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MAPPING EAST ASIA

CHINA

PLA Military Drills in May and June 2021

An army aviation brigade under the PLA's Xinjiang Military Command carried out a live-fire exercise in the hinterland of the Karakoram Range at an altitude of nearly 5,000 metres. The courses include intercepting and destroying mock enemy reconnaissance aircraft with air-to-air missiles, destroying armoured targets on the ground with air-to-ground missiles, suppressing ground targets at close range with rockets and aircraft guns.¹

Under the PLA's Northern Theatre Command, a multi-course drill in the waters of the Yellow Sea was held from May 17-20. The drill tested the troops' ability to perform submarine rescue missions and emergency treatments, where the application of multi-type submarine rescue equipment was the salient feature.² Meanwhile, a naval flotilla under the PLA Southern Theatre Command successfully completed a month-long open-sea training exercise, in the South China Sea, the Sulawesi Sea and the Western Pacific. During this exercise, warships comprising guided-missile frigates *Liuzhou* (Hull 573), *Suqian* (Hull 504), *Jingmen* (Hull 506) and the comprehensive supply ship *Weishanhu* (Hull 887), had participated.³

In June, the PLA's airborne troops carried out a drill on battlefield first-aid, in central China's Hubei Province, where several large transport planes and 60 military medics participated. According to the head of the PLA's airborne troops' hospital, since its establishment, its abilities of airborne landing in complex weather conditions, precise positioning and assembly, and mass casualty treatment has been continuously improving.⁴

The PLA's Hong Kong Garrison conducted a joint patrol drill on June 25, by deploying land, sea and air forces. The objective of the drill was to comprehensively test the troops' defence capabilities while focusing on joint search-and-rescue, interception and verification, force projection, etc.⁵

China Passes Law on the Protection and Rights of Military Personnel

At the meeting of the 29th session of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC), a law that protects the dignity and rights of military personnel in China was approved. According to this law, no organization or individual may in any way slander or belittle the dignity of soldiers, insult or slander the honour of soldiers, and must not damage or defile the honours given to soldiers. Further, the

¹ "PLA helicopters conduct live-fire exercise at altitude of 5000 metres" *China Military*, May 28, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-05/28/content_10041113.htm (Accessed on June 7, 2021).

² "PLA Navy conducts large-scale joint submarine rescue drill", *China Military*, May 25, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-05/25/content_10039514.htm (Accessed on June 7, 2021).

³ "PLA Navy organizes month-long open-sea training", *China Military*, June 7, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-06/07/content_10045412.htm (Accessed on June 7, 2021).

⁴ "PLA airborne troops carry out drill on battlefield first aid", *China Military*, June 15, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-06/15/content_10048852.htm (Accessed on June 8, 2021).

⁵ "PLA Hong Kong Garrison organizes joint land-air sea patrol drill on June 25", *China Military*, June 21 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-06/28/content_10055266.htm (Accessed on June 8, 2021.)

law stipulates that honours obtained by a soldier shall be enjoyed for life, and shall not be revoked except for statutory reasons or through statutory procedures.⁶ The new law on the protection of the status, rights and interests of military personnel will take effect on August 1.

PLA Air Force Commissions J-20 Stealth Fighter Jets

A batch of J-20s were commissioned to the Hero Aviation Group of the PLA Air Force on June 18. This new-generation stealth fighter jets were independently developed by China. Under the PLA Air Force, the hero aviation group is the No.1 aviation group, where in 2019, the China's Central Military Commission (CMC) have bestowed with the honorary title, "Pioneer Aviation Group in Strengthening the Military." Also, the first-generation pilots assigned to this group are credited with first records of air combats, dog fights, and night battles in the history of the PLA Air Force to resist US aggression and aid Korea, where they had shot down and stricken 92 enemy fighters in total.⁷

Chinese Defence Minister at 8th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus and 9th Moscow Conference on International Security

Chinese Defence Minister Gen. Wei Fenghe participated in the 8th Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus. At the meeting, Gen Wei emphasized the safeguarding of the international rule of law. He also assured China's commitment to safeguarding world peace, contributing to global development and maintaining international order and reiterated that the development of China's military is part of the growth of the world's peace forces.⁸ The Chinese Defence Minister also attended the 9th Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS-2021) between June 22-24, 2021. He underlined that China resolutely safeguards its core interests and strongly opposes acts that interfere in China's domestic affairs and damage China's interests.⁹

White Paper on China's UN Peacekeeping Mission

In the White Paper released by the China State Council Information Office in June 2021, China has sent more than 40,000 military personnel to participate in about 30 UN peacekeeping missions in several African and Middle Eastern countries.¹⁰

Since the time China began participating in UN peacekeeping operations in 1990, several accolades have been received for it. For instance, in May 2021, all 413 members of the eighth Chinese peacekeeping force to Mali were awarded the United Nations Peace Medal of Honor, in recognition of their outstanding contributions to

⁶ "China passes law to protect status, rights of military personnel" *China Military*, June 11, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-06/11/content_10047516.htm (Accessed on June 21, 2021).

⁷ "More J-20 fighter jets commissioned to PLA Air Force" *China Military*, June 21, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-06/21/content_10050988.htm (Accessed on June 21, 2021).

⁸ "8th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus held online." *China Military*, June 16, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-06/16/content_10049294.htm (Accessed on June 21, 2021).

⁹ "Chinese defence minister attends Moscow Conference on International Security", *China Military*, June 24, 2021 at: http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-06/24/content_10052577.htm (Accessed on July 3, 2021)

¹⁰ "China participates in about 30 UN peacekeeping missions: White Paper", Xinhunet, June 24, 2021 at http://www.xinhunet.com/english/2021-06/24/c_1310025344.htm (Accessed on July 3, 2021).

¹¹ "413 Chinese peacekeepers to Mali awarded UN peace Medal of Honor", Ministry of National Defence of the People's Republic of China, May 29, 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-05/29/content_4886421.htm (Accessed on July 4, 2021).

peacekeeping operations.¹¹ Further, a total of 225 members of the 16th Chinese Peacekeeping Engineer Contingent to Darfur, Sudan, were awarded UN peace medals and commendations by the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) on May 20, 2021.¹²

In the Middle East, ppeacekeepers of the 19th Chinese Peacekeeping Force to Lebanon carried out cultural exchange activities and donated supplies to two schools in southern Lebanon, wherein all 410 members were awarded UN peace medals.¹³

Presently, China ranks first among the permanent members of the UN Security Council in terms of the number of peacekeepers dispatched, and is the second-largest fund contributor to the UN's peacekeeping missions.

Special Training Session for Chinese Peacekeeping Forces

Under the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the Logistic Support Department, a special training session on vegetable farming was organised for the first time at Wuxi on June 16 for the troops that will be undertaking peacekeeping missions abroad. The objective of the training session was to enable the peacekeeping force to master vegetable cultivation technology and improve their scientific planting and management skills and the capability of emergency support of

fresh vegetables during the peacekeeping mission period. It is believed that such initiation will play a positive role in guaranteeing the military, non-staple food supply based on local conditions and enriching food variety for the peacekeeping troops abroad.¹⁴

TAIWAN

China condemns US Senators' visit to Taiwan on Military Plane

Subsequent to a visit to Taipei by three US Senators: Tammy Duckworth, Dan Sullivan and Christopher Coons, in a C-17 US military aircraft on June 6, the Chinese government officials expressed strong opposition to the United States.¹⁵ Wu Qian, spokesperson of Chinese defence ministry strongly criticized the visit as a 'political show', using the Taiwan issue to challenge the one-China principle, in an attempt to 'use Taiwan Island to contain China.' Further, Wu warned that "If anyone dares to separate Taiwan Island from China, the Chinese People's Liberation Army "will give it a head-on strike" and firmly defend national reunification and territorial integrity at all costs."¹⁶

Presence of US Destroyer in Taiwan Strait infuriates China

In June 2021, the sailing of *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG-54), through the Taiwan Strait infuriated

¹² "16th Chinese peacekeepers to Sudan's Darfur awarded UN peace medals", Ministry of National Defence of the People's Republic of China, May 24, 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-05/24/content_4885972.htm (Accessed on July 4, 2021).

¹³ "Chinese peacekeepers to Lebanon awarded UN Peace Medal of Honor", Ministry of National Defence of the People's Republic of China, June 16, 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-06/17/content_4887540.htm (Accessed July 4, 2021).

¹⁴ "Chinese military organizes special production training for peacekeepers for first time", Ministry of National Defence of the People's Republic of China, June 21, 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-06/21/content_4887765.htm (Accessed on July 7, 2021).

¹⁵ "China says US senators visiting Taiwan on military plane a 'vile provocation'", Reuters, June 8, 2021 at <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-denounces-vile-provocation-us-senators-taiwan-2021-06-08/> (Accessed on July 7, 2021).

¹⁶ "Very vicious political provocation' says defence ministry in response to US senators' visit to Taiwan Island by military plane", *Global Times*, June 8, 2021 at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202106/1225750.shtml> (Accessed on July 7, 2021).

China, which issued a statement. Senior Colonel Zhang Chunhui, the spokesperson for the Chinese PLA Eastern Theatre Command (ETC), in a written statement, declared that the US played the old trick to provoke trouble in the Taiwan Strait, deliberately disrupted and undermined the regional security situation, and jeopardized peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, which fully manifested [the fact] that the US is the biggest troublemaker for regional security and “China is firmly opposed to that.”¹⁷

Meanwhile, senior Colonel Ren Guoqiang, a spokesperson for China’s Ministry of National Defence pointed out that China is firmly opposed to any form of official exchanges or military contacts between the US and Taiwan, any attempt by the US to use Taiwan to contain China, and any effort of Taiwan to act on US support and seek “Taiwan [ese] independence” by force. Further, Colonel Ren reminded the US to fully realize that China’s development and growth cannot be stopped by anyone or any force. The US should abide by the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiqués, and sever all military ties with Taiwan.¹⁸

JAPAN

South Korea Begins Annual Military Drills near Disputed Islands

South Korea has begun its military exercises near the Dokdo Islands – referred to as the Takashima Islands by Japan. According to Yonhap News, a rumoured meeting on the sidelines of G-7 Cornwall

Summit between the leaders of countries was cancelled just a few days before the exercises started. The meeting is said to have been cancelled after the Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga objected to these annual drills. Ties between the two countries have severed in the past few months due to their long war-time history and the recent incident of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games organizers identifying the Islands as part of Japan on a map showing the route of the Olympic torch relay. South Korea also lodged a complaint with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on this matter, which was dismissed.

KOREAN PENINSULA

US Lifts Missile Restrictions on South Korea

On May 21, 2021, the US finally lifted the 42-year-old missile development restrictions on South Korea.

The restriction guidelines were first imposed in 1979 when South Korea looked to develop ballistic missiles by acquiring US technology and in return had agreed to limit the range of its missiles to 180 kilometres and a maximum payload of 500 kilograms. Since then, the guidelines were revised four times, as threats from North Korea became more frequent. South Korea can now develop ballistic missiles with a range beyond the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea has criticized this move, calling it a “stark reminder” of United States’ hostile approach toward North Korea.

¹⁷ “Chinese military denounces US Ddestroyer’s provocation in Taiwan Strait”, *China Military*, June 23, 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-06/23/content_10052163.htm (Accessed on July 8, 2021).

¹⁸ “China urges US to stop official’s exchange and military contact with Taiwan: Defence spokesperson”, Ministry of National Defence of the People’s Republic of China, June 24, 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-06/24/content_4888034.htm (Accessed on July 8, 2021).

South Korea to Develop “Iron Dome” Style Defence System

South Korea’s defence procurement agency announced on June 28 that it has approved the plan to build an artillery interception system similar to Israel’s “Iron Dome” to protect its national capital and other key facilities near the Seoul metropolitan area, from the long-range North Korean guns and rocket launchers.

The move can be perceived as a result of North Korea’s military deployment around the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Various reports have stated that there are an estimated 10,000 artillery pieces including rocket launchers, stationed in the north of the DMZ, placing them within 60 miles of Seoul, where half of the country’s population resides.

According to the Defence Acquisition Program Administration, the project is expected to be completed by 2035 at a cost of \$2.56 billion.

South Korea Appoints New Air Force Chief

South Korea’s Ministry of National Defence has appointed Lt. Gen. Park In-Ho, a three-star Air Force General, as the new Air Force Chief. Lee Seong-Yong the incumbent, was relieved of his duties on June 10, within a week of his resignation. He resigned after the Ministry of National Defence was severely criticized for the death of a female master sergeant, who, according to her family, took her own life after being sexually abused by her male colleague. This is not a first incident of female abuse and suicide, as South Korean defence forces are often criticized for mistreating female employees and the matter is brushed under the carpet by senior officials.

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* All the footnotes were verified at the time of publication.

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