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MAPPING EAST ASIA

CHINA

UN Peacekeeping Drill ‘Shared Destiny’ Held in China

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) organized the first UN peacekeeping field training exercise themed ‘Shared Destiny 2021’. The joint multinational exercise was conducted from 6 to 15 September at the PLA Ground Force’s Queshan Combined Tactical Training Base in Henan Province. Troops from four countries — China, Mongolia, Pakistan and Thailand — participated in the 10-day exercise. Reportedly, the training exercise was conducted in three stages: the first stage involved independent training for troops of different specialities; the second stage was the joint training of the participating armies in mixed groups; and the third entailed training demonstration and observation. The exercise comprised infantry soldiers, aviation squads, engineers and transport and medical personnel and the use of armoured assault vehicles, helicopters and unmanned aircraft. The deputy head of training at the headquarters, Lt. Col. Zhang Yiming observed in an interview that the objective of the exercise, was “to foster practical cooperation among the countries that contribute peacekeepers and improve the skills of standby peacekeeping units”.¹ Towards the conclusion of the exercise, China’s Central Military Commission hailed the exercise as an important event for commemorating the 50th anniversary of the restoration of the lawful

seat of the People’s Republic of China in the United Nations.²

China engages in multi-nation defence diplomacy

In a move to boost China’s defence ties with extra-regional powers and neighbouring countries, Beijing held defence talks with the United Kingdom (UK), Singapore, Malaysia, Argentina and Laos. General Li Zuocheng, the Chief of Joint Staff Department under China’s Central Military Commission (CMC) held virtual talks with General Sir Nik Carter, UK’s Chief of Defence Staff on 10 September. In the meeting, both sides agreed to strengthen strategic communication and military cooperation.³ Five days later, China and Singapore held the eighth China-Singapore Defence Policy Dialogue (DPD). Both sides affirmed their commitment to promote high-level exchanges, enhance strategic communication, expand pragmatic cooperation and multilateral coordination to advance robust military relations between the two countries. Subsequently, on 27 September, Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister, Wei Fenghe spoke with Malaysia’s Senior Minister of Defence Hishammuddin Hussein over a video call. During the meeting, Wei urged that China and Malaysia should work together to oppose hegemonism and power politics, strengthen communication and address differences on the South China Sea, and jointly uphold peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.⁴ Following these meetings, China conferred with Argentina

¹ “International peacekeeping exercise fosters cooperation among neighbors”, *China Military*, 7 September 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-09/07/content_10087044.htm (Accessed on 1 November 2021).

² Zhao Lei, “China’s first joint peacekeeping exercise concludes”, *China Daily*, 15 September 2021 (Accessed on 2 November 2021).

³ Li Wei, “China, UK to enhance military cooperation”, *China Military*, 10 September 2021 at http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-09/10/content_10088281.htm (Accessed on 2 November 2021).

⁴ “Chinese defense minister holds video talks with Malaysian counterpart”, *XinhuaNet*, 27 September 2021 at http://www.news.cn/english/2021-09/27/c_1310213241.htm (Accessed on 1 November 2021).

and Laos on 22 and 28 October respectively. General Wei Fenghe led the meeting with Argentina, while Beijing co-organised the seventh China-Laos Military Cooperation/Coordination committee meeting with Laos. In both the meetings, China discussed the regional security situation and called for expanding military, strategic and practical cooperation between China and the concerned countries.⁵

China Executes Beach Landing Drills Near Taiwan

The PLA carried out beach landing and assault drills in the Fujian province directly across the Taiwan Strait on 11 October.⁶ Although officially, the exercise was not linked to Taipei, the drills followed just days after President Xi Jinping's declaration to achieve peaceful reunification of Taiwan.⁷ Reportedly, the exercise involved shock troops, sappers and boat specialists. Also, the troops were organized into multiple waves to overrun the beach and perform combat operations at different stages. Furthermore, a short video of the exercise showed soldiers in small boats swift-

landing on a beach, throwing smoke grenades, breaking through barbed wire defences and digging trenches in the sand.⁸

China-Russia Joint Naval Drill in Sea of Japan

The PLA Navy in collaboration with their Russian counterpart, conducted a joint naval exercise in the Sea of Japan. The exercise was code-named 'Joint Sea 2021' and extended from 14 to 23 October.⁹ Various advanced warships including the Type 055 large destroyer *Nanchang*, the Type 052D destroyer *Kunming*, the Type 054A frigates *Binzhou* and *Liuzhou*, and the Type 903A comprehensive supply ship *Dongpinghu*, as well as fixed anti-submarine warfare aircraft and vessel-borne helicopters were sent from China. Similarly, the Russian side deployed large anti-submarine ships, frigates and aircraft. Over the course of the drill, the Chinese and Russian navies engaged in practice communications, sea mine counter-measures, air defence, live-fire shooting at maritime targets, joint manoeuvring and joint anti-submarine missions.¹⁰ Following the completion of the drill, a Chinese

⁵ Zhen Chuo, "China, Argentina vow to deepen military cooperation", *China Military Online*, 22 October 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-10/22/content_4897318.htm (Accessed on 1 November 2021); Zhen Chuo, "China and Laos agree to promote mil-to-mil relations", *China Military Online*, 28 October 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-10/28/content_4897916.htm (Accessed on 1 November 2021).

⁶ "China says it carried out beach landing drills in province opposite Taiwan", *Reuters*, 11 October 2021 at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-says-it-carried-out-beach-landing-drills-province-opposite-taiwan-2021-10-11/> (Accessed on 31 October 2021).

⁷ Carlos Garcia and Yew Lun Tian, "China's Xi vows 'reunification' with Taiwan", *Reuters*, 10 October 2021 at <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-xi-says-reunification-with-taiwan-must-will-be-realised-2021-10-09/> (Accessed on 31 October 2021).

⁸ "China says it carried out beach landing drills in province opposite Taiwan", no. 6.

⁹ Chen Zhuo, "China-Russia Joint Sea 2021 military exercise concludes", *China Military Online*, 23 October 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-10/23/content_4897383.htm (Accessed on 30 October 2021).

¹⁰ Guo Yuandan and Liu Xuanzun, "China, Russia hold joint naval drill in Sea of Japan, display 'higher level of trust, capability'", *Global Times*, 14 October 2021 at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1236294.shtml> (Accessed on 30 October).

military spokesperson contended in an interview that the drill had enhanced China and Russia's ability to counter security threats in the region. In a separate statement to the media, Tan Keifei, a spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense, stated that the exercise had deepened military relations between the two countries.¹¹

TAIWAN

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense publicly confirmed for the first time, the existence of the Yun Feng (Cloud Peak) medium-range surface-to-surface missile programme. The confirmation came during a joint hearing of the Legislative Yuan's Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee and Finance Committee, on a proposed special budget of NT\$ 240 billion to boost Taiwan's missile capability.¹² Although Taiwan's Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng declined to publicly divulge the details about the missile programme, as per reports, the Yun Feng missile has a range of 1200 to 1500 kilometres.¹³ Accordingly, the missile will be able to target the Chinese airports, harbours and command centres in the hinterland. Further, to boost Taiwan's self-defence, the missile could also be deployed to disrupt China's planned sorties

in a conflict. It is noteworthy that Taiwan's missile development programme has been underway since the 1990s, and the Yun Feng missiles are considered a key component in Taiwan's asymmetric warfare strategy against China.¹⁴

Taiwan President acknowledges presence of US Troops in Taiwan

In a media interview, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen, acknowledged the presence of US troops on the Island for training purposes. Prior to this explicit acknowledgement, there were 'vague' and conflicting reports in this regard in 2020, emanating from both the US military and Taiwan's defence ministry. However, the confirmation came in the backdrop of China's increasing military pressure on Taiwan.¹⁵ Although Tsai did not reveal the exact number of US troops present in Taiwan, she hinted ongoing military cooperation with the US by remarking that it was "not as many as people thought... We have a wide range of cooperation with the U.S. aiming at increasing our defense capability."¹⁶ The significance of Tsai's admission lies in the fact that she is the first president to acknowledge such a presence since the US officially left Taiwan in 1979. Reportedly, a

¹¹ "China-Russia joint naval drill enhances capability to counter threats, securing regional peace: spokesperson", *XinhuaNet*, 28 October 2021 at http://www.news.cn/english/2021-10/28/c_1310275889.htm (Accessed on 30 October 2021).

¹² "Taiwan military confirms 'Yun Feng' missile's existence", *Focus Taiwan*, 6 October 2021 at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202110060012> (Accessed on 7 October 2021).

¹³ Matthew Strong, "Taiwan defense minister says long-range cruise missile still in development", *Taiwan News*, 6 October 2021 at <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4307537> (Accessed on 7 October 2021).

¹⁴ No. 12

¹⁵ "Tsai confirms US troops present", *Taipei Times*, 29 October 2021 at <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2021/10/29/2003766945> (Accessed on 30 October 2021).

¹⁶ Will Ripley, Eric Cheung and Ben Westcott, "Taiwan's President says the threat from China is increasing 'every day' and confirms presence of US military trainers on the island", *CNN*, 28 October 2021 at <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/27/asia/tsai-ingwen-taiwan-china-interview-intl-hnk/index.html> (Accessed on 30 October 2021).

platoon of 40 marines from Taiwan's Marine Corps have been sent to Guam "on a one-month training program" under a Taiwan-US defence cooperation and exchange programme.¹⁷

JAPAN

Japan Participates in a Series of Joint Naval Exercises

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), with an eye on increasing threat from China, engaged in a series of joint naval exercises involving multiple countries. The primary objective of these exercises were to strengthen MSDF's tactical skills and interoperability with foreign navies. The first series of joint naval exercises was held from 2 to 3 October in the waters southwest of Okinawa. Three Japanese MSDF vessels including helicopter-carrying destroyer *JS Ise*, joined the US Navy carrier strike groups led by flagships *USS Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76) and *USS Carl Vinson* (CVN 70), and the UK's carrier strike group led by *HMS Queen Elizabeth*. Frigates from the Netherlands, Canada and New Zealand also joined them. The training exercises then moved from the waters off Okinawa to the South China Sea on 4 October, and continued there till 9 October. Here, except the US, the other five countries participated in the naval exercise.¹⁸

Simultaneous to the six-nation exercise, Japan also participated in India-Japan Maritime Bilateral Exercise (JIMEX) conducted in the Arabian Sea from 6 to 8 October. The Japanese navy fleet was led by Rear Admiral Ikeuchi Izuru, Commander Escort Flotilla - 3 (CCF-3), and included JMSDF ships *Kaga*, an Izumo-Class Helicopter Carrier and a Guided Missile Destroyer named *Murasame*. From the Indian side, Rear Admiral Ajay Kochhar, Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet, commanded the indigenously-built Guided Missile Stealth Destroyer, *Kochi* and Guided Missile Frigate, *Teg*.¹⁹ The objective of the exercise was to deepen mutual understanding of operational procedures and improve interoperability by way of conducting several advance exercises. Multidimensional exercises encompassing weapon firings, cross-deck helicopter operations and complex surface, anti-submarine and air warfare drills were undertaken to build coordination between the navies.

Within a few days of the conclusion of JIMEX, Japan along with the US, Australia and India, again organised a joint naval drill extending from 13 to 15 October. Reportedly, the exercise focused on advanced surface and anti-submarine warfare exercises, seamanship evolution and weapon firings. In this exercise too, Japan involved its *JS Kaga* and *JS Murasame* while the Indian Navy participated with the *INS Ranvijay*, the *INS*

¹⁷ "Defense minister confirms marines training in Guam", *Taipei Times*, 3 November 2021 at <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2021/11/03/2003767234> (Accessed on 4 November 2021).

¹⁸ Takushi Ohashi, "China's Reaction to Six Nation Joint Naval Exercises Proves their Point", *Japan Forward*, 19 October 2021 at <https://japan-forward.com/chinas-reaction-to-six-nation-joint-naval-exercises-proves-their-point/> (Accessed on 20 October 2021).

¹⁹ "Fifth Edition of Japan-India Bilateral Maritime Exercise 'JIMEX'", *Ministry of Defence*, PIB, 5 October 2021 at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1761131> (Accessed on 6 October 2021).

Satpura, the P-8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft and a submarine. The US Navy was represented by aircraft carrier *USS Carl Vinson*, and two destroyers, *USS Lake Champlain* and *USS Stockdale*, while the Royal Australian Navy was represented by the *HMAS Ballarat* and the *HMAS Sirius*.²⁰

LDP Calls for Doubling the Defence Budget

Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in its election manifesto, pledged to double Japan's defence spending to 2 per cent of the GDP. The LDP called for bolstering Japan's defence capabilities in view of China's assertive behaviour across the Taiwan Strait and the contested Senkaku Islands as well as North Korea's nuclear and missile programme.²¹ Earlier in May, Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi had suggested that Japan needs to increase its defence capabilities at a "radically different pace than in the past," and thus appropriately allocate funds required to defend national sovereignty.²²

Foreign Submarine Spotted by MSDF

The Japanese Defense Ministry in a statement alleged that a Chinese submarine was spotted near

its southern islands' waters. Reportedly, the MSDF spotted a foreign submarine, suspected to be Chinese, outside Japan's territorial waters, east of the Amami-Oshima Island, situated in the Kagoshima prefecture. The Japanese destroyer and patrol aircraft monitored the submarine, which subsequently left the contiguous zone. Thereafter, Japan engaged in collecting information and employed surveillance with a sense of urgency. The submarine reportedly did not enter Japanese territorial waters; Japan believed that the submarine could be Chinese since its destroyer was spotted nearby.²³

KOREAN PENINSULA

North Korea Holds Military Parade on its 73rd Anniversary

North Korea celebrated the 73rd anniversary of its foundation with a night-time parade in Pyongyang. The parade was held at Pyongyang's Kim Il Sung square at midnight with the North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un in attendance.²⁴ Along with soldiers, paramilitary and public security forces, the parade also featured personnel wearing orange hazmat suits with medical-grade masks. Reportedly, this unusual demonstration was made to convey the

²⁰ "Next phase of Quad's naval drills to kick off in Bay of Bengal today", *Hindustan Times*, 12 October 2021 at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/quad-navies-set-to-kick-off-2nd-phase-of-malabar-drills-101633935786044.html> (Accessed on 16 October 2021).

²¹ Kosuke Takahashi and Gabriel Dominguez, "Japan's LDP vows to double defence spending amid 'increasingly severe security environment'", *Janes*, 18 October 2021 at <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/japans-ldp-vows-to-double-defence-spending-amid-increasingly-severe-security-environment> (Accessed on 20 October 2021).

²² Junnosuke Kobara "Japan to scrap 1% GDP cap on defense spending: Minister Kishi", *Nikkei Asia*, 20 May 2021, at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Japan-to-scrap-1-GDP-cap-on-defense-spending-Minister-Kishi> (Accessed on 20 October 2021).

²³ "Japan says suspected Chinese submarine seen near territorial waters", *Reuters*, 12 September 2021 at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/09/12/national/china-submarine-territorial-waters/> (Accessed on 15 September 2021).

²⁴ "North Korea parades military hardware to celebrate founding", *Al Jazeera*, 9 September 2021 at <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2021/9/9/in-pictures-north-korea-founding-day-parade> (Accessed on 23 September 2021).

country's anti-coronavirus efforts. While some conventional weapons like rocket launchers, anti-tank missiles were on display, no ballistic missiles were displayed. Furthermore, unlike previous parades, the North Korean leader did not deliver a speech at the event.²⁵ According to observers, this apparently lack-lustre parade was targeted largely at the domestic audience and intended to promote domestic unity in the face of worsening economic woes, continuing US economic sanctions and COVID-19 restrictions.²⁶

Pyongyang Tests Hypersonic Missiles

North Korea on 29 September, claimed that it had successfully tested its hypersonic missile, *Hwasong-8*. The hypersonic missile launch was the third in a row of missile tests conducted by Pyongyang in September and October. Previously, in September, it tested a cruise missile and a train-launched ballistic missile system, and later in October, it conducted a submarine-launched ballistic missile test.²⁷

Evidently, this hypersonic missile launch was one of the most ambitious launches in North Korea's history. Post the hypersonic missile test-launch, the state media outlet, Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) described the missile as a strategic weapon that is likely to enhance North Korea's defence capabilities. Explicating the accuracy of

the missile, its national defence scientists confirmed the navigational control and stability of the missile. Reportedly, plans to induct hypersonic missiles into Pyongyang's military arsenal have been underway since January 2021. In a meeting of the Party Congress, Kim Jong Un had included a hypersonic missile system in a wish list of five weapons' systems. Noting the significance of the tests, experts opined that hypersonic missiles were a significant addition to Pyongyang's military capability because due to its speed and varied trajectories, these missiles are hard to detect and defend against.²⁸

South Korea Developing Powerful Missile

Reportedly, in response to increasing military threats from North Korea, Seoul is in the final stages of developing a missile as powerful as a nuclear weapon. The three-tonne missile has a flight range of 350 to 400 kilometres and is capable of reaching all areas of North Korea, if launched from around the inter-Korean border. More importantly, it is designed to penetrate underground tunnels and destroy North Korea's nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missiles before they are launched from their underground bases. This missile development programme is part of Seoul's larger aim to strengthen its deterrence and improve strike capabilities and deter any potential act of adventurism from Pyongyang. Amidst increasing

²⁵ "North Korea holds major military parade on anniversary of foundation", *DW*, 9 September 2021 at <https://www.dw.com/en/north-korea-holds-major-military-parade-on-anniversary-of-foundation/a-59128761> (Accessed on 23 September 2021).

²⁶ Kim Tong-Hyung, "N. Korea, slimmed down Kim Jong Un, enjoy toned-down parade", *Associated Press*, 9 September 2021 at <https://apnews.com/article/lifestyle-seoul-business-parades-north-korea-c9721fb45d123e63760c7e58de9eb1e1> (Accessed on 23 September 2021).

²⁷ "North Korea says it fired new 'hypersonic missile'", *BBC*, 29 September 2021 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58729701> (Accessed on 30 September 2021).

²⁸ "North Korea says it tested hypersonic missile", *Al Jazeera*, 29 September 2021 at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/29/north-korea-says-it-tested-hypersonic-missile> (Accessed on 30 September 2021).

tensions in the Korean Peninsula, this latest missile development programme is expected to fuel the conventional arms race between the two Koreas.²⁹

South Korea Launches Space Rocket *Nuri*

In a major step towards advancing its space ambitions, South Korea launched its first indigenously-built rocket on 21 October. The Korean Satellite Launch Vehicle II, codenamed *Nuri*, blasted off from the Naro Space Centre in Goheung, South of Jeolla province. However, according to a Government statement, the rocket failed to put the payload in the targeted orbit and hence did not complete its mission. A Korean-language statement from the Korea Aerospace Research Institute (KARI) suggested that the rocket's third stage might have shut down prematurely, which in turn resulted in failure.³⁰ Reportedly, South Korea spent an estimated two trillion won to develop *Nuri*, and if the tests had succeeded, Seoul would have become the seventh country in the world to lift one tonne into earth's orbit. Nevertheless, since South Korea is aiming to land a spacecraft on the Moon by 2030, it has planned to carry out four more launches of the *Nuri* until 2027.³¹

²⁹ "S Korea developing missile as powerful as nuclear weapon", *Al Jazeera*, 3 September 2021 at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/3/s-korea-developing-missile-as-powerful-as-nuclear-weapon-report> (Accessed on 30 September 2021).

³⁰ Megan Bartels, "South Korea's 1st Nuri rocket fails to put payload in orbit in debut space launch", 21 October 2021 at <https://www.space.com/south-korea-nuri-rocket-launch-failure> (Accessed on 30 October 2021).

³¹ "South Korea launches first homegrown space rocket *Nuri*", BBC, 21 October 2021 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58990718> (Accessed on 30 October 2021).

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