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रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

China's long-range Xian H-20 stealth bomber could make its debut this year

Minnie Chan

Prepared by:
Diya Deep Singh

South China Morning Post, May 4, 2020

China's new generation strategic bomber is likely to be ready for delivery this year, but Beijing is said to be weighing the impact of its unveiling at a complex time in regional relations due to the coronavirus pandemic. Military sources said the Xian H-20 supersonic stealth bomber – expected to double the country's strike range – could make its first public appearance at this year's Zhuhai Airshow in November, if the pandemic was sufficiently under control. H-20 will give China the nuclear triad of submarines, ballistic missiles and bombers, "The Zhuhai Airshow is expected to become a platform to promote China's image and its success in pandemic control – telling the outside world that the contagion did not have any big impacts on Chinese defence industry enterprises," a source said. But the appearance of the bomber at this year's air show could heighten tensions by directly threatening countries within its strike range, especially Australia, Japan and the Korean peninsula.

"The Beijing leadership is still carefully considering whether its commission will affect regional balance, especially as regional tensions have been escalating over the Covid-19 pandemic," another source said. "Like intercontinental ballistic missiles, all strategic bombers can be used for delivering nuclear weapons ... if China claimed it had pursued a national defence policy which is purely defensive in nature, why would it need such an offensive weapon?" Tensions in the region have worsened in the past month with a war of words between Beijing and Washington over the pandemic, and both sides increasing naval patrols of the Taiwan Strait and South and East China seas.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3082465/chinas-long-range-xian-h-20-stealth-bomber-could-make-its-debut>

South China Sea neighbours uneasy as Beijing expands enforcement actions

Catherine Wong

South China Morning Post, May 4, 2020

Southeast Asian nations are increasingly uneasy about their giant neighbour China as Beijing moves beyond island-building and military activities to administrative and law enforcement measures to solidify its claims in the South China Sea. China's recent moves to create two administrative districts as well as naming 80 geographical features in the sea have drawn protests from other claimants, like Vietnam. Also causing their unease is China's recent expansion of its domestic law enforcement tools to the disputed region, according to officials and experts in the region.

They are also worried that China, already engaged in a power struggle with the United States, is increasingly likely to find itself in direct conflict with smaller claimant states as it seeks to counter

their efforts to develop fishing and energy resources in the region. On April 1, the Chinese coastguard launched an eight-month law enforcement campaign named “Blue Sea 2020”, with one of its stated aims being to crackdown on “violations in offshore oil exploration and exploitation”, as well as marine and coastal project construction. The campaign is a multi-agency effort between the coastguard and the transport, natural resources, and environment ministries. China has so far released only accounts of recent operations targeting domestic violations. But diplomats and experts in the region believe the directive could be extended to the disputed waters of the South China Sea.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3082678/south-china-sea-neighbours-uneasy-beijing-expands-enforcement>

China’s military budget will still rise despite coronavirus, experts predict

Liu Zhen

South China Morning Post, May 3, 2020

China has made modernising its military and expanding its weaponry a priority. Defence spending could show the effect of economic headwinds but is still expected to increase. PLA’s modernization and strategic priorities demand spending is maintained even after GDP’s first contraction since records began, observers say. China’s upcoming defence budget will be only slightly hit by the economic downturn that followed the coronavirus outbreak, and a modest increase is still expected as it continues to develop its military capability, analysts said. The government’s military budget is expected to be revealed, as is the norm, at this year’s session of the National People’s Congress (NPC), China’s legislative body. Delayed by over two months because of the pandemic, it will finally be convened on May 22. Last year the defence expenditure announced at the NPC session was 1.18 trillion yuan (US\$176 billion), up 7.5 per cent from the previous year. China has said its military expenditure has always been kept below 2 per cent of its GDP over the past 30 years, although its official figures have long been described by Western observers as opaque, with significant omissions of important items.

In a report earlier this week, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimated that China’s actual military spending in 2019 was US\$261 billion, the world’s second highest, after the United States’ US\$732 billion. John Lee, adjunct professor at the University of Sydney and senior fellow at the Hudson Institute in Washington, estimated that this year the Chinese defence budget would remain roughly the same or increase modestly, in line with growth levels of recent years. “In the current environment, Beijing is keen to emphasise that China has recovered substantially from Covid-19 and that its power trajectory is unaffected by recent events,” Lee said. “At the same time, it would be aware of the anger towards the Communist Party for allowing the virus to become a pandemic. “Regardless of what the reality might be, I would be surprised if there were a dramatic increase or a significant cut.”

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3082530/chinas-military-budget-will-still-rise-despite-coronavirus>

China's Liaoning aircraft carrier returns home from a month of training

Minnie Chan

South China Morning Post, May 1, 2020

China's first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, returned to its home port of Qingdao on Thursday after nearly a month of training on the high seas, the People's Liberation Army said. According to military analysts, the warship was joined by at least five escort vessels, and the drills showed its crew had not been affected by the coronavirus pandemic and that it remained combat-ready. Warship joined by at least five escort vessels and analysts say the drills were 'very significant' to show the strike group wasn't hit by coronavirus. Latest exercises also seen as putting pressure on Taiwan's pro-independence forces, with strike group sailing through the strait

The annual cross-region drills included intensive and complicated air and sea operations, the official PLA Daily said in a post on social media on Friday. "The drills have further improved the real combat training level of the Liaoning carrier strike group, putting its systematic combat capability to the test," the statement on WeChat said, without giving other details. It was the longest training session by China's navy since the PLA resumed all large-scale drills in March, after they were suspended because of disruptions to transport and military resources across the country as the deadly new virus rapidly spread. Beijing-based naval expert Li Jie said it was important for the carrier to get back to training activities. "The recent training by the Liaoning carrier strike group is very significant because it's evidence that none of the 2,000 sailors and commanders on the ship have been hit by Covid-19, and neither have any of the other soldiers and personnel on the other warships and support units," Li said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3082532/chinas-liaoning-aircraft-carrier-returns-home-month-training>

China starts 2020 H2 military recruiting

Xinhua, April 30, 2020

China has started the military recruiting scheduled for the second half of this year, a military spokesperson said Thursday. Approved by the State Council and the Central Military Commission, the recruitment scheduled for the first half of this year, which was postponed to support China's epidemic prevention and control work, will be combined with that of the second half, said Wu Qian, a spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense, at a press conference. Online

enrollment for female applicants is scheduled to start from the end of June, he added. China has changed its military recruitment from once a year to twice a year, starting from 2020. Enditem

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/30/c_139021456.htm

Chinese military opposes more foreign naval presence in S China Sea

Zhang Zhihao

China Daily, April 30, 2020

The Chinese military opposes foreign powers bolstering their naval presence in the South China Sea, calling the actions detrimental to regional peace and stability, a spokesman for the Ministry of National Defense said on Thursday. The People's Liberation Army will remain highly vigilant and keep monitoring the activities by foreign naval forces in the region, Senior Colonel Wu Qian, the ministry's spokesman, said in a news release. Wu made the remarks amid recent "freedom of navigation" operations by the United States Navy. Since mid-April, the US and Australian navies conducted joint military exercises in the South China Sea. "Reality has proven once again that the US is the biggest facilitator of the militarization of the South China Sea, and is a trouble-maker for the region's peace and stability," Wu said. "The PLA will remain on high alert, and adamantly safeguard national sovereignty, security, and development interests, as well as the peace and prosperity of the region."

In response to the US Naval Institute's two articles published in early April, which called for the US to encourage the use of privateers to attack Chinese ships by issuing letters of marque - a document authorizing privately-owned ships to capture enemy merchant ships, Wu called the idea "an act of piracy". "These actions are criminal activities explicitly prohibited under international laws, and will absolutely receive joint opposition and severe backlash from the international community," he said. Wu said that publicly endorsing piracy has exposed the hegemonic ideas and law of the jungle mentality behind the authors, "and the international community should be on guard against these thoughts".

<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/30/WS5eaab6dca310a8b241153059.html>

China on 'high alert' as 'troublemaker' US patrols South China Sea

Catherine Wong

South China Morning Post, April 30, 2020

The Chinese military called the United States a "troublemaker" in the disputed South China Sea on Thursday, stressing that China was on "high alert" to safeguard its interests in the contested waters. The two powers, already mired in a dispute over the handling of the coronavirus pandemic,

have engaged in tense stand-offs over the South China Sea, with two back-to-back operations by the US to challenge China's expansive claims in the region in the last few days.

The US' guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill conducted a "freedom of navigation operation" in the Spratly Islands on Wednesday, a day after the guided-missile destroyer USS Barry conducted a similar operation near the Paracel Islands.

The US 7th Fleet said the operations were in response to "unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea [that] pose a serious threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight and the right of innocent passage of all ships". More footage emerges from 2018 near collision of US and China warships in South China Sea. And last week, an Australian frigate joined US warships in a joint exercise in the South China Sea after the Chinese research ship Haiyang Dizhi 8, accompanied by a Chinese coastguard vessel, tailed a Malaysian state oil company ship conducting exploration in the area. China's defence ministry spokesman Wu Qian said China had been "closely watching and on high alert" against the activities by the US and Australian militaries. "The frequent military operations in the South China Sea by extra-regional countries like the US and Australia are not conducive to the peace and stability in the South China Sea and we resolutely oppose them," Wu said.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3082376/china-high-alert-troublemaker-us-patrols-south-china-sea>

China's latest, most advanced howitzer enters Eastern Theater Command service

Liu Xuanzun

Global Times, April 30, 2020

China's most advanced vehicle-mounted howitzer, the PCL-181, recently entered service with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command, the theater command confirmed on Thursday. With technical details revealed for the first time, experts say the weapon is one of the best in the world. In the past few days, troops of a brigade under the Eastern Theater Command received the 155mm vehicle-mounted howitzer, which made its public debut as a newly developed weapon at the National Day military parade on October 1, 2019 in Beijing, the Eastern Theater Command confirmed on its Sina Weibo account on Thursday.

The statement came after China Central Television (CCTV) on Wednesday reported the weapon had been commissioned. This report is also seemingly the first time an official source has identified the designation of the howitzer as the PCL-181. Neither the Eastern Theater Command nor CCTV has specified how many howitzers were included in this delivery, but at least 18 were seen in the report. The 155mm wheeled vehicle-mounted howitzer weighs only 25 tons, making it much lighter and faster and with longer endurance than the previous self-propelled howitzer which uses

crawler tracks and weighs more than 40 tons, the CCTV report said, noting it can also hit targets at longer ranges with increased firepower.

This data means the PCL-181 not only has high mobility, but it can also be transported by large transport aircraft like the domestically made Y-20, which has a cargo capacity of more than 60 tons, a military expert who requested to remain anonymous told the Global Times on Thursday. A single Y-20 can likely carry two PCL-181s, or a combination of one PCL-181 and one 30 ton-class Type 15 lightweight main battle tank, both of which are choices that offer frontline troops immense firepower, the expert said, noting that this will give the Chinese military more tactical flexibility in strategic transport and quick reaction operations. The vehicle the howitzer is mounted on has a large driver's cab that can accommodate all six artillery squad members, protecting them with bulletproof glass that enhances the unit's survivability.

Digitalized control panels can be found in the cab, and this highly digitalized system allows artillery gun deployment with the press of a button, automatic gun calibration and half-automatic ammo reload. This can shorten the preparation time to shoot the weapon, giving the artillery stronger combat capabilities, according to the report. China has been leading the world in the artillery sector for many years, and the PCL-181 has set yet another example, the expert said. One key mission of the PLA Eastern Theater Command is to prepare for potential military struggle on the island of Taiwan, military observers noted. The PCL-181 was also spotted earlier this year in a round of PLA exercises in a high-elevation plateau region in Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, CCTV reported in January.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1187199.shtml>

Chinese military lashes out at American warship's 'intrusion' in South China Sea

Minnie Chan

South China Morning Post, April 28, 2020

PLA scrambles air and sea patrols near Paracel Islands in response to what it says is violation of Chinese sovereignty. Tensions rise in region, with both countries at odds over handling of the coronavirus pandemic. The Chinese military has accused an American guided-missile destroyer of "intruding into Chinese territory waters" near the Beijing-controlled Paracel Islands, saying the "provocative act" violated Chinese sovereignty. The People's Liberation Army's Southern Theatre Command, which oversees the South China Sea, said the USS Barry destroyer intruded into "waters around the Paracel Islands without permission" on Tuesday, prompting the command to scramble air and sea patrols to "track, monitor, verify, identify and expel" it.

The warning came as Taiwanese media reported that the American vessel sailed through the Taiwan Strait twice in this month, followed both times by PLA warships.

“These provocative acts by the US side ... have seriously violated China’s sovereignty and security interests, deliberately increased regional security risks and could easily trigger an unexpected incident,” a statement posted on the military unit’s WeChat social media account quoted Li Huamin, a command spokesman, as saying.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3081970/chinese-military-lashes-out-american-warships-intrusion-south>

Chinese military slams US repeated provocative acts in South China Sea

China Military Online, April 28, 2020

A US guided-missile destroyer USS Barry trespassed into Chinese territorial waters off the Xisha Islands without permission on April 28. In response, the Southern Theater Command (STC) of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) organized naval and air forces to track, verify, identify, and warn the ship away, Senior Colonel Li Huamin, spokesperson for the PLA STC, said in a statement on Tuesday. Snr. Col. Li pointed out that the provocative acts of the United States seriously violated international law and China's sovereignty and security interests, increased regional security risks, and were prone to cause unexpected incidents. They were also incompatible with the current joint efforts of international community to fight against the COVID-19, and against the common will of countries in the South China Sea region to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea.

China urges the United States to focus on its own business with pandemic prevention and control, make more contributions to the global fight against the COVID-19, and immediately stop military operations that are detrimental to regional security, peace and stability, Snr. Col. Li said, reaffirming that the Chinese military will stay on high alert and take all necessary measures to protect national sovereignty and security, and safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea.

http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-04/28/content_9802864.htm

China expands Marine Corps’ aerial assault capabilities following Type 075 ship launch

Liu Xuanzun

Global Times, April 27, 2020

In addition to intensive training, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy is boosting the aerial assault capabilities of its Marine Corps by systematically expanding it with combat-proven former Army units, a timely move to ready personnel in advance to maximize the power of the two recently launched Type 075 amphibious assault ships, analysts said on Monday. The Valiant Assault Exemplary Company and the Nianzhuangwei Assault Exemplary Company are

now parts of a Marine Corps aerial assault brigade, according to a story published by PLA Daily on April 13. Both companies won glory during the War of Liberation (1946-49), and they used to be under the command of the Army, but now they have joined the Navy's Marine Corps, Zhengzhijian, a WeChat public account run by Beijing Youth Daily, reported on Friday.

This was a part of an effort to expand China's newly formed Marine Corps, Zhengzhijian said. The PLA Daily report did not say when the shift took place. China's second Type 075 amphibious assault ship was launched on Wednesday after the first one was launched in September 2019, and military experts said that aerial assault forces of the Marine Corps are expected to be the core combat forces that use amphibious assault ships. Beijing-based naval expert Li Jie told the Global Times that amphibious assault ships mainly conduct vertical deployment and landing missions on islands and reefs like the island of Taiwan and those in the South China Sea. These warships with large flat flight decks can transport troops vertically via helicopters much faster than using only horizontal means, Li said.

China has a tradition in military development: "It is better to let trained personnel wait for new weapon development than to let weapons that have finished development wait for personnel training," and the development of the Marine Corps' aerial assault forces must go in tandem, if not faster, than the development of the Type 075 and the helicopters, a military expert who asked not to be named told the Global Times on Monday. Moving combat capable units into the Marine Corps could be an efficient way to expand its capabilities in a short time, analysts said. China has been holding intensive training and exercises for the Marine Corps. The troops have not only trained in land and waters across China, but have also used warships and trained across the world, significantly boosting their combat capabilities in all terrain, all dimensions and all times, according to a separate PLA Daily report on Thursday.

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1186938.shtml>

China's armed police to join maritime law enforcement: draft amendment

Zhang Han

Global Times, April 27, 2020

A draft amendment to China's Law on the People's Armed Police Force (PAP) has added sections about organization and command, and extended the troops' scope of responsibilities to cover domestic affairs as well as maritime law enforcement, which experts said is a timely move to meet new demands and legalize the results of an earlier military reform. The draft was submitted on Sunday during the 17th session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, the Xinhua News Agency reported. The main addition in the amendment is a new chapter on "Organization and Command," and the chapter "Missions and Duty" was divided into two chapters, "Mission" and "Function and Power." The amendment details the scope

of sentry duty, increases regulation of the responsibilities for emergency response, anti-terrorism and disaster relief, and stipulates the duty to carry out maritime law enforcement and defense combat by citing the related law.

Li Daguang, a professor at the National Defense University of the People's Liberation Army, noted it is a good time to revise the law and regulations that cover the PAP, as the most recent version enacted in 2009 can no longer meet the demands of national defense and military reforms. In the reforms, command of the PAP is jointly held by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Central Military Commission. The status of the armed police force was no longer subordinate to the State Council, China's cabinet, as of 2018, when China reformed the dual command structure.

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1186904.shtml>

Latest VT4 battle tanks delivered to foreign buyer: report

Global Times, April 27, 2020

China is delivering two customized VT4 main battle tanks to an undisclosed foreign buyer. Transported by trucks, two VT4 tanks left for their destination following a launch ceremony, Weihutang, military affairs column affiliated with China Central Television, reported on Friday, citing a video released by the Inner Mongolia First Machinery Group under the state-owned China North Industries Group (NORINCO).

The tanks are not the standard VT4 version and instead are equipped with a different turret boost design. The front design features a new explosive reactive armor, Weihutang said. This upgraded VT4 offers enhancements with extra protection capabilities, the report said, citing military experts. Further details on the deal have not been released, such as the purchase amount, overall value, and client name. Also known as the MBT3000, the VT4 is a new generation of made-for-export combat tank designed for the international market, Weihutang said, noting that it is one of the most popular Chinese weapons available and has been sold to Thailand and Nigeria. The VT4 is equipped with a 125-millimeter smoothbore gun, can fire armor-piercing fin-stabilized discarding-sabot (APFSDS), high explosive anti-tank cartridges, and missiles with a 5-kilometer range.

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1186834.shtml>

China's top legislature reviews draft amendment of People's Armed Police Force Law

Global Times,

China on Sunday drafted an amendment to the Law on People's Armed Police Force, detailing its scope and responsibilities in such things as dealing with emergency situations, anti-terrorism,

disaster relief, maritime law enforcement, and defense combat. The draft was submitted on Sunday during the 17th session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, Xinhua News Agency reported. The main addition in the amendment is the new chapter "Organization and Command," and divide the chapter "Missions and Duty" into two chapters, "Mission" and "Function and Power," Xinhua also reported.

The "Mission" chapter details the scope of sentry duty and increased responsibilities on emergency event response procedures, anti-terrorism, and disaster relief, citing related law. The draft also includes enhanced supervisory powers over the Armed Police Force. Supervisory committees with the Central Military Commission and at all levels shall supervise the Armed Police Force during its missions, and the people's government, related authorities, Chinese citizens, legal personnel, and other organizations can also participate, Xinhua said. Since the law was enacted on October 27, 2009, it has played a vital role in keeping the country safe and the society stable, and safeguarding people's lives. It has also served as a legal basis for the Armed Police Force to fulfill its duties in accordance with the law, said Wang Ning, Commander of the Chinese People's Armed Police Force, during the session when introducing the draft amendment. As the reforms of national defense and the military continue to deepen, the current law could not adapt to developing trends and needed amending, Wang said.

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1186839.shtml>

Xi stresses institutional strengths to respond to risks

Xinhua, April 26, 2020

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, on Monday presided over the 13th meeting of the Central Commission for Comprehensively Deepening Reform. Xi, also Chinese president, chairman of the Central Military Commission, and head of the Central Commission for Comprehensively Deepening Reform, stressed efforts to deepen reform, improve institutions, improve the governance system, and make good use of institutional strengths to respond to risks and challenges.

The fundamental reason behind China's solid progress in epidemic prevention and control as well as work and production resumption lies in the advantages of the CPC leadership and the socialist system, he said. The meeting deliberated and passed a plan on securing public health emergency supplies, a guideline on reforming the system for regulating medical insurance funds, a plan on reforming the ChiNext market, a plan on protecting and restoring major national ecosystems, a guideline for boosting the healthy growth of young people, and the implementation plan of major reform measures taken at the fourth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee. Medical insurance funds must be well managed and used, said a statement released after the meeting. To fight COVID-19, China has rolled out timely policies to include COVID-19 diagnosis and

treatment in the scope of payments by medical insurance funds, demonstrating the strengths of the Chinese socialist system, the statement said. The meeting stressed efforts to safeguard social fairness and justice and promote the healthy and sustainable development of the medical security system.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/27/c_139012869.htm

Xi: Build 'great space power'

Zhao Lei

China Daily, April 25, 2020

President Xi Jinping extended greetings to elder scientists who participated in the country's first satellite program 50 years ago and said he expected space industry workers to learn from their predecessors' spirit and strive to build the nation into a stronger space power.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, wrote a letter in reply to some distinguished Chinese space scientists who participated in the Dongfanghong 1 mission half a century ago. He said new generations of space industry workers should learn and uphold the spirit of those who took part in the making of the nation's first nuclear weapon, ballistic missile and satellite. A number of decorated space scientists, including Sun Jiadong and Wang Xiji, recently wrote the letter to Xi to express their expectations for China's space sector.

In his reply, Xi encouraged space industry professionals to overcome difficulties and hardships to achieve new heights in space science and technology. "(You should) strive to strengthen and expand our space exploration and make our country a great space power as soon as possible," the president wrote. Xi also wrote that he was in the village of Liangjiahe in Shaanxi province 50 years ago when he heard about the launch of China's first satellite. He told them he was very excited about the great news. He recalled that the scientists' enterprise, diligence and perseverance inspired the whole nation at that time and exemplified the Chinese people's spirit of striving.

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/25/WS5ea23e86a3105d50a3d1884e.html>

Chinese and US militaries on Covid-19 alert in Djibouti as rivals face common threat

Minnie Chan and Teddy Ng

South China Morning Post, April 24, 2020

Both countries act to pre-empt any outbreaks at strategically important bases in the African nation. Measures imposed at China's only overseas base and the US' largest African installation. The spread of the coronavirus in Djibouti has prompted both the United States and China to tighten

precautions at their military bases in the East African nation to prevent outbreaks among troops. Military installations housing US forces in Djibouti were placed under “precautionary” public health emergency measures on Thursday, while China is also stepping up precautions against any emergency in its first overseas military base. China started operating its Djibouti base – which it calls a logistics support hub – in 2017. “Health declarations are now required for personnel in Djibouti,” a source close to the Chinese military said, adding that the base had ventilators.

Song Zhongping, a Hong Kong-based military affairs commentator, said the pandemic control efforts applied in Djibouti would be the same as those adopted at military bases inside China.

“In some circumstances, the requirements will be stricter – for example, the entry and exit controls at the Djibouti base are more stringent,” he said. “There are medical personnel in the base who are also trained to take care of and test for Covid-19 [the disease caused by the coronavirus], and there are facilities for that. “One of the key missions for the base in Djibouti is to provide backup to the People’s Liberation Army’s peacekeeping force in Africa, and provide assistance to pandemic control measures in other African nations. Outbreak control measures inside the base are very important.”

A busy shipping hub strategically located at the southern entrance to the Red Sea, Djibouti has reported 985 cases of coronavirus, up more than 400 from a week ago. US Army Major General Michael Turello, commander of the US’ combined Horn of Africa joint task force, declared a public health emergency on Thursday for American forces under his command spread across the Djibouti base cluster. He said in a statement that the “precautionary measure” gives him more powers to deal with any outbreak of Covid-19. “Combating Covid-19 is my top priority,” Turello said. “Declaring a public health emergency keeps our forces, and those of our host nation partner, as healthy and as safe as possible.”

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3081460/chinese-and-us-militaries-covid-19-alert-djibouti-rivals-face>

China launches second Type 075 amphibious helicopter assault ship

Liu Zhen

South China Morning Post, April 23, 2020

China launched its second Type 075 amphibious assault ship, or helicopter carrier, on Wednesday in Shanghai, seven months after the first one. Celebrations marred by fire damage to sister ship two weeks earlier during fitting out at same shipyard in Shanghai. It is unknown whether incident will delay scheduled sea trials and delivery to Chinese navy. The vessel, decorated with small coloured flags, was towed by tugboats to its new berth at the state-owned Hudong-Zhonghua shipyard in the afternoon. It will now be fitted out, with equipment and weapons systems as well as crew quarters, which is expected to take some months.

The launch of the helicopter carrier was celebrated as a dedication to the 71st anniversary of the establishment of the PLA Navy, on April 26. It also came two weeks after its sister ship – the first Type 075 was launched last September and was fitted out in the same shipyard – caught fire, according to Global Times, a nationalist newspaper affiliated with People's Daily.

The fire, which broke out on April 11, was extinguished quickly, the report said, but gave no information about the cause of the incident or the extent of the damage. Photographs circulated on social media showed heavy black smoke covering the ship's superstructure and emerging through the stern gate. China sets date for launch of first Type 075, sources say

A video clip showed smoke extending a few hundred metres from the vessel. It is unknown what effect the fire will have on the scheduled sea trials and eventual delivery to the PLA Navy. The damaged ship, which appeared to have been repainted, could be seen in a video released on Wednesday of the new Type 075 as it was towed to the dock alongside it. The Type 075 is estimated to have a displacement of about 40,000 tonnes and is China's largest – and the world's third largest – amphibious assault ship, behind the US Wasp-class and America-class. It will be able to carry up to 30 helicopters, as well as a number of amphibious tanks, armoured vehicles, jet boats, and hundreds of marine troops for land attacks and follow-up ground operations.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3081197/china-launches-second-type-075-amphibious-helicopter-assault>