



CHINA REFORM MONITOR

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P.R.C. Government Actions and U.S. Policy

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Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Military Innovation; Missile Defense; Science and Technology; Warfare; NATO; SPACE; China; Europe; Lithuania; Iran; Philippines; Russia

CHINA, RUSSIA, IRAN HOLD JOINT NAVAL DRILLS

As the U.S. continues to strike Yemen's Houthi rebels, which are targeting commercial vessels in the Red Sea, China, Russia and Iran are conducting joint naval exercises off the coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The exercises, dubbed "Maritime Security Belt-2024," follow Tehran's call for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to establish a "maritime security belt." They include the PLA Navy guided-missile destroyer *Urumqi*, the guided-missile frigate *Linyi*, and the supply ship *Dongpinghu*, as well as Russia's *Varyag* guided-missile cruiser and *Marshal Shaposhnikov* frigate. Iran sent ten naval vessels and two helicopters. According to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the drill aims to "strengthen the security of international maritime trade, combat piracy and maritime terrorism, help humanitarian measures such as exchange of information for maritime rescue operations and exchange operational and tactical experiences." (*Newsweek*, March 12, 2024)

HOUSE LAUNCHES PROBE INTO PRC INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

The GOP-led U.S. House of Representatives Oversight and Accountability Committee has launched an expansive investigation into China's "political warfare." The investigation looks at whether PRC agents have infiltrated or influenced the policies and operations of nine federal agencies. The goal, according to Committee Chairman Rep. James Comer (R-KY), is to "ensure the federal government is taking every action necessary to protect Americans from the CCP's ongoing political warfare. Federal agencies have responsibilities to (1) conduct outreach to citizens about the dangers they may encounter; and (2) provide appropriate incentives for Americans to proactively protect themselves — their communities, schools, houses of worship, businesses, finances, food, and more — from the threat." (*Washington Times*, March 14, 2024)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The investigation, the first of its kind in the U.S., follows recent probes into PRC influence operations in Australia and Britain. Those investigations identified several government officials directly linked to China's government and military.]

BLINKEN: U.S. WILL DEFEND THE PHILIPPINES AGAINST CHINA

Following a series of clashes in contested waters between PRC and Philippine vessels, Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Manila and reaffirmed Washington's "ironclad defense commitments, including under our Mutual Defense Treaty." The U.S. commitment "extends to armed attacks on the Philippine armed forces, public vessels, aircraft — including those of its Coast Guard — anywhere in the South China Sea." But China has thus far used tactics (e.g., blocking Philippine ships from contested areas, ramming, water cannons, and lasers) that fall below the threshold of "armed attack." Behind Blinken's meetings with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. are basing agreements granting U.S. forces access to locations strategic for a future defense of Taiwan. The leaders of the U.S., Philippines and Japan will hold their first ever trilateral gathering in Washington on April 11th. "These are three countries that have a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific and I think a recognition that when we work together, when we collaborate, when we pool our resources — including in terms of economic cooperation, building critical infrastructure, humanitarian assistance — we are stronger when we do it together," Blinken told reporters in Manila. (*Washington Times*, March 19, 2024)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: While the Philippines contends with Chinese vessels off of the Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea, Japan is facing similar hybrid tactics near the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands in the East China Sea.]

CHINA AND RUSSIA TO PUT A NUCLEAR POWER PLANT ON THE MOON

By 2035, China and Russia plan to put a nuclear power plant on the moon to support lunar settlements, Yuri Borisov, the head of Russian space agency ROSCOSMOS said. "We are seriously considering a project — somewhere at the turn of 2033-2035 — to deliver and install a power unit on the lunar surface together with our Chinese colleagues. All the technical questions concerning the project had been solved apart from finding a solution on how to cool the nuclear reactor. We are working on a space tugboat. This huge, cyclopean structure that would be able, thanks to a nuclear reactor and high-power turbines, to transport large cargoes from one orbit to another, collect space debris and engage in many other applications," Borisov said. Beijing intends to put the first Chinese astronaut on the moon by 2030, and the two sides are discussing a joint crewed mission and eventually a lunar base. (Reuters, March 5, 2023)

CHINA HAS RAMPED UP ESPIONAGE CAMPAIGNS – LITHUANIA

China has escalated its espionage in Lithuania, recruiting locals and using cyber tools to gather information on the country's internal affairs and foreign policy, according to a new report by the Lithuanian security services. Masquerading as representatives from companies and think tanks, PRC agents use social networks to identify targets with direct access to sensitive information or a broad network of contacts among state officials, politicians, journalists, businesspeople, and scientists then offer them financial incentives for information and cooperation. Those recruited are invited to China, where they receive payment and are given intelligence assignments. Beijing is collecting information on Lithuania's role in the EU and NATO, and the country's internal affairs, political divisions, and foreign policy, the report said. "Russian and Chinese cyber capabilities will remain a threat to the security of information networks and systems of Lithuanian institutions and critical infrastructure." (*The Record*, March 7, 2024)