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CHINA

China and Mongolia Defence Cooperation

The Chinese Defence Minister, General Wei Fenghe visited Mongolia on 26 July to meet the Mongolian Defence Minister, Gursed Saikhanbayar. The meeting was held at Mongolia's capital Ulaanbaatar and explored prospects of strengthening defence cooperation between China and Mongolia. During his visit, the Chinese Defence Minister underscored the need for both sides to continue to support each other's core interests and major concerns, while remaining vigilant against extra-territorial forces interfering in regional affairs.¹ Further, he reiterated China's military commitment to work with Mongolia to implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, besides enhancing strategic mutual trust and expanding pragmatic cooperation, to sustain the comprehensive strategic partnership.²

SCO Defence Ministers Meeting

The 18th meeting of the Council of Ministers of Defence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was held on 28 July in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.³ The Chinese delegation to the meeting was led by State Councillor and Defence Minister Wei Fenghe. In his address to the SCO forum Fenghe emphasised that since the establishment of the SCO, defence departments of all the

member-states have been deepening their strategic mutual trust and practical cooperation under the strong guidance of the 'Shanghai Spirit'. He also noted that in the light of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, the SCO member-countries should strengthen their cooperation and jointly combat extremism, terrorism and separatism in order to safeguard regional peace and stability. During the SCO meeting, the Chinese Defence Minister held extensive talks with defence ministers of Pakistan, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on issues of regional and international importance, bi-lateral military-to-military relations and counter-terrorism cooperation.⁴

China-Russia Joint Military Exercise: ZAPAD/INTERATION-2021

In a major drive to enhance their military cooperation, Russia and China jointly conducted the military exercise Zapad/Interaction-2021, from 9-13 August. This was the first time that the Russian military had dispatched a troop unit to participate in a military exercise led by the Chinese. The military exercise was held at the co-ordination tactical training ground of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Tsingtungxia Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region of China. The slogan of the exercise was "China and Russia: Joining hands to build peace" and the stated objective of the military exercise was to build military cooperation to jointly safeguard regional security and stability.⁵ In the

¹ "China, Mongolia vow to enhance military cooperation, maintain regional stability" Ministry of National Defence of the People's Republic of China, 26 July 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-07/26/content_4890289.html. (Accessed on 28 August 2021)

² "Chinese and Mongolian Defence Ministers agree to strengthen cooperation", 26 July 2021, XinhuaNet at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-07/26/c_1310087476.html (Accessed on 28 August 2021)

³ "Joint Communiqué following the meeting of the SCO Defence Ministers", Shanghai Cooperation Organization Secretariat, 28 July 2021 at <http://eng.sectsc.org/news/20210728/770367.html> (Accessed on 30 August 2021)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Expert: Zapad/Interaction-2021 marks new high of China-Russia Military Cooperation", Huang Panyue, China Military Online, 28 August 2021 at http://www.81.cn/jwywpd/2021-08/21/content_10079375.htm (Accessed on 31 August 2021)

exercise, participating Russian and Chinese troops were divided into mixed groups to jointly plan and execute military drills and operations. Further, under a special operational command information system, the two militaries accomplished air and ground force coordination, unified their combat rules and established a united operational system with battlefield information systems.⁶ This military exercise was conducted in the backdrop of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan and the rise of Taliban to power.

China sets up ‘Defence Strategic Perimeter’

Following China’s completion of 100- plus drills across all major Chinese sea areas, its military experts claimed that People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has set up a ‘Defence Strategic Perimeter’ and is now prepared to fight simultaneous battles in multiple directions. According to navigation notices released by the Maritime Safety Administration, the PLA has conducted at least 120 military exercises in the Bohai Sea, the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea, over the past three months. The official media reports published after the drills cited use of most advanced warships and warplanes in these military exercises. Commenting on Chinese media the Chinese defence analysts observed that these military exercises have become a routine since last year. These exercises are intended to enhance China’s defence preparedness to deter Taiwanese secessionists and foreign forces.⁷

PLA’s Military Drills in the Tibetan Plateau

The PLA conducted military exercises in the Tibetan Plateau called the “Snowfield Duty-2021”.

The exercises emphasised on “multi-dimensional tactics with the goal of target elimination” and enhancing the security of China’s border and “stability of Tibet”.⁸ The exercises focused on destroying enemy reconnaissance, communications centres and helipads, and providing guidance for striking hostile targets behind the enemy’s defence lines. Therefore, it coordinated both defensive and offensive operations. Further the exercises displayed capabilities to defend the Chinese border troops against enemy air capability while simultaneously using conventional forces such as tanks and infantry to capture hostile positions. The electromagnetic warfare team was also deployed to provide additional assistance by disrupting enemy communications facilities. The multiple points of integrated operations demonstrated that these military drills are aimed at reducing India’s advantage and improving China’s offensive capability in capturing positions along the border.

TAIWAN

Taipei-Washington Defence Contract

Taiwan’s Defence Mission in the US and the American Institute in Taiwan signed a defence contract with the US to purchase airborne reconnaissance systems on 29 July. These systems are to be deployed to Hualien on the east coast of Taiwan. Although Taiwan’s Ministry of Defence did not provide any details of the contract. Taiwan’s media reports stated delivery of six MS-110 Recce Pods for F-16 jets, eleven High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems and 135 Standoff Land-Attack

⁶ “China and Russia Drill signals new era in joint exercises: spokesperson”, Huang Panyue, Xinhuanet, 8 August 2021 at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-08/27/content_4893113.htm (Accessed on 31 August 2021)

⁷ “PLA holds 100+ drills in all Chinese sea areas in 3 months, sets up ‘defense strategic perimeter’”, Liu Xuanzhun, Global Times, 24 August 2021 at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1232351.shtml> (Accessed on 25 August 2021)

⁸ “PLA Tibet Military Command Holds Large-Scale Joint Drills in Plateau Region”, Liu Xuanzan, Global Times, 26 August 2021 at: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1232487.shtml>. (Accessed on 28 August 2021)

Missile Expanded Response Systems as primary highlights of the deal.⁹

Taiwan to receive Howitzers from US

Amid rising cross-Strait tensions, the US State Department approved sale of forty 155 mm M109A6 medium self-propelled howitzer artillery systems to Taiwan. The US\$ 750 million worth arms sale is intended to help Taiwan defend itself better in an event of a Chinese invasion. Reportedly, apart from medium self-propelled howitzer artillery systems, the arms sale will also include 20 M992A2 Field Artillery Ammunition Support Vehicles (FAASV); one Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS); five M88A2 Hercules vehicles; five M2 Chrysler Mount; 50 calibre machine guns; and one thousand six hundred ninety-eight (1,698) multi-option, Precision Guidance Kits (PGK).¹⁰ Taipei, who for long had been trying to mobilise international opinion against Chinese military provocations, welcomed the US decision. Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu thanked the Biden administration and affirmed that the delivery of the artillery systems would help Taiwan to "maintain a rock-solid self-defence and regional peace and stability".¹¹

Modest hike in Taiwan's Defence Budget

President Tsai Ing Wen's cabinet proposed a modest hike in the country's defence budget just ten days after China conducted a series of military drills near Taiwan.¹² Reportedly, this proposed raise in the 2022 budget included the cost of US\$ 1.44 billion that Taiwan plans to spend to procure F-16 fighter jets, even though the Government has not given any details. If approved by the Legislative Yuan, the defence budget will constitute the third-largest Government spending for next year, after social welfare and combined expenditure on education, science and culture.¹³

JAPAN

Japan's Annual Defense White Paper Released

Japan's Ministry of Defense released its Annual Defense White Paper titled *Defense of Japan* on 13 July. In a noteworthy departure, Japan for the first time, categorically underscored the need to observe the developments surrounding Taiwan with a sense of crisis as Beijing's increasing military power could disturb the stability in the Taiwan Strait.¹⁴ Further, the White Paper outlined the inconsistencies in China's Coast Guard Law

⁹ Staff Writer, "Taiwan Inks Deal with US to Buy Defense Systems," *Taipei Times*, 29 July 2021 at <https://taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2021/07/29/2003761669> (Accessed on 30 July 2021)

¹⁰ Stacy Hsu and Y.F. Low, "U.S. Announces Sale of Self-propelled Artillery to Taiwan", *Focus Taiwan*, 5 August 2021 at <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202108050001> (Accessed on 6 August 2021)

¹¹ "Taiwan thanks US for approving \$1 billion howitzer for sale", *The Straits Times*, 5 August 2021 at <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/us-approves-potential-sales-of-howitzers-to-taiwan-pentagon> (Accessed on 6 August 2021)

¹² Jon Grevatt, "Taiwan proposes defence budget increase for 2022", *Janes*, 27 August 2021 at <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/taiwan-proposes-defence-budget-increase-for-2022> (Accessed on 28 August 2021)

¹³ "Taiwan plans to spend 1.4 billion on new fighter jets amid rising China military activity", *CNN*, 27 August 2021 at <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/26/asia/taiwan-defense-spending-intl-hnk/index.html> (Accessed on 28 August 2021)

¹⁴ "Japan takes up Taiwan Strait stability in defense report for the 1st time", *Reito Kaneko, Kyodo News*, 13 July 2021 at <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2021/07/43e571ef9341-japan-takes-up-taiwan-strait-stability-in-defense-report-for-1st-time.html> (Accessed on 25 July 2021)

vis-a-vis the international law, and Beijing's unilateral attempts to alter the status quo in the East and South China Seas. Furthermore, it termed Pyongyang's ballistic missile development programme as a "grave and imminent threat" to Japan's security. Accordingly, the Defence White Paper proclaimed to bolster Japan's defence capabilities while simultaneously coordinating and cooperating with like-minded powers in the Indo-Pacific to promote the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. The Defense White Paper identified Australia, India, European partners such as UK, France, Germany, Canada and New Zealand as important defence partners.¹⁵

Japan and UK joint naval drill in Pacific

The UK's Carrier Strike Group's warships led by *HMS Queen Elizabeth* held joint exercises with Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) and the United States Expeditionary Strike Group 7, south of Okinawa, on 26 August. This exercise was an outcome of Japan's persistent efforts to engage European powers in advancing freedom of navigation and rule of law in the Indo-Pacific. Rear Admiral Konno Yasushige from Japan's Self-Defense Force (SDF) suggested that such exercises would further reinforce Japan-UK security partnership in advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific. *HMS Queen Elizabeth* is planned to call at the US Navy's Yokosuka Base in Kanagawa prefecture in September.¹⁶

Japan's Defence Ministry seeks hike in Defence budget

Japan's Defence Ministry unveiled a US \$ 50 billion budget on 31 August, amidst a rising threat perception from China and North Korea. In the proposed budget, the Defence Ministry sought a nominal 2.9 per cent hike from the previous year. The aim is to advance Japan's capability in the space, cyber and electromagnetic domains. Detailing the defence expenditure, the proposed budget requested for an R&D outlay of ¥325.7 billion to pursue technologies like crewless aircraft using AI, and fund next-generation fighter jets; ¥130.0 billion to get F-35 advanced stealth fighter jets; ¥10.2 billion for transport ships; ¥37.9 billion for standoff missiles that can be launched from different platforms; and ¥5.8 billion to adapt radars for ships equipped with the Aegis missile interceptor system. The proposed budget also included provisions for setting up a new camp on Ishigaki Island where Japan intends to deploy surface-to-air and anti-ship missile batteries, and further bolster capabilities in other Islands, including Miyako, Yonaguni and Amami.¹⁷

KOREAN PENINSULA

US-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Meeting

On 20 July, Tokyo hosted a US-Japan-South Korea trilateral meeting, to discuss the shared challenge

¹⁵ "Defense of Japan :2021", Ministry of Defense, 13 July 2021 at https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2021/DOJ2021_Digest_EN.pdf (Accessed on 25 July 2021)

¹⁶ "UK, Netherlands, United States, Japan, complete intensive joint exercises in the Pacific", 26 August 2021 at <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2021/august/25/210825-pacific-exercises-for-carrier-strike-group> (Accessed on 27 August 2021)

¹⁷ Kosuke Takahashi and Andrew McDonald, "Japan requests US\$ 50 billion defence budget for 2022", , 31 August 2021, Janes. at <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/japan-requests-usd50-billion-defence-budget-for-2022#> (Accessed on 31 August 2021)

of realising complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and the threats posed by Pyongyang's ballistic missile programme. Additionally, global challenges including economic recovery and COVID-19 response, as well as defending the rules-based order and supporting a Free and Open Indo-Pacific were on the table. The meeting was attended by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo, and South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong Kun. They opposed any action that undermines the rules-based international order in addition to any unilateral efforts to alter the status quo in the South and East China Seas, and underlined the significance of stability in the Taiwan Strait.¹⁸

South Korea-US Joint Military Exercise

Seoul and Washington conducted their annual joint military training from 16-26 August. The military exercise sparked a strong reaction from North Korea. Kim Yo Jong, Deputy-Department Director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, registered a strong protest and stated that "the dangerous war exercises pushed ahead with by the US and the South Korean side in defiance of our repeated warnings will surely make themselves face more serious security threat." She further argued that "the US, which doggedly pushes ahead with the aggressive war drills at such a sensitive time as now when the eyes of the world

are on the development of the situation on the Korean Peninsula, is indeed the chief architect destroying peace and stability in the region. This also shows that 'diplomatic engagement' and 'dialogue with no strings attached' touted by the present US administration is hypocrisy to cover up its aggressive nature."¹⁹

IAEA Reports Restarting of Nuclear Reactor by Pyongyang

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in a report released on 27 August, suggested that North Korea may have restarted its Yongbyon nuclear reactor, violating UNSC resolutions. The report indicated that ever since July, this reactor has discharged cooling water, demonstrating that it is in operation. Further, there have also been signs of continuous mining, milling and concentration activities at a suspected uranium mine at Pyongsan. The Agency stated that it was "deeply troubled" and "concerned by the latest developments." There have been speculations that it is this 5 MW(e) reactor that produced plutonium for nuclear weapons and remains a key pillar of Pyongyang's nuclear programme.²⁰

Since international observers were expelled by North Korea in 2009, the IAEA Reports have been based primarily on satellite imagery of North Korea's nuclear activities.²¹

¹⁸ "Deputy Foreign Secretary Sherman's Trilateral Meeting with Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mori and Republic of Korea First Vice Minister Choi", Office of the Spokesperson, US Department of State, 20 July 2021 at <https://www.state.gov/deputy-secretary-shermans-trilateral-meeting-with-japanese-vice-foreign-minister-mori-and-republic-of-korea-first-vice-foreign-minister-choi/> (Accessed on 31 August 2021)

¹⁹ "South Korea, U.S. start joint training amid N. Korea's protest", Yonhap News Agency, 16 August 2021 at <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20210816002000315> (Accessed on 31 August 2021)

²⁰ "Application of Safeguards in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea", Report by Director General, IAEA, 27 August 2021 at <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gc/gc65-22.pdf> (Accessed on 31 August 2021)

²¹ Susan D' Agostino, "North Korea restarted nuclear reactor for plutonium production, IAEA says", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 30 August 2021 at <https://thebulletin.org/2021/08/north-korea-restarted-nuclear-reactor-for-plutonium-production-iaea-says/> (Accessed on 31 August 2021)

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