

Chinese Military told to keep close eye on situation in Asia

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Beijing: A top military officer has warned the Chinese military to keep a close eye on the changing situation amid a large-scale naval exercise in the South China Sea, held at the same time as a joint Washington-Seoul drill, State media reported on Thursday.

According to China Central Television, Chief of General Staff of the People's Liberation Army Chen Bingde, as well as the navy commander and other high-level military leaders, oversaw a naval exercise on Monday, the second day of the US-ROK maritime drill.

The CCTV program showed major warships of the North China Sea Fleet and East China Sea Fleet appearing in the drill organized by the South China Sea Fleet, without mentioning a specific location.

"Chen Bingde stressed that (the military) should pay close attention to changes in the situation and tasks, and get well prepared for military conflicts," the program said.

The exercise involved six aspects, ranging from precision striking at long range to practice against jet fighters and missiles. It took place under an electromagnetic environment meant to simulate realistic combat conditions, CCTV said.

"It is one of the drills in China's naval history that involved comprehensive cooperation and included the launch of many missiles," CCTV said.

The drill is just one of a slew of exercises the People's Liberation Army undertook before and during the US-ROK drill in the Sea of Japan, which is known as the East Sea in the ROK.

While Washington and Seoul completed their first joint exercise on Wednesday, Seoul said that the two sides will "present a joint military exercise every month until the end of the year."

An ROK official also said a US-ROK drill is scheduled to take place in the Yellow Sea in September.

The exercises, which were initially planned in the Yellow Sea, targeted the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for its alleged role in the sinking of the ROK warship in March. Pyongyang has vehemently denied the accusations.

The move has also drawn strong criticism from Beijing. The exercises placed the Chinese

capital within striking distance of the aircraft carrier USS George Washington, which was involved in the drill, Chinese military analysts said.

Li Jie, a researcher with the Chinese navy's military academy, told China Daily that Beijing has shown it has the determination to protect its territory not only through diplomatic speeches but also by demonstrating its military strength.

"If the bottom line were to be crossed, then China would firmly react," Li said.

Li also said the actions further stress that the South China Sea is one of China's core interests.

"The fact that the chief personally watched the performances implies that the region is seen as highly important, and the drills are considered vital," he said.

At a meeting on Asian security in Hanoi last Friday, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, as well as foreign ministers of other countries, pressured Beijing on issues in the South China Sea, over which China has overlapping territorial claims with some neighbors.

However Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi characterized Clinton's comments as "an attack on China". Beijing has always opposed any effort to "internationalize" the issue.

The South China Sea issue has become more complicated since the involvement of US and Japan, Li Jie added.

He also said the drill, taking place under an electromagnetic environment, has likely taken into consideration the advanced communication-jamming technologies of the US.

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