

Chinese warplanes approach Taiwan at night

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A handout photo made available by the Ministry of National Defense shows a Chinese H-6 bomber, bottom, flying over the Bashi Channel near Taiwan, as a Taiwanese F-16, top, approaches, before the Chinese aircraft returned to its base via the Miyako Strait on Feb. 10.

Photo: EPA-EFE

The air force on Monday scrambled to warn off approaching Chinese jets, the first time they were spotted near Taiwan's air space at night, the Ministry of National Defense said.

Taiwan has repeatedly said that China has stepped up its drills near the nation when it should be focusing its efforts on combating the spread of COVID-19.

An unspecified number of Chinese J-11 fighters and KJ-500 airborne early warning and control aircraft flew into the waters southwest of Taiwan for nighttime exercises, the ministry said late on Monday.

They came close to Taiwan's air defense identification zone at about 7pm, ministry spokesman Major General Shih Shun-wen (石純文) said.

"After our air reconnaissance and patrol aircraft responded appropriately, and broadcast [an order] to drive them away, the [Chinese] communist aircraft flew away from our air defense identification zone," he said.

The maneuvers were part of the Chinese squadron's nighttime training mission, the ministry said.

The military keeps close watch on the Taiwan Strait and its environs to ensure the nation's security, and people have no cause for alarm, it said.

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The last time that the Chinese military conducted a similar mission near Taiwan's airspace was on Feb. 28, when an unspecified number of Chinese H-6 bombers flew over the waters southwest of Taiwan, according to ministry records.

There was no immediate comment from China's military on the latest drills.

China has been flying what it calls "island encirclement" drills on and off since 2016 when President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) first took office.

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened already poor relations between Taiwan and China, with the two sides accusing each other of spreading fake news, and Taiwan particularly angered by Beijing blocking its access to the WHO.

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