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Taiwan

China unleashes wave of military drills around Taiwan after Nancy Pelosi's trip

Naval and air exercises on unprecedented scale aimed at punishing Taipei for US House Speaker's visit



Chinese military helicopters fly past Pingtan Island, one of the nearest points on mainland China to Taiwan, before Beijing launched huge punitive military exercises on Thursday © Hector Retamal/AFP/Getty Images

Kathrin Hille in Taipei 4 HOURS AGO

China has started a series of ballistic missile tests targeting waters close to ports in Taiwan, the island's defence ministry said, as Beijing seeks to punish the country for hosting a visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

A booming sound from what appeared to be artillery fire could be heard in northern [Taiwan](#) in the early afternoon as China started the three-day drills, which are unprecedented in scale and are strategically located in six areas off the island's coast.

“Between 1.56pm and 4pm, [China] fired 11 missiles of the Dongfeng series towards waters north, north-east, south and east of Taiwan,” the country's defence ministry said, condemning the drills as an “irrational action destroying regional peace”.

The Dongfeng ballistic missiles are some of the People's Liberation Army's most potent weapons and include the anti-ship intermediate range DF21, viewed as a tool for deterring the US navy from operating in strategically important areas.

The exercises have disrupted air traffic, with South Korea's flagship Korean Air cancelling all flights between Seoul and Taipei on Friday and Saturday and its rival Asiana Airlines has also reportedly done the same. Asiana could not be reached for comment.

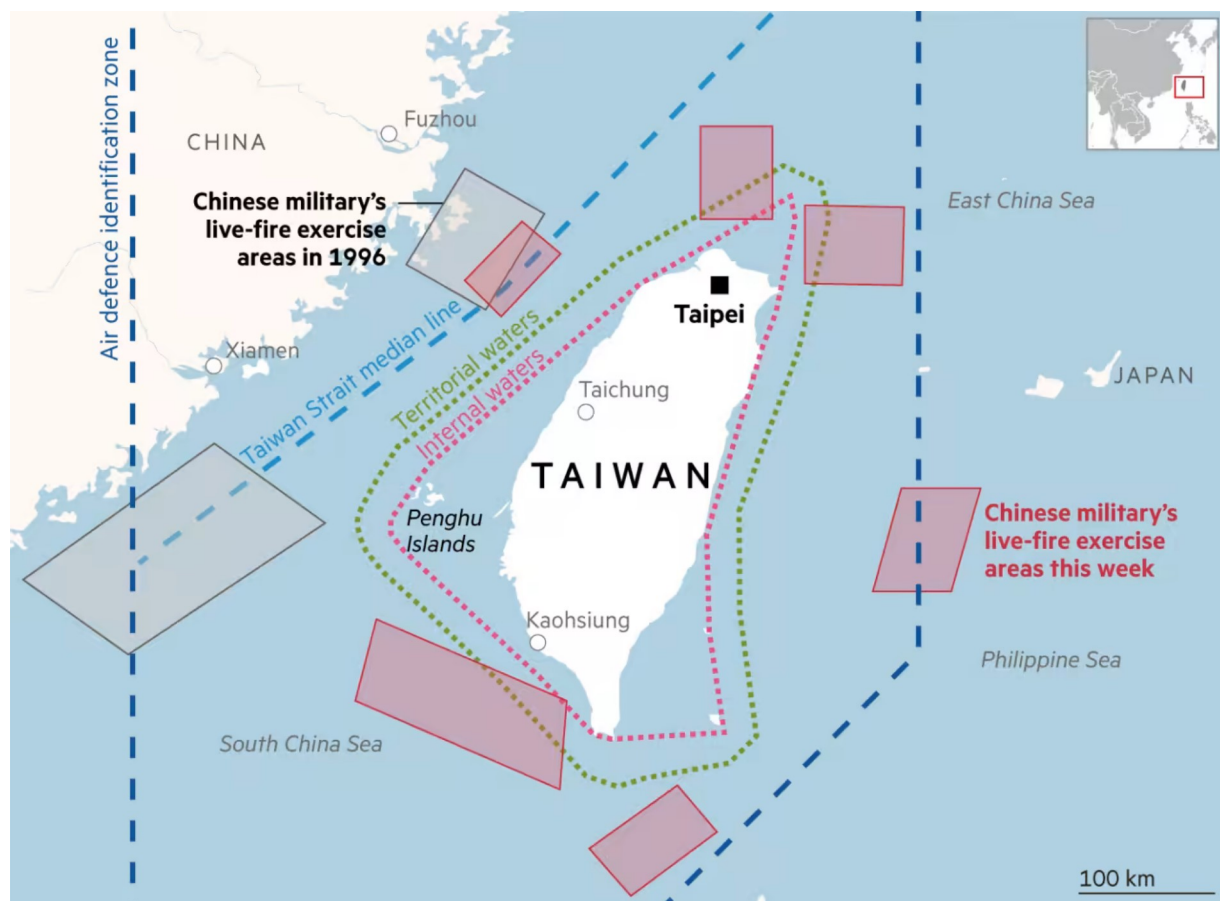
Pelosi became the first Speaker of the US House of Representatives to visit Taiwan in

25 years this week as part of a wider Asia trip during which she [pledged “ironclad” support](#) for the country’s democratically elected government.

Beijing, which accused Pelosi of violating its claimed sovereignty over Taiwan, waited for her to depart from the island on Wednesday for South Korea before starting the drills.

Analysts said the delay helped avoid immediate clashes with the US, but the exercises were expected to significantly exceed the scale, intensity and complexity of those held during the last crisis in the Taiwan Strait 26 years ago.

They said the [manoeuvres risked undermining](#) a fragile, decades-long peace between China and Taiwan, which has enjoyed de facto independence since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949, and could trigger conflict between Beijing and the US.



The [People’s Liberation Army](#)’s Eastern Theatre Command said early on Thursday afternoon that its ground forces had conducted long-range fire drills in the Taiwan Strait. “They . . . achieved the expected effect,” it said on Weibo.

It could not be immediately confirmed whether the PLA Dongfeng missiles flew over Taiwan. Some Chinese reports earlier in the week suggested the PLA would fire

missiles over the island.

Separately, Pelosi's visit to the island continued to make diplomatic waves. China cancelled a foreign minister-level bilateral meeting with Japan that was scheduled to take place in Cambodia on Thursday in an apparent protest against a statement released by the Group of Seven countries and EU criticising the PLA exercises.

"Japan is not in a position to comment on Taiwan related issues," said Hua Chunying, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, adding that the statement was "unfairly critical" of Beijing.

In South Korea, President Yoon Suk-yeol [declined to meet Pelosi](#) during the Seoul leg of her Asian tour in what critics said was a snub aimed at placating Beijing.

US reaction to the exercises has so far been muted. "USS Ronald Reagan and her strike group are under way in the Philippine Sea continuing normal, scheduled operations as part of her routine patrol in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific," the US Navy's Seventh Fleet said.

Two other US warships have been seen south of Japan and east of Taiwan.

Disruption to commercial shipping is so far unclear. According to the ship tracking website MarineTraffic, traffic in the areas the PLA has declared off-limits was thinner than usual, although some fishing and cargo vessels were passing through.

Beijing denounced Pelosi's visit in a [barrage of propaganda](#) as a provocation and singled out some politicians from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive party as targets for future "punishment".

On state television, a PLA analyst said the drills would "trap Taiwan independence elements inside the island".

Taiwan's government protested against China's military manoeuvres and said the country was fully prepared to face the threat.

"All units are operating normally in their regular training areas, closely monitoring the situation of the enemy in the Taiwan Strait," Taiwan's defence ministry said.

A Taiwanese cabinet spokesperson said a barrage of cyber attacks since Wednesday had briefly brought down the websites of the presidential office and the foreign and defence ministries.

But he added they had not caused lasting damage.

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Additional reporting by Maiqi Ding in Beijing, Christian Davies and Song Jung-a in Seoul and Kana Inagaki in Tokyo

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