

B-52s sent PRC message: expert

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The flight path of two US Air Force B-52s is pictured in an image from the Aircraft Spots Twitter account. It shows the two aircraft entering Taiwan's flight information region in the East China Sea on Wednesday.

Photo: screen grab from Twitter

Ministry of National Defense officials yesterday neither confirmed nor denied that two US Air Force B-52s entered the nation's flight information region (FIR) on Wednesday on a mission from their base in Guam, with experts saying it might have been a US response to flights around Taiwan and its surrounding islands by Chinese H-6 bombers.

The B-52s flew from Andersen Air Force Base, transited through the East China Sea to Taiwan's FIR over its territories to the east, then passed over Okinawa on their return to base, according to an Aircraft Spots tweet.

It was the first time this year that US Air Force B-52s had entered Taiwan's FIR following multiple missions through the South China Sea and East China Sea from air bases in Guam and Okinawa, Japan, defense experts said.

US military officials have previously said that these are "routine training" exercises and that US aircraft in the region were on "continuous bomber presence missions."

The ministry neither confirmed nor denied the passage of the B-52s in a statement released yesterday, but added that it has all activities and movements within the nation's airspace and waters under surveillance.

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There are six B-52s based at Andersen Air Force Base, as well as B-1 Lancer heavy bombers and B-2 Spirit Stealth Bombers, US military reports said.

They were redeployed last year as part of the US Indo-Pacific Command's strategic operations.

The redeployment of the US bomber fleet to the Asia-Pacific region is to reassure US allies in the face of a potential hostile attack by China or North Korea, defense experts said.

The National Interest magazine earlier this week published an article by defense editor David Axe titled "The Air Force Wants to Use B-52 Bombers to Protect Taiwan from Invasion."

The B-52H "Stratofortress" has a range of more than 14,000km, is capable of carrying cruise and nuclear missiles, and can reach Taiwan in four hours.

The mission was a response to flights around Taiwan and through the Miyako Strait by the People's Liberation Army Air Force's Xian H-6s, defense expert Chen Wei-hao (陳偉豪) said.

The B-52s deliberately activated their automatic dependent surveillance–broadcast system to announce their presence and send a strong message to China, Chen added.

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