

Chinese military

China's show of force in massive military exercises alarms Taiwan

Taipei wants other democracies to push back harder against Beijing



A fighter jet takes off from the Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning east of Taiwan during military drills on Monday © People's Liberation Army/AFP/Getty Images

Kathrin Hille in Taipei YESTERDAY

China's show of force around Taiwan in a day of massive military exercises has fuelled alarm in Taipei, which wants other democracies to push back harder against Beijing.

The fact that the People's Liberation Army had 153 aircraft and 36 naval and coastguard ships around Taiwan on Monday, [setting single-day records](#), showed "just how serious the threat to Taiwan was on that day and how big the pressure was," a senior national security official told reporters on Wednesday.

"We want to remind the international community that peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is related to global peace and prosperity," he said. "We also hope that the international community can... condemn China for failing to announce its exercises ahead of time in violation of international law and for damaging regional peace and stability by violating the most basic spirit of the UN charter which forbids the threat or use of force to resolve disputes."

The official added that while [Taiwan](#) would do its part to strengthen its defences, like-minded partners needed to help shore up deterrence against Chinese military aggression. Monday's drills highlighted the importance of regular operations by the US and other militaries to assert freedom of navigation against Chinese attempts to impose control over international waters and airspace, he said.

The plea reflects deepening concern that [China's](#) frequent use and rapid scale-up of military and other coercive moves around Taiwan is bringing it close to being able to launch an attack with little or no warning. China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and threatens to annex the country by force if Taipei refuses to submit under its control indefinitely.

Taiwan's defence minister [warned last month](#) that Beijing's growing operations in surrounding airspace and waters was making it harder to discern when it might be shifting from exercise to war. In briefings to foreign diplomats and reporters, Taiwanese national security officials on Wednesday said Monday's drills had underscored that risk.

Taipei has long warned of the dangers of Chinese greyzone activity — moves below the threshold of war — close to its borders. The PLA's air manoeuvres have ballooned from under 20 incursions into Taiwan's self-declared buffer zone in 2019 to 2,459 this year. Since those sorties are not illegal because they stay outside Taiwan's sovereign airspace, Taiwan and the US have struggled to counter them.

Under the Taiwan Relations Act, Washington considers any effort to determine Taiwan's future by non-peaceful means as an issue of grave concern to the US. The law commits Washington to providing Taiwan with defensive weapons and to maintaining US capacity to resist coercion that would jeopardise Taiwan's security.

US President Joe Biden has repeatedly said the US would come to Taiwan's help if China attacked. But his administration has narrowed the scope of arms sales to munitions and weapons crucial for fighting an invasion, a policy Taiwanese officials said was weakening the country's ability to push

back against the PLA's creeping pressure campaign.

Taiwanese military and national security officials believe that Monday's drills made that problem much worse. "Although we still believe that war is not imminent and not inevitable, their capacity to switch from exercises to war is really strengthening," the senior official said.

Twenty-five of the 36 Chinese naval and coastguard vessels involved in Monday's manoeuvres sailed right up to 24 nautical miles off Taiwan's coast, a line Taipei views as vital to guarding against attacks in sovereign waters.

The threat was exacerbated by Beijing's clear announcement that it was practising for a blockade of Taiwan's key ports and military bases. In that sense, the exercises were a step up even from the unprecedented manoeuvres Beijing launched in August 2022 to "punish" Taipei for hosting then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Taiwanese officials said.

It was a "misconception" to view Monday's drills as limited because they lasted only one day or to think that they did not involve live-fire components, the senior official said. "Although they did not launch missiles in Taiwan's direction this time, they did exercise their missile operations, and they shot two missiles in an inland direction," he added.

Two western officials said their analysis did not indicate a link between Chinese missile launches and the Taiwan drill. But other foreign officials said the Taiwanese government mentioned the live-fire activity in its briefing on the exercise and said Taiwan assumed a link because they happened simultaneously.

China listed its Rocket Force, the PLA arm in charge of missile operations, as part of the forces participating in the drill but did not announce any missile launch.

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