

## Han Kuang exercises to test F-35s for first time

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Ministry of National Defense spokesman Major General Chen Chung-chi speaks at a news conference at the ministry in Taipei yesterday about this year's Han Kuang military exercises.

**Photo: Tu Chu-min, Taipei Times**

The annual Han Kuang exercises are to begin next month with live-fire, anti-landing exercises in outlying Penghu County, while the military is to simulate for the first time the combat capability of US-made F-35 jets in a cross-strait conflict scenario.

Like previous Han Kuang exercises, this year's consist of two parts — a computer simulation of an attack by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), followed by nationwide field exercises to test the results of the simulation, the Ministry of National Defense said yesterday.

The first-stage simulation is to be conducted from May 1 to May 5 to simulate a PLA attack on Taiwan to test the military's capabilities in countering landing operations and a naval blockade, as well as the ability to collect intelligence and preserve key military facilities and weaponry.

"The simulation will be conducted factoring in China's military buildup, with three aircraft carriers, stealth fighter jets and new missiles to enter service by 2025," said Lieutenant General Chiang Chen-chung (蔣陳忠), director of the ministry's Office for Operations and Planning.

"We will test two defense strategies. The first is conditioned on the acquisition of F-35 jets and the second without F-35s," Chiang said.

Lockheed Martin F-35s are a desired procurement of the military, as their short takeoff and

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vertical landing capabilities, as well as their advanced stealth features, would allow the air force to retain combat capacity should air bases be destroyed.

It is to be the first time that F-35s are a factor in the exercises.

“In case we do not acquire F-35s, we are in the process of upgrading F-16s, Mirage 2000s and Indigenous Defense Fighters (IDF), as well as developing new weapons. The simulation will be based on realistic analysis, instead of fictitious war scenarios,” Chiang said.

The second-stage field exercises are to be held from May 22 to May 26, with a large-scale, live-fire drill to be conducted in Penghu.

The Marine Corps are to initiate a landing operation to simulate a PLA attack and test defensive troops' ability to protect critical facilities and strategic positions. The armed forces will then launch a joint operation to retake the Penghu archipelago.

Units and weapons to be engaged during the field exercises include Cheng Kung-class frigates, Chinchiang-class corvettes, Tuo Jiang-class corvettes, F-16 jets, IDF jets, AH-64E Apaches, AH-1H Super Cobras, RT2000 Artillery Multiple Launch Rocket systems, M60A3 tanks and light weapons.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) is expected to supervise the exercises, ministry spokesman Major General Chen Chung-chi (陳重奇) said.

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