



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

# CHINA

## MILITARY DIGEST

MARCH 2025

- The 33rd meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) was held
- Xi Jinping met with deputies from the armed forces
- China's defense spending growth remains at 7.2%
- China, Iran and Russia conducted joint naval exercises in the Middle East
- China hosted the 1st meeting of International Military Cooperation Organs of the SCO
- General Zhang Youxia spoke at the group meeting of the PLA and the PAPF

### **The 33rd meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) held**

The 33rd meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) was [held](#) on 25 March 2025 in Beijing. The Indian delegation was led by Shri Gourangalal Das, Joint Secretary (East Asia), Ministry of External Affairs and the Chinese delegation was led by Mr. Hong Liang, Director General of the Boundary & Oceanic Affairs Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The representatives of the two countries' foreign affairs, defense ministries, home affairs, immigration and other departments [attended](#). According to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, held in a positive and constructive atmosphere, the meeting comprehensively reviewed the situation along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China border areas. Peace and tranquility on the border are critical for the smooth development of overall bilateral relations. The two sides explored various measures and proposals to give effect to the decisions taken during the 23rd meeting of the Special Representatives on the India-China boundary question in Beijing in December 2024 and to advance effective border management. The two sides agreed to maintain and strengthen relevant diplomatic and military mechanisms towards this end. They also exchanged views on early resumption of cross-border cooperation and exchanges, including on trans-border rivers and Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra. The two sides agreed to work together to make substantial preparation for the next meeting of the Special Representatives (SR), which will be held in India later this year.

The Indian delegation leader paid a courtesy call on Assistant Foreign Minister H.E. Mr. Hong Lei. On March 28, Colonel Wu Qian, Spokesperson of the Defense Ministry [said](#) the two sides agreed to take practical and effective measures to continue to maintain peace and tranquility in the China-India border area.

### **Xi Jinping met with deputies from the armed forces**

Xi Jinping met with deputies from the armed forces to the 14th National People's Congress on March 7 in Beijing. He [delivered](#) a speech on theme "Implementing high-quality development plan and completing the set goals of the PLA as scheduled". It is crucial to balance progress and quality, costs and benefits, overall objectives and key focal points, development and regulation, as well as the plan's implementation and capacity building, he noted. He [ordered](#) the military to accelerate efforts in resolving bottlenecks and obstacles in implementing the plan, strengthen cross-department, cross-domain, and military-civilian coordination, and improve the making, assessment and implementation of policies. He urged that modern management concepts and methods must be leveraged to continuously refine strategic management systems, thus bolstering the systematic, holistic and coordinated execution of plans. The defense budget and other resources must be reasonably used to improve cost-effectiveness ratios, according to the president. He [emphasized](#) to accelerate the development of new quality combat effectiveness. He pointed out that for the [construction](#) of the army the "14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025)" is the blueprint that will help in achieving the goal of the 100-year struggle of the army. Before addressing the

lawmakers, he listened to thoughts and suggestions shared by six deputies who spoke about topics such as hardware testing facilities, expenditure management, weaponry production and military infrastructure construction. He urged to build a complete and effective supervision system to thoroughly investigate and address corruption. Zhang Youxia, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), presided over the meeting, and He Weidong, also CMC Vice Chairman, and Liu Zhenli and Zhang Shengmin, CMC members, attended the meeting.

### **China's defense spending growth remains at 7.2%**

On March 5, the Third Session of the 14th National People's Congress opened. In the government work report, Chinese Premier Li Qiang [announced](#) that this year's defense expenditure will reach RMB 178.47 billion, an increase of 7.2% year-on-year. The defense budget growth rate is same as in 2023 and 2024, and continues to be at the highest level since 2020 (the growth rate of defense expenditure from 2020 to 2024 was 6.6%, 6.8%, 7.1%, 7.2%, and 7.2% respectively). The government work report did mention that "to do our best to achieve the 100-year goal of building the army", "accelerate the development of new quality combat effectiveness", "to ensure the conclusion of the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Construction of the Army", "accelerate the implementation of major national defense development projects and accelerate the construction of the network information system." This is still well above China's economic growth target of about 5% this year. Since Xi Jinping came to power in China more than a decade ago, the defense budget has increased from 720 billion yuan

in 2013 to 1.78 trillion yuan (\$245.65 billion) this year. China remains the world's second-largest military spender after the United States, which is expected to have a military budget of \$850 billion in 2025. The New York Times [believes](#) that this reflects China's "confident attitude." China's military spending has maintained a relatively stable growth, which is the Chinese government's response to the complex world situation, TASS Russian News Agency said.

### **China, Iran and Russia conducted joint naval exercises in the Middle East**

The "Marine Security Belt 2025" joint exercise was held in the Gulf of Oman from March 11 to 13, near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the world's crude oil enters and leaves the Persian Gulf. This is the fifth year that the three countries have participated in the exercise since 2019. Russia's Defense Ministry said the joint naval exercises involved 15 combat ships, support vessels and gunboats, as well as helicopters, according to state news agency TASS. Russia [sent](#) the frigate *Rezkiy*, the frigate *Hero of the Russian Federation Aldar Tsydenzhapov* and the tanker *Pechenga* for the exercise. China sent Type-52D guided-missile destroyer *Baotou* and the integrated supply ship *Gaoyouhu* were dispatched. The Iranian forces [participating](#) in the exercise are more than 10 ships including the destroyer IRIS "Jamaran" and IRIS "Alvand" frigate from both its navy and the Revolutionary Guard, and South Africa, Pakistan, Oman and other countries sent naval fleets to observe. Russian and Chinese warships arrived in waters off Iran on March 10 for annual naval drills. The exercise will [include](#) simulated maritime attacks, joint search and rescue operations, and security

inspections. Neither side released the number of participants. China's CGTN news said the joint exercises were aimed at strengthening "cooperation among the naval forces of the participating countries". "Over the course of two days, the ships' crews conducted daytime and nighttime firing from large-calibre machine guns and small arms at targets simulating unmanned boats and unmanned aerial vehicles of a mock enemy," Russia's Interfax news agency reported. Observers for the exercise included Azerbaijan, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates — with the U.S. likely keeping watch as well. Neither China nor Russia actively [patrol](#) the wider Middle East, whose waterways remain crucial for global energy supplies. It is being guarded by the Western nations largely led by the U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet. The region's waterways have become increasingly militarized in recent years. As a critical energy shipping route, the region holds strategic significance for China, Iran, and Russia, all of whom have vested interests in maintaining stability and securing global trade.

### **China hosted the 1st meeting of International Military Cooperation Organs of the SCO Member states**

The Chinese MND [hosted](#) the first meeting of International Military Cooperation Organs of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Member States for 2025 in Qingdao, Shandong Province, from March 26 to 27. Over 30 representatives from defense ministries of the SCO member states and the SCO Secretariat attended the meeting. The participants had in-depth [discussions](#) on deepening defense and security cooperation within the SCO framework and expressed willingness to

maintain close communication to prepare for the upcoming SCO Member States Defense Ministers' Meeting to be held in China. SCO comprises ten member states -- China, Russia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Belarus. However, the details about the meeting held and its participants were not disclosed.

### **General Zhang Youxia spoke at the group meeting of the PLA and the PAPF**

On March 5, Zhang Youxia, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, [emphasized](#) at the group meeting of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) delegation at the Third Session of the 14th National People's Congress. Zhang Youxia emphasized that this year is a critical year for winning the battle to achieve the goal of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the PLA. He said, China must go all out to take down the tough tasks, work hard to seek new development, and accelerate the modernization of national defense and the army. He [said](#) the PLA must comprehensively strengthen military training and preparation, accelerate the transformation and upgrading of military training, build new domains and new types of combat forces, grasp all military struggle preparations, and improve the ability to win information-based and intelligent wars. He noted, the army must solidly promote high-quality development, implement the "14th Five-Year Plan", focus on the implementation of reform tasks, and play the leading role of military theory. He suggested that the army must demand benefits from military governance, focus on collaborative research, consolidate grassroots foundations, improve the level of rule of law in the army, and help achieve new development in the cause of strengthening the army.