



# GRYPHON GROWL

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The Gryphon Growl is a collection of news reporting produced by the 21st Intelligence Squadron and is designed to make acquisition professionals and leaders more fully threat informed. Articles are chosen because they impact AFLCMC programs or address larger national security issues in line with the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, National Defense Strategy, Reoptimizing for Great Power Competition, and AFMC/AFLCMC priorities. The Gryphon Growl is designed to generate discussions in your respective workspace on current events. If any topic drives interest at higher classifications, please contact your PEO's Director of Intel or the ICE, using the phone number listed above or at <https://usaf.dps.mil/sites/21IS>. The articles in this product are gathered from unclassified, open sources and are not evaluated intelligence products. The included articles do not reflect the official position of the 21 IS, AFLCMC, or DoD.

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## SIPR

[go.intelink.sgov.gov/CPI6RmN](https://go.intelink.sgov.gov/CPI6RmN)  
 Current Intelligence Brief (Monthly)

## JWICS

[go.intelink.ic.gov/3vKnmH3](https://go.intelink.ic.gov/3vKnmH3)  
 AFLCMC CC Intel Brief (Monthly)  
 Winged Warrior (Bi-Weekly)  
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Gryphon Growl Feedback Form: <https://forms.osi.apps.mil/r/WhpBtWbWYi>

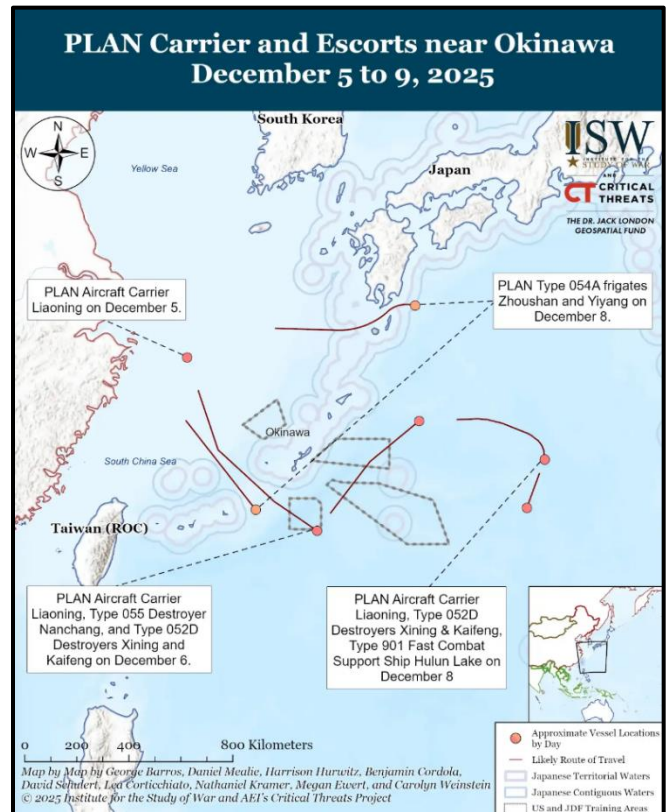
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# INDOPACOM

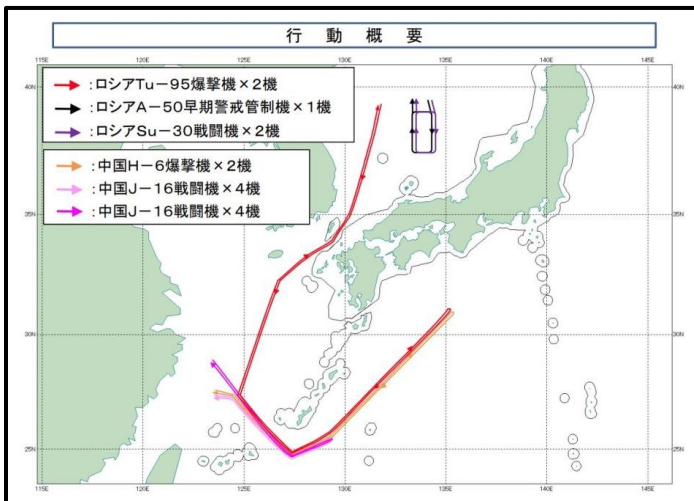
## ISW: CHINA-TAIWAN UPDATE

### Key Takeaways:

- U.S.-PRC Relations:** The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy deprioritizes the Indo-Pacific compared to previous iterations and places economics at the center of the U.S.-PRC relationship. The strategy broadly maintains continuity with past U.S. policy vis-à-vis Taiwan and regional security. Additionally, U.S. President Trump has permitted Nvidia to export its advanced H200 chip to the PRC, which will enable the PRC to significantly reduce the AI gap with the United States and possibly enhance its military effectiveness. The CCP will likely still try expanding its own chip industry and reducing its reliance on foreign supply chains.
- PRC-Japan tensions:** The PLA deployed a carrier task group to the waters around Okinawa as part of its intensifying coercion of Japan. The CCP is trying to deter Japan from intervening in a war over Taiwan and other countries from explicitly tying their own security to that of Taiwan. The PLA Navy Type 001 aircraft carrier *Liaoning* has operated in the waters near the Okinawa Islands since 5 December. This is the fifth time a PLA carrier task group has operated beyond the First Island Chain in 2025. Two additional PLA Type 052D frigates sailed between Japanese islands toward the West Pacific on 8 December. Two PLA Air Force H-6 bombers and eight J-16 fighter aircraft also operated in the area and were joined by two Russian Tu-95 bombers on 9 December.



## TWZ: JOINT CHINESE-RUSSIAN BOMBER PATROL SENDS JAPANESE, SOUTH KOREAN FIGHTERS SCRAMBLING



On 9 December, Japan and South Korea scrambled jets in response to a joint Chinese-Russian bomber patrol over international waters near both of those nations. Though part of an annual bilateral exercise, the flights come as tensions between China and Japan are heightened over the latter's increasing signals of support for Taiwan.

Two Russian Tu-95 Bear turboprop bombers flew south from the Sea of Japan into the East China Sea, the Japanese Defense Ministry (MoD) said. After flying between west of Japan and southeast of South Korea, they joined two Chinese H-6 series bombers near Okinawa Japan.

The bombers were joined by four Chinese J-16 Flanker multirole fighter derivatives "when these bombers flew back and forth between Okinawa Island and Miyako Island," the Japanese MoD noted. The Bear bombers later flew back along the same route

north into the Sea of Japan while the Chinese jets flew back toward China.

These flights are part of an increasing level of military cooperation between China and Russia. Last year, two Chinese H-6-series aircraft flew with a pair of Russian Bear bombers through a portion of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) around Alaska. It marked the first time Chinese H-6s of any kind have operated in this part of the world. Similar maritime flotillas have occurred at an increasing rate, as well.

## DEFENSEBLOG: CHINA TESTS NEW MODULAR AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV-7 has released footage of a previously unseen air defense system during a recent live-fire training exercise in the Gobi Desert.

The system, likely a short-range air defense platform, was shown launching surface-to-air missiles in what appeared to be high-precision strike tests. The new complex features a modular launcher mounted on a wheeled military truck chassis, suggesting rapid deployment capabilities across varied terrain.

According to open-source visual analysis of the broadcast, the interceptor missile used in the launch may be derived from an air-to-air missile type, adapted for ground-based air defense—an approach similar to Norway's use of AIM-120 AMRAAMs in the NASAMS system.



CCTV-7 did not name the missile or platform, and the Chinese Ministry of National Defense has yet to formally announce the system or its intended deployment timeline. However, the presence of modular components and mobile integration implies a system tailored for tactical-level protection of military columns or key infrastructure against aerial threats.

While not officially confirmed, the new system's architecture and use of what appears to be repurposed air-to-air missiles indicate an emphasis on cost-efficiency and interoperability within China's existing missile ecosystem.

## INTERESTINGENGINEERING: WORLD'S FIRST 16-TON DRONE MOTHERSHIP THAT CAN LAUNCH SWARMS MID-AIR FLIES IN CHINA



China has successfully flown its Jetank unmanned aircraft, a heavy-lift drone called "airborne UAV carrier" by state media, for the first time.

Commonly known as China's drone swarm mothership, the UAV took flight on 11 December in Shaanxi Province, according to the state-run People's Daily, which cited developer Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC). Chinese aerospace analysts said the event signals Beijing's progress in building large, multi-role UAVs capable of deploying swarms of smaller drones.

The aircraft incorporates independently developed technologies that allow it to carry heavy loads, operate across a wide speed range, and take off or land from short runways. It can carry payloads up to 6,000 kilograms (13,230 pounds), fly for 12 hours, and has a ferry range of roughly 7,000 kilometers (4,350 miles), performance figures that place it among the largest UAVs of its class.

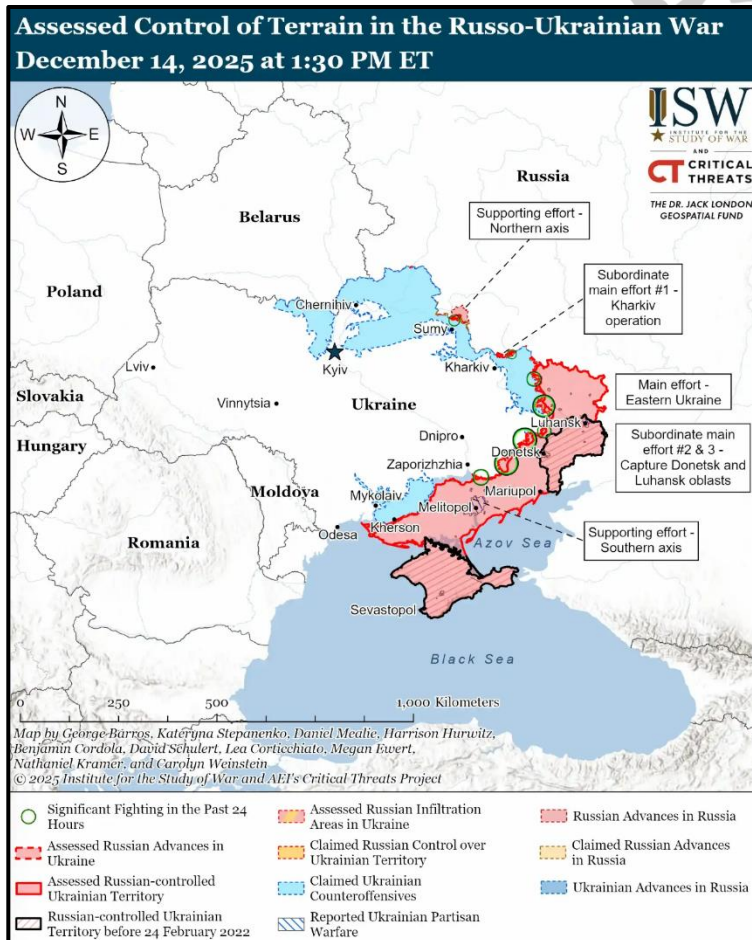
According to China Central Television (CCTV), the Jetank has eight underwing hardpoints and can carry 1,000-kilogram (620-pound) guided bombs, air-to-air missiles, anti-ship weapons, and loitering munitions. The platform's open-architecture design allows mission modules to be swapped in roughly two hours, enabling rapid transitions between strike, transport, and electronic-warfare roles.



## ISW: RUSSIA-UKRAINE UPDATE

## Key Takeaways:

- Kremlin Setting Conditions to Reject Peace Plan:** Russian Presidential Aide Yuriy Ushakov stated in a TV interview with Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin on 14 December that Russia has stated its position “very clearly” and that Russia will have “strong objections” if Ukraine and Europe make amendments to the peace plan.
- Russian Forces Struggle to Maintain Offensive:** Ukrainian observers note the Kremlin’s desired multi-pronged offensive operations in different operational directions are lacking due to the long-term materiel and manpower costs of such operation
- Ukraine’s Fortress Belt to Stretch Russian Resources:** Russia will likely need to concentrate even more forces and deprioritize other frontline sectors to exploit tactical advances around Hulyaipole or to attempt to seize the rest of Donetsk Oblast. The Kremlin is therefore making territorial demands of unoccupied parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts because it cannot militarily seize these regions at this time.



## DEFENSEBLOG: RUSSIA RECEIVES FRESH BATCH OF SU-34 STRIKE JETS



The United Aircraft Corporation (UAC), a subsidiary of Rostec, has delivered a new batch of Su-34 Fullback fighter-bombers to the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS), according to a release from the corporation. The aircraft reportedly passed all required ground and flight factory tests prior to handover.

In a statement, Rostec said, “The Su-34, due to its versatility and extensive arsenal of strike weapons, can perform a wide range of missions, making it one of the most in-demand aircraft in the Aerospace Forces. Based on experience from the Special Military Operation, the aircraft received enhancements that allow for more accurate and powerful strikes from hundreds of kilometers away from its home base.

In terms of flight and combat characteristics, this is one of the best aircraft in the world.

The Su-34 is a twin-seat, twin-engine fighter-bomber designed to strike ground and naval targets, air defense-protected infrastructure, and air threats at extended ranges. It is also capable of conducting tactical aerial reconnaissance.

According to a statement by a Su-34 pilot in the Russian Aerospace Forces, “As part of fulfilling the specific tasks set by the Minister of War of the Russian Federation on delivering particularly demanded weapons and equipment to the troops, crews of the Aerospace Forces accepted the Su-34 aircraft. The advantages of the Su-34 lie in its ability to carry out combat missions in simple, complex, and minimal weather conditions against ground and naval targets, using guided munitions of the air-radar, air-to-air, and air-to-surface types.”

## TWZ: RUSSIAN RETALIATION STRIKE RAISES STAKES IN BLACK SEA SHIPPING WAR

A Russian Shahed kamikaze drone strike on a ship in the port of Chornomorsk was in retaliation for a recent spate of Ukrainian attacks on Russian oil tankers in the Black Sea, according to the Ambrey maritime security firm. The attack on the Turkish-owned CENK-T roll-on, roll-off cargo ship comes after Russian President Vladimir Putin warned he would “cut Ukraine off from the sea” in response to Ukraine’s stepped-up campaign against Russian commercial shipping.

As previously reported, Ukraine carried out three attacks on Russian-connected oil tankers in the Black Sea in late November and early December. Reports emerged on 10 December that they carried out a fourth one.

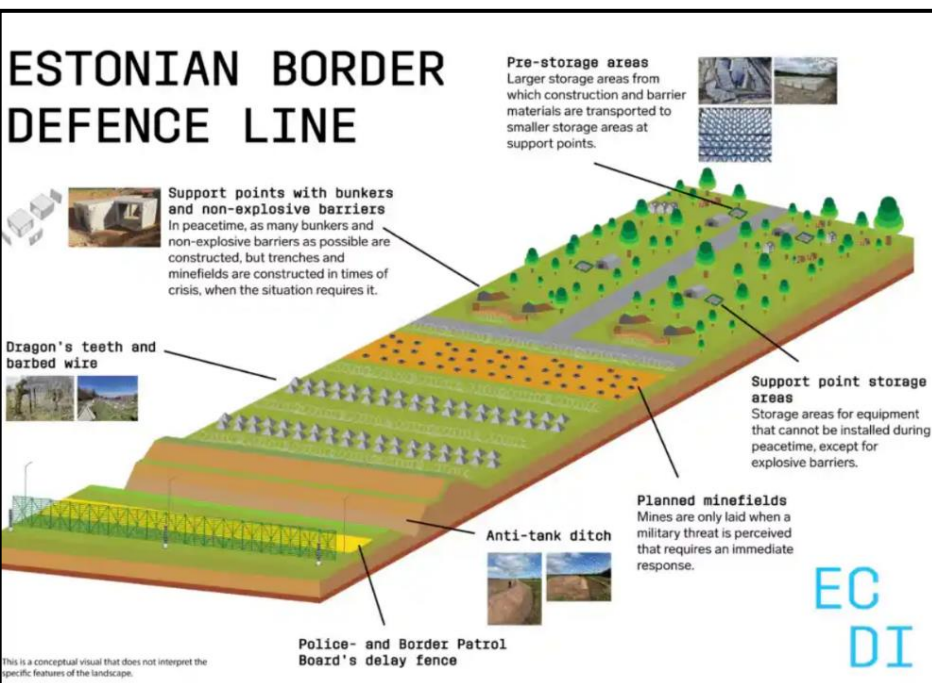


“This attack was the first retaliation,” Joshua Hutchinson, a former Royal Marine commando now serving as the company’s Managing Director of Risk and Intelligence, stated on 12 December.

Video emerging on social media showed several angles of the attack. One showed the Shahed flying over the port of Chornomorsk before the CENK-T’s bow became engulfed in flames.

Early reports on this incident from both Ambrey and Russian media claimed Russia used an Iskander-M ballistic missile to carry out the attack, but the video clearly shows otherwise. While it’s possible another strike occurred using a ballistic missile, we have seen no evidence of it at this time.

## DEFENSENEWS: ESTONIA ERECTS FIRST OF 600-STRONG BALTIC BUNKER WALL ON RUSSIA BORDER



Estonia has begun installing the first concrete bunkers along its southeastern border with Russia as part of the Baltic Defense Line, marking a key milestone for the trilateral fortification project despite delays.

Five bunkers were awaiting installation as of this week, with Estonian officials targeting 28 bunkers in the ground by year’s end, according to Krismar Rosin, press officer for the Estonian Centre for Defence Investments. The initial batch represents the first phase of a 600-bunker network designed to strengthen the European Union’s and NATO’s eastern flank.

The bunkers, each approximately 35 square meters (377 sq ft), are designed to withstand 152mm artillery shells. They represent one part of a layered defense system meant to stop a possible Russian

invasion. All barbed wire and dragon’s teeth obstacles have been delivered and stored in pre-positioned areas awaiting installation if the need arises, Rosin said.

Despite the setbacks, Estonia remains ahead of Latvia and Lithuania in physical implementation, according to Rosin. All three countries announced the coordinated Baltic Defense Line project, but are executing their national portions independently based on varying terrain and threat assessments, although they cooperate on concepts and knowledge-sharing.

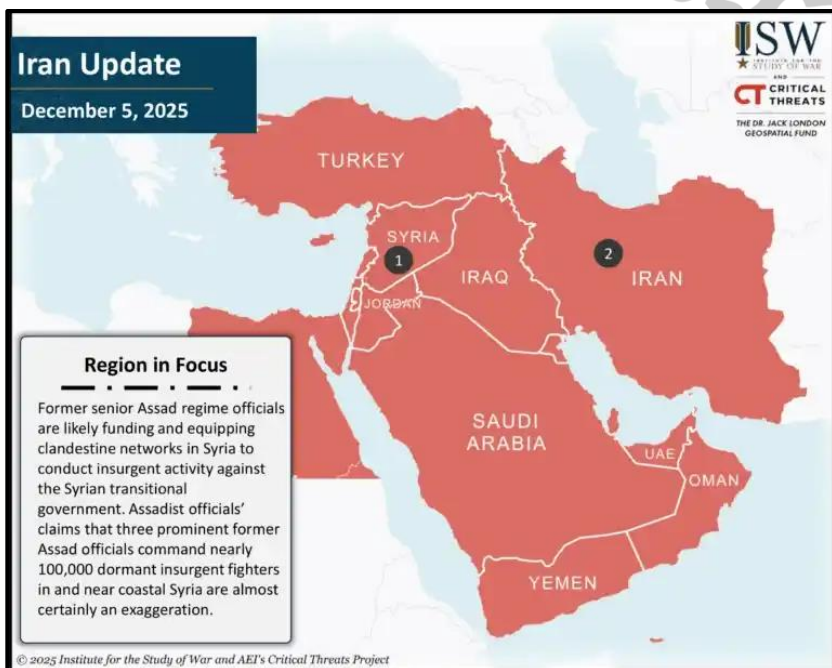


## CENTCOM

## ISW: CENTCOM UPDATE

## Key Takeaways:

- Iranian Ballistic Missile Production:** An Israeli journalist reported that Iran has reconstituted its “heavy” missile stockpile to around 2,000 missiles, which is consistent with other Israeli reports that Iran has prioritized rebuilding its missile program and stockpile after the Israel-Iran War. This rapid reconstitution indicates that Israel either failed to destroy all of Iran’s planetary mixers or that Iran has acquired or built new planetary mixers used to produce solid fuel ballistic missiles.
- Iran’s Deterrence Strategy:** Iranian Armed Forces General Staff-affiliated media proposed on 12 December that Iran establish a “joint operations room” with the Axis of Resistance to mitigate their weaknesses in the wake of conflict since 7 October 2023.
- STC Takeover in Southern Yemen:** The United Arab Emirates-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) is emphasizing its intent to establish an independent state to Western diplomats as it consolidates control on the ground in eastern Yemen. The STC is continuing to consolidate administrative control and establish new military units in eastern Yemen.



## TWZ: AMBUSH IN SYRIA LEAVES TWO U.S. TROOPS, CIVILIAN INTERPRETER DEAD



On 13 December, two U.S. troops and a U.S. civilian interpreter were killed and three were wounded in Syria during a “key leader engagement,” Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell announced on X. U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said the troops were ambushed by a lone gunman, who was killed.

“Their mission was in support of on-going counter-ISIS / counter-terrorism operations in the region,” Parnell wrote on X. “The soldiers’ names, as well as identifying information about their units, are being withheld until 24 hours after the next of kin notification. This attack is currently under active investigation.”

Video from the scene shows a U.S. Air Force F-16 flying low overhead in a show of force and either an MH-60 special operations Black Hawk or HH-60 combat search and rescue helicopter on the ground. Palmyra, a city of major historical significance, had been a stronghold of ISIS during the height of the group’s reign of terror.

The U.S. still has around a thousand troops deployed in eastern Syria as part of a coalition fighting the Islamic State group.

“Last month, Syria joined the international coalition fighting against the IS as Damascus improves its relations with Western countries following last year’s fall of President Bashar Assad when insurgents captured his seat of power in Damascus,” the wire service added.

# CYBERCOM

## **MBTMAG: CISA ISSUES ADVISORY ON HACKTIVISTS ATTACKING CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), in partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the National Security Agency, Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Defense Cyber Crime Center, and other international partners, has published a joint cybersecurity advisory: *Pro-Russia Hacktivists Create Opportunistic Attacks Against US and Global Critical Infrastructure*.

This advisory, published as an addition to the joint fact sheet on Primary Mitigations to Reduce Cyber Threats to Operational Technology (OT) released in May 2025, details that pro-Russia hacker groups are conducting less sophisticated, lower-impact attacks against critical infrastructure entities, compared to advanced persistent threat groups. These attacks use minimally secured, internet-facing virtual network computing (VNC) connections to infiltrate or gain access to OT control devices within critical infrastructure systems.



The groups involved include: Cyber Army of Russia Reborn, Z-Pentest, NoName057(16), and Sector16.

The groups are reportedly taking advantage of the widespread prevalence of accessible VNC devices to execute attacks, resulting in varying degrees of impact, including physical damage. These groups often seek notoriety by making false or exaggerated claims about their attacks. Their methods are opportunistic, leveraging superficial criteria such as victim availability and existing vulnerabilities. They attack a wide range of targets, from water treatment facilities to oil well systems.

CISA recommends the following actions: (1) Reduce exposure of OT assets to the public-facing internet; (2) adopt mature asset management processes, including mapping data flows and access points; and (3) ensure that OT assets are using robust authentication procedures.

## **CYBER SECURITY NEWS: 2 CHINESE HACKERS TRAINED IN CISCO PROGRAM NOW LEADING SOPHISTICATED ATTACKS ON CISCO DEVICES**



The cybersecurity world faces an ironic threat as two Chinese hackers who once excelled in Cisco's training program are now leading sophisticated attacks against the company's devices. Yuyang and Qiu Daibing were identified as key operators behind the notorious Salt Typhoon campaign. Have leveraged their Cisco Network Academy education to orchestrate one of the most expansive intelligence operations in recent history.

In 2012, both Yuyang and Qiu Daibing participated in the Cisco Network Academy Cup while studying at Southwest Petroleum University in China. Despite attending a poorly regarded cybersecurity education institution, they excelled in the competition. With Qiu's team winning third place nationally and Yu's team securing second place in Sichuan province. Their education through Cisco's

program covered many of the products they would later exploit, including Cisco IOS and ASA Firewalls. The Cisco Network Academy, which entered China in 1998, has trained over 200,000 students in the country.

In 2024, Yuyang and Qiu Daibing emerged as co-owners of companies named in a Joint Cybersecurity Advisory published by the United States and more than 30 allied nations. According to SentinelOne Labs, its Salt Typhoon operation compromised more than 80 telecommunications companies worldwide. Intercepting unencrypted calls and texts between US presidential candidates, key staffers, and China policy experts. The hackers also breached CALEA systems, which telecommunications companies use for lawful intercept of criminal communications. The campaign, first reported in September 2024, represents one of the most significant intelligence collection efforts of the last decade.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



AFMCA A2: World Threat Brief CAO: 6 Oct 2025

<https://usaf.dps.mil/sites/22244/SitePages/Command-Intel-Threat-Brief.aspx>



**China Aerospace Studies Institute:** CASI supports the Secretary of the Air Force, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other senior leaders of the Air and Space Forces. CASI provides expert research and analysis supporting decision and policy makers in the Department of Defense and across the U.S. government.

<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/CASI/>



**The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS):** is a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization dedicated to advancing practical ideas to address the world's greatest challenges.

<https://www.csis.org/>



**Defense Intelligence Agency Military Power Publications:** an intelligence agency and combat support agency of the United States Department of Defense, specializing in defense and military intelligence.

<https://www.dia.mil/Military-Power-Publications/>



**Institute for the Study of War:** The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) is a non-partisan, non-profit, public policy research organization. ISW advances an informed understanding of military affairs through reliable research, trusted analysis, and innovative education.

<https://www.understandingwar.org/>



**Perun:** An Australian covering the military industrial complex and national military investment strategy.

<https://www.youtube.com/@PerunAU>



**Research and Development Corporation (RAND):** RAND is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that provides leaders with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions.

<https://www.rand.org/>



**RealClearDefense:** RCD was created at the request of the Pentagon and Hill staff on the House Armed Services Committee for information about military affairs, defense policy, national security, and foreign affairs.

<https://www.realcleardefense.com/>



**Stockholm International Peace Research Institute:** SIPRI is an independent international institute providing data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

<https://www.sipri.org/>



**Task & Purpose:** Task & Purpose aims to inform, engage, entertain, and stand up for active-duty military members, veterans, and their families. The site quickly became one of the most trusted news and investigative journalism sources for the military, with its journalists reporting everywhere from the Pentagon to The White House and beyond.

<https://www.youtube.com/@Taskandpurpose>



**FRONTLINE** examines the rise of Xi Jinping, his vision for China and the global implications. Correspondent Martin Smith traces the defining moments for President Xi, how he's exercising power and his impact on China, and relations with the U.S. and the world.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/china-the-u-s-the-rise-of-xi-jinping/>