

No military exercise held on Saturday

Written by Taipei Times

Monday, 12 December 2016 07:56 -



Minister of National Defense Feng Shih-kuan attends a meeting at the Legislative Yuan in Taipei on Nov. 17.

Photo: CNA

The Ministry of National Defense yesterday denied that it launched a multi-branch exercise on Saturday in response to Chinese military aircraft circling the international airspace around Taiwan.

The Chinese-language *Apple Daily* yesterday reported that the ministry initiated the Lien Hsiang exercise by the army, navy and air force that saw the deployment of F-16 jets, Indigenous Defense Fighter jets, Keelung-class destroyers, Patriot surface-to-air missile batteries and Sky Bow missile defense units.

The Chinese aircraft reportedly flew along Taiwan's territorial airspace before encountering Japanese F-15 planes, which launched decoy flares at the Chinese aircraft over the Miyako Strait.

The newspaper said that the Chinese airplanes left the area after Taiwan's missile defense system locked onto them.

However, ministry spokesman Major General Chen Chung-chi (陳重志) rejected claims that the Lien Hsiang exercise was held on Saturday.

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Different branches of the armed forces were activated according to the military's emergency defense response procedure, Chen said, but he declined to identify which units were mobilized and what response measures were taken.

"I cannot reveal how many aircraft, vessels and ground forces were deployed because it is a matter of national security," he said, adding that the "necessary forces were employed" without being provocative or escalating potential conflicts.

"As it conducts flight training, China is collecting intelligence about our military capacity, secrets we cannot afford to give away," he said.

The Chinese aircraft did not intrude into the nation's airspace, although they came close to the defense zone, Chen said, but he denied claims that the missile defense system locked onto the Chinese airplanes.

A ministry source said that the military would not activate the missile lock, because that would allow Chinese surveillance aircraft to collect sensitive information.

However, should Chinese aircraft fly into Taiwan's air defense zone, the missile system could lock onto them, the source said.

Minister of National Defense Feng Shih-kuan (馮世寬) oversaw Saturday's operations from the Heng Shan Military Command Center in Taipei, the ministry said.

Several Chinese aircraft, reportedly Su-30 fighter jets, two Xian H-6K bombers, a Tupolev Tu-154 surveillance aircraft and a Shaanxi Y-8 tactical transport aircraft, passed over the Miyako Strait near Japan's Ryukyu Islands and circled the international airspace surrounding Taiwan.

The Chinese exercise was the second one in as many weeks.

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While the Chinese military said the flight was a routine offshore training exercise, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force scrambled some of its F-15 jets.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2016/12/12](#)