

Han Kuang 2025: A Paradigm Shift Towards Unscripted and Lengthened Combat Simulations

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Introduction

China's accelerating use of hybrid and grey-zone coercion—including cyber intrusions, disinformation campaigns, maritime militia harassment—pose a continuous challenge to Taiwan's National Security. Traditional defence exercises, often limited in duration and scope, are increasingly deemed insufficient for preparing the nation for both the complex pre-war phase and the sustained conflict. In response to this challenge, Taiwan in its 41st edition of annual Han Kuang Exercise, has conducted an unprecedented 10-day and 09-night exercise featuring record-length computer wargames and the integration of real grey-zone scenarios, aimed at testing and strengthening its preparedness and deterrence against a simulated 2027 invasion scenario.

Background

An inevitable Chinese invasion in 2027, confirmed by the Assistant Secretary of Defence for the Indo-Pacific region, is Taiwan's worst-case scenario and has guided its defence preparations since its founding.¹ Recently, Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te called China a "Foreign Hostile Force," reflecting the rising tensions.² In the past years, Chinese military activity has tripled, with exercise serving as invasion rehearsals³, and additionally Chinese modernisation now surpasses the United States of America (USA) in air, maritime and missile capabilities.⁴ Since 1984, Taiwan's annual Han Kuang drill, literally meaning, 'Han Glory', simulates a Chinese invasion to test its own defences⁵. The 41st edition was the longest yet, shifting from a scripted demonstration usually lasting 05-07 days and focused on public relations to lasting 10 days and 09 nights, emphasising realism, reservist mobilisation, and new US supplied systems like, the High Mobility Artillery Rocket (HIMARS), the ABRAM tanks and the HESCO barrier system.

Overview of the drill

- The 41st edition of the Han Kuang drill was structured in three distinct phases:
 - The first phase (09-11 Jul 2025), based on the grey-zone operations by the People's Republic of China Coast Guard vessels in tandem with the maritime militia boats. In response, Republic of China (ROC) naval assets were deployed and air defences were positioned to the front. Taiwanese forces prepared defensive obstacles including tank traps, barbed wire, Czech hedgehogs, and HESCO Bastion barriers, alongside deploying missile units and conducting rapid defensive manoeuvres to counter hybrid threats.⁶
 - In the second phase (12-14 Jul 2025), the military transitioned to full-scale combat drills by testing the HIMARS rockets at key coastal defences,

reinforcing river and beach landing sites with fortifications and live-fire exercises, and staging overnight urban and logistics protection manoeuvres to simulate resisting a People's Liberation Army (PLA) beachhead.⁷

- The third and the final phase (15-18 Jul 2025) concentrated on urban warfare and whole-of-society resilience, integrating military operations with civilian infrastructure drills, energy site defence, mass evacuations, and joint exercises by troops, police, and civil agencies to prepare for protracted conflict and sustained attacks.⁸
- 5 Key areas of the Han Kuang drill were:
 - Countering grey-zone threats posed by China, including incursions in the Air Defence Identification Zone since 2022 and its recent amplification, Chinese Coast Guard vessels entering Taiwan's sovereign waters since the early 2024, etc.⁹
 - Improving combat readiness and deployments, ensuring rapid Mobilisation, Well Co-ordinated defence and resilience against simulated Chinese invasion.
 - Strengthening strategic communications enhancing countering misinformation, ensuring smooth communication between military and civilians.
 - Boosting reserve forces, through training and then compelling them to participate in close to reality drills.
- Building a multi-layered defence system, and applying the 'Porcupine Strategy' to slow the enemy as much as possible for a sustained combat.

Military simulations

- **Urban Warfare Drills:**
 - **Hot Pit Refuelling at the banks of Danshui River.** Two Army aviation brigades simulated combative operations followed by a forty-minute hot pit refuelling, based on the question, what should be done by the Taiwan military, if it lost its airfield and military bases. Public parks in the New Taipei city were used for refuelling and rearming where, four helicopters were refuelled with new tanker fuel and re-armed with missiles. The location which is at the banks of the Danshui River which flows from New Taipei to Taipei city, is of utmost importance; providing concealment to the aviation units from the Chinese in the simulation.

- **Defence of Songshan Airport.** Marines from Taiwan's 66th Brigade carried out early morning drills specifically aimed at defending Songshan Airport, Taipei's main air transport hub. During these exercises, the Marines simulated how they would retake control of the airport if enemy troops arrived by helicopter. This brigade is specially assigned to protect the airport, and the drills were part of Taiwan's annual Han Kuang military exercises, taking place over several days and completed that week.
- **Maintenance and logistical Hub in Urban areas.** In Taoyuan, the 584th Armoured Brigade practised repairing and maintenance of M88A1 Tanks while in combat, where 8 broken tanks were placed and a timeframe of 30 minutes was given to the support team to fix them. Also, the Taoyuan high school served as a mini base for soldiers to gather and store ammunition.
- **Defending the National Capital.** Taiwan's 202nd Military Police Command conducted a first-ever full closure drill on Wan Ban Bridge, a strategic connection between Taipei and New Taipei City, where they built a four-tier blockade using roadblocks, razor wire, civilian buses, and HESCO Bastion barriers. Drones were used for reconnaissance to detect enemy positions. In the simulation, the PLA broke through the first three barriers before being neutralized by Taiwanese snipers and armoured vehicles, this exercise showcased Taiwan's rapid response and integration of military and civilian resources to defend Taipei against an invasion.

- **Naval operations**

- **Corridor for Allied Vessels.** The ROC Navy at Taiwan's east coast practiced maintaining a safe corridor for the US vessels to enter the Hualien port facility, which included building defences and positioning of two Tuo Chiang-class corvettes and anti-air units around the port. The simulation concluded with escorting ships which entered the port at 6:00 a.m.
- **Mine laying Operations.** At Kaohsiung, which is Taiwan's, main port city; ROC Navy's Mine laying unit practised mine-laying exercise in the area around the Tsuo-ying Naval base in the simulation bases upon an amphibious invasion.

- **Integration of Air Raid Drill and Prevention drill.** The Urban Resilience drill, which combined 'Wan An' Air Drill and the 'Min An' Disaster Prevention Drill included a number of key simulations including, Air raid warning broadcasts, evacuation and sheltering procedures, traffic control, first aid training, etc. Air raid sirens were sounded to signal people to vacate the streets in Taipei, in several cities including, Taoyuan, Keelung, Yilan, etc, where people were retreated to the nearest underground shelters, Necessary aid distribution took place.

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Poster about the counter air attack exercise in Taoyuan city, 2025

Source- Global Taiwan¹⁰

New Technology

The Han Kuang exercise prominently showcased Taiwan's integration of advanced U.S. weaponry, including the HIMARS rocket launchers and the M1 ABRAM tanks, highlighting Taiwan's modernization efforts. Additionally, the Hesco Bastions barrier system, acquired from the US which had been used in Iraq and Afghanistan, made its debut. Despite delays in arms deliveries caused by global conflicts and production issues, Taiwan's swift operationalization of these technologies strengthens its position for accelerated shipments.

On the indigenous front, Taiwan displayed a range of homegrown weapon systems during the Han Kuang 2025. These included the Thunderbolt 2000 rocket launcher compatible with the HIMARS munitions, the supersonic Hsiung Feng III anti-ship missile, and the Sky Sword II land-based surface-to-air missile system. The fast Tuo Chiang-class corvettes patrolled coastal waters, while newly introduced Kuai Chi unmanned surface vessels enhanced maritime surveillance, showcasing Taiwan's focus on leveraging domestic innovation to build a layered and resilient defence posture.¹¹

Chinese response

During the preparations of the Drill, China began trying to disrupt the it, using its planes and naval vessels to continue harassment operations which went on till the exercise ended. The Taiwanese Defence Ministry detected 14 air and 09 naval incursions, also crossing Taiwan Strait's Median line 9 times. China's Ministry of Defence called the

drill, a bluffing and a deceiving trick, by the leading party of Taiwan's minority government Democratic Progressive Party in order to force upon the people, the independence of Taiwan.

Following the Han Kuang 2025, China launched Justice Mission 2025, a large-scale PLA joint exercise around Taiwan. During the exercise, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence reported the detection of over 130 PLA aircraft and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle sorties¹², with around 90 crossings of the Taiwan Strait median line¹³, alongside 14 PLA warships and multiple Chinese Coast Guard vessels operating around the island. In response, Taiwan adopted a pragmatic grey-zone counter-offensive, prioritising endurance over escalation. Building on the Han Kuang's framework, Taipei sustained high readiness, force dispersal, civil-military coordination, and infrastructure protection.

Conclusion

The Han Kuang 2025 marks a clear evolution in Taiwan's defence posture by recognising that conflict with China is more likely to unfold through a prolonged grey-zone coercion than through an abrupt conventional invasion. By extending the exercise, incorporating unscripted scenarios, and integrating civilian agencies with military forces, Taiwan has shifted towards preparing for sustained pressure across multiple domains rather than short, symbolic demonstrations.

China's response to such preparedness is unlikely to remain limited to episodic reactions to individual drills. Over the long term, Beijing is expected to intensify grey-zone operations cumulatively by normalising higher PLA air and naval activity around Taiwan, further eroding the median line, and expanding Chinese Coast Guard and maritime militia presence, along with increase of live fire drills around Taiwan.

In this context, the Han Kuang 2025 reflects Taiwan's attempt to adapt to a long-term contest of endurance, signalling its intent to resist sustained coercion and deny China strategic gains below the threshold of war, and a shift to an unscripted combat simulation.

Endnotes

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