

Seventh Chinese jet spotted this month

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A Chinese fighter jet briefly entered the nation's airspace at about noon yesterday, the Republic of China (ROC) Air Force said in a news release.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force Chengdu J-10 fighter was detected near the southwestern region of Taiwan's airspace, and was immediately intercepted and escorted away following radio warnings, it said.

It was the seventh time this month that Chinese military aircraft have been spotted flying near Taiwan, following similar incidents on June 9 and 12, as well as once every day from Tuesday to Friday last week, the Ministry of National Defense said.

The Chengdu J-10 might be part of China's deployment in the South China Sea or part of a contingent of PLA forces conducting combat training, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Tsai Shih-ying (蔡啟芳) said.

If the latter is true, it could mean that the PLA is a greater threat than initially assumed, which would place more pressure on the nation's defenses, he said.

Tsai, who has been a member of the legislature's Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee since 2016, said that if the jet is part of a deployment in the South China Sea, it could explain the large number of aircraft sightings near the nation's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the past few days.

However, whereas Chinese fighters used to take off from bases in southeast China before flying toward Taiwan, this year some of the aircraft took off from bases in central China, which has led to speculation that they might be taking part in combat training, he said.

Such a scenario would be a headache for the ministry, he added.

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The ministry would continue to respond to aircraft entering Taiwan's ADIZ the same way it has done in the past — by dispatching fighter jets to escort them away, he said, adding that failure to do so would put the nation at risk.

Tsai called on the government to increase the ROC Air Force's budget and invest in facility improvements for aircraft maintenance, as well as to seek purchases of more advanced aircraft from the US.

Separately, the ministry said in a report that military action by the PLA against Taiwan remained a possibility, and could take the form of a blockade, missile attack or landing attempt on the nation's outlying islands.

The PLA has in the past few years been bolstering its capabilities to act out such scenarios, it said.

The ministry plans to upgrade its Hsiung Feng anti-ship missile defense systems by 2023, it said.

Deputy Minister of National Defense Chang Che-ping (張哲平) has told lawmakers at the legislature that the ministry was mulling purchasing Harpoon anti-ship missiles from the US to boost its defense capabilities.

Such a procurement might happen as soon as 2023 if the US agrees to the sale, he said.

Institute of National Defense and Security Research senior analyst Su Tzu-yun (蘇子雲) said Taiwan was keeping pace with its development and procurement of missile systems, and it retained air and naval superiority over China.

Under the current circumstances, the PLA would be unable to make a landing on Taiwan's outlying islands, Su said.

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