

TENSION GROWS AROUND TAIWAN AND MACRON DIFFERENCES FROM THE UNITED STATES

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The military tension around Taiwan increased in April, after the visit of the President of that country to the United States. Tsai Ing-wen traveled to Belize and Guatemala. From there he went to the United States, and met with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California. For Chinese diplomacy, this is a fact that strongly increases bilateral tension with Washington, which shows an attitude towards de facto recognition of Taiwanese sovereignty, despite the principle of "one China" in force in the diplomatic relationship between the Asian power and United States since the 1970s. It should be noted that, in August 2022, the visit of the then Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, to Taiwan, unleashed another spike in tension, in which military exercises were an instrument of Chinese diplomatic action. This time they were held between April 8 and 11. Its axis was the maritime and air blockade of the island, which would be the first Chinese military response in the event of a war. The exercises also had another axis with live fire, which was supposed to be used if the blockade was not effective or generated a Taiwanese military reaction. China mobilized nine ships and a share of between 25 and 75 aircraft per day. Chinese forces also used one of their two aircraft carriers in service. The shadow of a military conflict between China and the United States remains the most relevant geopolitical risk in Asia, and would imply a conflict between two nuclear powers.

Days before, at the beginning of April, the United States military exercises with South Korea and Japan ended, as a response to the risk that North Korea implies with its missile launches. The eccentric North Korean dictator - who supplies Russia with weapons in the conflict with Ukraine - continues to launch medium-range missiles, some of them capable of carrying nuclear loads. He also tested, days ago, a large underwater drone that could be fitted with nuclear shells. In response, the United States and South Korea have upgraded the annual binational military exercises. Logically, South Korea is the most threatened country due to its geographical proximity to Pyongyang. North Korea also threatens Japan, who is potentially hit by its missile launches. It should be noted that the presence of the Russian navy in the Far East around the Kuril Islands, claimed by both countries, is also a potential threat to Japan. This led to

unscheduled military exercises by the United States, South Korea and Japan, which constitute a de facto alliance in the Far East. It should be noted that these two Asian countries are NATO allies in military support for Ukraine. South Korea, in particular, not only supplies Kiev with weapons, but also has a contract for the sale of fighter planes and tanks with Poland, a country that aspires to become the most important military power in Europe.

In addition, on April 11, the United States and the Philippines began the largest military exercises in 39 years, consolidating their military alliance in the South China Sea, which is projected towards Taiwan. The annual exercises, called *Balikatán* ("Shoulder to Shoulder" in Philippine), bring together more than 17,600 men, including 12,200 Americans and 5,400 Philippines, nearly double the number who participated in last year's exercises. They now include a live-fire maneuver less than 300 kilometers east of Scarborough Reef, which is disputed between China and the Philippines. In the first week of April, the Philippine government announced the four new US military bases on its territory, made up of several archipelagos. One of them is 400 kilometers from Taiwan and another on Balabac Island, close to the islands that Beijing and Manila dispute. Simultaneously, on April 10, the US Navy sent the destroyer *Milius* to the site. China condemned the move, claiming to have "undisputed sovereignty" over the disputed islands and their adjacent waters. The expansion of the alliance between the United States and the Philippines led Chinese diplomacy to maintain that it "endangers regional peace and stability." He also stated that the countries of this part of the world "must preserve their strategic independence and firmly resist the mentality of cold war and confrontation between blocs."

For his part, on April 10, French President Emmanuel Macron said that Europe "has no interest in an acceleration of the crisis on Taiwan" and that it should follow an independent strategy. This definition took place days after his visit to Beijing, in which he was accompanied by the president of the European Commission, German Ursula von der Leyden. The French president added that "Europe must not accelerate the conflict, but rather take the necessary time to build its position as the third pole between China and the United States." He also said that "the worst thing would be to think that we Europeans should become followers on this issue and adapt to the American pace or a Chinese overreaction." From a strategic-global point of view, Macron, who through NATO maintains firm support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, states that the

situation is different in the case of China. But among the 31 members of NATO, the positions were not coincidental. In the Mediterranean countries, such as Italy and Spain, they were praised, assuming that economic and commercial ties with Beijing must have their own economic entity, without aligning themselves with those of the United States. In contrast, in the ex-communist countries of Central, Eastern Europe and the Baltics, opinions were critical, arguing that they weaken the political and war effort in support of Ukraine at the moment. Germany, for its part, seems to be located somewhere between the two positions.

In conclusion: the visit of the president of Taiwan to the United States and her meeting with the speaker of the House of Representatives led China to respond with relevant military exercises around the island. A few days before, scheduled military exercises were carried out between the United States and South Korea against the threat posed by North Korea, and in which Japanese forces also participated. At the same time, the US and the Philippines launched the most important military exercises since they signed a military alliance 4 decades ago, which were interpreted as a threat by Beijing. Lastly, President Macron expressed that European policy must be independent of the United States in the Taiwan conflict, and that Europe must assume a balanced position in it.