
CHINA AGAIN FLIES BOMBERS AROUND TAIWAN

11.05.2018

The StraitsTimes (11 May 2018)

Bombers and fighter jets from China's air force conducted encirclement drills around Taiwan on Friday (May 11), the latest round of increasingly frequent military manoeuvres near the self-ruled island that Taipei has denounced as intimidation.

China claims Taiwan as its sacred territory, and its hostility towards the island has grown since the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen from the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party.

In the past year, Beijing has stepped up such military exercises, designed to send a message to Taiwan that it will thwart what it sees as any moves toward independence, even as Tsai has pledged to maintain the status quo and keep the peace.

The People's Liberation Army Air Force said in a statement on its official microblog that H-6K bombers and surveillance aircraft flew in opposite directions around Taiwan, displaying "a new upgrade in combat capabilities".

It said it was the first time Su-35 fighter jets had flown with the bombers through the Bashi Channel, which separates Taiwan from the Philippines.

China is in the midst of an ambitious programme to modernise its armed forces, developing stealth fighters, aircraft carriers and advanced missiles as it strives to acquire a world-class military by the middle of the century.

That goal, coupled with an increasingly assertive stance in the disputed South China Sea waterway and around Taiwan, has rattled nerves around the region and in Washington.

Taiwan is well equipped with mostly US-made weaponry, but has been pushing for Washington to sell it more advanced equipment, including new fighter jets, to help it better deter its giant neighbour.

Military experts say the balance of power between Taiwan and China has now shifted decisively in favour of China, which could probably overwhelm the island unless US forces came quickly to its aid.

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