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Taiwan

Chinese fighter jets fly close to Taiwan ahead of Nancy Pelosi's visit

Taipei and Washington braced for prospect of violent reaction after Beijing warns it will 'not sit by idly'



A Taiwanese soldier takes part in an amphibious landing drill last week during the Han Kuang military exercise, which simulates China's invasion of the island © Annabelle Chih/Getty Images

Kathrin Hille in Taipei, **Demetri Sevastopulo** in Washington and **Tom Mitchell** in Singapore 2 HOURS AGO

China is ratcheting up military activity around Taiwan ahead of a potential visit by Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, who is expected to land in Taipei on Tuesday night.

The Taiwanese government also said it had come under cyber attack.

Several Chinese fighter jets flew close to the median line that divides the Taiwan Strait on Tuesday morning, according to a Taiwanese official briefed on the developments, in a reminder to Taipei that Beijing's air force could reach the island in a matter of minutes.

Military units across the People's Liberation Army's Southern Theater Command, which is in charge of the South China Sea and some Taiwan-related missions, have entered a status of high alert, according to military officials in two neighbouring countries.

[Taiwan](#) and the US braced themselves for a potential violent reaction from Beijing, which has repeatedly warned that the PLA would "not sit by idly" if Pelosi were to visit Taiwan as part of a wider Asia trip that began in Singapore on Monday. Beijing claims Taiwan as part of its sovereign territory.

The office of the Taiwanese presidency said that its official website was forced down for 20 minutes on Tuesday evening due to what it described as an overseas denial of service attack involving 200 times the site's normal traffic.

[Stocks fell](#) over the tensions, with Hong Kong's Hang Seng index dropping as much as 3.2 per cent and China's CSI 300 index falling as much as 2.8 per cent on Tuesday.

China also announced a series of war games in the South China Sea scheduled to last from Tuesday morning until Saturday night, following various drills the previous week.

Domestic air traffic in Fujian, the Chinese province closest to Taiwan, was disrupted on Tuesday, a sign that the airspace could be cleared for military movements.

Russia accused the US of "provoking" China, in an apparent reciprocation of Beijing's tacit backing for Moscow's assault on Ukraine.

"Everything about this tour and the possible visit to Taiwan is purely provocative," said Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, according to Reuters. In a further confirmation of what the two countries have called a "no limits friendship", the Ostankino television tower in Moscow [lit up with a message](#) this week saying "China, we are with you!"

Taiwan was not mentioned on Pelosi's official itinerary, which also includes Japan, South Korea and Malaysia, but people familiar with the matter confirmed [she would meet Taiwan's president Tsai Ing-wen](#) on Wednesday.

This would make Pelosi, a longtime critic of [China](#), particularly over human rights abuses, the first US House Speaker to visit Taiwan in 25 years.

"Large-scale Chinese exercises around Taiwan after Pelosi leaves are the very least we should expect," said Hsu Yen-chi, a researcher at the Council on Strategic and Wargaming Studies in Taipei.

Zhang Jun, China's ambassador to the UN, condemned the visit as "dangerous and provocative".

"Taiwan's tendency towards independence is further developing," Zhang said after Pelosi's visit was confirmed. "If we do not take appropriate, forceful action . . . the situation might [get] out of control."

A Taiwanese official familiar with the PLA's movements said tension in the Southern Theater Command was the highest, with Pelosi expected to pass through its area of

...Southern Command has the highest, with Pelosi expected to pass through its area of responsibility on her route from Malaysia to Taipei.

“Since the Chinese government has warned that she needs to bear the consequences if she flies close to Taiwan, the Southern Command will be responsible for deterring the US in that area,” the official said.

In waters off Taiwan’s east coast, considered the country’s weak flank, PLA Navy patrols have intensified over the past 10 days. According to the Japanese military, a missile destroyer, a frigate and a military surveillance ship from the PLA have been circling Japan’s south-western islands in recent days, frequently passing between Japan’s westernmost territories and Taiwan.

The largest airline operating out of Xiamen, a city in Fujian, announced on Tuesday that it was adjusting many of its flights, citing the “influence” of provincial air traffic control.

Many flights into the airport at Quanzhou, a small coastal city north-east of Xiamen, were also cancelled. Quanzhou’s Jinjiang airport is also used by the PLA Air Force.

The Pentagon declined to comment on its preparations to protect Pelosi and her delegation. But the US military already has naval assets in the region, including the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier and the USS Tripoli, a large amphibious assault ship that carries fighter jets.

If China sends fighter jets to intercept Pelosi’s aircraft, the US Air Force and Navy could scramble fighters from ships at sea, or from bases in the region, to intercept them.

One defence official said the Pentagon did not need to change schedules to protect Pelosi.

“This is why you have forces in theatre and why we advocate for forces to be in theatre, because we don’t have to surge in the event of crisis,” said the defence official.

John Kirby, the National Security Council spokesperson, on Monday warned China not to turn a potential visit by Pelosi to Taiwan into a “pretext to increase aggressive military activity in or around the Taiwan Strait”.

He said the Chinese military appeared to be preparing for more activity “in the coming days”.

The [Financial Times reported last week](#) that China had issued stark warnings to the

White House that included possible military retaliation.

Kirby said the possible responses ranged from firing missiles into the Taiwan Strait to flying much larger sorties of warplanes into Taiwan's "air defence identification zone", in addition to sending aircraft and naval ships across the median line in the Taiwan Strait.

Additional reporting by Emma Zhou and Maiqi Ding in Beijing

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