

Taiwan Detects Record Number of Chinese Warplanes

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said it detected 103 Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) warplanes operating around Taiwan from 6 am Sunday to 6 am Monday, the most in a 24-hour period since Taipei began releasing the figures in September 2020. China has significantly stepped up its military activity around Taiwan in response to the island's growing military and diplomatic ties with the US. Most notable was the massive live-fire exercises that the PLA held in response to then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visiting the island in August 2022. The US is increasing its military activity in the region and ties with Taiwan in the name of deterrence, but it has brought about a heavier Chinese military presence. Beijing has made clear to the US that Taiwan is a major red line.

US and Iran Swap Prisoners

Five Iranian Americans arrived in Qatar on Monday 18th after being released by Iranian authorities as part of a prisoner swap deal between Washington and Tehran that was mediated by Doha and unfroze \$6 billion in Iranian funds. The five Americans were greeted by US and Qatari officials and given a brief medical check before boarding a government plane headed for Washington. In exchange for Iran releasing the Americans, the US released five Iranians and dropped charges against them. Two of the released Iranians also arrived in Qatar and are headed to Iran. According to the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the other three are not returning to Iran. One will join his family in a third country, and two decided to stay in the US. According to Iran's PressTV, Iran's Central Bank chief said the \$6 billion in Iranian oil revenue that the US agreed to release was now in Qatar. The money was transferred from South Korea, where it was frozen in 2018 when the US tore up the nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, by reimposing sanctions on Iran. The US issued new sanctions on Iran at the end of last week, which probably shows the US is using a carrot and stick approach with Iran.

Azerbaijan Launches War on Nagorno-Karabakh

Azerbaijan launched a military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh on Sep 19th under the guise of "local anti-terrorist measures" to "ensure the safety of its military personnel and restore the constitutional order." The Azerbaijani government's statements about the operation and humanitarian corridors suggest its goal is to seize all or most of Nagorno-Karabakh and force a large portion of the Armenian population to flee the region. It remains to be seen if this turns into a full-blown war. Just last week the Armenian government was criticising Russia for not being able to fulfil its security guarantees and this escalation is further evidence that the Russian peacekeeping contingent is incapable of preventing Azerbaijan's seizure of the region, despite this being a clear violation of the November 2020 ceasefire brokered by Russia that ended the last war.