

Military ready for moves by 'Liaoning'

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China's aircraft carrier Liaoning, with accompanying vessels, conducts a drill in the South China Sea in an undated photograph taken last month.

Photo: Reuters

The Taiwanese military is prepared for possible maneuvers by the China's aircraft carrier group in the Taiwan Strait, the Ministry of National Defense (MND) said yesterday.

The group — composed of the Liaoning aircraft carrier and five escort vessels — is conducting exercises in the South China Sea, and might sail along the Taiwan Strait's median line on its return to its home base in the northeastern Chinese port city of Qingdao.

The ministry has an uninterrupted communication channel with President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) in case the carrier group engages in maneuvers during the president's nine-day visit to the nation's Central American allies, which is to begin on Saturday, ministry spokesman Major General Chen Chung-chi (陳中奇) said.

The armed forces have conducted drills during Han Kuang military exercises to simulate possible aircraft carrier maneuvers in the Strait, he added.

"We have [missiles] ready, but we cannot reveal the details," Chen said in response to media reports that hundreds of missiles have been deployed on the west coast to prepare for the carrier's passage.

Taiwan will seek alliances with other nations, military or otherwise, to ensure regional security

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and economic stability, Chen said about reports of a cooperation agreement between Taiwan, the US and Japan, which would allow the nations' military aircraft to be identified as "friendly" on one another's radar systems.

The armed forces would respond to Chinese military action in accordance with the ministry's defense response procedures, should carrier-borne aircraft, such as Shenyang J-15 fighter aircraft, intrude into Taiwan's airspace, Chen said.

The ministry has experience in monitoring the carrier's activities and initiating appropriate responses, as the Liaoning cruised through the Taiwan Strait to conduct cross-sea training in 2014, Joint Intelligence Center Director Major General Wang Shao-hua (王少華) said.

"[The military] has the ability to detect all activities of the carrier group," Wang said.

The group sailed through waters east of Taiwan late last month — the first time it crossed the first island chain — and should the Liaoning cruise along the median line of the Taiwan Strait on its return voyage, it would be the first time that it had done so with aircraft onboard.

"The combat capabilities of the Liaoning are developing and further observations are needed to determine if it can function on par with its US counterparts," Wang said.

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