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CHINA

PLA Daily says AI has Strategic Value for China's Military

The Chinese military's official media outlet People's Liberation Army (PLA) Daily in a commentary urged the army to accelerate the integration of [Artificial Intelligence](#) (AI) in military operations. Citing the Iran-Israel-US war, the article argued that the vast use of AI in planning, intelligence assessment and target identification has demonstrated the strategic value of AI in the military domain and its role in reshaping the rules of armed engagement. In this context, development of AI technology to support combat operations is imperative for the PLA to gain strategic edge in future warfare. Notably, the article highlighted that AI could act as a protective armour across all military domains and will be particularly beneficial for early warning systems, command and control and logistics. The commentary noted AI to be crucial for cognitive warfare.

PLA Western Theatre Command Explores Combat Information Sharing Mechanism

In mid-April a certain Air Force Unit of the PLA Western Theatre Command [collaborated](#) with sister units for integrated intelligence support during a tactical mission at a high-plateau. During the exercise, the commander used his command information terminal to access combat data streamed from various units

such as PLA Information Support Force, PLA Ground Force Defense Brigade, and the PLA Air Force Radar Brigade. The integrated intelligence support helped the air force unit to complete the designated tactical mission. The training aimed to improve and strengthen a multi-service combat information sharing mechanism and to refine PLA's operational database infrastructure. Such database infrastructure allows 'data streams' from multiple military branches to converge within a single training environment, thereby achieving full interconnectivity and on-demand access. Joint operations are not merely a simple aggregation of military forces, rather, they represent a deep integration of information, experience, and combat methodologies. The air force unit maintains regular associations with various units such as PLA Information Support Force, PLA Ground Force Air Defense Brigade to jointly explore the establishment of a cross-branch operational information-sharing mechanism. The idea is to create a system to facilitate duty officers at various workstations to maintain seamless information flow and execute rapid responses in the event of sudden emergencies. Data sharing [serves](#) as a powerful force multiplier, empowering combat training. By leveraging shared data, they constructed a multi-layered air-defense fire network, achieving simultaneous improvements in overall operation.

JAPAN

Japan Joins Balikatan 2026 Exercise

In a noteworthy departure from the past, detachments of Japanese armed forces fully [participated](#) in an exercise held jointly by the United States of America (US) and the Philippines in the latter country. Balikatan, a multinational exercise lasted half a month starting from 20 April to 8 May and saw participation of troops from Australia, Canada, France and New Zealand beyond the hosts and Japan. The deployment marks the first time Japanese armed forces have arrived on Filipino soil since the Second World War.

Though holding observer status since the inception of the exercise in 2012, Japan has decided to participate in the Balikatan exercises in light of the implementation of the Japan-Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement signed last year. [According](#) to the official press release by Japan, the agreement will allow the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) to ‘conduct field training involving the use of weapons within Philippine territory’. The JSDF fielded approximately 1,400 personnel from all commands of the Japan Ground and Self-Defence Forces. Further, the ‘helicopter destroyer’ (actually mini-carrier) *Ise* and the Murasame-class destroyer *Ikazuchi*, the landing ship *Shimokita*, C-130H transport aircraft, US-2 amphibious search and rescue aircraft, and Type 88 surface-to-ship missile systems,

were also deployed as part of its training detachment. The exercises covered a wide variety of items, including live-fire, maritime strike and amphibious operations drills alongside training exercises dealing with integrated air and missile defence, cyber-attack response, joint medical operations and airfield damage repair.

Japan-Australia Defence Ministers’ Meeting

Japan’s Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi [visited](#) Melbourne, Australia to meet his Australian counterpart Richard Marles under the Framework for Strategic Defence Coordination (FSDC) that was established in December 2025. The meeting [followed](#) closely Marles’ visit to Tokyo in early April, where the two defence chiefs discussed issues of regional concern and agreed to maintain ‘a close relationship of cooperation’ as a regional deterrent.

During the meeting in Australia on 18 April, Koizumi and Marles [confirmed](#) that their countries would pursue defence cooperation building on Australia’s recently-released National Defence Strategy 2026. The two sides welcomed ‘increased Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) participation in Australia-based activities in recent years and discussed [their] shared ambition to expand [their] cooperation in the future’ under the JSDF’s Joint Operations Command as well as ‘the steady and positive developments’ of ‘broader defence industrial collaboration’

including ‘the finalisation of an Implementing Arrangement regarding the [unmanned aerial combat vehicle] MQ-28A Ghost Bat, which establishes the framework to conduct formal Collaborative Combat Aircraft activities between Australia and Japan’. A Defence Cyber Partnership was also mentioned as a welcome step between the two countries.

Later on the same day, the two defence chiefs visited the Mogami-class frigate JS *Kumano* for the formal ‘[conclusion](#) of the contract of Australia’s General Purpose Frigate and the signing of documents between the relevant authorities’. The sale of the upgraded Mogami class of vessels to Australia marks a signal step forward in Japan’s loosening of restrictions on arms transfer.

TAIWAN

Development of Low Cost Air Defence Munitions by Taiwan

Taiwan’s National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST) has [focussed](#) on developing low-cost air defence munitions. Among these munitions, two stand out, one of which is “designed to counter saturation attacks by drones” and another to “respond to enemy missile and long-range rocket attacks.” Both types of defence munitions will “undergo testing in the first half of next year.” Separately, the NCSIST and AirShare, a Canadian firm, have concluded an agreement to develop “a ribbon-

stabilised sub-munition system.” This sub-munition system will integrate AirShare’s low-cost ribbon-stabilised sub-munition with NCSIST’s Counter-Unmanned Aircraft System platform. Reportedly, AirShare’s sub-munition is equipped with a parachute.

Further, the NCSIST is also [working](#) on a long-range subsonic anti-ship cruise missile with precision-strike capabilities. Reportedly, this anti-ship missile with a range of 900-1000 kilometres, can be launched from a mobile vehicle. This under-development missile, known as “Taiwanese AGM-158,” will undergo operational testing sometime later this year. Upon successful testing, it will be “Taiwan’s third domestically developed long-range strike system.”

In a parallel development, the NCSIST has [upgraded](#) M60A3 tanks, which have been in service for more than twenty years. The upgraded tanks are now equipped with new cannon-firing systems and they can now “engage one target while tracking another.” The upgraded tanks are scheduled to conduct live-fire drills next month on 19 May.

Taiwan- France Cooperation on Frigates

DCI-DESCO, a subsidiary of French defense consultancy company DCI, signed a contract with Taiwan to “help upgrade” Taiwan’s Kang Ding-class frigates for US\$61.93 million over next five years till March 2031. NCSIST’s Hua Yang vertical

launch system, that can fire the Sea Sword II surface-to-air missiles, is to be fitted to the frigates under the upgrade plan. The BAE Systems Artisan radar and the French PASEO NS electro-optical fire control system will also be added to the ships, improving their detection capabilities for stealth targets.

Additionally, the media [learnt](#) that Taiwan's next-generation Strong Bow, also known as Sky Bow IV, anti-ballistic missile can target up to 1,500 kilometres and its speed can exceed Mach 10. Its interception altitude could be up to 70 kilometres. Its "active electronically scanned array radar" can detect targets beyond more than 500 kilometres.

THE KOREAN PENINSULA

South Korea's Defence Exports

In April 2026, the South Korean media reported about a [deal](#) by Finland to buy 112 more K9 self-propelled howitzers worth US\$ 635 million from South Korea. This new agreement by Finland to acquire additional K9 howitzers is followed by an earlier purchase of 96 howitzers in 2017. Notably, South Korea-made K9 howitzers have gained popularity across the world and have been successful even in the harsh Nordic environment. Also, during the summit between South Korean President Lee Jae Myung and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in April in Seoul, both countries agreed to [deepen](#) their cooperation in defence industry. In the

recent years, South Korea has exported weapons worth billions of dollars to Poland, which included K9 howitzers, K2 tanks, K239 Chunmoo multiple launch rocket system, and FA-50 light attack aircraft. Notably, during the state visit of President Lee to India in April, [cooperation](#) in defence industry between the countries was an important agenda for Seoul.

North Korea Develops Cluster Bomb Warhead

In April 2026, the North Korean state media *KCNA* [reported](#) about the development of the cluster bomb warhead of tactical ballistic missile in the country. According to the report, the surface-to-surface tactical ballistic missile Hwasongpho-11 Ka could be loaded with the cluster bomb ammunitions and can cause significant damage to "an area of 6.5~7 hectares with the highest-density power". This was stated to be a major breakthrough in the development of sophisticated weapon systems in North Korea and a significant achievement for the North Korean armed forces. The South Korean military [confirmed](#) the launch of short-range ballistic missiles from the Wonsan area of North Korea on 8 April 2026. This missile system was reported by North Korea to be carrying the cluster weapons warhead.