

Drone shot down amid China tensions

Written by Taipei Times

Friday, 02 September 2022 06:59 -



Kinmen County's Shi Islet is pictured in an undated photograph with the skyline of China's Xiamen in the background.

Photo courtesy of retired Kinmen teacher Hung Ching-chang

Taiwan yesterday downed a civilian drone after weeks of complaints about incursions by uncrewed aerial vehicles from China, a sign Taipei is pushing back against Beijing's efforts to encroach on its territory.

Taiwanese troops shot the drone down near Kinmen's Shi Islet (石牌) at about noon after attempts to repel it failed, a statement from the garrison on the Taipei-held outpost just off China said.

That followed incidents on Tuesday and Wednesday in which Taiwanese soldiers fired warning shots and flares at civilian drones that approached the nation's outlying islands.

The military is trying to reaffirm limits on Chinese presence near its territory after US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei early last month.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) in a speech on Tuesday urged the military to craft a strong response to China's pressure campaign without prompting further escalation.

"Drones are part of China's gray-zone tactics and cognitive warfare against Taiwan," said Kuo Yu-jen (郭宇堅), director of the Institute for National Policy Research in Taipei. "The incursions are an attempt to humiliate Taiwan's military. Taiwan's government first responded to it cautiously, and only turned tougher when they became more frequent."



Kinmen Defense Command soldiers fire a warning flare to drive away Chinese craft in an undated photograph.

Photo courtesy of the Kinmen Defense Command

Chinese troops held unprecedented exercises for several days around Taiwan after Pelosi's visit, including firing ballistic missiles over Taiwan proper.

Taipei has reported that an average of more than 10 Chinese warplanes have crossed the US-drafted median line that divides the Taiwan Strait each day since Pelosi's visit, data compiled by Bloomberg News showed.

The drones' flights over the outlying islands started in late July, although neither side has specified where they are coming from.

The Chinese Communist Party's Global Times newspaper has said that "the frequent flights of civilian drones from the mainland [China] expose the Taiwan armed forces' weak defenses."

"China meant to test the response of Taiwan's military in offshore islands like Kinmen by sending those drones, and also used these small-scale events to see how Taiwanese society responds to them," said Crystal Tu (涂晶瑩), assistant research fellow at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research. "They may also try to see whether there are loopholes in the procedure or response that they can further take advantage of."

The Ministry of National Defense told lawmakers that China's encroachments pose "severe military challenges," a report seen by Bloomberg said.

Major General Lin Wen-huang (林文煌), who is in charge of combat planning at the ministry, told reporters that Taiwan would repel Chinese forces if they were to enter its territory.

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“The closer the incursions are to Taiwan, the stronger our countermeasures will be,” Lin said.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2022/09/02](#)