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# **EAST ASIA MILITARY MONITOR**

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**Editor**

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

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The East Asia Military Monitor strives to deliver important developments on security and military issues in the East Asian region. While the COVID-19 pandemic is still creating challenges to the East Asian countries, the security environment has worsened with tensions in the Taiwan straits, the developments within Taiwan, whereby its defence industry is being strengthened against the Chinese challenge and the increasing support of the US to provide it with arms and ammunition. Though the election of Joe Biden has created the impression of stability among the Asian countries, the lack of clarity on the China policy is still motivating countries like Japan to seek greater partnership and self-help in the international system. On the other hand, China is looking at strengthening its neighbourhood policy in an attempt to alleviate the challenges rising from the great power competition.

In this increasingly dynamic situation, the East Asia Military Monitor aims to bring significant developments regarding China's military activities in the Taiwan Straits, its regional diplomacy, and changes in Japan's leadership and the resultant impact on its foreign policy. In particular, Japan is increasing its attention to Southeast Asian countries in an effort to diversify its policies and dependence as well strengthen regional mechanisms such as the Quad.

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# MAPPING EAST ASIA

## CHINA

### Chinese PLA in Military Exercise, ‘Kavkaz-2020’

- A week-long military exercise, ‘Kavkaz-2020’ from September 21-26, 2020, was held in the Astrakhan Region, Russia. A total of 1000 foreign military personnel from six countries, including China, Armenia, Belarus, Myanmar and Pakistan, participated. Representatives from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Indonesia, Iran and Sri Lanka participated as observers.

According to the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, the objectives of conducting ‘Kavkaz-2020’ were: Verifying the degree of readiness of the leadership and military command bodies of the USC of the Southern Military District, the command staff of military contingents, tactical (operational) groups to manage groups of troops (forces), formations and units in the course of joint operations to localize and resolve armed conflict relating to countering terrorism; Improving the compatibility and level of interaction between military command bodies and troops; And to ensure the readiness of Russian Armed Forces and partner states to protect national interest, increasing the level of interaction in solving joint tasks.<sup>1</sup> Senior Colonel Tan Kefei, spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defence of the People’s Republic of China, said that the Chinese participating troops were mainly from the PLA Western Theatre Command.<sup>2</sup>

This is the third consecutive year that the Chinese PLA has participated in strategic exercises hosted by the Russian military. The previous two were the ‘Votstok-2018’ and ‘Tsentr-2019’.

### Joint Meeting of SCO, CIS and CSTO

- On September 2, 2020, defence ministers of all the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) held a joint meeting in Moscow, Russia. In the meeting, the ministers exchanged views on the current international and regional security situation and strengthening of military cooperation in the current international and regional security environment. The member states also discussed mutual cooperation and the creation of capabilities for responding to biological threats. In a joint communique, signed by the defence ministers, it reaffirmed the commitment “to the purpose and principles of the UN Charter and the universally recognised principles and norms of international law” and also specified that “all states and peoples to actively cooperate in order to strengthen stability in the world, as well as to increase efforts in the fights against challenges and threats.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Maneuvers Kavkaz 2020” Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, September 19, 2020 at [http://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12312963@egNews](http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12312963@egNews) (Accessed on November 2, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defence on September 24", Ministry of National Defence the People’s Republic of China, September 24, 2020 at [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-09/28/content\\_4872015.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-09/28/content_4872015.htm) (Accessed on November 1, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> “Statement of participants of the joint meeting of Defence Ministers (heads of defence departments) of the SCO member states, CIS member states and CSTO member states on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the victory In the Second World War”, Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, September 9, 2020 at [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12312538@egNews](https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12312538@egNews) (Accessed on November 1, 2020).

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# TAIWAN

## The Taiwan Strait and the PLA

- Despite numerous military activities by the PLA in the air and maritime space near Taiwan, the overall military situation seems to be under control in the Taiwan Strait. Recently, Defence Minister Yen De-fa stated, “the Chinese communists have continued their acts of provocation against Taiwan, but there are currently no signs showing it is ready to launch a full-scale war.” He remarked that, “one sign of an imminent attack would be if troops from inland parts of China began massing along its east, but there are no indications that is happening.” However, he informed, Taiwan is “maintaining peacetime combat preparedness and have not stepped up their alert status.”<sup>4</sup>

The period under review saw the media continuously reporting Taiwanese accusations of Chinese military activities in the areas near Taiwan. In fact, the Taiwanese defence ministry informed in the last week of September that China had “threatened [to] or entered into Taiwan’s airspace 46 times in the past nine days.” Then, it claimed that a PLA aircraft “infringed on the island’s air defence identification zone at altitudes of 2,300 metres (7,545 feet) and 9,000 metres (29,527 feet),” which it termed as a “‘provocative’ action.”<sup>5</sup>

Taiwan’s Ministry of Defence created a new “section on its website” to inform the public “the latest movements” of the PLA “near Taiwan’s air defence identification zone (ADIZ).” The section is titled as “Latest Military Deployment.” The section also informs of the Taiwanese response to the PLA’s activities near Taiwan’s ADIZ, which are “deploying fighter jets, issuing radio warnings and monitoring the Chinese movements until the airplanes flew away.” This section is seen as a move away from the “traditional approach” of not sharing such information publicly. It is believed that Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) is following Japan’s example, where the Japanese “Self-Defense Force regularly makes public, Chinese aircraft and vessels’ photos, charts and routes that are found entering Japan’s ADIZ and waters.”<sup>6</sup>

## Taiwan’s defence industry

- The Taiwanese military has sought a budget for buying “Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (TUAVs) and underwater vehicles” and enhance its capabilities “to improve its radar surveillance and camouflage capabilities.” Its proposal to the Legislative Yuan (parliament) for 2021 seeks to “spend NT\$ 779 million (US\$ 26 million) to buy 50 TUAVs to boost its newly-formed combined arms battalions’ early warning and response capability from fiscal year 2021 to 2023.” Similarly, the Navy wants another NT\$ 213 million to be allocated to it for 2021-2022 “to purchase 12 underwater vehicles to boost its amphibious forces’ mobility. It has a plan to “spend a total of NT\$ 5.05 billion to overhaul its existing radar stations” between 2021 and 2030.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Reuters Staff, “Taiwan Defence Chief Says No Signs China is Preparing for War”, Reuters, September 29, 2020 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL4N2GQ2GB> (Accessed on November 10, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> “Taiwan Says 46 Incidents Involving Chinese Planes in Last 9 Days”, *Al Jazeera*, September 25, 2020 at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/25/taiwan-says-china-has-made-46-air-incursions-in-past-nine-days> (Accessed on November 10, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Matt Yu and Joseph Yeh, “MND Website Makes Chinese Military Intrusions Public”, *Focus Taiwan*, September 17, 2020 at <https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202009170005> (Accessed on November 10, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Matt Yu and Joseph Yeh, “Military Allocates Budget to Buy Tactical UAVs, Boost Radar Capability”, *Focus Taiwan*, August 31, 2020 at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202008310016> (Accessed on November 10, 2020).

The election-bound Trump administration sent “three sales of advanced weaponry to Taiwan” in October 2020. The proposed sales of “as many as seven major weapons systems” included “a truck-based rocket launcher made by Lockheed Martin [Corporation] called a High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), long-range air-to-ground missiles made by Boeing called SLAM-ER, and external sensor pods for F-16 jets that allow the real-time transmission of imagery and data from the aircraft back to ground stations.” It included “large, sophisticated aerial drones, land-based Harpoon anti-ship missiles and underwater mines” too.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, a maintenance centre for F-16 jets was opened in Taichung. The centre termed it as “the first of its kind in Asia.” It would help upgrade Taiwan’s fighter jets, and “eventually other countries’ aircraft”, the media informed. The US and Taiwan had concluded an agreement for the centre in December 2019 under which Taiwan’s Aerospace Industrial Development Corporation (AIDC) and the US-based Lockheed Martin jointly set it up at a cost of NT\$ 110 billion (US\$ 3.73 billion).<sup>9</sup>

The US Navy confirmed that the *USS Barry*, an Arleigh-Burke-class guided missile destroyer, “transit through the Taiwan Strait” on October 14. It maintained that the sailing of the *USS Barry* demonstrated the US’ “commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.” Taiwan’s MND informed that “it was the 10th such transit by a US naval vessel this year.” Before this, a US destroyer sailed through the Strait on August 31.<sup>10</sup>

## JAPAN

### India-Japan strengthen security cooperation with ACSA

- On September 9, 2020, India and Japan signed the Agreement Concerning Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services, also known as the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement. This Agreement is aimed at facilitating smooth provision of supplies and services between the two forces. The objective is reciprocal use of logistics facilities in the course of visits to each other’s ports and bases. This may allow access to the Japanese base in Djibouti, and the Japanese may access facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. These kind of agreements ease administrative preparations and help in the replenishment of fuel, rations, spares (where required), and berthing and maintenance for ships and aircraft during regular port calls, joint exercises and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations. It helps in book-keeping and uses standing logistics network. This Agreement will be in force for ten years, and shall thereafter be automatically extended for successive periods of ten years each, unless either party notifies the other of its intention in writing, to terminate this Agreement at least six months before the end of each period of ten years. The India-Japan

<sup>8</sup> David Brunnstrom, Patricia Zengerle, Mike Stone, “White House Moves Forward on Three Arms Sales to Taiwan: Sources”, Reuters, October 12, 2020 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-taiwan-arms-exclusive/exclusive-white-house-moves-forward-on-three-arms-sales-to-taiwan-sources-idUSKBN26X246?il=0> (Accessed on November 10, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Staff Write, “F-16 repair hub opens in Taichung”, *Taipei Times*, August 29, 2020 at <https://taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/08/29/2003742474> (Accessed on November 10, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Lin Hung-han and Chiang Yi-ching, “US Confirms that Navy Destroyer Passed through Taiwan Strait”, *Focus Taiwan*, October 15, 2020 at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202010150003> (Accessed on November 10, 2020).

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agreement encompasses supplies and services related to the following categories: food; water; billeting; transportation (including airlift); petroleum, oils; clothing; communications services; medical services; base operations support (including construction incident to base operations support); storage services; use of facilities; training services; spare parts and components; repair and maintenance services (including calibration services) and airport and seaport services.<sup>11</sup>

## India-Japan Summit

- On September 10, the India-Japan summit meeting was held between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart, Abe Shinzo. This was the last official prime ministerial level exchange before Abe's departure from the office.<sup>12</sup> Both leaders have invested enormous political capital in forging this Special Strategic and Global Partnership. Both nations have been guided by principles of the rule of law and freedom of navigation and overflight, while pursuing the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy. Shared values and convergence of strategic goals add depth to this relationship. Japan has emerged as an important partner in India's Act East policy. It also performs an active role in empowering India's economic modernization since Japan is not just a prominent source of ODA but also FDI. In addition to flagship projects in economic hubs, Japan is also engaged in the strategic peripheries such as the Northeast and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. After Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide has assumed office, India is poised to further accelerate the momentum set in the bilateral relations.

## India-Japan maritime exercise held

- The fourth edition of the India-Japan biennial maritime exercise (JIMEX) was held in the North Arabian Sea from September 26-28. In 2018, JIMEX was conducted off the coast of Vishakhapatnam. The objective is to develop a high degree of interoperability and joint operational skills by conducting advanced exercises across the spectrum of maritime operations. This year, the focus was on tactical exercises involving weapon firings, cross-deck helicopter operations and complex surface, anti-submarine and air warfare drills. JIMEX 20 was conducted in a "non-contact at sea-only format" given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

## Prime Minister Suga takes charge

- Suga Yoshihide became the Prime Minister of Japan on September 16, following Abe Shinzo's resignation owing to health concerns. Suga had served as the Chief Cabinet Secretary in the Abe administration since 2012, and is considered as the architect behind the political stability during Abe's historic tenure as the longest serving prime minister. Reviving the economy while fighting the COVID-19 pandemic will be his priority. Criticising bureaucratic sectionalism, he has emphasised on regulatory reform and digitalization of the economy. He is expected to carry forward the policy direction of the Abe administration and advance

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<sup>11</sup> "Signing of the Agreement Between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of India Concerning Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services Between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Indian Armed Forces", MOFA, September 10, 2020 at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_002896.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002896.html) accessed on September 20, 2020

<sup>12</sup> "Japan-India Summit Telephone Talk", MOFA, September 10, 2020 at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/s\\_sa/sw/in/page3e\\_001060.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sw/in/page3e_001060.html) accessed on September 20, 2020

<sup>13</sup> "Bilateral Maritime Exercise between Japan and India (JIMEX 20) to Commence off West Coast of India", PIB GOI, September 25, 2020 at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1659154#:~:text=The%204th%20edition%20of,26%20to%2028%20September%202020> accessed on October 1, 2020

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Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. As the regional security situation aggravates and becomes more complex, he has expressed his intentions to further bolster the US-Japan alliance, and revise the Constitution along the line of proposals made by the Liberal Democratic Party.

On October 26, Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide delivered a key policy speech at the beginning of the extraordinary Diet session which is scheduled to continue till December 5. The focus remained on reinvigorating the economy, and dealing with the pandemic, firming up national security and advancing the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision.<sup>14</sup> He stressed on reviving the local economy with agricultural reform and tourism, breaking down bureaucratic red tape and vested interests, advancing digitalization, and also incorporating infertility treatment in national health insurance in order to manage the demographic challenge. He also officially outlined Japan's pledge to go carbon neutral by 2050, and making a fundamental transition from Japan's reliance on coal to a mix of renewable and nuclear power. On the foreign policy front, he reiterated that the US-Japan alliance was the cornerstone of national security and argued that the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision and multilateral free trade frameworks will continue as mainstays of his administration.

### **Japan-Vietnam Strengthens Defence Cooperation**

- Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide in his maiden overseas trip after assuming office on September 16 visited Vietnam and Indonesia from October 18-21, 2020. Both countries are important pillars of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. He underscored Japan's support for ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) articulated in 2019, and emphasized the need to advance common principles of rule of law, openness, freedom, transparency and inclusiveness. In Vietnam, which currently happens to be the Chair of ASEAN, Prime Minister Suga stressed that Tokyo is strongly opposed to any actions that escalate tensions in the South China Sea.<sup>15</sup> Japan has largely pursued defence cooperation in the region through its Vientiane Vision, focussing on strengthening rule of law, maritime security, and capacity-building. In this regard, Japan has negotiated a substantial agreement with Vietnam in order to advance technological cooperation and affect transfer of defence equipment to Vietnam. The proposed agreement, reportedly called as the Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology, will be an enabler when it comes to exporting equipment, including surface combatants such as offshore patrol vessels, maritime patrol aircraft, radar and surveillance equipment, and communications and information systems. Earlier in July, Japan extended a US\$ 349 million loan to Hanoi to support procurement of six patrol vessels for the coast guard.

### **Tokyo hosts Quad Ministerial Meeting**

- On October 6, 2020, Tokyo hosted the second Australia-India-Japan-United States Ministerial Meeting. India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar held consultations on the post-COVID-19 international order with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne. As India assumes membership of the UN Security Council in 2021, it seeks collective solutions to global challenges, including global recovery from the pandemic and reform of multilateral

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<sup>14</sup> "Policy Speech by the Prime Minister to the 203rd Session of the Diet", Kantei, October 28, 2020 at [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/99\\_suga/statement/202010/\\_00006.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/99_suga/statement/202010/_00006.html) accessed on October 30, 2020

<sup>15</sup> "Speech by Prime Minister Suga at the Vietnam-Japan University – Building together the future of Indo-Pacific", MOFA, October 19, 2020 at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/s\\_sa/sea1/vn/page3e\\_001070.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea1/vn/page3e_001070.html) accessed on October 30, 2020

institutions.<sup>16</sup> The leaders reiterated the collective vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, anchored on a rules-based international order, underpinned by the rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international seas, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes. Post-pandemic, it is imperative for like-minded countries to coordinate responses on a wide range of issues including increasing the resilience of supply chains; and enhancing access to affordable vaccines, medicines and medical equipment, connectivity; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; maritime safety and security; health security, and counter-terrorism.

### **India-Japan Strategic Dialogue and Cybersecurity Agreement**

- Tokyo hosted the 13<sup>th</sup> India-Japan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue on October 7, 2020. The Indo-Pacific has attained larger salience in recent times and given the mutuality of strategic interests and commonality of values, Japan is considered as a lead partner in the connectivity pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI). During the discussion, External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar and his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi, stressed the significance of digital technologies and the need for resilient digital and cyber systems. In this context, the text of the cyber security agreement has been finalized, aimed at promoting cooperation in capacity-building, research and development, security and resilience in the areas of Critical Information Infrastructure, 5G, Internet of Things (IoT), and Artificial Intelligence (AI).<sup>17</sup>

## **KOREA**

### **UN Report on North Korea**

- An interim United Nations report in August has indicated that Pyongyang can now miniaturize its nuclear weapons suitably to put them on missiles. This is in synergy with Washington and its allies evaluation. It is suggested that Pyongyang is continuing nuclear weapons programme and its nuclear tests helped advance technology to miniaturize nuclear devices. The panel of experts observing UN sanctions indicated that North Korea "is continuing its nuclear program, including the production of highly enriched uranium and construction of an experimental light water reactor."<sup>18</sup>

### **North Korea Military Parade**

- North Korea had conducted its military parade to observe the 75 years of the Workers Party. In the parade, there was a display of its ICBM missile units and other equipment such as new assault weapons and air defence systems. The new ballistic missiles and the number of these missiles has led to speculations about the intentions of the North Korean regime. It has come at a time when there is no information about the status of coronavirus in the country and the number of infected people. North Korea's Kim Jong-Un stated that the country would continue to develop its military for self-defence, significant during the leadership transition in the US.

<sup>16</sup> "Opening remarks by EAM at 2nd Quad Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo, Japan", MEA, October 6, 2020 at <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33097/> accessed on October 30, 2020

<sup>17</sup> "13th India-Japan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue", MEA, October 7, 2020 at [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33100/13th\\_IndiaJapan\\_Foreign\\_Ministers\\_Strategic\\_Dialogue](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33100/13th_IndiaJapan_Foreign_Ministers_Strategic_Dialogue) accessed on October 30, 2020

<sup>18</sup> Michelle Nichols, "North Korea has 'probably' developed nuclear devices to fit ballistic missiles, U.N. report says", Reuters, August 4, 2020 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-sanctions-un-idUSKCN24Z2PO> accessed on October 30, 2020

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

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