



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# China's military actions against Taiwan motivated by pressure ahead of the presidential election



China has sent numerous fighter jets and ships towards Taiwan this week, once again raising tensions in the eastern Pacific, suggesting that such practices might become more frequent.

There has been no apparent reason for a new Chinese offensive action involving as many as 100 fighter jets, which once again alarmed the weaker Taiwanese armed forces.

In previous similar situations, the military action of the Chinese army directed towards Taiwan usually followed some significant political event that Beijing disagreed with.

This was, for example, the case a year ago, following the controversial visit of the former speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, to Taiwan.

At that time, as many as 200 fighter jets departed the Chinese mainland towards Taiwan and about 50 ships. Missiles were even launched towards the island.

## A show of force amid important talks between China and the US

This time, China's aggressive military action comes at a time when relations with the US appear to be improving, given the recent meeting between US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and leading Chinese diplomat Wang Yi in Malta, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and China's vice president Han Zheng on the margins of the UN session in New York.

The military action comes in anticipation of a possible meeting between the two presidents, Joe Biden and Xi Jinping, by the end of the year, which was hinted at by US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry during his visit to Beijing this summer.

Whatever the motive, China's military action raises concerns and may have a direct link to Taiwan's upcoming presidential election in January.

## Pre-election threat

Even though it considers Taiwan to be part of it, China wants to influence the outcome of these elections, but above all, to keep the island's 25 million population in a state of tension with its military threats and their desire for state independence to decline.

Transferred to the field of political struggle for the presidential mandate, Beijing wants to weaken the position of the candidate who currently has the best prospects, the current Taiwanese Vice President Lai Ching-te.

This candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Lai Ching-te is strongly in favour of the state independence of Taiwan and describes himself as a "political worker of Taiwan independence".

Beijing would not want the DPP's dominance to continue. It has been ongoing for 8 years, and China would rather see someone from a fragmented bloc of pro-China parties and candidates in the position of president.

However, the competition is fierce despite the latest surveys showing that all 3 presidential candidates have only about 50% voter trust.

## A billionaire has a chance to succeed

The recent high-profile candidacy by Terry Gou, the founder of the Taiwanese technology giant Foxconn, the largest producer of iPhones in a factory in China, reduces the likelihood of success for any of them.

As an independent candidate, Mr Gou would still have a better chance than the candidates of the established opposition parties, Kuomintang and the Taiwan People's Party, thanks above all to his great charisma as a successful businessman.

Terry Gou advocates the urgent dialogue establishment with Beijing, advocating the "back from the abyss of war with China" policy.

He does not want Taiwan to become "another Ukraine".

Beijing would be interested in the next president of Taiwan being one of the candidates who advocate this kind of policy that would end the multi-year rule of the DPP, and its strong pro-independence policies.

## The US does not want radicalisation

Military actions similar to the one from earlier this week have pressured Taiwanese voters to support politicians who advocate rapprochement with China. Perhaps Mr Go, because of his reputation as a businessman who has already built significant bridges within the divided nation.

The US has similar interests, even though none of the officials in Washington has publicly emphasised support for any of the candidates.

The continuation of the campaign will probably not bring a plain and public determination of Washington to favour any of the candidates because it would possibly cause a counter-effect among the voters.

Nevertheless, it is in the interest of the US that, whilst undoubtedly preserving the alliance with Taiwan, the next president has a softer policy towards China, which means someone from the opposition.

To reduce China's economic and security pressures in the region, the US is primarily interested in easing security tensions regarding Taiwan and normalising relations with Beijing.

With a president from the pro-independence DPP, Taiwan will not make it easier for the US to reduce the strategically significant tensions in the Pacific, making communication with Beijing difficult.