

DEFENCE

US defence delegation visits Taiwan, China reports cyber attack

On 22 September representatives of 26 US companies involved in the uninhabited aerial vehicle (UAV) industry, along with officials from the Department of Commerce and Department of Defense Innovation Unit, arrived in Taipei for a four-day visit.^{1 2} Companies taking part included Northrop Grumman, DEDRON, and AeroVironment. On 23 September the delegation held policy round tables with officials from the American Institute in Taiwan and Taiwanese manufacturers, and visited commercial and defence companies. The delegation was also expected to meet officials from Taiwan's military and the National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology, Taiwan's leading developer and manufacturer of weapons systems.³

Also on 23 September, the Ministry of State Security – China's national security ministry – accused Anonymous 64 of carrying out cyberattacks against targets in China.⁴ In a blog post on its official WeChat account, the ministry alleged it was a Taiwan military-backed hacking group and urged people to report “anti-propaganda sabotage”.⁵ It also published screenshots of the group's X account with heavily redacted text and said that it had opened a case against three named members of Taiwan's cyber warfare unit in relation to the group. The ministry also asserted that its investigation into the group had found many of the websites Anonymous 64 claimed to have accessed were fake or had little traffic, and that posts showing it having infiltrated university and media websites had been photoshopped.

The hacking group's account on X was created in June 2023; its content to-date includes screenshots of efforts to broadcast videos likening Chinese President Xi Jinping to an emperor as well as tweets marking the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations.⁶ Its profile picture uses the Anonymous hacking group's Guy Fawkes mask in the style of the graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, but neither the X account nor the post from the Ministry for State Security suggested Anonymous 64 had any affiliation with the international hacking group. In its reporting, Reuters was also unable to verify where the group was based or whether they had carried out the alleged hacking attacks.⁷

On 24 September Taiwan's Defence Minister Wellington Koo refuted the allegations and stated that China is the main global cyber-attacker, targeting Taiwan and other democracies.⁸ In his subsequent response, Taiwanese Premier Cho Jung-tai reaffirmed the government's position and accused China of spreading fake news to undermine Taiwan, emphasising the Taiwanese position, “we must respond forcefully to fake news accusations against us”.

Adarga Analysis: The US delegation's visit to Taiwan demonstrates a deepening collaboration between the two countries in advanced military technology. While Northrop Grumman has previously signalled its intention to expand into the Taiwanese market, Taiwan has already placed an order with another of the companies represented in the delegation, AeroVironment, which makes the Switchblade loitering munitions, a lightweight, precision-guided UAV known colloquially as ‘killer drones’. Switchblade has proven effective in striking Russian targets at range during the war in Ukraine and Taiwan has reportedly placed a USD60.2 million order for 720 of its latest model, the Switchblade 300, with deliveries expected in 2024/25.^{9 10} Taiwan has also been working since 2022 to build a “national drone team” as part of its asymmetric warfare strategy focussed on countering the threat of China's much larger People's Liberation Army.¹¹

This is likely to elicit increased concern and potentially a direct response from Beijing in the form of countermeasures on the US companies involved. China has previously sanctioned US defence firms, including primes such as Lockheed Martin, in retaliation for Washington's approval of military equipment sales to Taiwan. Most recently, on 18 September China imposed sanctions on nine US defence firms including Sierra Nevada Corporation; the companies targeted will have their assets in China frozen and all transactions with China-based people or entities prohibited with immediate effect.^{12 13} In a press briefing on the same day a spokesperson for China's foreign ministry urged the US “to immediately stop the dangerous trend of arming Taiwan [...] stop conniving and supporting Taiwan independence and stop undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.”¹⁴

The visit also occurred at a time the US is seeking to mitigate the supply chain risks of Beijing's dominance as the top global UAV provider, with Washington looking to collaborate with like-minded partners to help form a supply chain for UAVs and counter-UAV systems outside mainland China.¹⁵ Speaking before the visit, Taiwanese Defence Minister Wellington Koo told reporters that due to the US policy of decoupling from mainland China's ‘red supply chain’, “there is a significant opportunity for Taiwan to become part of its supply chain”. Therefore, as well as demonstrating that Chinese countermeasures are unlikely to significantly disincentivise US defence companies from exporting to Taiwan, the visit may also signal increased collaboration on advanced military technologies in the future.

Although it is unlikely to be directly linked to this visit, China's concurrent claim about Anonymous 64 fits within this broader context of heightened tensions. China's decision to publicly highlight the alleged activities of the group, despite its seemingly small-scale operations, is likely driven by several strategic considerations. By publicising the alleged activities of Anonymous 64, China can portray itself as a victim of cyberattacks and disseminate a narrative that positions Taiwan as an aggressor in the cyber domain while simultaneously downplaying the impact in order to discredit Taiwan's cybersecurity capabilities. The incident could also serve China as a suitable pretext to implement stricter domestic cybersecurity measures, engage its population in cyber vigilance, or expand its own offensive cyber operations under the guise of defence. Meanwhile, the Taiwanese response has been consistent with the island's strategic positioning of a defensive posture in the cyber domain; officials have categorically denied China's allegations, but also used it as an opportunity to turn the accusation back on China by highlighting the state's own activities, both directly related to cyber and more broadly its information operations within the wider context of China's gray-zone warfare strategy.

ECONOMICS

China hands over fishing port in Ghana

On 13 September, China and Ghana held a handover ceremony for the Jamestown Fishing Port Complex in Accra. The project, initiated in August 2020, aims to enhance the living and working conditions of local fishermen while promoting economic and social development in the region. It includes various facilities such as office buildings and trading markets, and is expected to create over 3,000 local jobs.¹⁶

Ghanaian President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo emphasised its significance for the local fishing industry and the economy. He highlighted that the project aims to reduce post-harvest losses, create jobs, and stimulate the local economy, transforming the fishing community. He expressed gratitude to the Chinese government for its support in this and other infrastructure developments.¹⁷ President Akufo-Addo drew attention to the harbour's comprehensive infrastructure, including dredging, breakwater construction, and various facilities that will enhance operational efficiency. He expressed pride in fulfilling the promise of transforming the harbour from a concept to reality, countering scepticism about its viability.¹⁸

The Jamestown Fishing Port Complex is one of 12 fishing ports and catch landing sites funded by the China Development Bank, totalling USD185.57 million. Ghana's initiatives are part of broader Chinese investments in fisheries across Africa, which include training and infrastructure projects.¹⁹ China and Ghana have developed a robust economic relationship, primarily through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), making China Ghana's largest trading partner and a significant source of foreign investment.²⁰ Major Chinese investments span various sectors, including mining, agriculture, and infrastructure, notably the expansion of Tema Port, which aims to enhance Ghana's maritime capabilities, and the Asogli Power Plant.²¹

Adarga Analysis: China and Ghana have a long-standing bilateral relationship which has intensified in recent years, as China has become Ghana's largest trading partner and a major source of investment, including via the BRI.

The Jamestown Fishing Port Complex is part of a much broader programme of Chinese investment in Ghana, and highlights that China's direct economic interests in investing in developing countries are not only linked to the critical minerals and related strategic resources that typically make the headlines. China is the world's largest seafood consumer and demand is increasing, with Chinese fishing fleets ranging far from China's own waters. Chinese ships have been accused of illegal fishing off west Africa and there is evidence of them operating under local flags, while port investments will likely facilitate access to fisheries.²²

However, the project should still be understood in the wider context of China-Ghana relations. The handover of the port complex follows the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) earlier this month, which further cemented China's key role as a development partner across Africa, including in emerging areas of technology such as green energy. During FOCAC, Ghana's President Akufo-Addo met with Xi Jinping to discuss further strengthening ties. The two leaders announced an upgrading of their countries' bilateral relationship to a Strategic Partnership on 5 September, reflecting the importance placed on it by both sides.²³ Akufo-Addo has embraced Chinese investment in Ghana and welcomed China's presence in the country during his attendance of the China-Ghana Business Forum in Shenzhen on 7 September, emphasising its contribution to Ghana's stability and security.²⁴

During the FOCAC meeting, Xi highlighted China's support for Ghana's work as part of the UN Human Rights Council from 2024-2026; one important strategic motivation for China's engagement in Africa is precisely to cultivate support within multilateral organisations such as the UN.²⁵ In pushing against the US-led international system, China is keen to demonstrate effective leadership of the Global South both to gain support in existing global institutions and to help advance its own vision of an international order. This is one which emphasises state sovereignty over universal liberal values, and China sees shifting international concepts of human rights away from the latter as an important foreign policy goal.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Chinese and ASEAN business and trade leaders gather for expo and summit

On 24 September, the 21st China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Expo (CAEXPO) and the China-ASEAN Business and Investment Summit (CABIS) opened in Nanning, Guangxi province.^{26 27} Ding Xuexiang, Member of the Politburo Standing Committee and Vice Premier of the State Council, addressed the opening ceremony. In his speech, Ding highlighted the increase in trade between China and ASEAN members, which grew from RMB876.38 billion in 2004 to RMB6.41 trillion in 2023 - ASEAN has been China's largest trading partner since 2020.^{28 29}

On the same day, 109 projects were signed, including 93 major domestic investment projects and 16 international economic and trade cooperation projects with ASEAN countries.³⁰ In terms of sector focus, these cover industries including chemical materials, energy and energy storage, non-ferrous metals, and mechanical equipment, as well as emerging industries like low-carbon polymer materials and high-end semiconductor chemical materials.³¹

The CAEXPO and CABIS combined reportedly host 3,000 enterprises across nearly 200,000 square metres and are scheduled to run until 28 September.³² These are significant annual events within the broader framework of China-ASEAN relations, and serve an important role in enhancing economic and trade cooperation between China and ASEAN countries.³³ This year's summit is reportedly focused on fostering closer ties and cooperation in key areas, including digital technology and green energy.³⁴

Adarga Analysis: ASEAN is of major strategic importance to China. Not only does Southeast Asia have extensive resources – from oil to fish to minerals – but it is a geographic gateway to the Chinese mainland. Since the Second World War many of the countries in Southeast Asia have been aligned with the US, which continues to be of concern for Beijing.

Previous Adarga research using its Country Influence models has shown how Chinese structural influence in Southeast Asia has significantly grown in the last decade, with US allies like Thailand actively targeted (with the presumed aim of ‘flipping’ them away from the US). China's initiatives with ASEAN are an attempt to increase its overall influence in the region. Although there are benefits to its work with ASEAN – for example, using the body to try and get Chinese technological standards adopted as the regional norm – our research shows that bilateral relations in the region remain Beijing's preferred vector of influence.

ABOUT

Briefly - China in the Changing World Order

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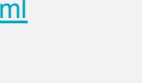
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