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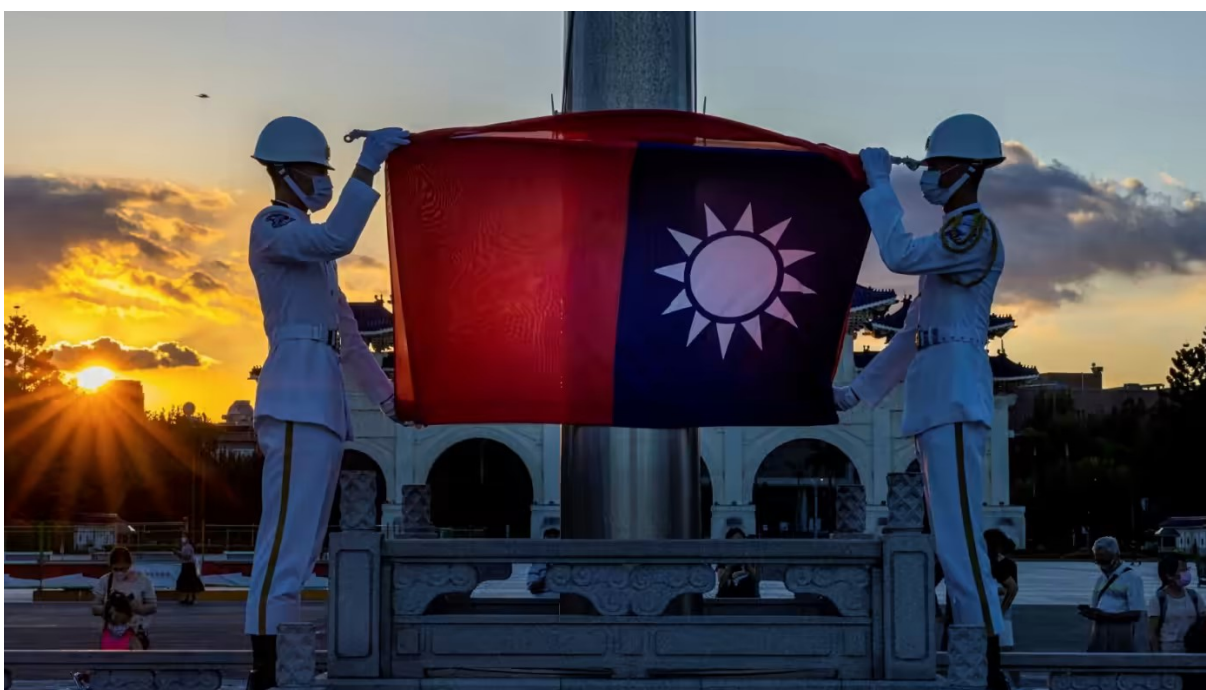
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### Taiwan

## Taiwan warns opposition deputy's trip to China threatens 'internal unity'

Taipei condemns visit by Kuomintang politician as Beijing maintains military drills around island



Taiwan's China policy body said opposition party deputy Andrew Hsia's trip to the mainland would 'cause domestic controversy and anxiety' © Annabelle Chih/Getty Images

**Kathrin Hille** in Taipei 6 HOURS AGO

Taiwan's Beijing-friendly opposition party has sent its deputy leader to China on a trip that Taipei warns risks sowing internal division as the country faces unprecedented intimidation from the People's Liberation Army.

Andrew Hsia, a veteran diplomat who served as the country's top China policy official in the last Kuomintang government, justified the visit as an attempt to support Taiwanese citizens living in China.

"We have not made any plans to meet with Chinese officials, although it is, of course, possible that they will reach out or we might encounter them in the context of our meetings with Taiwanese businesses," he told the Financial Times before his departure on Wednesday morning for Xiamen in China's south-eastern Fujian province.

Although the [KMT](#) said the visit had been planned for weeks and was unrelated to the crisis in the Taiwan Strait, it will probably prove highly contentious in Taiwan.

The PLA is continuing to [conduct exercises on an unparalleled scale](#) around the island after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei last week. On Wednesday, Xiao Qian, China's ambassador to Australia, said that there was no timeframe for when Beijing would cease military activity.

[Taiwan](#)'s cabinet-level China policy body told local media that it had strongly advised against Hsia's visit. It was quoted as saying: "This move will cause domestic controversy and anxiety, high public misgivings and affect our internal unity. It will also confuse and mislead the international community's perception of the threat Taiwan faces."

The KMT has struggled for years to shake off allegations from the ruling Democratic Progressive party and suspicions among voters over its engagement with the Chinese Communist party. According to a recent opinion poll, its [support among voters has sunk](#) to a historic low of 17 per cent.

The opposition party has joined the government in condemning China's military drills, but Hsia evaded questions about whether he would protest against the exercises on his trip. "Our position has been consistent, and I will reiterate it when asked," he said.

Zhu Feng, an international relations professor at Nanjing University, said: "The mainland military exercise is not over yet. It is a very important gesture for the vice-chairman of the Kuomintang to come to the mainland. The two sides need to strengthen communication, especially in the current situation."

Beijing claims Taiwan as its territory and threatens to take it by force if the island resists unification indefinitely. The Chinese Communist party has tried to use the KMT to undermine the authority of Taiwan's government.

Ahead of Hsia's arrival, Beijing published a white paper on its Taiwan policy that reiterated its position that "there is no room for doubt nor change that Taiwan is part of China".

A Chinese government spokesperson said the white paper would help "strengthen the confidence and courage of forces inside the island and abroad that oppose 'independence' and promote unification".

In 2005, when cross-Strait relations were at a nadir after the re-election of Taiwan's pro-independence president Chen Shui-bian, then-KMT chair Lien Chan met Communist party general secretary Hu Jintao, the first meeting between KMT and CCP leaders since 1945.

Subsequently, the two parties established regular dialogue, which was fiercely criticised by the DPP as an attempt to undermine Taiwan's sovereignty. The last time a KMT deputy chair visited the mainland was in 2019.

The KMT accepts the premise that Taiwan is part of one China, but adds that the sides reserve their respective interpretation of that one China.

Hsia rejected criticism that his delegation might become a tool of Chinese division tactics. "It's not like we haven't been a target of United Front tactics before and don't know how to guard against it," he said, referring to a political strategy body of the Chinese Communist party.

"But in the end, communicating is always better than not communicating. We want to do something for our China-based citizens at a time when the government can't," he added.

Hsia said his delegation would try to address problems faced by Taiwanese in China over coronavirus mainland's pandemic restrictions and cross-Strait trade.

*Additional reporting by Nic Fildes in Sydney*

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