



TAIWAN STRAIT: PELOSI VISIT AND CHINESE MILITARY RESPONSE



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**METIS
INSIGHTS**

Overview

On 02 August 2022, US Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi arrived in Taiwan, the most senior US official to visit Taiwan since Newt Gingrich in 1997. Taiwan is administered by the Republic of China (ROC) but claimed by the People's Republic of China (PRC), who refer to Taiwan as Chinese Taipei. The US has not recognised the ROC as an independent state since 1979, but Washington and Taipei continue to have strong economic and military ties.





THE RESPONSE

Rumours of the Pelosi visit elicited a strong response from Beijing, who promised an escalation in the PRC's military presence in the Taiwan Strait. In response to Pelosi's visit, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy of the PRC announced six days of live-fire military exercises in the waters surrounding Taiwan. It has designated six zones for the exercises, two of which overlap with the territorial sea and internal waters of the ROC. The PRC maintains that the ROC are separatists and that ROC sovereignty over those waters is not non-existent.

These military exercises are an escalation from previous PRC responses to US support for the ROC. At this stage is assessed that China has limited avenues of recourse, a number of which have already been realised. In particular these have included incursions into Taiwanese domestic airspace with military aircraft, aggressive posturing of land-based armed forces including a heightening of readiness, and the enforcement of no-sail zones around Taiwan. Military exercises are a typical form of hard-power posturing that demonstrates the PRC's capacity to implement an effective blockade of Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait at short notice.

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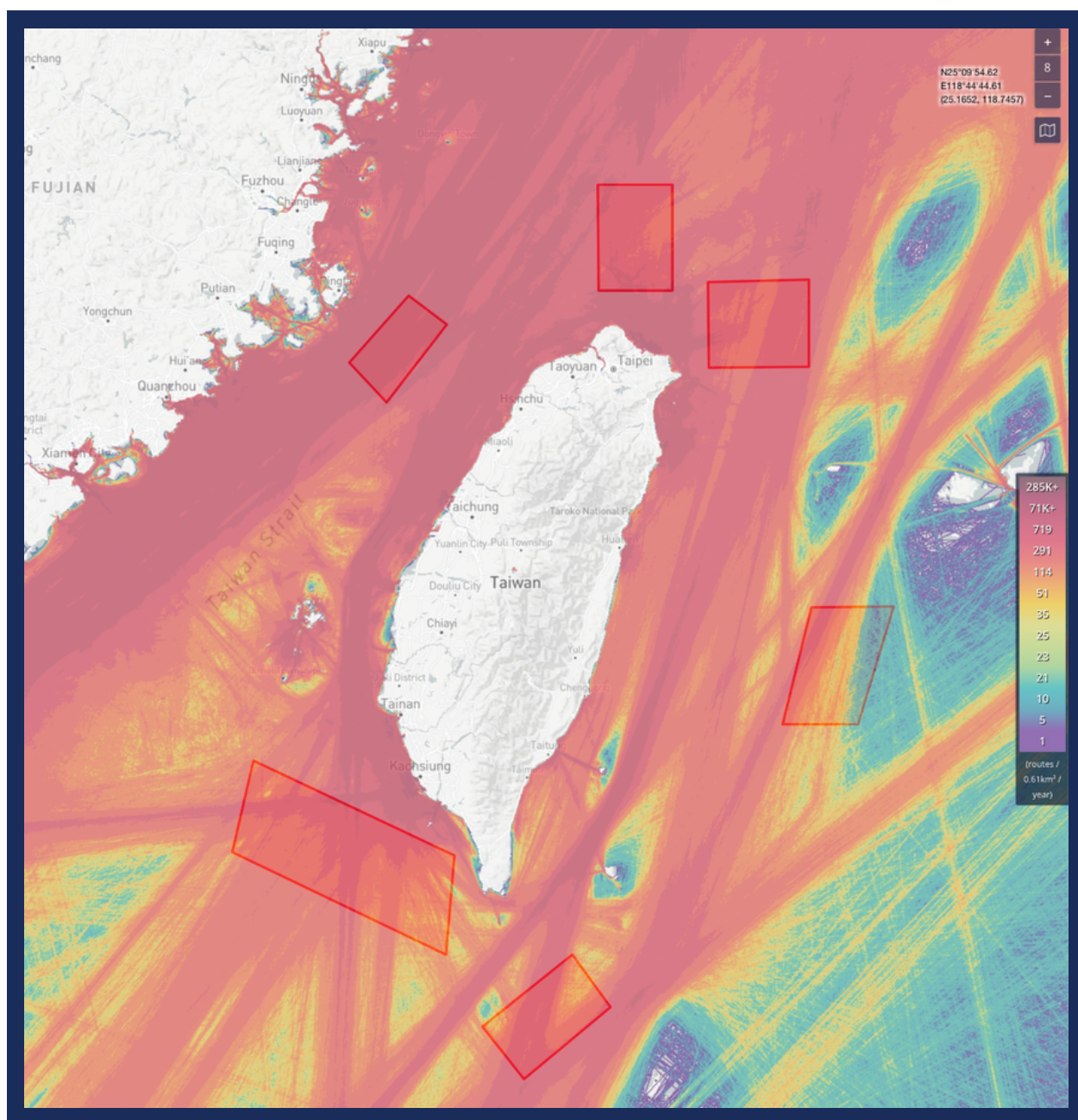


Image credit @tshugart3 and MarineTraffic

It is important to note that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) faces several ongoing internal crises in mainland China, particularly against the backdrop of a difficult macro-economic climate. Such domestic issues will likely feature heavily in any assessment of escalation. Whilst it is highly likely that, following the live-fire drills, normality will return to the region, it remains a realistic possibility that across the longer term, the Polosi visit may be seen as an impetus for Chinese escalation which may further provide suitable distraction from internal issues within China.

RISKS SURROUNDING THE RESPONSE



For commercial traffic transiting through or near the Taiwan Strait, this is a significant geopolitical development however, the threat remains predominantly an issue of safety resulting from traffic density and congestion rather than a compromise of security. The Taiwan Strait is the primary route for shipping transiting between Northeast Asia and the rest of Asia. The exercise zones established by the PLA Navy prohibit passage for commercial shipping, requiring complex rerouting within deeply congested waters. Rerouting introduces significant safety issues for commercial vessels, as it increases the density of traffic on other routes, increasing the risk of collision. PLA Navy vessels are understood to be converging on the Taiwan Strait however it remains highly unlikely that such vessels will interrupt lawful and legitimate commercial traffic. It is advised commercial vessels keep clear distance from military traffic and ensure that if hailed by military vessels, masters should respond with ship's name, flag state and confirm that they are proceeding in accordance with International Law. Vessels should remain compliant with any instructions given.

The likelihood of commercial traffic being affected by the ongoing naval exercises and state of heightened geopolitical tension is assessed as low and avoiding the no-sail zones is deemed a sufficient mitigation of this risk. Whilst avoidance of the Taiwan Strait is not necessary at this time it is important to consider the potential impact on routing as a result of no sail zones and consider the potential safety implications resulting from this.

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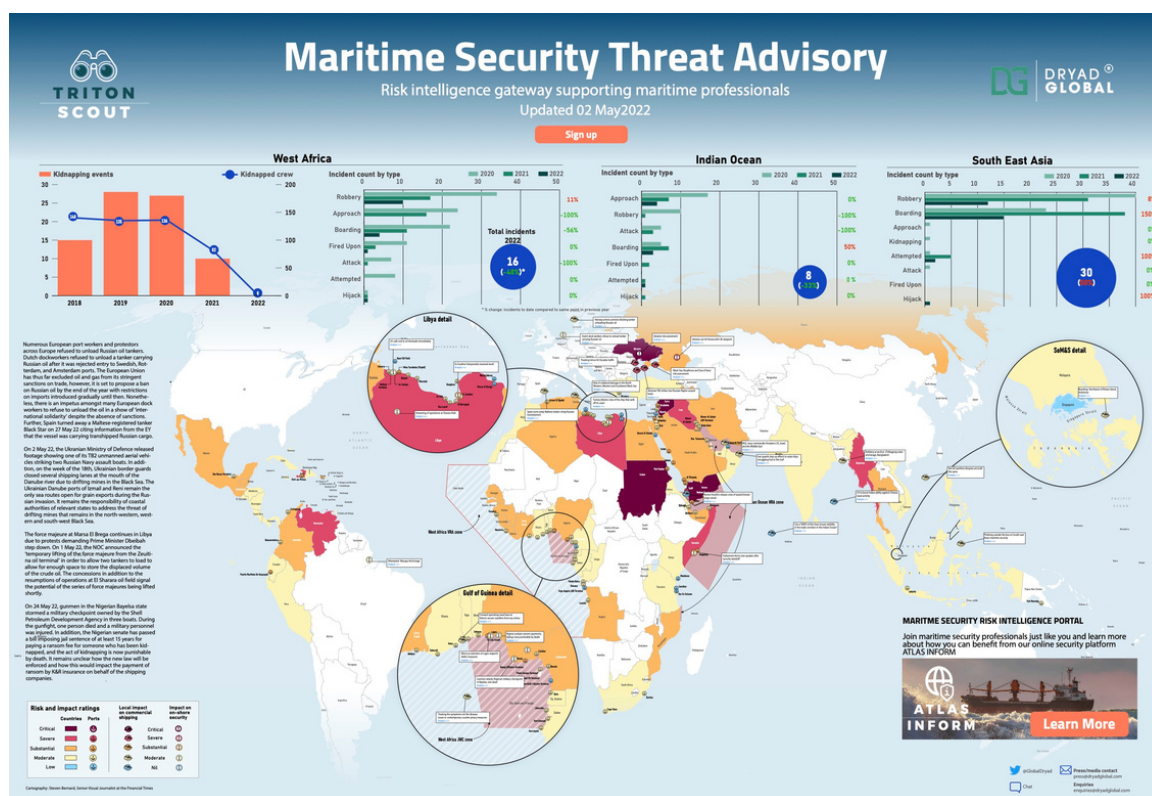
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