

Taiwan mounts massive anti-China war games

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Taiwan's huge annual Han Kuang military exercises, which concluded last week, doubled in length from five to ten days and were far more extensive in scope. The war games involved not only live-fire exercises that included newly-arrived US weaponry. They also were associated with civilian "urban resilience" drills in many cities and counties. The army, navy and air force were boosted by the mobilisation of 22,000 reservists—up from 14,500 last year.

The shift in focus and extent reflected demands from Washington to boost military spending and adopt a "porcupine" strategy that would inflict maximum damage and casualties in the event of a supposed Chinese invasion. Drawing on the experiences of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the US has insisted that Taiwan purchase drones, High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and other weaponry designed to transform the island into a deadly trap for Chinese forces.

The Trump administration is already waging an economic war against China, which it regards as the chief threat to its global hegemony, and is preparing for military conflict against Beijing. In a warmongering speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore last month, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth denounced "aggression by Communist China" and demanded that US allies in Asia boost military spending and prepare for an "imminent" war with China over Taiwan.

In reality, just as it actively provoked Russia into invading Ukraine, the US under both Biden and Trump has sought to goad China into using its military to take over Taiwan. Formally, the US still abides by the "One China" policy—de facto recognising Beijing as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

Washington has been systemically undermining that policy by dispensing with associated diplomatic

protocols, arming Taiwan with offensive weapons and stationing US troops on the island. It knows full well that China has long warned that it would answer with force any attempt by Taipei to declare formal independence.

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te, from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), is known for his hardline view that Taiwan is an independent country. In the lead-up to the Han Kuang war games, he provocatively delivered a series of 10 speeches across the island to justify his claim.

In office for just over a year, Lai has insisted on boosting military spending. Speaking on the final day of the military exercises, he declared that "there is no other choice but to be prepared." He added: "We must actively and comprehensively promote whole-of-society defence resilience, so that everyone understands that national defence is everyone's responsibility."

Taiwan's defence ministry described the war games as designed to respond to a potential 2027 Chinese invasion—an echo of Hegseth's unsubstantiated claim in Singapore last month that Chinese President Xi Jinping was preparing to invade Taiwan by 2027.

Taiwan's military exercises were themselves significant. These were "large-scale, realistic combat drills," as Lai told his audience, with the first of the army's new US-made M1A2 Abrams battle tanks on display. The HIMARS units that began arriving in May were also used during the drills. With a range of about 300 kilometres, the rockets could strike military bases and targets on the Chinese mainland across the Taiwan Strait.

In the past, the exercises were designed to display the military's major weapon systems and offer reassurance that Chinese forces could not invade. This year's drills were based on a scenario in which a Chinese

amphibious landing was successful and involved smaller, more mobile weaponry. Taiwanese troops practised the defence of critical infrastructure and protecting the centre of the capital Taipei. The unstated aim was to bog Chinese troops down in a land war, at least for long enough for the US to respond.

More significant, however, was the scope and compulsory nature of the civilian exercises. These included air raid drills, which in one case involved supermarket shoppers being herded into a basement car park and the transformation of a school hall into a makeshift wartime hospital. Some drills involved how to suppress protests if food and other supplies run short. An official told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that taxi drivers are being trained to become a volunteer wartime police force.

The *Taiwan Times* reported on an air raid drill in which all vehicles were required to stop and pedestrians were ordered to seek shelter and follow directions from officials. Passengers were not allowed to exit rail stations. Those who did not comply faced possible fines of \$NT30,000-150,000 (about \$US1,000-5,000).

This resort to large fines points to significant opposition to the scare campaign and attempts to whip up Taiwanese patriotism. The BBC cited a poll last October by the government-linked Institute for National Defence and Security Research, which found that more than 60 percent of Taiwanese do not believe China will invade in the next five years.

Lai, however, is determined to undermine and suppress any opposition. The *Financial Times* (FT) reported in March that a Chinese resident of Taiwan was being expelled for advocating on social media for its annexation by Beijing. According to Taiwan's intelligence agency, 64 people were prosecuted last year on charges related to spying for China—three times the figure of three years ago.

The FT article highlighted Lai's announcement that he planned to reinstitute military courts, supposedly to counter Chinese infiltration of the armed forces. It noted that such a measure was likely to be highly controversial given that the Kuomintang (KMT) dictatorship of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had ruled through martial law for nearly 40 years.

Following the overthrow of the nationalist KMT regime in the 1949 Chinese Revolution, Chiang Kai-shek, his military forces and wealthy Chinese retreated

to Taiwan with the assistance of the US military. Until 1979, when the US established diplomatic relations with Beijing, it backed the KMT's claim to be the legitimate government in exile of all China. From 1979, Washington ended diplomatic ties, as well as its military alliance, with Taipei and withdrew all US troops.

The DPP rose to prominence amid mass opposition to the KMT regime in the late 1980s which resulted in the first direct presidential election in 1996. It won the presidency for the first time in 2000. While the DPP has based itself on Taiwanese nationalism, the KMT has sought a rapprochement with its former enemy, the Chinese Communist Party, and advocated closer ties with China amid the capitalist restoration in China and the opening up of lucrative investment opportunities.

Currently, the KMT and its allies hold a majority in the Legislative Yuan or parliament and are thus able to block Lai's legislation. In response, Lai and the DPP are waging an unprecedented recall campaign against 31 KMT lawmakers. If successful in ousting them in fresh elections, this would end KMT control of the Yuan. At a pro-recall rally last weekend, campaigners openly voiced their intent to remove "pro-China" lawmakers.

The whipping up of anti-China xenophobia to establish DPP parliamentary control is a warning that new anti-democratic measures are being prepared to crack down on opposition to the preparations for war. This goes hand-in-hand with the recent war games. Washington plans to transform Taiwan into an Asian Ukraine as a means of triggering a conflict, destabilising China and subordinating it to the economic and strategic interests of US imperialism.



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