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By Yen Zhi Yi

SYNOPSIS

In December 2025, China mounted another large-scale military exercise rehearsing a blockade of Taiwan. As the manoeuvres suggest that China may be escalating the conflict, there are implications for Singapore, including maintaining trade flows, ensuring the security of Singaporeans living or working in Taiwan, keeping diplomatic channels open, and maintaining domestic social cohesion in the event of a crisis.

COMMENTARY

On 30 December 2025, China carried out [large-scale military drills](#) and live-fire exercises around Taiwan, involving significant elements of its army, navy, air and rocket forces. Codenamed “Justice Mission 2025” and simulating a blockade of Taiwan, these exercises appeared to be a response to the United States (US) sale of a [US\\$11 billion weapons package](#) to Taiwan, the largest arms sale to the island ever. This latest drill is part of a pattern of increasingly frequent and complex operations China has been conducting in the Taiwan Strait region in recent years.

A conflict in the Taiwan Strait is widely regarded as a significant security challenge for Indo-Pacific states, including Singapore. China regards Taiwan as a breakaway province that must be eventually unified with the mainland and opposes any steps towards its independence. China maintains that peaceful reunification is preferable and has not renounced the use of force. As for Taiwan, it has persistently abjured reunification, triggering recurrent episodes of cross-strait tensions.

The Taiwan Strait is one of the world’s busiest maritime corridors, serving as a critical hub in the global shipping, logistics, and financial network. Almost half of the world’s container fleet and [over 80 per cent of the largest vessels](#) pass through the strait.

With the increase in military exercises, the region has become more prone to conflict escalation.

Flashpoints

The December 2025 exercises underscored a broader trend towards the normalisation of military drills in the Taiwan Strait over the past few years. Intended to signal China's stance on Taiwan, this pattern of exercises accelerated after the visit by then-US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan and her meeting with Taiwan's former President Tsai Ing-wen in August 2022. It prompted an [extensive series of Chinese military exercises](#) in condemnation of the visit.

In the three years that followed, several major drills took place, including one in [April 2023](#) and two "[Joint-Sword](#)" exercises in 2024. Fortunately, none of these exercises was as severe as the one conducted during the *Third Taiwan Strait Crisis* of 1995-1996, which is widely regarded as one of the most serious [near-confrontations](#) in the strait.

Tensions in East Asia have also risen to new heights after Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi made an unprecedented remark in November 2025 that a blockade of Taiwan could constitute a "[survival-threatening situation](#)" for Japan. This implied that a Taiwan Strait crisis could trigger the mobilisation of Japan's Self-Defense Forces, drawing the ire of China, which considers the Taiwan issue an internal affair.

The ensuing diplomatic spat and [military signalling](#) between Japan and China highlighted the sensitivity and potentially far-reaching repercussions of actions taken in the Taiwan Strait, reinforcing the strait's critical role as a focal arena for major and regional powers alike.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army has continued to ramp up the scale, frequency, and sophistication of joint drills and patrols, regularising incursions across median lines and expanding its operations to include [air, naval and coast guard forces](#), as seen in the December 2025 exercises. While the recent drills have yet to cross the threshold of war – though this in itself can be contested given the [use of grey-zone tactics](#) – China's manoeuvres indicate it may be gradually escalating the conflict.

Implications for Singapore

If a blockade occurs around Taiwan, one of Singapore's immediate concerns would be the major disruption to regional transport and trade routes, given the strait's centrality to global maritime commerce.

Research by the Washington-based [Center for Strategic and International Studies \(CSIS\)](#) showed that approximately US\$2.45 trillion worth of goods – almost 20 per cent of global maritime trade – transited the Taiwan Strait in 2022, with around 14.8 per cent of Singapore's trade volume passing through the same waters in that year. Given the continued growth in global commerce since 2022, current figures are likely to be higher.

Taiwan is also one of Singapore's key trading partners, especially for electronic products and components critical for semiconductors and high-tech manufacturing. As a result, Singapore will be exposed to spillover effects from a broader global supply shock stemming from a blockade of Taiwan, just as it is currently experiencing rising [fuel and food prices](#) due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

Analyses using Automatic Identification System data also suggested that, should the Taiwan Strait become blockaded, vessels could be forced to detour from as little as [10 kilometres to as much as 350 kilometres](#). While alternative routes exist, longer transit times of up to three days would translate into substantially higher costs for fuel, insurance and crew operations, with an estimated daily loss of approximately US\$160-320 million to the global shipping industry. For an open, trade-dependent economy like Singapore, cumulative supply chain disruptions of this magnitude will eventually affect businesses and households.

A second concern would be the direct security risks to Singaporeans and other Southeast Asians living or working in Taiwan. A naval blockade would restrict maritime traffic and pose significant security risks to evacuation vessels. At the same time, critical infrastructure such as airports, ports, and railway networks may be disrupted, complicating efforts to repatriate Singaporean nationals safely.

According to [Taiwan's Ministry of Labour](#), the island is home to an estimated 970,000 Southeast Asians as of November 2025, with large communities from Indonesia, Vietnam and [the Philippines](#). Even if humanitarian corridors can be negotiated, securing safe passage across contested air and sea routes cannot be guaranteed in a high-intensity conflict environment. The absence of precedents or protocols for joint civilian extraction also makes ASEAN-level coordination uncertain under crisis conditions.

Diplomatically, a Taiwan Strait conflict could place Singapore in a tricky position as it is both a major security cooperation partner of the US and shares an upgraded partnership with China. Singapore adheres to the One-China policy and has no official relations with Taiwan, though it consistently emphasises respect for international rule of law and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has frequently [expressed concern](#) over cross-strait developments, urging restraint and cautioning against unilateral actions that may escalate the situation. In a crisis, any public position on Taiwan will be closely scrutinised by China – as seen from its sharp reaction to Prime Minister Takaichi's comments – and Singapore will have to exercise even more caution in its messaging to safeguard its interests and avoid unnecessary diplomatic spats.

Increased geopolitical tensions in the Taiwan Strait could also inflame ethno-nationalist sentiments in Singapore. While many Chinese born and raised in Singapore identify themselves as Singaporeans first, some may still share closer interpersonal, commercial, and cultural ties with the mainland Chinese, which may shape their views on the cross-strait situation.

Nevertheless, Singapore has been clear that it will not allow itself to be taken advantage of by [any causes supporting Taiwanese independence](#), and that its relations with China are grounded in national interests rather than ethnic ties. Nonetheless, exposure to external media narratives and online disinformation during a potential Taiwan Strait conflict could highlight identity-based cleavages, thereby fragmenting social cohesion.

In brief, a potential Taiwan Strait conflict will jeopardise Singapore's critical supply chain networks, pose direct security threats to its citizens living or working in Taiwan, generate delicate diplomatic situations, and potentially undermine domestic social cohesion.

Conclusion

Singapore recognises that any serious escalation in the Taiwan Strait could quickly evolve into a regional crisis. Given that China and Taiwan are valued partners of Singapore, it has a strong incentive to sustain backchannel communications with both parties and support de-escalation where possible.

To mitigate the economic risks of a potential blockade, Singapore should continue to diversify its supply chains to ensure their resilience in the event of a Taiwan Strait contingency, drawing on lessons from its [multi-pronged strategy](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 Suez Canal obstruction.

At the same time, maintaining a high level of domestic preparedness will be essential. This includes planning for rapid consular and evacuation responses, enhancing societal resilience and ensuring that local agencies are well-prepared to manage the potential spillover effects. Singapore can then better navigate the shocks of any Taiwan Strait contingency while protecting its economic lifelines, diplomatic space, security and society.

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