

Taiwan says Chinese warships passed south of Island, China calls it 'routine exercise'

26/12/2016 21:52 by admin

Beijing: Amid increasing tensions between Beijing and Washington over Taiwan and the disputed South China Sea, a group of Chinese warships entered the upper half of the South China Sea on Monday after passing south of Taiwan, said the island's defence ministry. However, China has termed it a "routine exercise".

Taiwan says Chinese warships passed south of Island

The ministry said that a naval formation consisting of aircraft carrier Liaoning, several destroyers and frigates had early Monday afternoon passed southeast of the Pratas Islands, which are controlled by Taiwan, heading southwest.

The carrier group earlier in the day passed 90 nautical miles south of Taiwan's southernmost point via the Bashi Channel, between Taiwan and the Philippines.

The activities involved several J-15 carrier-borne jets and helicopters. J-15 is the new fighter jet being developed by China to operate from the deck of the carrier.

On Friday, several J-15 took off from the Liaoning, carrying out assignments including air refuelling and air confrontation in the Yellow Sea.

The training was guided by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy Commander Wu Shengli.

The training "strengthened the synergy among different vessels in the formation and refined its overall capability," he said.

The training and tests were normal arrangements in accordance with annual plan made by the navy. Since it was commissioned in 2012, the Liaoning has been carrying out the training and tests steadily.

Prior to the latest training and tests, the formation held a live ammunition drill in the Bohai Sea, the coastal waters between China and the Korean peninsula.

China is publicising the exercises as it had heated exchanges with US President-elect Donald Trump over One-China policy after his unprecedented phone call with the Taiwanese President following which Beijing lodged a diplomatic protest.

Trump followed it up questioning the One-China policy that has been in practice for decades.

The exchanges were followed by China seizing a US unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV) operated by an American survey ship in the disputed South China Sea leading to protests from Washington and criticism from Trump.

China later returned it, saying its navy found this unidentified device and examined in a professional manner to verify it to prevent from causing harm to freedom of navigation.

On December 16, the carrier, a refitted vessel acquired from Ukraine and commissioned in 2012, conducted its maiden live fire drills on a massive scale along with a host of naval ships, aircraft and submarines.

Earlier reports said the aircraft carrier would be deployed in the disputed South China Sea when it is ready.

China has become more assertive over the South China Sea after an international tribunal struck down its claim over all most all of the area.

The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counter claims over the South China Sea.

Besides Liaoning, China is currently building two more aircraft carriers.

- IT