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## Taiwan

### Nancy Pelosi's visit lends urgency to Taiwan war games

China has stepped up military activity, stoking fears of a once 'unthinkable' conflict



Taiwanese soldiers participate in the Han Kuang military exercise on Wednesday © Ritchie B Tongo/EPA/Shutterstock

**Kathrin Hille** in Taipei YESTERDAY

Taiwan's armed forces are practising fighting off a Chinese invasion in live-fire drills this week that have taken on unprecedented relevance after Beijing threatened a military response to a planned visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

The annual Han Kuang manoeuvres have entered their most intensive phase just as Joe Biden and Xi Jinping are [set to talk on the phone](#) on Thursday. The US and Chinese presidents are expected to discuss mounting tensions over Taiwan, which Beijing claims as part of its territory.

While the military exercises are aimed at identifying weaknesses in Taiwan's military preparedness, the Han Kuang drills typically culminate in a scripted display designed to reassure the Taiwanese public and the US government of the armed forces' strength. But this week, the [furore over Pelosi's visit](#) has meant the exercises have been conducted in a particularly charged atmosphere.

"The manoeuvres are more relevant now because we hear about Chinese warplanes circling [Taiwan](#) and China making threats all the time," said Weng Yueh-sheng, a reservist in Bali, a town near the capital Taipei.

Soldiers trained on one of the few beaches suited to an amphibious assault on the mountainous and urbanised island on Wednesday. They also practised protecting Taipei Port, the country's third-largest, against seizure, which would allow the

[Chinese military](#) to bring in troops on ships.

“We are facing reality now,” Weng said. “The things our soldiers are exercising are the things that would happen in a war with China, and such a war is not so unthinkable anymore.”

Drills on Wednesday included simulating counter-attacks against Chinese forces landing around the mouth of the Tamsui river, a natural corridor into the Taipei basin that an invading force trying to take the capital would have to pass through.

As part of its preparations to defend the corridor, Taiwan's military is practising trench warfare on the Tamsui riverbank. “This technique is known since the first world war, but they are experimenting if it suits our needs,” said Sheu Jyh-shyang, an assistant research fellow at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research, a think-tank backed by the defence ministry.

Sheu said that it was unlikely that any changes had been made to the manoeuvres in response to tensions because the drills had been planned far in advance, but the messaging around the exercises was more targeted.

“They are emphasising the [role of the reserve force](#) more and more because that is something the US cares about most,” he said.

The exercises also focused on the east coast, which was traditionally viewed as a fallback area for the military in the event of a Chinese attack. But the area is becoming more vulnerable as China steps up air and naval posturing.

On Monday, the People's Liberation Army flew a reconnaissance and attack drone along Taiwan's east coast, according to the joint staff of the Japanese military, an unprecedented move that analysts said was part of Beijing's attempts to warn Washington against Pelosi's visit.

President Tsai Ing-wen on Tuesday signalled Taiwan's resolve to defend itself with a rare visit to a warship in the east coast port of Suao.

For the first time, the air force released photos of soldiers loading missiles on to fighters inside Chiashan, an east coast air base with a warren of tunnels dug deep into the mountains, where the country plans to shelter fighters from Chinese attacks.

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