

## China unveils new weapons system amid growing tension with Taiwan

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### Body

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At a time when China's relations with the rest of the world are characterized by increasing tension – the United States, India, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom – nowhere is it as intense as on either side of the 130 kilometers of water separating Taiwan from the mainland. After last week the island received the most important U.S. diplomatic visit in four decades, China pulls military muscle in the form of a missile.

The Tianlei 500 was the protagonist of the last edition, broadcast last Friday, of a program specialized in defense of the CCTV-7 channel. To this name, which can be translated as Thunder of Heaven, responds to a missile of half a ton weight and 60 kilometers of range recently designed by the arms firm China North Industries Group (Norinco). Unlike convention models, the Tianlei 500 employs a laser guide and is capable of spreading submunitions in the air, giving it greater rank and allowing it to attack different points at the same time.

"It can carry up to 240 submunitions that when dispersed can spread over an area of more than six square kilometers," explained a Norinco engineer during the report. The expert also detailed how the missile is designed to storm runways from airports, runway planes, electrical installations and large groups of armed personnel. This model fills a gap in the air forces, whose combat capability has been limited by the lack of advanced weapons despite the progressive increase in China's military budget. According to the program, the Tianlei 500 could help the Army gain aerial superiority, improve its attack efficiency, and undermine the enemy's combat capabilities.

The unveiling of this new missile comes at a time of intense friction between China and self-governing Taiwan, following a visit last week by Alex Azar, US Secretary of Health. This is the most important delegation sent by the US to the island since 1979, the year in which it ceased to recognize its sovereignty. During his stay, Azar met with the president, Tsai Ing-wen, and highlighted the occasion as "testimony of mutual trust and fluid dialogue between the United States and Taiwan (...). Both governments will continue to constantly improve this cooperative partnership on the global stage to safeguard the values of democracy, freedom and human rights."

This gesture caused irritation from the Chinese government. Wang Wenbin, foreign Ministry spokeswoman, questioned the trip as "a threat to peace" after acknowledging that Taiwan is "the most sensitive issue in Chinese-American relations." China has never forcibly renounced unification of what it considers a rebellious province, while U.S. law forces the country to defend the island from a hypothetical continental invasion.

Beijing expressed discontent by sending fighter jets that crossed the Taiwan Strait midline. It was drawn by Washington in the 1950s to maintain peace between the two sides after the end of civil war between Mao Zedong's communists and Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists, but is not recognized by international law. The use of military operations as a message exchange has continued since then, with all parties involved carrying out military maneuvers in the area.

The U.S. Navy conducted exercises in the South China Sea last week. On Sunday, the people's Liberation Army garrison in Hong Kong also published images of its own drill in the Taiwan Strait. A spokesman for the Chinese

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Armed Forces then stated, without referring to the U.S.explicit, that "a certain important country" had carried out provocations that had encouraged the forces "pro-independence in Taiwan."

Last Monday, the Taiwanese government announced that it was "strengthening the management" of arrivals from Hong Kong to prevent the establishment on Chinese spy island.

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