

Nato

Nato holds first dedicated talks on China threat to Taiwan

Transatlantic security body discussed how to make Beijing aware of consequences of any military action



Taiwan's president Tsai Ing-wen holds an anti-tank weapon while visiting a military base on the island. The US is keen for its Nato allies to take a tougher stand on China's increasingly assertive military posture © Taiwan's Presidential Office/AFP

Henry Foy in Bucharest and **Demetri Sevastopulo** in Washington 8 HOURS AGO

Nato members held their first dedicated debate on Taiwan in September, as the US encourages other members of the transatlantic security alliance to pay more attention to the rising threat of China to the island.

The talks were held by the North Atlantic Council, the alliance's main political decision-making body, according to several people familiar with the matter. Nato members had discussed [Taiwan](#) in previous NAC meetings as China ratcheted up pressure on the country, over which it claims sovereignty, but the September session was the first dedicated debate.

The discussions came three months after Nato released a strategy that for the first time described China as a threat to the 30-member alliance and one month after Beijing launched [large-scale military exercises](#) in response to a visit by Nancy Pelosi to Taipei — the first by a US House Speaker in 25 years.

“It is notable and significant that, for the first time, the alliance is conducting discussions about the status of Taiwan, its democratic government and its critical role in the manufacture of microchips globally,” said James Stavridis, a retired US admiral and former Nato supreme allied commander.

One of the people familiar with the September debate said [Nato](#) ambassadors discussed the latest intelligence about the threat to Taiwan and the impact that any conflict there would have on the members.

“We did not talk about what Nato’s role would be in the event of any military action but discussed the variety of impacts that it could have on Euro-Atlantic security and wider implications for the alliance,” the person added.

They also discussed how Nato should make Beijing aware of the potential ramifications of any military action — a debate that has gained significance following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine amid questions about whether the west was tough enough in its warnings to Moscow.

The US has been urging allies, particularly in Europe, to focus more on the threat to Taiwan, as concerns mount that Chinese president Xi Jinping may order the use of force against the island.

Senior US military officers and officials have floated several possible timelines for military action, with some eager to increase the sense of urgency to ensure Washington and its allies are prepared.

As part of US efforts, the state department recently shared an economic analysis with allies that said a Chinese blockade of Taiwan would cost the global economy \$2.5tn per year.

“If there is an issue that we are discussing inside out and upside down, it’s Taiwan and possible scenarios and essentially a sense of what would happen,” said a senior EU official.

Nato foreign ministers said they would discuss the “challenge” from China on Wednesday as part of meetings in Bucharest, Romania.

The US, citing its support for Ukraine and Europe this year, is pressing European allies to hew closer to its tougher stance on Beijing. While the Nato strategy document released in June mentioned China, it did not refer to Taiwan.

“People are moving at different paces on this, inevitably in an alliance of 30,” said one western official. “[But] we have made a lot of progress on China . . . We are moving from assessing the problems to addressing them.”

In a phone interview from Bucharest where she is attending the Nato meetings, Canadian foreign minister Mélanie Joly said there had been more discussion on

Taiwan among G7 members, though China was watching closely how the Nato alliance was responding to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

“I think the unity of the alliance is our strength, and we need to make sure that we reinforce it,” Joly said.

Canada last week unveiled its [strategy for the Indo-Pacific](#), which described China as “an increasingly disruptive global power”.

One person familiar with discussions between the US and its Nato allies about Taiwan said it was important not to overestimate what Nato would do in a conflict.

“The most important implication for Nato of a potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait is the likely need for European militaries to backfill US military assets in the north Atlantic in the event that the US has to redeploy some assets to the Indo-Pacific. Nato is unlikely to get involved directly into a Taiwan crisis or war,” the person said.

While the US presses allies, it is pleased that Europe is starting to take the issue more seriously, even if some nations are reluctant to take a tougher stand given their trade with China or unwillingness to divert attention from Ukraine.

The “fundamental principle” that Nato had shown in relation to the Ukraine war and to the challenges posed by China was that “we are doing it together, we’re doing it united”, Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, said on Tuesday. “That is Nato’s greatest strength.”

Nato spokesperson Oana Lungescu said that the alliance did not comment on classified discussions, but added: “Nato allies regularly address a range of security issues, including the situation in and around east Asia.”

“The policy of Nato allies on Taiwan has not changed. The Nato secretary-general has made clear that there is no justification for China to use aggressive rhetoric or to make threats against Taiwan,” she said. “We are concerned by China’s coercion and intimidation in the region. A conflict in Taiwan is in nobody’s interest.”

The White House declined to comment.

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