

Government keeps mum after alleged missile test

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Taiwan has carried out a major missile exercise less than a fortnight after China showed off advanced ballistic weaponry in a massive National Day parade in Beijing, local Chinese-language newspapers reported yesterday. The Presidential Office, however, declined to confirm or deny the reports.

Missiles capable of striking major Chinese cities were launched on Tuesday from the tightly guarded Jioupeng (九棚) base in Pingtung County, both the pro-opposition Liberty Times (the Taipei Times' sister paper) and the pro-government United Daily News reported.

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), who has been accused of being too friendly with China, was among the observers of the exercise, the papers said, citing a "reliable military source."

Both Presidential Office Spokesman Wang Yu-chi (王郁琦) and the Ministry of National Defense yesterday declined to comment on the reports.

The Apply Daily yesterday quoted anonymous military sources as saying that Ma was "very satisfied" with the missile test.

The missiles tested included the Hsiung-Feng 2E (HF-2E), which has a range of around 600km and has not yet officially entered the military's inventory, the media reports said.

The missile is intended for launch from both land and sea and would be capable of striking airports and missile bases in southeast China, as well as cities such as Shanghai and Hong Kong, military experts say.

In the annual presidential address on Double Ten National Day, Ma said Taiwan would "never ignore the other side's military threat despite significant improvements in cross-strait ties."

China celebrated 60 years of Communist rule on Oct. 1 by parading high-tech weapons, including intercontinental ballistic missiles, through the streets of Beijing.

Asked for comment yesterday, Wendell Minnick of the Defense News global weekly said: "I am skeptical there was a test of the HF-2E cruise missile. For one, we are only a couple weeks away from the first economic cooperation framework agreement [ECFA] meeting with China and I do not believe Ma would do anything to upset that meeting."

"Second, [Taiwan's] budget for Hsiung-Feng 2E was cut last year," Minnick said. "Third, if there was a missile test, it was for the Hsiung-Feng 3 anti-ship missile or the Tien Kung 3 air defense missile, but that is a big maybe."

Developed under extreme secrecy at the Chungshan Institute of Science and Technology in Taiwan, the Hsiung-Feng 2E missile program has run into difficulties over the years. Defense News reported in October 2007 that the US State Department had been pressuring Taipei to cancel the program because of its offensive nature.

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The US defense establishment is also reported to have refused to provide Taiwan with terrain--mapping data necessary for the missile's guidance system, although sources say such systems could have been obtained from a third party.

While the Taiwanese government has pledged to only develop and acquire defensive weapons, pressure mounted under former president Chen Shui-bian's (陳水扁) administration to develop a deterrent capability.

Source: [Taipei Times 2009/10/15](#)