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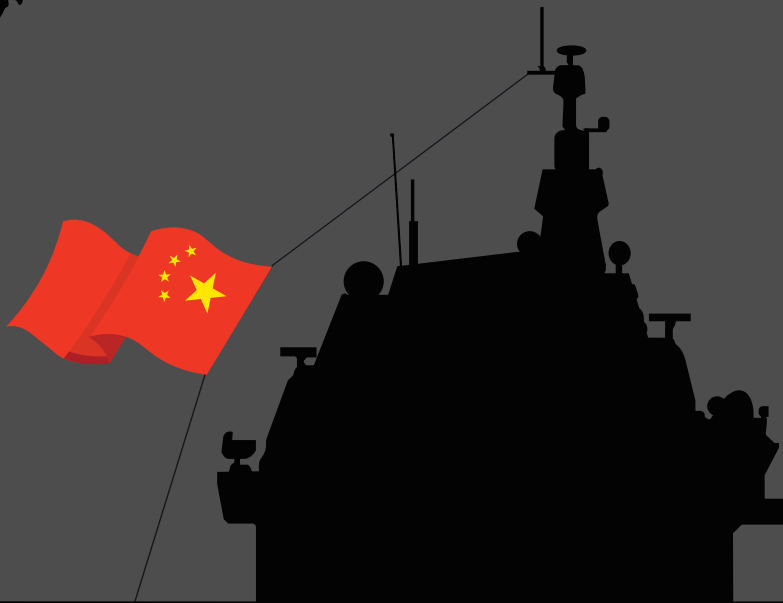
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NOTES: 21



The New Normal East of Taiwan



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The New Normal East of Taiwan

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Key Takeaways

- Since early June, the China Coast Guard (CCG) has maintained a continuous presence in waters east of Taiwan. Beijing describes these operations as a response to a joint statement issued by Japan and the Philippines in late May, in which the two countries pledged cooperation to delimit their maritime boundary.
- Given their duration, these operations differ from past practice, in which CCG cutters appeared east of Taiwan for short periods of time, ostensibly to signal dissatisfaction with the island's political leadership.
- On 4 July, the original CCG task force deployed after the joint statement was issued was relieved by two new ships, suggesting that Beijing intends to normalize CCG presence in these waters.
- Normalized CCG presence east of Taiwan would pose challenges for Japan and the Philippines, as China would likely apply elements of its longstanding East and South China Sea playbook to this new ocean area.
- Aside from sovereignty patrols, the CCG could be directed to support operations that exercise China's claimed coastal state rights east of Taiwan. It could, for instance, escort PRC survey and fishing vessels operating in this disputed space. Using a catalogue of non-lethal means, CCG patrol cutters might also obstruct the operations of foreign fishing and survey vessels.
- Taiwan might face these same challenges, while also being confronted with the prospect that normalized CCG operations east of Taiwan could enable a more rapid transition to quarantine operations.

¹ Ryan D. Martinson is a researcher at the China Maritime Studies Institute. The views and opinions expressed here are the authors' alone and do not reflect the assessments of the U.S. Navy, U.S. Department of Defense, or any other U.S. government entity. The authors thank Chris Sharman and Andrew Erickson for comments/edits on earlier drafts of this article. Any errors/omissions are his alone.

Introduction

In recent years, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has repeatedly deployed maritime law enforcement (MLE) forces to Taiwan-administered waters. Along with the ships and aircraft of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), MLE patrol cutters have served as key tools in Beijing's multi-pronged pressure campaign against the self-ruled island. Over time, China's MLE forces have expanded their operating areas.² Initially focused on the waters of the Taiwan Strait, they have now appeared in multiple locations around Taiwan, including, periodically, in waters to its east. Since early June, ostensibly in response to plans by Japan and the Philippines to initiate maritime boundary negotiations, this episodic presence east of Taiwan has metamorphosed into continuous presence. The PRC appears intent on normalizing MLE operations in these water, which would pose significant new threats, not just for Taipei, but for its neighbors to the north and south.

The New Normal?

On 28 May 2026, Japan and the Philippines issued a joint statement which, among its many stated goals, included plans to begin maritime boundary negotiations.³ Since Japan's southernmost islands and the Philippines' northernmost islands generate overlapping exclusive economic zones (EEZs), this represented a constructive effort to resolve a source of dispute between the two countries. However, given that their EEZs also potentially overlap with Taiwan's EEZ, the joint statement triggered an angry response from Beijing, which claims the island and all its entitlements.⁴ On 29 May, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition," declaring that the initiative "severely infringed China's maritime rights and interests."⁵ Figure 1 below shows the approximate location of the overlapping EEZs.

² Julia Famularo, "Great Inspectations: PRC Maritime Law Enforcement Operations in the Taiwan Strait," China Maritime Report No. 49, China Maritime Studies Institute, July 2025, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/48/>.

³ "Japan-Philippines Joint Statement on the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership: 'Weaving the Future Together: Peace, Prosperity, Possibilities,'" Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 May 2026, www.mofa.go.jp/files/101035755.pdf.

⁴ Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on 9 June 2026, expressing its position on PRC operations to its east and the Japan-Phil joint statement. 外交部譴責中國交通部於 6 月 6 日深夜宣布啟動所謂「台灣島東部海域海上交通專項執法行動」，並派遣海警船舶在我國東部海域從事非法執行活動，並進一步說明外界關注日本與菲律賓啟動專屬經濟海域及大陸礁層劃界談判事 [“The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Condemned the Chinese Ministry of Transport's Announcement Late on June 6th of the Launch of the So-Called 'Special Enforcement Operation on Maritime Traffic in the Eastern Waters Of Taiwan Island,' and the Dispatch of Coast Guard Vessels to Conduct Illegal Enforcement Activities in My Country's [Taiwan's] Eastern Waters. The Ministry Further Addressed Concerns Raised by the International Community Regarding the Commencement of Negotiations Between Japan and the Philippines on the Delimitation of Their Exclusive Economic Zones and Continental Shelf Boundaries”], Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 June 2026, www.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=95&s=122451.

⁵ 2026 年 5 月 29 日外交部发言人毛宁主持例行记者会 [“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning Holds Regular Press Conference on 29 May 2026”], 中华人民共和国外交部 [PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs], 29 May 2026, https://ag.china-embassy.gov.cn/fyrth/202605/t20260529_11921244.htm

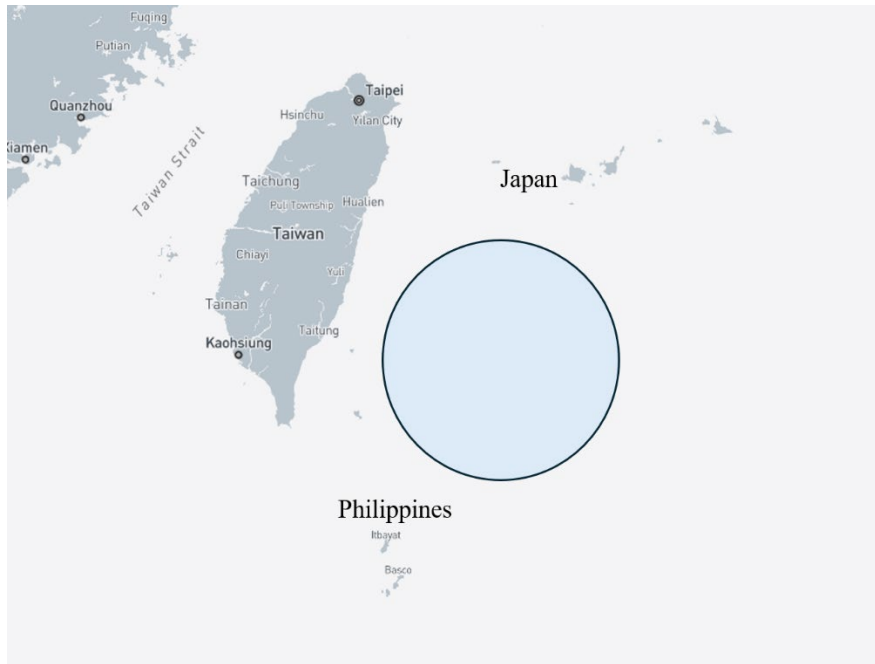


Figure 1. Approximate Location of Overlapping EEZs.

Beijing buttressed its public statements with operational assertions in the water space in question. On 1 June, the CCG dispatched at least two cutters—the 5,000t *Daishan* (岱山舰, hull 2502) and the 3,000t *Baita* (白塔舰, hull 2304)—to waters east of Taiwan to conduct a “law enforcement inspection” (执法巡查).⁶ Five days later, another MLE agency, the Maritime Safety Administration (MSA), sent its own four-ship task force east of Taiwan as part of a “special maritime law enforcement operation” (专项执法行动). This mission turned into a circumnavigation of the island, with the ships returning home four days later.⁷ However, the CCG cutters remained on station for over a month, only departing after the arrival of two other CCG cutters—CCG 1401 and CCG 2305. See Figures 2 and 3 below.

⁶ 中国海警位中国台湾岛以东海域开展执法巡查 [“The CCG Conducted Law Enforcement Patrols in the Waters East of Taiwan”], 中国海警局 [China Coast Guard], 1 June 2026, https://www.ccg.gov.cn/wqzf/202606/t20260601_3113.html; 聚焦中国海警位中国台湾岛以东海域开展执法巡查 海警岱山舰 白塔舰执法巡查展示管辖权 [“Focus on China Coast Guard Law Enforcement Patrols in Waters East of Taiwan: Coast Guard Vessels *Daishan* and *Baita* Demonstrate Jurisdiction Through Their Patrols”], CCTV 13, 2 June 2026, <https://tv.cctv.com/2026/06/02/VIDEW65C7GlgxSgU3Df2XaRP260602.shtml>;

⁷ 台湾岛东部海域海上交通专项执法行动启动 [“Special Maritime Law Enforcement Operation Launched in Waters East of Taiwan”], 新华社 [Xinhua], 6 June 2026, <https://www.news.cn/politics/20260606/ecf12ff0d4fd4ff5afc42983163a6c28/c.html>; 台湾岛东部海域海上交通专项执法行动直击 [“A Close Look at the Special Maritime Law Enforcement Operation in Waters East of Taiwan”], 新华社 [Xinhua], 8 June 2026, <https://www.news.cn/tw/20260608/4150e9b181e046e7b5a5bf54c8100fbc/c.html>; 台湾岛东部海域海上交通专项执法和扫测行动圆满结束 [“Special Maritime Law Enforcement and Hydrographic Survey Operations in Waters East of Taiwan Have Successfully Concluded”], 新华社 [Xinhua], 10 June 2026, <https://xinwen.bjd.com.cn/content/s6a2930abe4b03fa51a7fa1b5.html>.

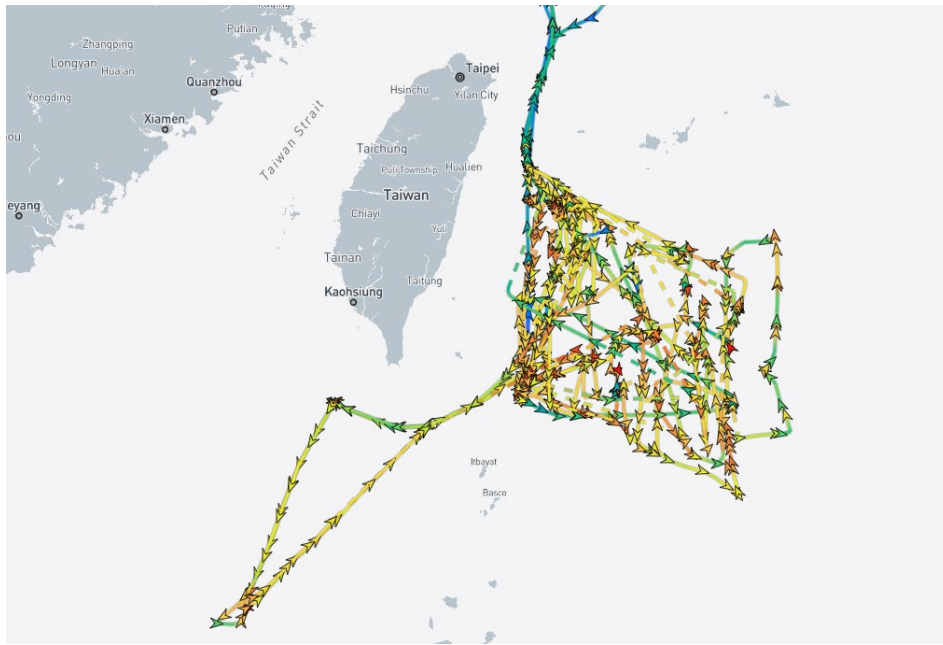


Figure 2. The operations of the *Daishan* and *Baita* (1 June to 4 July 2026)⁸



Figure 3. The *Baita* (left) and the *Daishan* (right).

This is not the first time PRC cutters have operated east of Taiwan. For example, in May 2024, a CCG task force led by the *Baita* conducted a simulated boarding drill east of Taiwan in the days following the inauguration of the country’s president-elect, Lai Qing-te.⁹ Over time, these types of operations have grown in scale and intensity, but have remained brief, episodic events. Figure 4 below shows a PRC graphic depicting an April 2025 CCG operation around Taiwan, suggesting its intense but transient nature.

⁸ AIS tracking data comes from www.MarineTraffic.com.

⁹ Ryan D. Martinson, “Missing in the Gray Zone? China’s Maritime Militia Forces Around Taiwan,” *The Diplomat*, 24 December 2026, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/12/missing-in-the-gray-zone-chinas-maritime-militia-forces-around-taiwan/>; 海警 2304 舰艇编队位台岛以东海域开展综合执法演练 [“A CCG Ship Formation Led by Cutter 2304 Conducted Comprehensive Law Enforcement Drills in the Waters East of Taiwan”], 中国海警局 [China Coast Guard], 24 May 2024, https://www.ccg.gov.cn/hjyw/202405/t20240524_2264.html

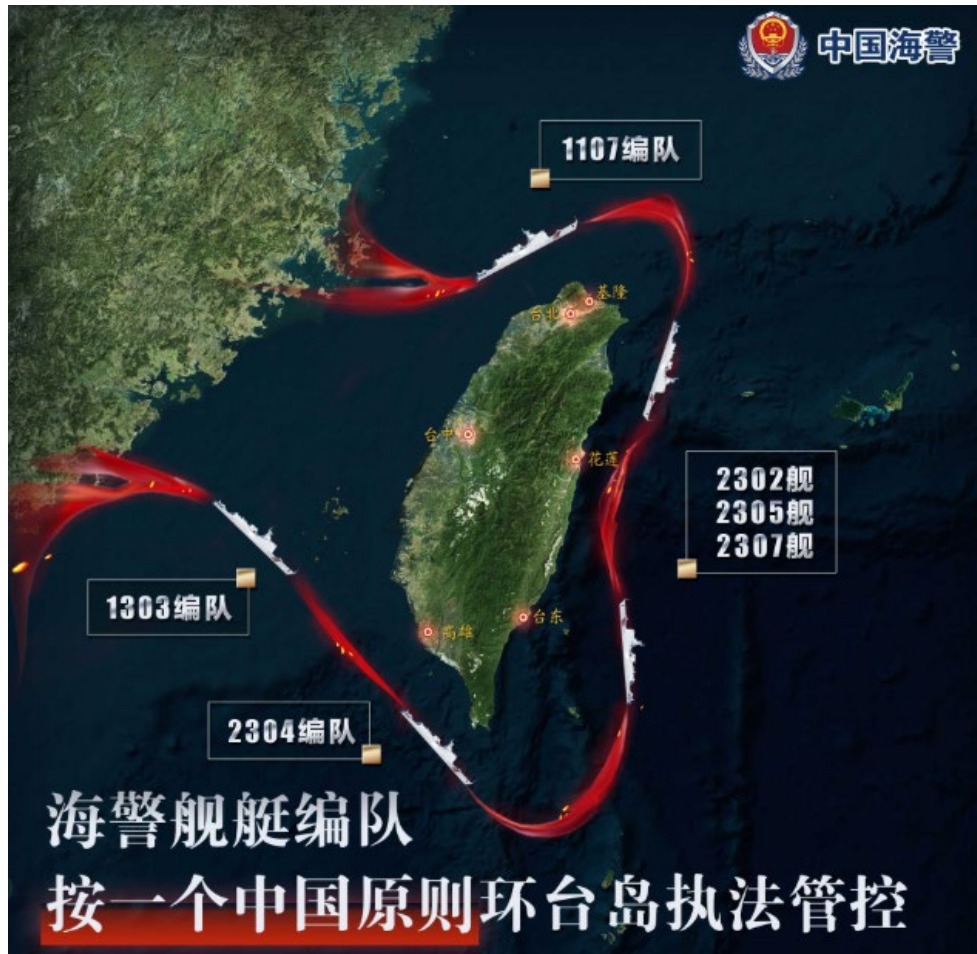


Figure 4. A CCG Graphic Depicting Its Operations Around Taiwan (April 2025).¹⁰

This time seems different. In the weeks following the Japan-Philippines joint statement, CCG forces have remained on station, suggesting an effort to “normalize” their presence east of Taiwan. That the *Daishan* and *Baita* have been relieved by two other CCG cutters strongly suggests that Beijing has decided to establish permanent MLE presence in these waters, and there is probably nothing that Taiwan, Japan, or the Philippines could—or would—do to convince them to return to the status quo ante.

Implications

China’s actions pose risks for all three countries involved. For Japan and the Philippines, a CCG foothold in these waters will come with new costs. Although CCG ships generally transmit AIS, their movements must still be tracked from the sea and air, as such transmissions can be switched

¹⁰ The text in boxes indicates the names of the task forces operating around Taiwan. The number of the task force matches the hull number of the lead ship. The caption at the bottom of the graphic reads: “China Coast Guard Ship Formations—Conducting Law Enforcement and [Exercising Administrative] Control Around the Island of Taiwan in Accordance with the One-China Principle.” 海警舰艇编队按一个中国原则环台岛执法管控 [“A CCG Task Force Conducted Law Enforcement Patrols and Control Operations Around Taiwan in Accordance with the One-China Principle”], 中国海警局 [China Coast Guard], 1 April 2025, https://www.ccg.gov.cn/hjyw/202504/t20250401_2638.html.

For its part, Taiwan must cope with the same types of CCG operations in these waters, but it also faces another far graver prospect. By maintaining permanent presence east of Taiwan, the CCG would be postured to rapidly enforce PRC administrative control, using maritime law enforcement as a pretext for boarding, inspecting, and potentially seizing vessels heading to and from Taiwan. This could put tremendous pressure on Taipei, for it would feel compelled to respond in some way, risking escalation with its more powerful neighbor—which, in certain scenarios, could be precisely what Beijing desires.