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## CHINA

### PLAN Destroyer Achieves Operational Capability in South China Sea

According to Chinese media reports, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)'s eighth Type 055 large destroyer [achieved operational capability](#) in South China Sea (SCS) following an exercise conducted in an unclosed location in that region in February. Commenting on this news Chinese experts have observed that at present all the eight warships of the large destroyer class are now in service and ready for deployment. Reportedly, maritime exercises with the Type 055 large destroyer (named *Xianyang*) were conducted during the Spring Festival holidays. During the exercises *Xianyang* was tested for combat readiness and was tasked to independently counter mock aerial targets.

Analysts note that the Type 055 is one of the world's most powerful classes of multi-role warship due to features like "high firepower of 112-cell vertical launch system capable of hosting air defense, anti-ship, anti-submarine and land attack missiles, as well as the outstanding situational awareness granted by its advanced radars, sensors and data link systems integrated into its mast".

### Chinese Navy and the Global Security Initiative

The [46<sup>th</sup> fleet of the Chinese Navy](#) was sent to Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia on an escort mission. They sailed from a military port in Zhanjiang of Guangdong province. According to news reports, "the

46th fleet includes the guided-missile destroyer *Jiaozuo*, the missile frigate *Xuchang*, and the comprehensive replenishment vessel *Honghu*. It has over 700 officers and soldiers, including dozens of Special Forces personnel, and two helicopters on-board". Given the deterioration of the security situation in the Middle East, there were speculations whether these missions were a response to it. However, in a press conference from the Ministry of Defence, it was clarified that it is part of the [Global Security Initiative](#) that the Chinese ships are providing safe and reliable escorts to the Chinese and foreign vessels and had started even before the current instability began.

## JAPAN

### Japan Deploys Military Assets to Contested Maritime Boundary

The Japanese Ministry of Defence (MOD) [reported](#) on 1 February that the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) has been deploying air assets such as Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft and patrol helicopters into the zone within its air defence identification zone (ADIZ). It is noteworthy that back in 2016 the ADIZ was claimed by China. The ministry revealed that this move was in response to the increased sighting of Chinese coast guard and maritime militia vessels in Japanese waters near the contested ADIZ. As evidence, the MOD reportedly furnished the *Yomiuri Shimbun's* coverage of the increased Chinese activity around the Senkaku

Islands and attributed its response mainly to that. The ministry informed that it had subsequently deployed a patrol helicopter, fixed-wing patrol aircraft and AWACS plane into the area, as well as a destroyer. It also expressed Japan's strong opposition to China's unilateral demarcation of the Senkaku Islands in its ADIZ, calling it "totally unacceptable". The MOD was presenting its findings at a meeting of the Liberal Democratic Party's Research Commission on Security, whose deliberations are generally open to the press unless otherwise specified.

### **5<sup>th</sup> India-Japan Dharma Guardian Exercise**

The fifth edition of the Dharma Guardian exercises between the Indian Army and the Japanese Ground Self-Defence Forces [began](#) on 25 February in the western Indian state of Rajasthan. The exercise, being held at the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges, continued till 9 March, and involved a contingent of 40 members each from both armies. The Japanese detachment included troops from the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment based out of Camp Itazuma, Shizuoka Prefecture, while the Indian Army is represented by a battalion of the Rajputana Rifles. The exercise revolved primarily around counterterror operations, and included tactical drills on creating temporary operating bases, creating Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) grids and cordon and search operations in hostile rural areas among others. In a press conference held on

15 February, the JGSDF Chief of Staff General Yasunori Morishita [told](#) the media that the exercises would "improve operational skills and mutual understanding and trust" between the two sides.

## **TAIWAN**

### **Taipei's Defence Modernisation Endeavours**

The Taiwanese media reported around mid-February that Taiwan's Air Force will purchase spare parts for its Indigenous Defense Force (IDF) fighter jets for [US\\$111.29 million](#). It has a total of 129 IDFS, which has served the air force since 1992. Spare parts to be bought are mainly related to the engines. Taiwan's Aerospace Industrial Development Corporation (AIDC) will supply spare parts. Reportedly, Taiwan will build [three land-based anti-ship missiles bases](#) in south Taiwan. They are to be built by the end of 2027 with a cost of US\$107.47 million. Incidentally, London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) released its finding that Taiwan's defence spending [increased by 24.2%](#) in 2023 compared to 2022.

Additionally, it has also been reported that RTX Corporation, a U.S. company, will ["produce 50 Joint Standoff Weapons \(JSOWs\) for Taiwan..."](#) under a fixed-price contract for US\$68 million" by March 2028. The sale of these medium range JSOWs, which can be fired from Taiwan's F-16V fighter jets using GPS-inertial navigation and thermal imaging infrared seeker systems, were part of the missile sale

package approved in 2017. The Biden administration has cleared 13 defence deals for Taiwan thus far. The proposed [US\\$75 million sale](#) of the Link 16 communications system is the 13th defense deal. Reportedly, Taiwan will buy spare parts for its [Lafayette frigates for US\\$79.37 million](#) from France.

## THE KOREAN PENINSULA

### ROK Defence Diplomacy in February

Bolstering defence ties and agreements with major Middle East countries were signed during Republic of Korea's (RoK) Defense Minister Shin Won Sik's seven-day trip to the Middle East region.

Defense Minister Shin during his meeting [on 2 February with his counterpart](#), UAE Minister of State for Defense Affairs Mohammed bin Mubarak Fadhel Al Mazrouei, agreed to review the achievements of 15 years defence cooperation and foster further cooperation. In Riyadh, the Defense Minister participated in the World Defence Shows 2024 and on 5 February signed [MoU with Saudi Defence Ministry](#) to foster long-term defence cooperation in defence industry and joint military exercises. According to the MoU, Korean Defense Acquisition Program Administration and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Defense will continue cooperation by forming a joint committee to further develop a long-term bilateral defense industry and defense technology cooperation. Thereafter, on 7 February a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\) was signed](#) between RoK Defence Minister

Shin Won Sik and Qatar Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State Defence Khalid bin Mohammad in Doha. This is first time RoK is having defence agreement with the Kingdom of Qatar. In the MoU, the two countries agreed to form a defence cooperation joint committee to facilitate regular ministerial level meeting, increase exchanges between defence institutions and enhance defence, science and technology cooperation.

Defense Minister Shin's trip to Middle East region comes as South Korea seeks to become one of the world largest arms suppliers.

### North Korea's Missile Tests

In early February, North Korea [launched cruise missiles](#) as well as its new land to air missiles off its west coast. The Korean state media informing about these tests informed that they were aimed at enhancing Pyongyang's defence capabilities. The KCNA further informed that "These tests are part of the normal activities of the General Directorate and the Agency for Defense Development under its jurisdiction to advance the technology of new weapon systems in various aspects such as their function, performance, and operation, and are unrelated to the regional situation."