

EAST ASIA MILITARY MONITOR

VOLUME 7 | ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2024



- **PLA Holds Military Drills in South China Sea Amidst US-Philippines Naval Exercise**
- **Open Water Trials for New Type 054B Frigate**
- **US Urged by China to Stop Arming Taiwan**
- **Japan, US, ROK Hold Joint Naval Exercise**
- **India, Japan Coast Guards conduct 'Sahyog Kaijin' exercise**
- **Taiwan's Defence Preparedness**
- **South Korea's Plan to Launch More Spy Satellites**
- **Military and Security Development in Korean Peninsula**



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES
मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
STUDIES AND ANALYSES

No. 1, Development Enclave,

Rao Tula Ram Marg, Delhi Cantt., New Delhi-110 010

Telephone: 91-11-26717983; Fax: 91-11-26154191, Website: www.idsa.in

CHINA

PLA Holds Military Drills in South China Sea Amidst US-Philippines Naval Exercise

In early January warships from China and the US held rival naval drills with warships in the disputed waters of South China Sea. Reportedly, in its WeChat account, The People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s Southern Theatre Commander informed that sections of navy and air force were deployed to conduct routine patrols to monitor '[disruptive](#)' activities in the region. The post elaborated that "Troops in the theatre remain on high alert at all times, resolutely safeguarding national sovereignty, security and maritime rights and interests...any military activities that disrupt and create hotspots in the South China Sea are fully under control". Besides conducting military drills China also issued [diplomatic protests](#), terming US-Philippines drill as "provocative" and aimed at "flaunting military might". In a press conference Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin contended that "Foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said the exercises were "detrimental to management and control of the maritime situation and related disputes".

Open Water Trials for New Type 054B Frigate

Reportedly, in January the Chinese Navy began open water trials for a new Type 054B frigate that was launched in August 2023. According to pictures circulated in Chinese social media, the [next generation frigate](#) appeared sailing on the Huangpu river near the Hudong-Zhonghua Shipyard

in Shanghai. Observers have noted that the rapid progress to open water trials indicated an urgency on PLA's part to commission the vessel. Elaborating on the features of the vessel, a media report highlighted that the optimised shape of the frigate will possibly shield both radar and infrared signatures, increasing the vessel's [stealth capability](#).

US Urged by China to Stop Arming Taiwan

During Defence Policy Coordination talks in Washington, ahead of Taiwan elections, Chinese officials urged the United States (US) to [stop arming Taiwan](#) and supporting calls for independence. The two-day meeting was the first since Beijing suspended military talks with the US after then US-House speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022. According to a Defence Ministry statement, released following the meeting, the Chinese delegation conveyed that "China will not make any concession or compromise on the Taiwan question and demand the US to abide by the one-China principle." The statement also informed that "The US needs to take seriously China's concerns and do more to contribute to the development of the two militaries' relationship", possibly indicating that advancement of Sino-US military cooperation could be contingent on the US position on Taiwan.

JAPAN

Japan, US, ROK Hold Joint Naval Exercise

The South Korean military [announced](#) on 17 January that it, along with naval forces from the US and Japan, had participated in

a trilateral naval exercise in waters south of the Korean peninsula. The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) announced that the exercise took place southeast of Jeju Island, and involved a total of nine warships from the three countries. US Navy platforms that participated in the exercise included the nuclear powered aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson*, based out of San Diego, California, along with the South Korean navy's Aegis destroyers and the Japan Maritime Self Defence Forces' *Kongo*-class destroyers. The exercises followed on the heels of North Korea's continuous firing of ballistic and other missiles, and the JCS in a statement underlined the exercises being important for "bolstering the three nations' deterrence and response capabilities against North Korea's nuclear and missile threat as well as maritime threats."

India, Japan Coast Guards conduct 'Sahyog Kaijin' exercise

The Indian and Japanese Coast Guards [conducted](#) the latest iteration of the joint exercise codenamed 'Sahyog Kaijin' in waters off Chennai on 12 January. The exercise involved five vessels from the Indian Coast Guard alongside air assets for reconnaissance and monitoring, while the Japanese Coast Guard was represented by the JCGS *Yashima*. The exercise simulated a collision between two tanker ships on the high seas, resulting in a fire on one of them. The ICGS *Shaurya* and the JCGS *Yashima* were tasked with rescuing the personnel trapped in the two ships, while smaller patrol vessels and air assets provided real-time data on the status of the ships and

assisted in rescuing personnel who had been cast adrift. The *Shaurya* and the *Yashima* also conducted a drill on 8 January that involved testing pollution response training on the high seas. The joint exercise was reviewed by Inspector General Donny Michael, Commander of Coast Guard Region (East).

TAIWAN

Taiwan's Defence Preparedness

Taiwan and the US signed a deal for [depot-level maintenance services](#) for Taiwan's RIM-66 Standard missiles in early January. The four-year deal will cost Taipei US\$22.55 million and is likely to be completed [by the end of 2027](#). Meanwhile, the increased production of domestic Hsiung Feng anti-ship missiles and the procurement of land-based Harpoon missiles from the U.S. has necessitated the augmentation of missile storage facilities. Therefore, the government has decided to construct [2 new missile bases](#) on Taiwan's east coast. In a separate development, Taiwan concluded a deal with French missile manufacturer MBDA [to purchase parts for its arsenal of French-built MICA and Magic missiles](#). Reportedly, an amount of US\$127.95 million has been earmarked for the deal and the purchase will be carried out [between January 2024 to the end of 2028](#). The parts bought from the MBDA will be used [to bolster the air combat capabilities of its Mirage fighter jets](#).

The Taiwanese media also reported that 66 F-16V Block 70 fighter jets will be delivered "[over the next two years](#)" from the US. The first batch will reach Taiwan

this year. The remaining portion of the order is expected to be fulfilled by 2026. Also, 65 pilots will go to the U.S. for [a full year of specialized tactical training](#) in the current year.

Notably, according to [a Cato Institute scholar](#), Taiwan has purchased around US\$19 billion worth of weapons systems, but their delivery will take considerable time. Further, some time ago, the Taiwan government increased compulsory military service again to one year. The media informed that “[the first batch of one-year compulsory military recruits](#)” started its training course on 25 January 2024.

THE KOREAN PENINSULA

South Korea’s Plan to Launch More Spy Satellites

On 8 January, South Korean arms procurement agency announced Seoul’s plan to launch two more [spy satellites](#) to monitor North Korea’s military activities. The Defense Acquisition Program Administration informed that two Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) satellites are scheduled to be launched on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida in April 2024 and November 2024, respectively. Reportedly, in December 2024, Seoul is planning to launch an electro-optical and infrared satellite and four more SAR satellites into the orbit by 2025. According to South Korean authorities, the SAR satellites will be able to collect data in all-weather conditions and enhance Seoul’s intelligence capabilities.

Military and Security Development in Korean Peninsula

North Korea’s President Kim Jong Un, during his address at North Korea’s Parliament, Supreme People’s Assembly called for [rewriting of North Korea’s constitution](#) to eliminate the idea of peaceful unification between the war-divided countries and to cement the South as an “invariable principle enemy.” Kim stated that “we don’t want war but we have no intention of avoiding it.” Also, the Supreme Assembly declared that three organizations that handle inter-Korean reconciliation; the Committee for the peaceful Reunification of the Country, the National Economic Cooperation Bureau and the (Mount Kumgang International Tourism Administration will be closed.

Kim’s declaration came following North Korea’s earlier decision in November 2023, to end a five-year military deal with South Korea, which agreed to prevent military conflict in all spheres including ground, sea and air.

Meanwhile, enhancing its missiles programmes, [North Korea tested a new solid-fuel missile](#) fitted with a hypersonic warhead. The launch took place at a time when North Korea Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui had headed to Moscow in early January for bilateral meeting amid concerns in the United States that [North Korea was selling weapons to Russia](#) for use in Ukraine in return for Russian technological expertise.