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CHINA

Xi Jinping Calls for Modernisation of National Defence and Army in Two Sessions

On 7 March, President Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and also the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) attended and delivered a [speech](#) at the plenary meeting of the delegation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Armed Police Force at the Fourth Session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC). Reportedly, during his speech he called for promoting “far-reaching” modernisation of the national defence and army. He also emphasised greater supervision for military projects to root out corruption as China enters the 15th Five Year Plan. In the same speech, Xi instructed the PLA to strengthen efforts at “political army building” and “unswervingly uphold and strengthen the party's absolute leadership over the army” and issued stark warning against disloyalty towards the Party. Vice-Chairman of the CMC, Zhang Shengmin who was also present in the [meeting](#) called for “deepening political rectification and anti-corruption efforts”. Similarly, Chinese Defense Minister, Dong Jun [stated](#) that “political building in the military” is a fundamental task.

Troops from a Xinjiang Military Command Unit Conduct Armed Mountain Climbing Training

In late March, a unit of the Xinjiang Military Command [stationed](#) at an altitude of 4,200 meters in the Karakoram Range Mountains organised an armed mountain climbing training exercise amidst conditions of oxygen deprivation, extreme cold, and steep terrain. The natural environment around the

military station is harsh characterised by low oxygen levels, perpetually low temperatures, and constant snow cover. This mountain climbing exercise also included simulated drills between two rival squads with all available weapons and equipment. The exercise also saw live-fire drills that was completed on the unit's way to the summit of the mountain. Following the exercise, the PLA troops trekked for three hours to reach the summit of the mountain which is at an altitude of 4,700 meters. In his interaction with the media, the participating Sergeant Li Xian stated: “This armed mountain-climbing exercise has not only honed our comrades' survival capabilities and combat skills in extreme environments, but has also tempered our fighting spirit – instilling in us a resolve to fear neither hardship nor death.”

JAPAN

Dharma Guardian 2026 Concludes

The 2026 edition of the Dharma Guardian bilateral ground forces' exercise [concluded](#) on 8 March after a nearly fortnight-long exchange between detachments from the 14th Battalion, Ladakh Scouts of the Indian Army and the 1st Division of the Japan Ground Self-Defence Forces (JGSDF) at Chaubattia Field Training Range in India. The exercises, which commenced on 24 February, were designed ‘to improve operational capabilities and tactical skills related to counter-terrorism operations through joint training with the Indian Army, and to promote mutual understanding and trust between the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force and the Indian Army’. During the exercises, both armies [undertook](#) extensive cooperative exercises in order to strengthen interoperability and enhance joint operational capacity. Particular emphasis was laid on counter-

insurgency and counter-terrorism operations, including house searches and picket formation. Urban warfare drills, including areas with difficult terrain, were also part of the exercises.

In the final 48 hours of the 12-day training period, ASAHI SHAKTI, a Validation Exercise, was undertaken in order to test the skills operationalised during the exercise. A ‘simulated operational scenario’ was laid out wherein the two forces were assigned the task of eliminating terrorists. Terrain analysis, establishment of a Company Operating Base, intelligence gathering, cordon and search operations, heliborne operations, room intervention and hostage rescue components were incorporated into the exercise. The drills involved the use of surveillance technology such as drones in order to enhance situational awareness, coordination and operational effectiveness.

Japan MoD Establishes New Department for Pacific Defence

Japan’s Minister of Defence Shinjiro Koizumi [announced](#) on 28 March that the Ministry would be establishing a new office which would focus on conceptualising a strategy for the defence of Japan’s Pacific flank. The new office, to be entitled the ‘Pacific Defence Concept Office’, would start work in April and be tasked with coming up with measures to reinforce the Self-Defence Forces’ ability to monitor, track and respond to China’s growing ability to deploy maritime assets in the Pacific Ocean. In remarks made to reporters during a visit to Iwoto (formerly Iwo Jima) to commemorate 81 years of the climactic World War II-era battle there, Koizumi called the office’s mission ‘an urgent task’, and admitted that there was ‘a vacuum’ in Japan’s defences in the Pacific

Ocean. Concrete initiatives before the office include the development of Iwoto’s harbour facilities and the deployment of a string of radar stations across the Pacific Coast of the Japanese archipelago to monitor naval activity there. The latter has recently been identified as a key national security priority by a committee, chaired by the Defence Minister, convened to revise the three key national-security documents of Japan.

TAIWAN

Political Tussle in Taiwan over Defence Spending

Taiwan is [witnessing](#) a tussle over defence spending between the government and the opposition parties, that is, Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People’s Party (TPP), which holds majority in the Legislative Yuan (parliament). In 2025, the government pledged to increase “the defense budget to 5% of GDP by 2030.” It had also proposed a special procurement plan of US arms worth US\$39 billion, which required a legislative review. However, presently, the legislature is reviewing three competing bills for the purpose. The KMT proposes around US\$11.8 billion USD, though its bill permits additional acquisitions, if required. The TPP’s bill allocates about US\$12.4 billion for “five major arms purchases”. This situation has created a deadlock, forcing the US representatives to issue appeals to resolve the matter.

Taiwan’s Defence Preparedness

The Army’s Kinmen Defense Command [carried out](#) the “Taiwu” live-fire drills near “Donggang on Lieyu Island” in the Kinmen Islands group. The drill tested “readiness to engage in coastal combat and respond to unmanned aerial systems.” It included “drone response, live-fire defense, near-

shore defense and beach combat” and “final protective fire.”

Reportedly, Taiwan is also [aiming](#) to strengthen the T-Dome air defence system. For this purpose, it is investing in “mass production of the Sky Bow III.” At present, it is producing 96 Sky Bow III missiles annually. If this pace is maintained, Taiwan will have produced 480 Sky Bow III missiles in next five years. Meanwhile, the US [issued](#) a letter of acceptance (LOA) to sell high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS). The US would provide 82 HIMARS to Taiwan for about US\$4.05 billion. The US has also issued LOAs for M109A7 self-propelled howitzers, which would cost around US\$4.03 billion, Javelin anti-armor missiles for around US\$375 million and TOW missiles for about US\$353 million. However, on its part, Taiwan would require legislative authorisation to execute the deals.

In a separate development Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) [reported](#) that the authorities indicted 64 Taiwanese “in Chinese espionage cases” in 2024. It underlined criminal gangs, underground moneylenders, shell companies, temple organisations, and civic groups as five major infiltration channels. It noted that cultivation, online contact, financial rewards, and debt coercion were four major methods “to recruit Taiwanese” to “expand... spy network and gain access to important classified and sensitive information.”

THE KOREAN PENINSULA

South Korea-US Conduct Freedom Shield Exercise

In March 2026, South Korea and the United States (US) [conducted](#) exercise “Freedom

Shield”. An annual event, the 11-day joint exercise involved about 18,000 army men. This military exercise was conducted in the backdrop of speculations that some air defence systems operated by the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) have been diverted to the Middle East amidst the ongoing conflict in that region. These joint exercises often raise tensions on the Korean Peninsula as Pyongyang perceives them as “rehearsals for invasion” of North Korea. Also, the relocation of some crucial military assets by the US from South Korea to other places, including Middle East has raised [concerns](#) in South Korea over potential military adventurism by the North Korean regime.

North Korea Tests Missile Systems

Pyongyang continued to test different kinds of missile systems throughout March. On 4 March, the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un personally monitored the [launch](#) of [sea-to-surface](#) “strategic cruise missiles” from the newly built 5,000-tonne naval destroyer called Choe Hyon. Kim referred to this new military capability of Pyongyang as a “new symbol of sea defence”. He also called for increased production of warships and expansion of the country’s nuclear weapons programme. Later, in March, North Korea again [test-fired](#) several missiles. The South Korean media reported that about ten ballistic missiles were fired from the Sunan area in North Korea towards the East Sea (Sea of Japan). Reportedly, these missiles covered a range of about 350 kilometres. The launch of these North Korean missiles happened in the backdrop of the annual South Korea-US joint military exercise, “Freedom Shield”.