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## CHINA

### Preventing Spread of Erroneous Ideology in PLA

In April 2021, the Central Military Commission had [issued guidelines](#) on promoting ideological and political education in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to strengthen its loyalty towards Xi Jinping and the Party. Keeping in with the guidelines, *China Military*, on 6 December 2023, published an article by Chen Zuosong, director of the political work department for the Southern Theatre Command Air Force, observing that [“hostile forces”](#) operating in China are spreading misguided ideas in the military. Calling on the PLA to build cultural soft power, the senior official also underscored the risk of ideological drifting in the PLA and advocated a culture of absolute loyalty to the Communist Party of China (CCP) and “dare to fight spirit”. He [urged](#) the troops to be “guided to oppose” the “erroneous ideological trends and arguments” that “have ... spread into military camps.”

### China-Russia Maritime Drills in Yellow Sea

The Chinese Defence Ministry informed in early December 2023 that China and Russia conducted maritime drills in the Yellow Sea, following their joint patrol over East Sea. The [announcement](#) stated that a Navy fleet from the PLA Northern Theatre Command participated in “multiple days of continuous at-sea training”. Without disclosing the time and location of the drills, the Defence Ministry statement informed that the naval drill “involved missile and naval gunfire attacks, air and

marine defence exercises, and reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance training to “strengthen the cooperation capabilities” between Chinese and Russian vessels. Responding to the China and Russia joint air and naval drills, the head of the United States (US) Indo-Pacific Command [claimed](#) that military cooperation between China and Russia is “concerning” and urged Beijing to avoid escalating maritime tensions with its neighbours.

### Former Navy Commander as New Defence Minister

Towards the end of 2023, China [appointed](#) former navy top commander General Dong Jun as its new Defence Minister. His appointment was announced by the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee. Reportedly, General Dong is the first Defence Minister from navy and has served in all major divisions of the PLA including the Northern Sea Fleet which now regularly conducts joint exercises with the Russian navy. According to observers, General Dong will have less authority than counterparts in other countries and will work more as military's public representative.

## JAPAN

### Japan, US, ROK Hold Joint Air Exercise

The United States Air Force (USAF) [announced](#) on 21 December 2023 that it had participated in the second trilateral air exercise jointly with the air forces of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan. The USAF platforms that participated in the exercise included two B1-B strategic bombers originating from Ellsworth Air

Force Base in the US, F-16 fighters and KC-135 Stratotankers, while the South Korean air force dispatched F-15K fighters and the Japan Air Self Defence Forces dispatched F-2 fighters to escort the US convoy. The exercise was conducted as part of President Biden's commitment to his Asian allies at the Camp David Summit that US air assets would be made more visible in the Korean peninsula following North Korea's unprecedented missile tests throughout 2023. After the exercise, all air assets returned to their respective bases.

## TAIWAN

### Taiwan-US Defence Ties

The US Congress on 13 December 2023, passed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY2024 NDAA). This act has Taiwan-specific clauses that seek to expand and strengthen "[military coordination](#)" between the two sides, which would cover "[military cybersecurity cooperation, speeding up the delivery of arms, and a strategy for dealing with a Chinese blockade of the country](#)" under the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act.

Further, deepening defence ties, Taipei would purchase [US\\$547 million](#) worth of weapons for its fighter jet missiles from the US. Besides, the US may also sell Command, Control, Communications, and Computers (C4) for [around US\\$300 million](#). Under this deal, Taiwan will buy the following items: C4 Life Cycle Support, procurement of spare and repair parts, technical documentation, personnel training, software and hardware, software development, and other associate logistics and program support.

## THE KOREAN PENINSULA

### ICBM Test by North Korea in December

On 18 December 2023, North Korea tested the [Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles \(ICBM\)](#), *Hwasong-18* in the backdrop of joint exercises by S.Korea and the US. The ICBM containing built-in-solid propellants will be difficult for adversaries to detect than light-fuelled weapons. Media reports also indicated that the missile could reach an altitude of 6,518 km. Responding to the missile test, the US, South Korea and Japan [issued a joint statement](#) declaring that "The United States, Japan, and the ROK (South Korea) stand together in opposition to the DPRK's (North Korea's) continued development of its unlawful weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile programs"

Since 2017, North Korea has been carrying out ICBM tests in a bid to acquire the ability to launch nuclear strikes on the US mainland. In November 2023 the North Korea launched its first military spy satellite.

### South Korea Plans to Increase Defence Spending

According to South Korea's Defence Ministry's [2024-2028 midterm defence plans](#) published in mid-December 2023, the government plans to spend 346.7 trillion Korean won (US \$ 262.8 billion) over the next five years to bolster the country's defence capabilities. The official document noted an increase of 17.3 trillion Korean won from last year's defence budget. Reportedly, the increased budget will support troops training and modernisation programmes which will make South Korean troops "strong and combat ready".