

## US Navy transits Taiwan Strait

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The Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS *Chancellorsville* transits the East China Sea in the Taiwan Strait during routine operations yesterday.

**Photo: AFP / Justin Stack / US NAVY**

Two US warships yesterday sailed through the Taiwan Strait, the US Navy said, the first such transit since China staged unprecedented military drills around Taiwan, which the Ministry of National Defense said are still ongoing.

In a statement, the US Navy said the transit “demonstrates the United States’ commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

Tensions in the Strait soared to their highest level in years after US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei from Aug. 2 to 3.

Beijing reacted furiously, staging days of air and sea exercises around Taiwan. Taipei condemned the drills and missile tests as preparation for an invasion.

The Ministry of National Defense said it detected 23 Chinese aircraft and eight Chinese ships operating around Taiwan yesterday.

That included seven Chinese aircraft that crossed the median line of the Strait, which normally acts as an unofficial barrier between the two sides, it added.

The US Seventh Fleet said a pair of Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruisers — the USS *Anti-etam* and the USS *Chancellorsville* — conducted a “routine” transit yesterday “through waters where high seas freedoms of

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navigation and overflight apply in accordance with international law.”

“These ships transited through a corridor in the Strait that is beyond the territorial sea of any coastal state,” a US Navy statement said. “The United States military flies, sails and operates anywhere international law allows.”

The Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) said the US had “openly hyped up” the ships’ passage through the Strait.

“The PLA Eastern Theater Command is following and warning the US vessels throughout their entire journey, and is aware of all movements,” theater command spokesman Senior Colonel Shi Yi (石屹) said.

“Troops in the [eastern] theater remain on high alert and are prepared at all times to foil any provocations,” he said.

The Ministry of National Defense confirmed a pair of warships sailed from north to south through the channel.

“During their southward journey through the Taiwan Strait, the military is fully monitoring relevant movements in our surrounding sea and airspace, and the situation is normal,” it said.

The Seventh Fleet is based in Japan and is a core part of Washington’s navy presence in the Pacific.

The US and Western allies have increased “freedom of navigation” crossings by naval vessels of the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea to reinforce that those seas are international waterways, sparking anger from Beijing.

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Washington has said its position on Taiwan remains unchanged and has accused China of threatening peace in the Strait and using Pelosi's visit as a pretext for military exercises.

Pelosi's visit to Taiwan was followed about a week later by a group of five other US lawmakers, with China's military responding by carrying out more exercises near Taiwan.

US Senator Marsha Blackburn, a member of US Senate's commerce and armed services committees, arrived in Taiwan on Thursday in the third visit by a US dignitary this month, defying pressure from China to halt the trips.

Additional reporting by Reuters

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