Takeaways from China’s Taiwan Drills

What is the issue?

The recently concluded military drills by People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in Taiwan Strait reveal a great deal about the nature of military capabilities of China.

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What is the overview of China’s capabilities?

- Chinese capabilities in three areas
  - Air assault capabilities
  - Missile capabilities
  - PLA’s Joint Logistic Support Force (PLAJLSF)
- China’s Eastern Theater Command (ETC) is responsible for planning and executing any potential invasion of Taiwan
- The Southern Theater Command (STC) is also in an advanced state of alert for the drills.

How about China’s air power?

- The Chinese have made substantial progress in the development and operation of rotary and fixed wing aircraft for dedicated assault missions against Taiwan.
- People’s Liberation Army’s latest helicopters are almost as advanced as their American variants.
- The comprehensive reorganisation of the PLA into group armies has enabled the Chinese to significantly operationalise their rotary wing aircraft.
- An aviation brigade is part of each of the PLAA’s group armies and the group armies deployed in Xinjiang and Tibet.
- There are two specialised air assault brigades that are directly geared for an air assault mission against Taiwan.

How about the missile strength of PLA?

- The PLA fired several long-range missiles of the **Dong-Feng (DF)** class to test whether the PLA’s missile brigades could coordinate missile strikes and carry out post-attack battle damage assessment.
- The PLA likely gained information about Taiwan’s missile defence capabilities covering the island’s missile radar tracking capabilities.
- The People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) which carried out tests likely assessed the rapidity and precision with which Taiwanese defences could be suppressed.

What about the area of precision logistics?

- It is a core weakness of e PLA because without logistics, a full-scale invasion of Taiwan is impossible.
- China's amphibious assault capabilities are a key weakness and can only succeed if the PLA has a highly developed logistics support system.
- Relying heavily on its **BeiDou** Satellite Navigation System, the PLA is trying to ensure communications and coordination between spread out mobile units on the battlefield.
- Crucial factors for effective military mission across the Taiwan Strait:
    - Timely combat support centred on supplies
    - Reinforcements and repairs
    - Evacuation
    - Medical assistance to dispersed air and amphibious assault units
- The PLA is deficient in amphibious vessels, and has an inadequate number of personnel trained for complex logistics missions and military transport aircraft.

What do the China's military drills signify?

- Beijing issued a new white paper on Taiwan in which it withdrew an earlier commitment not to deploy troops or base administrative personnel in Taiwan after reunification.
- The military drills conducted by the PRC were only a partial demonstration of the PLA's military prowess.
- The PLA has still some distance to traverse before it gains the confidence and the requisite proficiency for combined arms warfare that is crucial to the invasion of Taiwan.

The phrase "salami slicing" (A divide-and-conquer tactic used to dominate opposition territory, piece by piece) has been used to describe the actions of both sides in this conflict.

References

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