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G7 foreign ministers say China's actions east of Taiwan threaten stability

By **Reuters**

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TAIPEI, Nov 12 (Reuters) - China's increasingly assertive actions in the waters east of Taiwan threaten regional stability and freedom of navigation, G7 foreign ministers said in a joint declaration published

late on Wednesday following a meeting in Paris.

China, which views Taiwan as its own territory, has stepped up activity off the island's east coast since June with regular coast guard patrols. Officials in Taiwan, which rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims, say they believe China is practising for a potential maritime blockade using overlapping military, paramilitary and civilian assets.

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While the US, Britain, France and Germany have all previously expressed their concern about China's actions off Taiwan's east coast, the G7 statement is the strongest unified expression of concern to date about the Chinese activities.

China's increasingly assertive activities in the waters east of Taiwan "threaten regional stability, freedom of navigation and the safety of international shipping", the statement said.

"We reaffirmed our opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo, particularly by force or coercion, or the threat thereof."

China's foreign ministry on Thursday said the statement "disregards objective facts ... crudely interferes in China's internal affairs, and maliciously slanders and smears China."

The statement "once again proves that the G7 is an ideological clique clinging to Cold War mentality and engaging in bloc politics," said ministry spokesperson Mao Ning.

China recognises no claims of sovereignty by Taiwan. On Thursday, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged complete "reunification" of Taiwan with the motherland and pledged to do so peacefully.

TAIWAN WELCOMES STATEMENT

Taiwan's presidential office welcomed the G7 statement, saying peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific region are core issues vital to global security and prosperity.

Taiwan will continue working to strengthen its self-defence capabilities and cooperate closely with like-minded international partners including G7 member states, spokesperson Karen Kuo said in a statement.

Following the China Coast Guard's latest patrol off the east coast last month, Taiwan said China was harassing shipping and trying to exert a fictional jurisdiction.

Taipei regards the area off its east coast as critical to wartime supply routes from allies in the event of a blockade or conflict. China's military operates around Taiwan on a daily basis.

China is carrying out "area denial" drills in the Western Pacific involving one of its aircraft carriers and other naval formations, Taiwan Defence Minister Wellington Koo said on Tuesday, following a reported rise in Chinese activities.

Reporting by Ben Blanchard; Editing by Stephen Coates and Ros Russell

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