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CHINA'S COAST GUARD INCREASES ITS PRESENCE AROUND KINMEN

Since mid-February, China's coast guard ships have increasingly entered the waters around Kinmen Island. The intrusions began after a Chinese fishing boat entered the waters near Kinmen and overturned while fleeing Taiwan's coast guard – resulting in two deaths. Beijing decried the "harsh and unfair treatment of its citizens" and soon after deployed its own coast guard to the area. Since then, Beijing has used the incident as a pretext to chip away at Taiwan's *de facto* jurisdiction over the islet. (*Newsweek*, March 29, 2024)

TAIWAN RESPECTFULLY DECLINES CHINA'S EARTHQUAKE AID

PRC officials "express their sincere condolences to the Taiwan compatriots affected by the [earthquake] and are willing to provide disaster relief assistance," a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office said in the wake of the 7.2 magnitude quake that hit the island on April 3rd. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council quickly responded: "We express our gratitude to the Chinese side for their concern. There is no need for the Chinese side to assist in disaster relief due to this earthquake." Taipei's rejection reflects lingering bitterness from the 1999 earthquake, when Beijing prevented the UN from providing assistance. "There is a lot of skepticism towards the intent of [China], because of the military intimidation," notes Ja Ian Chong of the National University of Singapore. The massive earthquake collapsed buildings, water towers, roads, and other infrastructure on the self-governing island. (*Time*, April 4, 2023)

CHINA QUIETLY PUSHES INTO RUSSIA'S FAR EAST

The Russian region of Primorsky Krai, situated along the PRC border, has seen a surge of Chinese migration and land purchases. Deteriorating economic conditions in northeastern China have driven more Chinese farmers into the Russian Far East, pushing up land prices. At the same time, the wages of Russian farm workers, the number of Russian family farms, and yields of corn and wheat have fallen. "The inflow of Chinese people will challenge Russia control. I don't think the sovereignty issue is still up for negotiation, but how to manage the Chinese farmers on the ground will be a thorny issue," says Yun Sun of the Stimson Center. (*Newsweek*, April 3, 2024)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Xi Jinping has made the retrieval of lost territory part of his effort to "rejuvenate the Chinese nation." Primorsky Krai, which was ceded to Russia by the Qing dynasty in 1860 after its loss in the Second Opium War, has thus been attracting more attention from Chinese nationalists. Last year, PRC maps replaced the Russian name for eight Russian cities with the Chinese one – including Haishenwai, or Vladivostok, the regional capital of Primorsky Krai.]

RUSSIA USES MORE CHINESE YUAN

Thanks to Western sanctions, during the first half of 2023 Russia used China's yuan to settle three-quarters of its transactions with China and one-quarter of those with other countries. In its new 2024 annual report, Russia's central bank said it lacked viable alternatives to the yuan as a reserve currency because "in a number of such countries there are restrictions on the movement of capital." Using the yuan for transactions has helped Russia and China mitigate the impact of Western sanctions and test an alternative financial payment scheme to the widely-accepted SWIFT system. "If Russia had other options, RMB is not the most appealing reserve currency," says the Stimson Center's Yun Sun. (*Newsweek*, April 3, 2024)

KENYA CONSIDERS CURBING TIKTOK

Kenya's National Security Council is considering banning officials from using TikTok in order to protect sensitive data. Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki told a parliamentary committee that the platform has become "a real theatre for misuse by criminals." He said Kenya had asked "TikTok to provide to us the levels of compliance with our laws. We have also asked them to explain the measures that they have taken or intend to take to ensure the privacy of individuals is respected in accordance with the laws of our country. At the moment, we are not satisfied that there is compliance, we are waiting for an explanation from TikTok." Should TikTok fail to provide the required information, "we will enforce the law through issuance of directives, orders and requirements." The minister's comments came during discussion on a public petition seeking to ban TikTok. (*South China Morning Post*, April 4, 2024)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: TikTok has become a notable public policy issue in Africa, and last year the app was banned in Senegal and Somalia. Beyond the continent, concern is growing as well. India banned it in 2020, Italy fined it €10 million for failing to protect children, and the U.S. Senate is currently considering a bill to force parent company ByteDance to divest from TikTok's U.S. assets or face a ban on the app in the United States.]