



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on January 19, 2023

China's Navy Conducts South China Sea Combat Drills Encompassing Aircraft Carriers

SINGAPORE — Recently, the battle group of China's CNS *Shandong* aircraft carrier conducted a combat exercise in the South China Sea to start its yearly training operations, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy announced.

Various J-15 fighter jets participated in an air-defense drill to intercept "incoming enemy aircraft," and pilots ran a slew of sophisticated tactical maneuvers before locking on their targets and simulating missile strikes, the PLA Navy declared in an article on its WeChat account.

During the exercise, which entailed warships, aircraft, and submarines, the *Shandong* battle group polished up the abilities of its sailors and aviators to participate in joint, multi-domain operations, the article indicated, elaborating that a group of new naval aviators was certified for night operations on the J-15 after engaging in the exercise.

The *Shandong* — China's second aircraft carrier and the first wholly designed and constructed domestically — displaces at least 50,000 metric tons of water. It has a conventional propulsion system and uses a ramp to launch J-15s, the spearhead of the Chinese carrier force. The largest and most advanced naval ship in the PLA Navy, *Shandong* was commissioned in December 2019. Photos accompanying the article depicted the *Shandong's* deck packed with J-15s and such fighter jets taking off from the carrier at night.

Wu Peixin, a military affairs observer, posited that the exercise showed that the battle group "has become ready for long-distance, large-scale operations."

The exercise is a real test for a carrier battle group to mobilize a large number of aircraft, ships, and submarines in the open sea, as such a move generally entails a lot of coordination and cooperation. Furthermore, it must be implemented by experienced and trained officers, sailors, and pilots, Wu said. "We can see that the *Shandong* battle group has a lot of experience and know-how on complex maneuvers. And I am sure Chinese carrier groups will sail farther soon to do their training."

The past two weeks have seen various group armies with the PLA Ground Force conducting opening ceremonies for their yearly training sessions, as well, and troops and weapons have been deployed to stage live-fire drills across the nation. The Navy's destroyers and frigates have staged intense battle exercises encompassing gun shooting, missile launching, air-defense and anti-submarine tasks, and



Tyg728/Wikimedia Commons
CNS Shandong in 2019



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counterterrorism and anti-pirate maneuvers.

Several PLA Air Force brigades relied on their fighter jets, such as the J-20 stealth combat aircraft, to simulate real-life combat scenarios.

Previously, the Eastern Theatre Command of the PLA said its forces held “joint combat readiness patrols and actual combat drills” in the sea and airspace around Taiwan, focused on land strikes and sea assaults. The goal was to test joint combat capabilities and “resolutely counter the provocative actions of external forces and Taiwan independence separatist forces,” it said in a brief statement.

Taiwan’s presidential office lambasted China for making “groundless accusations” and vehemently fulminated the drills, stating the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait and the region were the responsibilities of both Taiwan and China.

The island’s position is very clear in that it will neither intensify conflicts nor incite disputes. However, Taiwan would resolutely protect its sovereignty and security, the presidential office declared. “The nation’s military has a close grasp of the situation in the Taiwan Strait and the surrounding area and responds calmly. Our people can rest assured.”

For the past three years, China has conducted regular military incursions into the waters and airspace near Taiwan. Meanwhile, U.S. lawmakers and others from other Western allies have visited Taiwan on various occasions, snubbing Beijing’s warnings.

Military pugilism coming from Beijing is not to be tolerated, said Johannes Vogel, a senior lawmaker from one of Germany’s ruling coalition parties. “We want to also let you see our visit here as a gesture of support,” he told Taiwan parliament speaker You Si-kun during a visit by a German parliamentary delegation.

The United States has no formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, but is the island’s most prominent arms provider and international supporter.

On January 17, Taiwan’s military unveiled plans to include women in its reservist training for the first time this year, as the island tries to boost its forces to counter China’s saber-rattling. Taipei’s Defense Ministry said it would permit around 200 discharged female soldiers to enlist in voluntary reservist training from the second quarter of this year to fortify the overall backup force.

“This is the first year to include women in the reservists training, so this year will be a trial programme,” said Major-General Yu Wen-cheng from the ministry’s All-Out Defense Mobilization Agency. “We will plan the training capacities according to the number of applicants.”

The voluntary programs aim to “strengthen the effectiveness of the retraining of reserve troops in combat skills to help improve the combat capabilities of reservists,” Yu told reporters.

Earlier this month, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the former NATO secretary-general, said that democratic countries should make clear the “severe economic consequences” that China would face should it invade Taiwan. He added that European countries could participate in training exercises with Taiwan’s military forces, which currently use weapons mostly made locally and by the U.S.

China regards Taiwan as a renegade province to be reunified by force if necessary, but Taiwan dismisses China’s claims.



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