

# Chinese bombers likely training for US strikes

The report by Pentagon details how Beijing is transforming its ground forces to “fight and win.”

● Chinese bombers are developing capabilities to hit targets as far from China as possible

● PLA is the largest standing ground force in the world

● China seeks to establish new bases in countries such as Pakistan

● Key to this expanding footprint is China’s “belt and road” initiative

AFP | Washington, United States

Chinese bombers are likely training for strikes against US and allied targets in the Pacific, according to a new Pentagon report that also details how Beijing is transforming its ground forces to “fight and win.”

The annual report to Congress, released Thursday, highlights China’s growing military, economic and diplomatic clout and how Beijing is leveraging this to rapidly build its international footprint and establish regional dominance.

In the case of China’s air power, the report states that Chinese



Representative picture (Courtesy of Hong Kong free press)

bombers are developing capabilities to hit targets as far from China as possible.

“Over the last three years, the PLA (People’s Liberation Army) has rapidly expanded its over-water bomber operating areas, gaining experience in critical maritime regions and likely training for strikes against US and allied targets,” the document states, noting how China is pushing its operations out into the Pacific.

In August 2017, six Chinese H-6K bombers flew through the Miyako Strait in the southwest

of the Japanese islands, and then for the first time turned north to fly east of Okinawa, where 47,000 US troops are based.

The PLA may demonstrate the “capability to strike US and allied forces and military bases in the western Pacific Ocean, including Guam,” the report says.

## Largest ground force

China is engaged in a decades-long build-up and modernization of its once-backward armed forces, and military leaders have set a goal of fielding a world-class military by 2050.

President Xi Jinping last year ordered the PLA to step up efforts, saying China needed a military ready to “fight and win” wars. The call has alarmed China’s neighbors, several of whom are embroiled in tense border disputes with the superpower.

According to the Pentagon, the PLA in April 2017 undertook a massive transformation of operational and tactical units as part of its structural reforms.

With nearly a million troops, the PLA is the largest standing ground force in the world.

“The purpose of these reforms



With nearly a million troops, the PLA is the largest standing force in the world

is to create a more mobile, modular, lethal ground force capable of being the core of joint operations and able to meet Xi Jinping’s directive to “fight and win wars,” the report notes.

China’s military budget for 2017 was about \$190 billion, according to the report, far behind the Pentagon’s annual budget of about \$700 billion.

When the Pentagon released its annual report last year, Beijing dismissed it as “irresponsible” in predicting that China would expand its global military presence by building overseas bases in countries like Pakistan.

This year’s report reiterates that China will seek to establish new bases in countries such as Pakistan.

Key to this expanding footprint is China’s “belt and road” initiative that seeks to bolster ties with other nations through lending and infrastructure deals.

## US man charged with killing pregnant wife, two toddlers

Washington, United States

A Colorado man who spoke of worriedly leaving the lights on for his pregnant wife and two small daughters when they failed to come home as expected has been charged with killing them.

Chris Watts, 33, was taken into custody Wednesday night and faces three counts of first-degree murder and three counts of tampering with a body in the Denver area of the western US state.

A TV station, Denver 7, said Watts has confessed to the bizarre killings. There was no immediate word on a possible motive.

The body of Watts’ 34-year-

old wife Shannan, who was 15 weeks pregnant, was found earlier Wednesday on the property of an oil company where the father used to work.

So were the bodies of their daughters Bella, 3, and Celeste, 4, Colorado Bureau of Investigation director John Camper told reporters Thursday.

The three had gone missing on Monday. Watts told TV station KMGH on Tuesday that he thought his wife had taken the kids to a friend’s house when she did not answer his text messages.

Watts also said his wife had come home from a business trip in the early hours of Monday and the couple had exchanged fraught words.

## Philippines urges US to return seized church bells

Manila, Philippines

Manila’s defence chief renewed calls yesterday for the return of church bells seized by the US military more than a century ago, urging Washington to relinquish what he called “trophies for atrocities”.

American forces took three bells from the Catholic church of Balangiga town in 1901 as war booty in what historians said was a particularly brutal military operation in the former US colony.

The US embassy in Manila announced earlier this month it would send them back but gave no timetable for their return, following a public campaign by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. But reports that some

US legislators would oppose the move prompted Philippine Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana to join calls for the bells to be brought home.

“We call on the American people not to allow the bells to serve as trophies for atrocities that were committed by both sides on Philippine soil a very long time ago,” he said in a statement.

“The return of the Balangiga Bells will be a strong indicator of the sincerity of the Americans in forging a lasting relationship.”

Duterte has demanded Washington give back the Balangiga bells during public tirades against Washington. The president urged their return during his State of the Nation address

last year: “Give us back those Balangiga bells. They are not yours. They are ours. They belong to the Philippines. They are part of our national heritage.” Two of the bells are installed at a memorial for US war dead in the state of Wyoming, while the third is with US forces in South Korea.

The Philippines, a Spanish colony for centuries, was ceded to the US in 1898 at the end of the Spanish-American War. The country gained independence from Washington in 1946.

The bells were taken during the brutal Samar campaign, which was launched about a month after Filipino rebels killed 34 US troops in Balangiga on September 28, 1901, according to the US Army War College.

## Rare ‘bamboo rat’ photographed at Machu Picchu

Lima, Peru

A rare rodent species known as a “bamboo rat” that lives around the Inca ruins at Machu Picchu in Peru has resurfaced after a decade of absence and been photographed for the first time.

A specimen of the rodent Dac-



A rare, little known species of rodent commonly called “bamboo rat”

tylomis peruanus was spotted by guards among bamboo trees at the citadel, which is surrounded by a protected area, said the National Service of Natural Protected Areas.

The last time the animal was recorded at Machu Picchu was in 2008.

The bamboo rat lives in sub-

tropical or wet tropical areas, according to Peruvian authorities.

It has also been reported at medium-altitude heights on the slopes of the Andes in northern Bolivia.

In Peru, the animal is on a list of creatures about which little is known because it is seen so rarely.

## Thousands pay homage to late Indian leader

New Delhi, India

Thousands of mourners in white funereal dress escorted the coffin of three-time prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee through the Indian capital on Friday, showering his body in rose petals before his cremation.

Vajpayee, a poet and spell-binding orator respected across the political divide in India, died Thursday after a long period of declining health. He was 93.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who described Vajpayee’s passing as “a personal and irreplaceable loss”, led the procession through Delhi to the leafy cremation grounds near the sacred Yamuna River.

Senior cadres from Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), mourned alongside foreign dignitaries including Bhutan’s king and Afghanistan’s former leader Hamid Karzai.

## Trump to attend WWI parade in Paris

Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump yesterday said he would attend a November celebration in Paris marking the end of World War I, hours after a military parade planned for the same time in Washington was postponed over soaring costs. Trump said he had in fact canceled that event, blaming local politicians for charging a “ridiculously high” price and vowing to “attend the big parade already scheduled at Andrews Air Force Base on a different date, & go to the Paris parade, celebrating the end of the War, on November 11th.”

## Fake bomb scare on plane

Athens, Greece

A bomb scare that forced a German passenger jet carrying 250 people to make an emergency landing on the Greek island of Crete was false, local police said Friday.

The plane took off from the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Hurghada on Thursday and was en route to the German city of Duesseldorf when the pilot requested an emergency landing over reports there were explosives on board.

However a security team including bomb disposal experts found “nothing suspicious” after inspecting the plane, a local police officer said Friday.

The Boeing 753, owned by German carrier Condor, was immediately evacuated after landing at an airport in the western Crete city of Chania, where passengers spent the night in a hotel.

The jet was expected to leave for Duesseldorf on Friday, a police source said.