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## CHINA

### Deepening of China's Strategic Capabilities

President Xi Jinping called for enhancing [strategic capabilities](#) in emerging areas. He stated that these capabilities would enhance the combat preparedness of the armed forces and enable them to integrate with each other in a better way. He [stated](#) that there is “need to highlight reform in emerging areas as a priority for further comprehensively deepening reform” and “called for an innovation ecosystem characterized by self-reliance, openness, integration and vitality”. The Global Times [cited](#) a PLA Daily quote saying that many ‘new technologies are being developed and China needs to be aware of the trends, their battlefield applications and conduct active research’.

### China's New Heavy Attack Helicopter

Images of a new [heavy attack helicopter](#) appeared on Chinese social media, *Weibo* around mid-March which observers referred to as Z-21. According to certain experts, the Z-21 is [similar](#) to the previous Z-20 medium-lift helicopter in many ways. For instance, the Z-21 has a similar capacity of 10 tonnes and like the Z-20 is heavier than two attack helicopters, currently in service, the Z-10 and the Z-19. In international terms the Z-21 is being compared to AH-64 Apache, the United States' (US) military's most advanced attack helicopter. As per the images that were in the Chinese social media, the Z-21

helicopter has two seats in a front-back layout and has been developed by [Changhe Aircraft Industries](#) Corporation, based in the eastern province of Jiangxi. It is being widely speculated that the [new heavy helicopter](#) might play an important role in future military operations across the Taiwan Straits.

## JAPAN

### Japan and India Participate in Cobra Gold Exercise

The armed forces of Japan and India, along with 30 other countries, [participated](#) in the Cobra Gold exercises jointly organised by the armies of the United States and Thailand. The ten-day exercise was held in Rayong, Thailand between 28 February and 8 March 2024, and saw the participation of regional militaries including China, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore alongside the hosts. The exercise boasted 9,500 individual personnel from the 30 countries, and included large-scale land, air and sea drills along with cyber- and space-related training. The Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) dispatched 180 personnel to the exercise, where they participated in some hostage-rescue drills as well as the main program. India and China only participated in humanitarian relief drills.

### JSDF Conducted Record Number of Drills, Escort Duties in 2023

An analysis by the Yomiuri Shimbun [reported](#) that the JSDF took part in fifty-six discrete multinational exercises in 2023, eighteen times the figure recorded in 2006

when the JSDF commenced participating in foreign exercises. Sixty-four percent of these exercises were designed to hone tactics and battle operations, [indicating](#) the JSDF's desire to augment warfighting capabilities in the event of foreign attack in the Indo-Pacific region. Sixty percent of the drills in 2023 were held at sea, of which twelve were anti-submarine warfare drills. Eighteen of the seaborne drills were conducted in Japanese waters while ten were in waters around Southeast Asia. The US was the most-preferred partner for the JSDF, with fifty out of fifty exercises seeing its participation, while Australia (23) and South Korea (16) took up second and third places respectively.

On 19 March, the Ministry of Defence [revealed](#) that the JSDF had conducted twenty-seven sea-borne or air-borne escort missions in 2023, the second-highest number after 2022. Twenty-two of these missions were to aid the US military, of which the lion's share involved the protection of vessels during joint training exercises. Five instances of air escort to US platforms were recorded, while four instances involved escort for US assets engaged in intelligence and surveillance activities, such as during North Korea's prolific missile launches. Australian armed forces occupy the second rung of escort recipients, with five instances in 2023, of which four were seaborne escorts for Australian naval assets participating in joint training exercises, and one was an air escort for Australian air assets.

## TAIWAN

### Taiwan Military to Build New Bases

The Taiwanese media reported that the military is likely to build [six new bases](#) for the naval anti-ship missile squadrons. The proposed bases will be constructed in Taitung, Yunlin, Tainan and Kaohsiung, and two in Pingtung. These bases will be located near Taiwan's east coast from where the Taiwanese military will counter Chinese warships off east coast of Taiwan. The media learnt that the squadrons stationed in these bases are likely to have US-made Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems. In 2020, the US agreed to sell 100 sets of shore-mounted Harpoon missile systems to Taiwan, which included "[400 RGM-84L-4 Harpoon Block II missiles, four RTM-84L-4 Harpoon Block II exercise missiles, 100 Harpoon launcher transport units, 25 radar trucks and other related equipment.](#)" The sale deal is likely to be completed before the end of 2028.

### Development of Vehicle-Mounted Laser Weapon

Taiwan's Chungshan Institute of Science and Technology will be able to develop a prototype 50-kilowatt (KW) vehicle-mounted laser weapon system by the end of 2024. It was able to produce a low-powered prototype last year. Now it is expected that the institute will be able to produce "[a full-powered system mounted on CM-32 Clouded Leopard wheeled armored vehicles for use against missiles and uncrewed aerial vehicles.](#)" The media learnt

that the institute received significant help from its foreign partners in this project.

## **THE KOREAN PENINSULA**

### **RoK Defence Diplomacy in March 2024**

A bilateral defence meeting between [RoK Defence Ministry, Shin Won Sik and his Iraqi counterpart Thabet Mohammed Saeed Al-Abbasi](#) was held on 20 March in Seoul. During the meeting, both sides discussed enhancing exchanges and cooperation in the fields of defense and the defense industry. The two sides also evaluated the existing level of defense industry cooperation on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the deployment of the Zaytun Unit and the 10th anniversary of signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on bilateral military cooperation. Meanwhile, RoK Defence Minister Shin acknowledged that military training exchanges, T-50 trainer aircraft exports, and airbase reconstruction projects have helped lay the foundation for bilateral cooperation.

On 28 March in Seoul, [RoK Defence Minister Shin Won Sik and his Thai counterpart Sutin Klungsang](#) held a bilateral defence dialogue. In the meeting, both defence ministers assessed the achievements made in bilateral defense industry cooperation and with regard to export of T-50 supersonic advanced trainer crafts and frigates. They also exchanged views on ways to expand this cooperation.

### **Development of Hypersonic Missiles by North Korea**

North Korea's state media reported towards the end of March 2024, that Pyongyang has successfully tested a solid-fuel engine for its [new-type intermediate-range hypersonic missile](#). Kim Jong un, North Korea's leader oversaw the tests which took place at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground in the country's northwest. Media reports also claimed that efforts are underway to develop a more powerful, agile missile which would be able to hit targets deep inside the Guam territory of the US.