

China detains Taiwanese fishing boat amid rising cross-strait tensions

Ben McGrath
8 July 2024

The China Coast Guard (CCG) of the People's Republic of China last week seized a Taiwanese fishing boat and its five crew members in the waters around Kinmen Island, located just a few kilometers from the Chinese mainland. The incident follows other incidents in recent weeks and months and represents a further escalation of tensions around the Taiwan Strait, which is a dangerous flashpoint whipped up above all by US imperialism.

On July 2, two CCG vessels detained the Da Jin Man 88 fishing vessel in Beijing's territorial waters, 23.7 nautical miles northeast of Kinmen Island (also known as Quemoy), which is administered by Taipei. The island, the largest in the Kinmen Island group, lies just 10 kilometers east of the city of Xiamen, Fujian Province.

The Chinese authorities ordered the boat to head for a nearby port in the mainland city of Jinjiang. In addition to the Taiwanese captain, the crew included four other members including another sailor from Taiwan and three from Indonesia. According to the CCG, the fishing vessel was detained for violating the annual summer fishing moratorium in place between May and August.

"The act was deemed detrimental to fishery resources and marine ecology," stated CCG spokesman Liu Dejun. "The Fujian coast guard boarded the boat, and vessels from Taiwan attempting to interrupt their law enforcement were warned off in accordance with the law." Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (CGA) dispatched seven ships in an attempt to stop the Da Jin Man being detained. A standoff between the two sides lasted for approximately 50 minutes.

Kuan Bi-ling, the head of Taiwan's Ocean Affairs Council stated last Wednesday, "The incident involved a Taiwanese fishing boat operating in Chinese waters

during China's summer fishing moratorium. Consequently, the Chinese coast guard took law enforcement action."

Despite this acknowledgment, Tsai Ming-yen, the director-general of Taiwan's National Security Bureau (NSB), stated on Thursday that Taipei would proceed "with great caution and fully defend the legal rights of fishermen engaged in lawful fishing operations at sea," implying that Beijing's actions in its own waters were illegitimate. The NSB is Taiwan's primary intelligence agency.

It is not uncommon for vessels from Taiwan and the mainland to operate in each other's waters, with Taipei's Fisheries Agency stating that a "tacit agreement" existed between the two sides. In the past, if the CCG did board vessels, fishermen would be fined and quickly released. The CCG had not detained a Taiwanese fishing vessel since 2007.

Kinmen in fact has close economic relations with Xiamen with many of its residents favoring greater relations with the mainland, rather than fearing a supposed invasion. It is a sharp change from the past when the island was heavily militarized, particularly during the period of dictatorial martial law in Taiwan that lasted from 1949 to 1987.

However, Taipei continues to base special forces on Kinmen, specifically the 101st Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion. The US has also stationed troops on the island, which then-Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng claimed in March was part of a training mission alongside Taiwanese soldiers. This "training exercise" goes back to at least 2020. Last year, the US raised its number of troops in Taiwan from 30 in 2022 to between 100 and 200. The stationing of US forces on Kinmen no doubt facilitates intelligence gathering near Xiamen, which has naval and air bases.

The tensions in the Taiwan Strait are ultimately driven by Washington's efforts to goad China into a war to bolster its hegemony in Asia. Under first the Trump administration and now Biden, this has included provocatively challenging the One China policy by permanently stationing US troops in Taiwan, conducting visits by high-ranking politicians, and sending warships through the Taiwan Strait. Washington is also encouraging pro-independence politicians like new President Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party to take an even more hardline approach to Beijing.

The One China policy stems from Washington's refusal to acknowledge the People's Republic of China following the victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949 and the defeat of the brutal dictator Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang (KMT). The US instead claimed that the KMT regime, which had fled to Taiwan with US assistance, represented the legitimate government of all of China.

Only in 1979 did Washington recognize Beijing and withdraw formal diplomatic and military relations with Taipei. The US therefore de facto recognized Beijing as the legitimate government of China, including Taiwan. Beijing has never given up its goal of reuniting with Taiwan, conscious that allowing Taipei to declare independence would set a precedent for further carving up Chinese territory in line with the aims of US imperialism.

Washington has responded to the incident with the Da Jin Man in a thoroughly hypocritical manner. On July 3, the White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre answered a question from the press, saying Washington was "closely monitoring the incident, so we're going to continue to do that." She made no criticism of the Taiwanese fishermen's violation of Beijing's fishing moratorium.

The US has politicized the issue of Chinese illegal fishing in waters around the world in order to demonize Beijing and claim it and Chinese businesses do not follow the "rule of law." In April, Admiral John Aquilino, Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, denounced Chinese fishing vessels as a "maritime militia." This has been used as an excuse for the US to send its own coast guard into the South Pacific and board Chinese fishing vessels alongside nations hosting the US vessels. Beijing has branded the

US Coast Guard's actions illegal.

Washington's actions are also leading to a growth of other dangerous incidents. On February 14, two mainland Chinese fishermen drowned near Kinmen after being chased by the Taiwanese coast guard for supposedly fishing in restricted waters. Since then, the CCG has increased patrols around Kinmen, including entering what Taiwan calls restricted waters. Then on June 15, new regulations announced in May took effect that allow the CCG to detain people suspected of violating Chinese waters for up to 60 days.

Beijing subsequently announced that its coast guard had "adopted a new model of conducting law enforcement" around Kinmen. On June 25, four China Coast Guard vessels reportedly entered restricted waters around Kinmen and were followed by three Taiwanese coast guard ships in response.

The state-owned *Global Times* wrote the following day, "Since June, the Fujian Coast Guard has organized a fleet of warships to continuously strengthen law enforcement patrols in the waters near Kinmen, and earnestly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese fishermen, including those in the island of Taiwan."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact