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CHINA

PLA Eastern Theatre Command Patrol and Military Exercise around Taiwan

The People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s Eastern Theatre Command [launched](#) combat readiness patrol and military exercises around the Taiwan Island from 8 to 10 April. According to Shi Yi, the spokesperson of the Eastern Theatre Command, the exercises were intended to warn against the “collusion between separatist forces seeking ‘Taiwan independence’ and external forces and against their provocative activities”.

In this military exercise, the PLA tested a number of its capabilities such as integrated joint combat capability, the efficiency of the number of commands of different services to quickly mobilise its forces, establishing a [deterrence situation](#) around the island. The military exercises also carried out air strikes, tested long-range air and naval capabilities and three-dimensional blockade, especially, the troops' capability to “seize control of targeted sea areas, airspace” and simulation of “attack on key targets in island and surrounding wars”.

Xi Jinping Visits PLA Southern Theatre Command

Xi Jinping [inspected](#) the PLA Southern Theatre Command on 11 April and delivered a speech at its naval headquarters. In his speech, Xi stated that the PLA needs to accelerate the modernisation of its forces on all fronts. He also ordered the PLA to “strengthen training under combat conditions, innovate the concepts of combat and the methods of combat and training, and intensify force-on-force training based on operational plans”. He also stated that

the PLA should look at the military issues from a political perspective, and also expedite the incorporation of new equipment in the operation.

Talks between Chinese and Russian Defence Minister in Moscow

On 18 April, Chinese State Councillor and Defence Minister Li Shangfu [held talks](#) with his Russian counterpart Sergei Shoigu. The two Ministers discussed the current state of military cooperation between the two countries and concluded that both countries have cooperated closely, enriching the strategic cooperation between the two countries. The two sides agreed to maintain close high-level communication, improve military-to-military engagement and expand cooperation between theatres, services and academies of the two armies. Lastly, the two sides also reiterated mutual support for safeguarding core national interests against interference by external forces. Before the Defence Ministers' meet, Russian President Vladimir Putin met the Chinese Defence Minister on 17 April. Reportedly, in the meeting Putin [highlighted the importance](#) of military cooperation between the two countries and expressed hope to strengthen cooperation in joint training and professional exchanges.

JAPAN

Japan signs \$2.8bn missile deal

The Ministry of Defence of Japan [announced](#) on 4 April that it had signed contracts worth 480 billion yen (\$2.8 billion) with domestic manufacturer Mitsubishi Heavy Industries for the development and mass production of Type 12 missiles in surface, air and sea variants, for deployment by 2026. The primary reason advanced by the Ministry is island

defence, though the threat from recent Chinese and North Korean missile launches also feature as prominent considerations. Mass production of the Type 12's surface-to-ship guided missiles and hypersonic gliding missiles, which were already in the research and development phase, are scheduled to be mass-produced this year, after testing is completed at test ranges in the United States. Japan has also declared that it will buy 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the US for deployment on its remote island chains by 2026.

Japan's SDF evacuates citizens from Sudan

As the security situation in Sudan worsened from 21 April onwards, Japan's defence ministry [declared](#) that it would be dispatching three C-130 transport planes to its forward base in Djibouti to assist in the evacuation of 68 Japanese nationals residing mainly around Khartoum. Additionally, the Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) also announced that they would be ready to divert cruisers deployed at Djibouti for anti-piracy operations around the Gulf of Aden for evacuation if necessary. Subsequently, after a 72-hour ceasefire was declared by both sides early on 24 April, 45 Japanese nationals were [able](#) to make their way to Port Sudan, from where they were evacuated to Djibouti, while another eight left for Djibouti and Ethiopia with the cooperation of the French government. One Japanese national is reported to have evacuated without the SDF's assistance. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, in the process of making an [announcement](#) of the completion of the evacuation process and congratulating the embassy staff for their 'courageous and responsible actions', also declared that Japan would temporarily be closing its embassy in Sudan until the situation stabilizes.

TAIWAN

Taiwan's military modernisation

As has been widely reported, due to the Ukraine crisis, the US has not been able to deliver weapons worth approximately US\$19 billion (NT\$589 billion) as promised under various arms deals with Taiwan. The US Department of State reassured that it was "[actively reviewing](#)" processes involved so that it can "[speed up arms shipments to Taiwan](#)." Further, the media reported that Taiwan is "[in the process of purchasing 400 Harpoon anti-ship missiles](#)" from the United States. The purchase will be completed through "[an arms deal approved by the U.S. Congress in 2020](#)."

As for Taiwan's indigenous defence capabilities development programme, the media reported that Taiwan's National Chung Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST) has developed two advanced versions of the surface-to-air missile (SAM) system, the *Sky Bow III* and Taiwan's Air Force has "[completed evaluations](#)" for one of the two versions. Reportedly, the evaluated version can "[intercept targets at an altitude of 70 kilometres](#)." The work for its mass production has begun. The other version, which is yet to be evaluated by the Air Force, has the capacity of going up to 100 kilometres. The missiles are being developed under the Strong Bow Project. There have always been concerns about "a potential "[decapitation strike](#)" targeting Taiwan's top leadership and its key political and military command installations. Taiwan is reportedly working on doubling the size of its military police from 5,000 to 10,000 officers to protect and defend the President and key installations from any such strikes. As for the other side of the Taiwan Strait, China's Shandong aircraft carrier exercises are being viewed

as the PLA testing its capabilities whether it can “[impose a blockade on Taiwan without the use of missiles.](#)”

Taiwan’s counter to military blockade

Reportedly, Taiwan’s [biggest annual Han Kuang](#) war games will include drills on breaking up blockades simulated by the Chinese military. Each year the Han Kuang war games are held in two stages, with computerised war games organised in May and live fire drills in July. The breaking up of blockade drills will happen from 24 to 28 July. According to Taiwan’s Defence Ministry statement, the live fire drills will include combat force preservation, maritime interception, and protection of major facilities, including sea and air ports. Further, in the computerised war games, Taiwan authorities will use a US-built system to simulate joint, combined, and coalition civil-military operations.

THE KOREAN PENINSULA

ROK Joint Military Exercise and Defence Diplomacy in April 2023

In order to strengthen coordination against an increasing North Korean missile threat, the Republic of Korea conducted a series of joint military and defence diplomacy exercises in April 2023. An [anti-submarine joint exercise with the US and Japan was conducted](#) in international waters off South Korea’s southern island of Jeju from 3-4 April. In the exercise, *USS Nimitz*, the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and naval destroyers were involved. Further, on [14 April the ROK and US air forces conducted aerial exercise](#), involving US B-52H strategic bomber along with South Korean F-35A and F-15K fighters, and US F-16 fighters, over the Korean Peninsula. This was followed by another [maritime missiles defence exercise between ROK, US and Japan](#) were conducted on the international

waters of East Sea on 17 April. On this trilateral ballistic missile defence exercise, it featured missile destroyers like ROKS *YulGok Yi I*, *USS Benfold*, and *JS Atago* of Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force. Besides joint military exercise, South Korea also engaged in a series of defence diplomacy. The [22nd Korea-US Integrated Defence Dialogue](#) was held in Washington, D.C. from 11-12 April between the ROK Ministry of National Defence and the US Department of Defence. The two sides discussed fostering cooperation in defence science and technology, space and cyber and promoting regional security cooperation. Further, the [12th Korea-Japan Security Policy Council](#) was held in Seoul on 17 April. The dialogue was attended by senior diplomats and defence officials from both sides. In the meeting, officials exchanged views on various issues including the Northeast Asian security environment, threat from North Korea’s nuclear missile programme, bilateral defence cooperation between the ROK and Japan and broader trilateral cooperation with the United States.

North Korea’s new type of weapon

On 13 April, North Korea tested an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) reported to be a [mobile and harder to detect missile](#). According to the statement released by South Korea’s Defence Chiefs of Staff, the missile was launched from near Pyongyang and fell in the waters between Korean Peninsula and Japan following a 1000 km flight. Observers are divided over its range as the US called it a long-range missile and Japan described it having an inter-continental range. However, the primary concern was the possible use of solid fuel as a propellant for the ICBM because Kim Jong un has vowed to develop solid-fuel ICBMs as one of the key high-tech weapons to cope against US military threats.