ At the same time, China has sought to appeal to Arab states and has offered support for Iran to advance its own interests.³⁴⁷ China's failure to clearly and unequivocally condemn the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, exposed China's use of the conflict to further align itself with Arab countries and other countries in the "Global South."³⁴⁸ Despite the PLA's stated mission in the region being focused on anti-piracy, it also did not contribute to coalition efforts to protect maritime shipping from Iranian-backed Houthi terrorist attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea.³⁴⁹ However, China did denounce Israel's assassination of Hamas terrorist chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.³⁵⁰ (For more on China's strategic interests and activities in the Middle East, see Chapter 5, "China and the Middle East.")

China Seeks Benefits from Wide-Ranging Contacts in African Countries

China began the year with a push to showcase its diverse and deepening ties in Africa as a key indicator of China's supposed global diplomatic leadership. For the 34th consecutive year, China used the minister of foreign affairs' first overseas visit of the year to highlight relations with the countries of Africa as a core part of China's international affairs.³⁵¹ Minister Wang traveled first to Egypt* and Tunisia in North Africa, then to Togo and Côte d'Ivoire in Western Africa, meeting with both the president and foreign minister of each country.³⁵² China's official readouts assert a commonality of interests, often promoting Xi's three major global initiatives and highlighting areas of potential cooperation (variously, trade, infrastructure, energy, agricultural technology, AI, healthcare, investment, and development).³⁵³ China also sought to benefit from lower-profile party-to-party meetings, especially in central and southern Africa. Between January and May 2024, the CCP's International Liaison Department met with representatives of political parties in Rwanda, Lesotho, Malawi, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, and Namibia.³⁵⁴ Readouts of these meetings echo many of the same claims and topics as the readouts from the meetings with government officials, while in some cases they reveal China's ongoing efforts to promote the CCP's authoritarian governance model.³⁵⁵

The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), held in Beijing from September 4 to 6, provided China with a high-profile opportunity to press its case for global leadership in Africa. Representatives from 53 of 54 African countries attended the triennial gathering, with the lone exception of Eswatini, which maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan.³⁵⁶ Delegates to the

*Egypt's membership in BRICS was formalized in January 2024. Thayer Mansour, "Egypt's BRICS Membership Officially Activated under Russian Leadership," *New Arab*, January 2, 2024.

2024 FOCAC summit approved the Beijing Action Plan (2025–2027), in which Beijing promised to provide Africa with approximately \$50 billion (renminbi [RMB] 360 billion) in financial support during the next three years, including \$30 billion (RMB 210 billion) in loans as well as other forms of aid and investment, such as \$140 million (RMB 1 billion) in military aid.³⁵⁷ On the one hand, China’s pledge to provide about \$10 billion annually in loans to African countries over the next three years represents a significant increase relative to the recent past. On the other hand, the value of the promised new loans remains far less than China’s lending to African countries during the peak years of BRI (2013–2018), when Chinese loans often exceeded \$15 billion per year.³⁵⁸ Some of the promised new funding reflects the priorities of China’s Global Development Initiative, which emphasizes small-scale projects addressing issues such as climate change and poverty, rather than large infrastructure.³⁵⁹ At the FOCAC summit, China vowed to help fund 1,000 “small and beautiful” projects to “improve people’s livelihood” in Africa and encourage greater Chinese investment in solar, wind, and other green energy initiatives across the continent.³⁶⁰ At the same time, China continued to provide loans for more traditional large-scale infrastructure projects, including \$1 billion for a railway in Nigeria.³⁶¹ Significantly, China’s financial assistance to African countries will also include yuan-denominated loans, and the Beijing Action Plan explicitly calls for “expanding the use of the RMB in Africa”—part of China’s wider goal to internationalize the RMB.³⁶² (For more on internationalization of the RMB, see Chapter 7, “China’s New Measures for Control, Mobilization, and Resilience.”)

While the FOCAC summit was replete with rhetorical nods to China’s global leadership and thinly veiled criticisms of the United States and its allies, it also laid bare problems and imbalances in the China-Africa relationship. The summit declaration includes language explicitly reaffirming that “Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’s territory” and supporting “all efforts by the Chinese government to achieve national reunification.”³⁶³ In an attempt to frame China-Africa ties within the context of China’s larger vision for an alternative global order, the Beijing Action Plan is suffused with references to China’s preferred diplomatic principles, such as “equal and orderly multipolarization” and “beneficial and inclusive economic globalization,” and it refers to China and Africa as “representatives of the Global South.”³⁶⁴ The action plan also repeated Beijing’s frequent criticisms of “unilateralism, protectionism, and maximum pressure” as well as “erecting walls and barriers” and “decoupling and supply chain disruption,” criticisms that are largely directed at the United States.³⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the FOCAC summit failed to address several pressing concerns about China-Africa relations, particularly with regard to debt and market access. The renewed expansion of Chinese lending to African countries has exacerbated concerns over debt sustainability, especially considering the lack of transparency in the Chinese lending model.³⁶⁶ The FOCAC summit also revealed China’s lack of progress on promises to import more products from Africa. At the 2021 summit, Xi had vowed to import \$300 billion worth of African goods over three years.³⁶⁷ China failed to reach this target, and in his address to the 2024 summit, Xi made

only vague promises to “unilaterally expand” access to the Chinese market.³⁶⁸

China Elevates Diplomatic Outreach to Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean

China sought to deepen its diplomatic and political engagement with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2024 as part of its effort to cast itself as a leader of what it refers to as the “Global South.” Most notably and for the first time, after its regular commencement in Africa, Foreign Minister Wang’s first overseas trip of the year also included visits to two countries in Latin America and the Caribbean,* namely Brazil and Jamaica.†³⁶⁹ In meetings throughout the year, China’s diplomats tried to present China as a key partner for economic development opportunities and a partner who would work with Latin American and Caribbean countries to safeguard their interests internationally.³⁷⁰ Chinese officials also conducted party-to-party exchanges in Mexico (multiparty parliamentary delegation), El Salvador (New Ideas Party), and Cuba (Communist Party of Cuba) seeking to promote China’s international interests.³⁷¹

China sought to deepen political exchanges with Brazil and further efforts to counterbalance the United States and its allies, with some success. During his visit to Brazil in January 2024, Minister Wang met Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula and pushed for strengthening what he called the two countries’ “strategic alignment.”³⁷² Chinese government readouts assert that the meetings also discussed trade, investment, BRICS, and “state governance.”³⁷³ Exchanging governance experience was a theme, as well, from the seventh meeting between the CCP and the Brazilian Workers Party held in April 2024.³⁷⁴ In May 2024, Director Liu met with Brazil’s deputy foreign minister in Beijing, seeking the country’s potential collaboration to reform global governance in multilateral mechanism such as BRICS, the China Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Forum, and the G20.³⁷⁵ China’s efforts in Brazil appear to have had some success. In May 2024, the two countries presented a joint plan for ending the war in Ukraine that did not acknowledge Russia’s aggression.³⁷⁶ Instead, it opposed “dividing the world into isolated political or economic groups” and made a broad call seemingly unrelated to the conflict itself to “enhance international cooperation on energy, currency, finance, trade, food security and the security of critical infrastructure”—all policy areas in which China seeks to deepen ties with other countries to counterbalance the United States.³⁷⁷

Concerns about distortions caused by China’s economic model may be growing, however. Chinese companies have recently enjoyed significant relative growth in “new infrastructure” industries in the region such as information and communication technology,

*A Chinese state media commentator argued that the visits were a deliberate effort to raise the profile of a region that is “more integrated into the Western system” compared to the rest of the “Global South” and where China’s diplomacy has comparatively lagged as a result. Pan Deng, “Wang Yi’s First Annual Latin America Visit Holds Landmark Significance,” *CGTN*, January 22, 2024.

†Jamaica was the first Caribbean state to establish a strategic partnership with China. Pan Deng, “Wang Yi’s First Annual Latin America Visit Holds Landmark Significance,” *CGTN*, January 22, 2024.

high-end manufacturing, renewable energy, and EVs, and the first half of 2024 saw a flood of Chinese EVs into Brazilian and Mexican markets.³⁷⁸ To support its domestic industry, in January 2024 Brazil reinstated tariffs on imported EVs starting at 10 percent, which then increased to 18 percent by July and are set to reach 35 percent by July 2026.³⁷⁹ In April 2024, Mexico's government ceased providing incentives such as tax cuts and low-cost public land for EVs in the country.³⁸⁰ The United States and Mexico also announced joint tariffs of 25 percent on steel not melted and poured in the United States, Mexico, or Canada and tariffs of 10 percent on aluminum from China, Russia, Belarus, and Iran.³⁸¹

ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

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