



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on April 2, 2023

Taiwan Prepares for Conflict With China as Tsai Visits U.S.

Taiwan's military is ramping up preparations for a possible future war with China by planning an unprecedented military drill that will take place at a civilian airport in July this year, the island's official Central News Agency (CNA) declared in a statement.

The military aircraft emergency landing and takeoff exercise will be conducted at Taitung Fengnian Airport on the southeast coast of Taiwan, as part of the annual *Han Kuang* military exercise in July. *Han Kuang*, Taiwan's major war games, evaluates the island's fighting capabilities against a possible Chinese invasion.



AP Images
Tsai Ing-wen in New York

The upcoming drill would prepare Taiwan's military should a Chinese incursion destroy the island's military airports and airstrips. In such a scenario, fighter jets would have to land at civilian airports or on highways, [CNA cited](#) an anonymous military source as saying.

The military plans to transform a section of Highway 9 "into an emergency landing strip" and a section of a road in Taitung County into an emergency runway, the same source added.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense has not provided further details due to the sensitivity of the matter.

China regards the island of Taiwan as one of its provinces, and wants to reunite it with the mainland by force if necessary.

In response to any major political events or to any show support given to Taiwan by its allies, China regularly holds live-fire exercises in the Taiwan Strait or intensifies flyovers by its military aircraft.

When Nancy Pelosi, the first U.S. House Speaker to visit Taiwan in 25 years, arrived in Taipei last August, Beijing declared a week-long military exercise around the island.

On March 29, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's visit to New York catalyzed threats of retaliation from Beijing. At her hotel in New York, several pro-Beijing demonstrators rallied together and waved China's red flag whereas another group of pro-Taiwan people waved their banner as well as the U.S. stars and stripes.

Xu Xueyuan, the *charge d'affaires* at the Chinese embassy in Washington, said she had cautioned U.S. officials numerous times that Tsai's trip would breach China's core interests.

"We urge the US side not to repeat playing with fire on the Taiwan question," she told reporters.

China has threatened to take "resolute measures to fight back" if Tsai meets with present House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, with the United States telling Beijing not to use Tsai's U.S. trip as a pretext to be pugilistic around the Taiwan Strait.

Tsai was poised to meet with the leaders of Guatemala and Belize to enhance ties with those diplomatic



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allies. On her way back to Taiwan, the premier is slated to transit in California, where McCarthy had said he would meet her.

Tsai's trip follows Honduras' decision in March to sever ties with the island and court Beijing instead. Consequently, Belize and Guatemala are among just 13 remaining countries that have official ties with Taipei.

Since her rise to power in 2016, Beijing has been stepping up its military, economic, and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan as well as poaching nine of the island's diplomatic allies, including Honduras.

Both China and Honduras unveiled a [joint communiqué](#) on March 26 to formalize ties.

In the communiqué, China's Qin Gang and Honduras' Eduardo Enrique Reina pledged "to develop friendly relations" premised on the "principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence."

Beijing's diplomatic recognition requires Honduras to acknowledge the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as "the sole legal Government representing the whole of China," as well as Taiwan being "an inalienable part of China's territory."

"Beijing's attempts to poach Taiwan's diplomatic partners will lead to Taiwan developing closer ties with the United States," observed James Lee, a researcher on U.S.-Taiwan relations at Academia Sinica.

In spite of recognizing Beijing instead of Taiwan in 1979, the United States remains Taiwan's most significant ally and largest arms supplier.

"The loss of official relations with third countries will be offset by a deepening of Taiwan's unofficial relations," Lee said.

Remarkably, analysts have asserted that former Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou's visit to Shanghai just a day before Tsai visited New York was likely staged.

Ma's alleged personal visit to China was deemed to shadow Tsai's own so-called private "transit" through the United States.

"The bond between Taiwan and the United States is strong today," Tsai said in New York, hailing Taiwan as "beacon of democracy" in Asia and urging for closer ties between the island and the United States.

On the other hand, Ma called for enhanced cross-strait ties and lauded China's "effective control measures" in Wuhan after the outbreak of Covid-19 as a "contribution to the whole of humanity," according to the CCP-controlled *Xinhua* news agency. Additionally, he is scheduled to return to Taiwan on April 7, a day before Tsai's return.

Austin Wang, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, opined that the "international propaganda effect that Beijing is hoping to achieve" was intentional by aligning Ma's mainland visit with Tsai's sojourn in America.

"After all, Ma Ying-jeou is a former president, and from the attention of domestic and foreign media, his visit to China gives a sense of 'balance,' as if Taiwan's public opinion is not all leaning towards the US," Wang said to Radio Free Asia (RFA).

Both Ma's and Tsai's trips precede Taiwan's January 2024 presidential election that would determine



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Tsai's successor.

While Tsai cannot run again for president, her vice-president, Lai Ching-te, is widely regarded to be the nominee for the ruling Democratic People's Party (DPP).

"I'm proud to see President Tsai represent our country with dignity. No matter the difficulties we face, Taiwanese people are calm, pragmatic, and confident in who we are," Lai [tweeted](#) on March 29.

Meanwhile, Ma's Kuomintang (KMT) party emerged victorious in the Taipei mayoral race in November last year, and plans to retake the presidency in 2024.

Notably, party spokesman Alfred Lin said the prospect of a KMT victory next year would not guarantee imminent reunification with communist China. The party only wished to "engage in peaceful exchanges and coexist" with Beijing, he said, while maintaining the status quo.

Based on a report by *The Washington Post*, Tsai said on March 29 in New York that although Taiwan wanted to thaw ties with Beijing amid growing fears of a military conflict, it hoped to maintain the status quo where the island is not at the beck-and-call of the Beijing regime.

"Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a wake-up call to us all, and served as a reminder that authoritarianism does not cease in its belligerence against democracy," Tsai reportedly said. "Taiwan has also long endured the peril of living next to an authoritarian neighbor."

Additionally, Hudson Institute President John Walters praised Tsai during her New York stint, with the institute giving her an award for leadership in resisting Beijing's belligerence.

"The Chinese Communist Party fears her because she and Taiwan are an inspiration for the Chinese people who aspire to be free and yearn for democracy," Walters said, based on an event recording obtained by *The Washington Post*. "Her battle — their battle — is our battle."



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