

FEATURE

China Appears to Warn Japan, U.S. with Drills Around Taiwan



*Eastern Theatre Command/Handout via Reuters
A ship fires a weapon during drills east of Taiwan, in this screenshot from a video released by the Eastern Theatre Command of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) on December 29, 2025.*

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Japan and the United States were on alert as the Chinese military began conducting exercises around Taiwan on Monday, the first such drills since April. China has hinted that the drills are meant to counter not only Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's administration, which it views as an enemy, but also the United States and Japan, which it expects may interfere in a Taiwan contingency.

Responding to 'external interference'

Multiple propaganda posters for the exercise that were released on Monday by the Eastern Theater Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) featured imagery of military aircraft and naval vessels being blocked from approaching Taiwan's main island from the east.

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"It is a stern warning against 'Taiwan Independence' separatist forces and external

interference,” said a spokesperson for the PLA Eastern Theater Command, clad in camouflage, in a social media post.

It was the fourth time for China to announce military drills encircling Taiwan since President Lai Ching-te took office in May last year. While China has previously criticized Lai as a “separatist,” it now also appears to be targeting “external interference.”

Although China has not named specific countries, it seems to be referring to Japan and the United States. On Dec. 17, the Trump administration approved \$11.1 billion in arms sales to Taiwan, the largest ever U.S. weapons package for the island. Meanwhile, Japan’s relationship with China has rapidly deteriorated after Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in the Diet that a Taiwan contingency could constitute a “survival-threatening situation” for Japan.

“Anyone who crosses the line or makes provocations on the [Taiwan] question will be met with China’s firm response,” a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on Monday.

Meng Xiangqing, a professor at the National Defense University, told China Central Television on Monday that the current drills are clearly aimed at preventing interference by external forces. He was apparently referring to “anti-access and area denial,” China’s strategy for deterring and repelling the United States in a Taiwan contingency.

Announcing the drills

China announced it was sending military units for major drills involving live-fire in five maritime and airspace zones around Taiwan’s main island and advised vessels and aircraft not to enter the designated areas.

Similar measures were taken when China held military drills after then U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in August 2022. During these drills, China fired ballistic missiles, some of which landed in Japan’s exclusive economic zone south of Yonaguni Island in Okinawa Prefecture.

But no notification was given for three other military drills around Taiwan in 2024 and 2025. A Japanese security expert suggested that China may test-launch ballistic missiles in the latest exercises.

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Meanwhile, Taiwan’s Presidential Office condemned the actions in a statement by its spokesperson, saying they severely damage security and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific region.

The statement also said China has continued to harass and intimidate around Japan and the Philippines over the past few months, raising tensions in the region. Taiwan will work closely with countries in the region and ensure a rules-based international order, the statement added.

On Monday, Taiwan’s National Defense Ministry released photos of Chinese fighter aircraft and naval vessels that are believed to be deployed around Taiwan. Taiwan seems to want to show off its surveillance capabilities, as well as its ability to trace the movements of the Chinese military.

Taiwan also released a short video on social media titled, “Resilient Taiwan. Steadfast Defense.” It shows Taiwan’s forces training and calling on the public to unite.

Japan concerned about intimidation

With China’s latest drills around Taiwan, Japan is increasingly concerned that China might try to intimidate it, especially after Takaichi’s remark. The government plans to respond calmly so as not to exacerbate the situation.

“We will be as vigilant as we can and keep a close watch on the situation by cooperating with our allies and like-minded countries,” said a senior Defense Ministry official on Monday.

Since China may intentionally fire missiles into Japanese coastal waters, the Self-Defense Forces are ready to gather information and conduct surveillance around Taiwan using destroyers and patrol planes.

The latest drills are being conducted extremely close to Taiwan's main island, increasing the risk of an accidental collision between patrolling Taiwanese forces and Chinese forces.

“As can be seen in China's directing of radar at SDF aircraft, the Chinese military is taking increasingly radical actions,” said Itsunori Onodera, chairperson of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's Research Commission on Security. “There is concern that [China] will escalate suddenly into military action.”

Onodera called on the Japanese government to be prepared to act if a conflict does break out between China and Taiwan.