



CHINA July 2019

China ramps up exercises off the coast of Taiwan

China held military exercises involving army, navy, air force, the rocket force, and the strategic support forces off the coast of Taiwan amid growing tensions between Beijing and Washington over a \$2,2 billion US arms sale to Taiwan. The exercises took place while Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen was in the United States as part of a tour that included visits in the Caribbean aimed to shore up support among the island's allies in that region.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly called for the reunification of Taiwan, even refusing to rule out the use of force in a major speech last January. In the past year, China has ramped up its military exercises around the island holding live fire drills in the Taiwan Strait while Chinese fighter jets crossed the maritime border separating the island from the mainland in a rare incursion last April 2019

Taiwan has been self-ruled since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949, which saw the Communist Party take control of the mainland and the Nationalist government forced to flee to the island. But Beijing still views the island as their territory and has worked consistently for decades to try to threaten or cajole it into reuniting with the mainland. However, Taiwan's President has taken an increasingly strident anti-China stance ahead of the national election in January 2020 where she will seek re-election.

Nevertheless, at political level Beijing sought to minimise the significance of the manoeuvres by describing them as routine drills in order to avoid tensions in the trade talks that should be resumed and should reduce or eliminate some tariffs, while avoiding further commercial tensions.

On the other hand, the mechanised component of the 72nd Group Army (i.e. 1st Amphibious Mechanized Infantry Division, based at Hangzhou) is an elite class A unit, untouched by any restructuration of the People's Liberation Army. The exercise itself appears to cover all the islands and reefs off the coast of Zhejiang and Fujian and would be held close to the Taiwan Strait and Japan's Naha airbase on Okinawa.

Anyhow the new Chinese defence white paper restates Beijing's longstanding position: China will not renounce the use of force as an option for reunification with Taiwan and official outlets underlined this political tenet.

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