DETAILED REPORTS

Tracking the People's Liberation Army (PLA): 11th - 17th October, 2026

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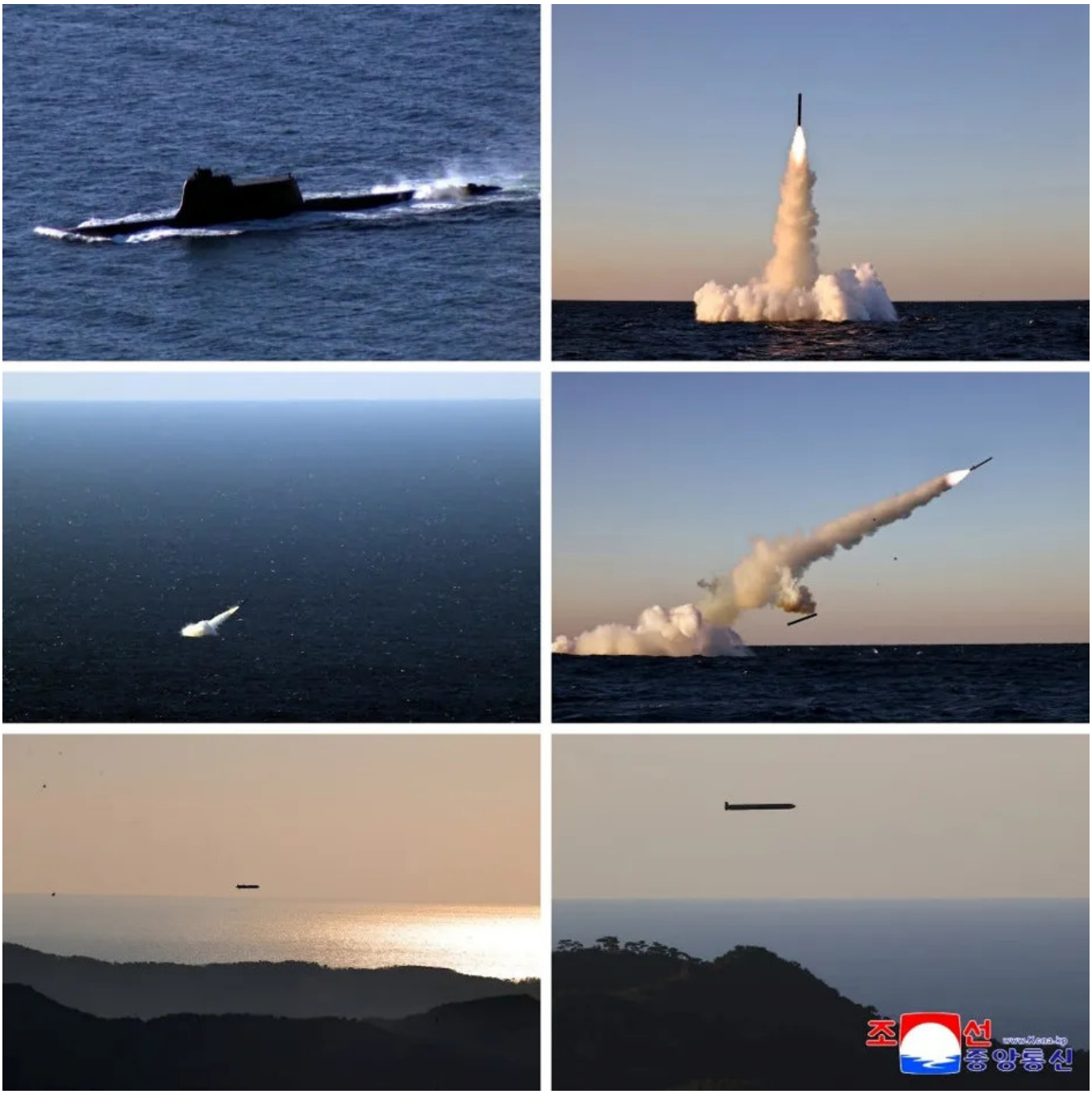
EXECUTIVE BRIEF & KEY FINDINGS

Dear Reader,Thank you for reading this week's newsletter. The 90th Anniversary Celebrations of the Long March continued to receive undivided attention in China. Apart from public events such as war memorials, greater attention is being paid to chronicling anecdotes of a bygone era, reconnecting with the roots and inspriring the current generation to reach greater heights.Nevertheless, the week was happening one making it a difficult choice of what to cover and what to leave. North Korea test fired at least three missiles.As if this wasn't enough, the Liaoning CBG set sail for exercises. In addition, seven PLAN ships set sail possibly to monitor Exercise Keen Sword-2026, which commenced on 19 Oct 2026. Some of the PLA exercises highlight integration within the services but also across services and PLA's progress towards 'System of Systems' operations and MUMT. The PLAAF is likely to have conducted a major transportation exercise.Read on.

Neighbourhood

North Korea

North Korea test-fired three missiles during the week. The tests included **one tactical ballistic missile** fired on 12 Oct 2026 and **two strategic submarine launched cruise missiles** on 14 Oct 2026. KCNA said that the test-firing of ballistic missile validated upgradation of a core component while the test firing of SLCMs validated operational status of underwater combat systems. Japan's MoD, however, announced that **two missiles were fired** on 12 Oct 2026. The first one at 9.19 AM JST flew to altitude of 20 km and a distance of 220 km. The second one fired at 9.36 AM JST flew upto an altitude of 70km and a distance of 910 km.



(Images of test-firing of Submarine Launched Cruise Missiles shared by North Korea. Image Source: KCNA)

The last missile test was conducted by North Korea was on 03 Oct 2026. Going by the Japanese count, North Korea has conducted 13 tests so far during this year including four during this week.

Taiwan Straits

PLA flew a total of 47 sorties this week, a slight reduction over the 52 sorties flown during the previous week. Of these, 36 sorties crossed the Median Line between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan. The largest number of sorties (15) were flown on 14 Oct 2026, which included J-16, J-11, Su-30, JH-7 and Y-8 EW aircraft. In addition to aerial sorties, PLAN and official Chinese ships maintained their presence around the island. The number of PLAN ships monitored by Taiwan authorities varied between 5 to 10 on each day of the week. In addition, between 3 to 9 Chinese official ships maintained their presence around Taiwan. (Data Source: https://x.com/MoNDefense?s=20)

Chinese Response to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's Speech

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's National Day speech drew a strong response from China. Responding to the speech on 11 Oct 2026, **Ministry of National Defense Spokesperson** said that Lai Ching-te constantly played up 'threat from mainland" and incited cross-Straits confrontation to pander to external interests. Further he said that the Democratic Progressive Party, driven by its selfish interests, had converted the whole of Taiwan into a battlefield and undermined stability in the Taiwan Straits. He justified PLA's exercises and training around Taiwan as essential to deter 'Taiwan independence' forces and external actors and safeguard the "safety and well-being" of the people of Taiwan. (PLA Daily. 12 Oct 2026. Page 4. Questions on Lai Ching-te's so-called "Double Tenth" Speech Answered (就赖清德发表所谓"双十"讲话答记者问))

East China Sea

Atleast seven PLAN ships sailed to the Pacific Ocean between 16 and 17 Oct 2026. One detachment comprising of Type-52DL class destroyer *Tangshan* (Hull number 122), Type 54A frigate *Daqing* (Hull number 576) and Type 903A replenishment ship Taihu (Hull number 889) crossed between Okinawa Main Island and Miyako-jima Island to the Pacific Ocean on 16 Oct 2026. The second detachment comprising of Type 52 D Destroyer *Qiqihar* (Hull number 121) and Type 901-class AOE *Hulunhu* (Hull Number 901) crossed the Osumi Straits into the Pacific Ocean on the same day. In addition, two Type 815A AGI* ships - *Kaiyangxing* (Hull No 796) and *Yuhengxing* (Hull No 798) sailed independently on 17 and 18 Oct 2026. (Source: https://x.com/JapanJointStaff?s=20)

*AGI - Auxiliary General Intelligence

It is likely that these ships have been deployed to monitor the US-Japan Joint Exercise Keen Sword 2026 which commenced on 19 Oct 2026. The presence of replenishment ships in both detachments suggests that PLAN is planning for an extended deployment.

The PLA flew three Y-9 ELINT sorties and one UAV sortie parallel to the Japanese coast line in East China Sea between 13 and 15 Oct 2026. One WZ-7 recce UAV flew from East China Sea, between Japan's Yonaguni Island and Taiwan, and then flew Southwards parallel to the Taiwan's East Coast on 14 Oct 2026. (Source: https://x.com/JapanJointStaff?s=20)

The number of sorties flown seem to be slightly above the norm. It is likely that in addition to the regular intelligence-gathering sorties, additional sorties were flown to monitor preparations for Exercise Keen Sword 2026.

Ideological and Political Education

Learning from Sister Units

As part of the 90th Anniversary celebrations of Long March, units across PLA are retracing their history and identifying units with whom they share historical connections, akin to 'sister units' in other armies. This week's PLA Daily carried a set of three articles about 'Red Fourth Company'(红四连) of Xinjiang Military District and Shangganling Special Eighth Company (上甘岭特功八连) from Airborne Corps. In Nov 1936, the predecessors of **these two companies fought** together in the Battle of Shangchengpu. A **chance encounter between the political instructors** of both companies in 2023 led to sharing of ideas, mutual learning and joint development. PLA **believes** that this will help preserve its rich history, inspire the younger generation and improve operational standards through mutual learning. (PLA Daily. 14 Oct 2026. Page 5. Sharing the Glory of Building a Strong Military Across Thousands of Miles (跨越千里共沐强军荣光). Two Red Army companies went in opposite directions (两支红军连队的双向奔赴). Empowering Grassroot Development through "Red-Themed" Inter-Unit Collaboration(用红色联建赋能基层建设))

Political Rectification in the PLA

Political Commissars have been in the limelight for the past few weeks. Last week it was Senior Colonel **Zhang Wusong**. This week, it was **Party Secretary Huang** of an unidentified PLARF battalion who took ownership for failures in a recent complex mission. By careful planning, identifying difficulties, rectifying them with inputs from all ranks and leading from the front, Secretary Huang rectified issues. In a subsequent exercise the unit successfully completed its mission despite the commander being ruled 'KIA' in the initial phase of the exercise. The battalion performed well with six of its officers being assessed in the top ten commanders of the brigade. (PLA Daily. 13 Oct 2026. Page. When Party Secretary leads the Way, Leadership gains Strength (书记带头干 班子有力量))

Political Commissars undergo Flight Simulator Training

A PLAAF unit has made it mandatory for **political instructors to undergo flight simulator training** as some of them lacked indepth understanding of flying missions while some neglected their professional education. This enables them to provide ideological and practical support to their units. (PLA Daily. 14 Oct 2026. Page 4. Flight Simulator Training Becomes a Mandatory Course for Political Officers (模拟飞行训练成为政治干部必修课))

Military Forum

System of System Operations and MUMT

In an article on **development of Advanced Combat Capabilities** (先进战斗力), Long Xingang, Yin Yanxi and Sun Chan highlight PLA's progress in 'system of systems' warfare and Manned-Unmanned Teaming. First, is a recent exercise where Type 71 LHD *Hainan* (Hull No 31) fused intelligence data from the Army, Air Force and Rocket Force, into an unified, real-time battlefield picture and acted as mobile, multi-dimensional command hub for maritime operations, coordinated information and fire support and successfully deployed naval and ground forces to their designated objectives. Second, is the case of an unidentified brigade of 82 Group Army which has explored "Mengshi Assault vehicle +unmanned system"‘ model where by unmanned systems guide and accompany personnel while

personnel control unmanned equipment. (PLA Daily. 12 Oct 2026. Page 7. Seizing the “High Ground” of Wisdom(抢占“智”高点))

Adapting Combat Assessment in tune with the Times

Zhu Yelei and Yu Faming call for **adapting Combat Assessment in tune with the times**, one which accurately reflects ground realities, identify shortcomings, and drive improvements. Instead of focusing only on quantifiable factors, the authors call for evaluating capabilities as they manifest through processes, effectiveness through the capability to adapt, and proficiency based on responsiveness. (PLA Daily. 13 Oct 2026. Page 7. Optimizing Combat Assessment in tune with the Times(与时俱进优化作战评估))

Training

CTC conducts Brigade level Exercise

The CTC conducted a **brigade level exercise** recently. Major change from the previous exercise was the brigade commander and his staff controlling the complete exercise including synchronising fire support from PLAAF and Army Aviation, spectrum management and special operations, with higher HQ limiting itself to oversight and evaluation. The article further highlights that this has become the ‘new norm’ for brigades and battalions, adding that all-domain,” “system-of-systems,” and “AI” are now part of the brigade routine. (PLA Daily. 13 Oct 2026. Page 8. Combined Arms Brigade Commander directs Joint Exercise(合成旅旅长导调联合演练))

Liaoning Carrier Battle Group

PLAN announced that **Liaoning Carrier Battle Group commenced training in Western Pacific** on 14 Oct 2026, as part of a routine exercise in accordance with the annual training plan. Joint Staff of Japanese Self Defense Forces announced that aircraft carrier *Liaoning* (Hull No 16), two Type 055 destroyers *Anshan* (Hull 103) and *Wuxi* (Hull 104), and one Luyang III-class missile destroyer *Huainan* (Hull 123) were observed transiting between Okinawa’s Main island and Miyako Island on 14 Oct 2026 and sailing towards South China Sea on 15 Oct 2026. (PLA Daily. 15 Oct 2026. Page 1. PLAN’s Liaoning Carrier Battle Group conducts Training in Western Pacific(海军辽宁舰航母编队赴西太平洋相关海域开展训练). Japan Joint Staff (https://x.com/JapanJointStaff?s=20))

Integration of PLAAF Services

A PLA Daily article highlights the smooth **integration of radar, SAM, fighter aircraft and Electronic Warfare units** of a PLAAF division deployed near Beijing during a recent exercise in contrast to a two-sided exercise held a few years ago in the North West (WTC). While the Red side had latest fighter aircraft(J-20?), the Blue side won the exercise due to synergy between radar, SAM and Electronic Warfare units. This is due to the change in mindset, deeper understanding of each other’s roles, real time information networks and shift in focus towards system rather than individual components. (PLA Daily. 14 Oct 2026. Page. Debate over “Protagonist” is a thing of the Past (“主角”之争成了过去时))

Information Support

An Information Support Force unit has developed **cross-domain information support mechanism** to support units from different services. Units can log in and submit requests for support with type of fault, coordinates and urgency. The

system coordinates clearances from other services enabling timely rectification of information support issues, especially during exercises. This coupled with tutorials for frontline units for common faults and remote guidance has improved the quality of information support. (PLA Daily. 14 Oct 2026. Page 4. Frontline Units Place Orders Anytime; Support Services Delivered Efficiently(一线随时下单 服务高效送达))

Did PLAAF conduct Transportation Exercise?

On 14 and 15 Oct 2026, a large number of Y-20 aircraft* were detected flying towards/from Xinjiang based on data from Flightradar24. On 14 Oct 2026, 14 Y-20 sorties were detected. On 15 Oct 2026, 16 sorties including one YY-20 sortie was detected. On 16 Oct 2026, five Y-20 sorties were detected including two YY-20 sorties. In addition, 29 sorties of unidentified aircraft (without call sign, type of aircraft and registration numbers)** were observed on both days. *In contrast to the one to two sorties detected in a day, the large number of sorties suggests that the PLAAF carried out an airborne/transportation exercise on these two days. Judging by the serial numbers of YY20 detected (11355, 11550 and 20548), it is likely that the PLAAF has three units of YY-20).*

**Data based on manual checking of each aircraft observed in flightradar24 along the Lanzhou-Urumqi air corridor. It is possible that a number of sorties were missed out.*

***Based on the ICAO 24 bit address of unidentified aircraft, it is likely that these were Y-20 aircraft or its derivatives.*

Border Management

'Tourist' Patrols to the LAC

An interesting article highlights promotion of **'Red Tourism' along the Line of Actual Control** (LAC). Longzi County Bureau of Culture and Tourism along with border defence company of Shannan MSD have created a border tourism experience for mainland tourists. The experience centres around monthly border patrols to the LAC and includes homestays, customised souvenirs and a photography exhibition. The patrol route is 10 kilometres and reaches a pass at an altitude of 4,350 metres along the LAC. The article highlights that the remote township has had 12,000 tourist visits till 2025 and has improved the local economy. (PLA Daily. 11 Oct 2026. Page 3. "Red Tourism" amidst Snow-Capped Peaks revitalizes Yumai (雪山红旅兴玉麦))

*The area falls opposite Taksing, in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh which has been in the news for 'faceoffs' since July this year. The patrol programme is being organised as part of Xiaokang villages to sustain the local economy and encourage locals to continue to say. The county **website** shows a list of 207 homestays in the village.*

Equipment

Y20B MRTT

A recent PLA Daily carried a photograph of an **Y-20B aircraft with refueling pods and pallets being loaded into the cargo compartment**, which suggests that the PLAAF has inducted Multi Role Tanker Transport(MRTT). The same aircraft can carry cargo or carryout mid-air refuelling (with field modifications), providing it greater flexibility during operations.



(Cargo being loaded into a Y-20B MRTT. Refueling pods have been circled in red. Image Source: PLA Daily. 14 Oct 2026)

Defence Cooperation

PLA-Pakistani Army Joint Exercise 'Karakoram-2026' begins

PLA and Pakistan commenced their first ever joint training of their ground forces at the Combined Arms Training Base at Korla on 14 Oct 2026. The exercise will focus on counter-terrorism and clearance operations in high-altitude environments and include drone operations, long-range sniping, along with joint command exercises and live-force drills. (PLA Daily. 15 Oct 2026. Page 4. Opening Ceremony of Sino-Pakistan Joint Army Exercise "Karakoram-2026" held (中巴"喀喇昆仑-2026"陆军联合训练举行开训仪式))

"Great Wall-2026" International Anti-Terrorism Forum

The **Great Wall 2026 International Anti-Terrorism Forum** was held in Beijing from 13 to 15 Oct 2026. Delivering the keynote address, Lieutenant General Zhao Dongfang, Chief of Staff of PAPF made four proposals to strengthen cooperation: uphold multilateralism; foster exchange and mutual learning; leverage digital and intelligent technologies to address threats; and tackle symptoms and root causes to strengthen governance. The conference focused on trends in terrorism and capability building, counter-terrorism, counter-infiltration prevention at borders, and preventing and combating maritime terrorism. Another article highlighted that **PAPF is an important element** in combating terrorism and maintaining domestic stability. 320 military and civil representatives from 62 countries and international organisations attended the conference. (ST Daily. 14 Oct 2026. Page 3. "Great Wall-2026" International Counter-

Terrorism Forum Held (“长城-2026”反恐国际论坛举办)) PLA Daily. 14 Oct 2026. Page 2. “Great Wall-2026” International Counter-Terrorism Forum Opens in Beijing (长城-2026”反恐国际论坛在京开幕)

Zhao Dongfang attending the conference as Chief of Staff suggests that the appointment of Commander, PAPF remains vacant. The Forum is held every alternate year since 2016 and aims to strengthen exchanges with PAPF's counterparts in other countries, strengthen cooperation, and protection from terrorism.

Mission Harmony 2026

PLAN Hospital Ship **Auspicious Ark arrived at Abidjan**, Ivory Coast on 14 Oct 2026. During the seven day visit, the ship will provide medical services to local patients on board and provide specialised medical exchange and mobile clinic teams to the Abidjan Military Hospital and University of Félix Houphouët-Boigny. This is the first visit of a PLAN Hospital Ship to Ivory Coast. (PLA Daily. 15 Oct 2026. Page 4. Chinese Navy hospital ship “Auspicious Ark” visits Ivory Coast (中国海军“吉祥方舟”号医院船访问科特迪瓦))

48th Escort Task Force Departs from Malaysia

PLAN's **48th Escort Task Force concluded its 5 day visit** and departed from Kota Kinabalu port in Malaysia on 12 Oct 2026. During the visit, the TF Commander interacted with the leaders of Royal Malaysian Navy. Both sides organised visits to each other's ships and held discussions. The TF comprises Type 52DL destroyer *Tangshan* (Hull No 122), Type 54A frigate *Daqing* (Hull No 576), and Type 903A replenishment ship *Taihu* (Hull No 889) and is returning to China after completing anti-piracy escort duties in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia. (PLA Daily. 13 Oct 2026. 48th PLAN Escort Task Force concludes friendly visit to Malaysia(中国海军第48批护航编队结束对马来西亚友好访问))

5th China-Laos Border Defence Friendship Exchange

China-Laos Border Defence Friendship Exchange took place at Mohan Port, Yunnan on 13 Oct 2026. The heads of delegation - Vice Admiral Wang Xianfeng, Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff of STC, and Senior Lieutenant General Saichay Kommasith, Deputy Minister of National Defense of Laos and Chief of General Staff of Lao People's Army -visited a border defence company and observed demonstrations of small arms and drones. The exchange aims to promote friendship between the two nations, strengthen border defense cooperation between the two armies, and safeguard peace and tranquility in the border region jointly. (PLA Daily. 14 Oct 2026. Page 2. 5th China-Laos Border Defense Friendship Exchange Held(中老第五次边境国防友好交流活动举行))

Hope you enjoyed this week's newsletter. See you again next week.