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Taiwan Bolsters Defences with US Rockets in Annual Drills

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Taiwan has rolled out its latest arsenal of high-precision strike weapons, the US-supplied High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), as part of its annual Han Kuang exercises, aimed at sharpening its ability to fend off potential aggression from China. The deployment marks a significant step in Taiwan's efforts to strengthen its defensive posture amid rising tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

On Saturday, two armoured trucks carrying HIMARS were spotted navigating the streets of Taichung, a city on Taiwan's central coast, during the fourth day of the 10-day Han Kuang

exercise, the island's most extensive annual military drill, as reported by Reuters. Colonel Chen Lian-jia, a military spokesperson, emphasised the importance of keeping the HIMARS concealed from enemy surveillance, including aerial reconnaissance, satellites, or covert operatives, until the moment they are ordered to fire. "Our ability to hide these systems is critical to their effectiveness," he stated.

China, which claims Taiwan as its territory and has repeatedly threatened force to enforce its claim, has ramped up military pressure over the past five years. Beijing's near-daily air and naval patrols, coupled with large-scale war games, have kept Taiwan on high alert. In response to the Han Kuang drills, China's Ministry of National Defence dismissed them as "a futile exercise in self-deception," while its Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated its staunch opposition to military cooperation between Taiwan and the United States.

Taiwan's President William Lai Ching-te, speaking on Thursday, underscored the drills' focus on "large-scale, realistic combat scenarios." The drills feature the first 11 HIMARS units delivered in late 2024 as part of a 29-unit U.S. sale, and are designed to test Taiwan's preparedness for large-scale conflict. HIMARS systems, depending on munitions, can strike targets up to about 300km away, potentially reaching coastal targets in China's Fujian province.

The United States, Taiwan's primary supplier of defensive arms, is bound by the Taiwan Relations Act to view threats to Taiwan with "grave concern," though it does not guarantee direct military intervention. However, with President Donald Trump at the helm, it remains uncertain whether Washington would commit forces to counter a Chinese assault. Senior Taiwanese military officials, speaking anonymously to Reuters, revealed that this year's drills are unscripted, designed to mirror real combat conditions, including simulated enemy attacks and invasion scenarios. "We're not just preparing for a fight; we're showing the world we're ready to defend ourselves," one official said. The drills send a clear message to both China and the international community: Taiwan is resolute in its determination to protect its sovereignty. With Beijing's rhetoric growing sharper and its military posturing more aggressive, Taiwan's investment in advanced weaponry and realistic training reflects a pragmatic response to an increasingly volatile region.

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