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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Military Innovation; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; China; Latin America; Taiwan

REGULATING COMBAT READINESS

The PLA will set up a new oversight system to strengthen military training and combat readiness, Xi Jinping, chairman of the Central Military Commission, has laid out in a new order. The new regulation is meant to "rectify" problems such as cheating, waste and unnecessary bureaucracy. Proper systems will be established, and inspectors assigned to monitor training and hold them accountable for failures and derelictions of duty. "The regulation details the criteria for identifying malpractices and discipline violations during military training and clearly states the responsibilities, power and priorities of military training supervision and standardizes the methods and procedures," the official Xinhua news agency reports. Although ostensibly the regulation is aimed at "peacetime malpractices" – that is, the PLA's lack of combat readiness – it also expands political oversight to ensure the military remains a loyal tool of the party and "core" leader Xi. (*South China Morning Post*, February 14, 2019)

U.S. "MUST USE ALL MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC MEANS" TO DEFEND TAIWAN

The U.S. should prepare to deter Chinese aggression against Taiwan, according to The Asia Society's new report, "Course Correction: Toward an Effective and Sustainable China Policy." The study lays out that: "Washington must maintain a strong and credible military presence in the Western Pacific to convince Beijing that the United States still has serious military options." The U.S. should "assist Taiwan in developing asymmetric capabilities to hold off the massively superior mainland military until the United States can bring forces to bear. Robust shore batteries, improved air defenses, mobile response units, and sea mines to counter landing craft can all pose major problems for an invading PLA force." In addition to defense, Washington should also expand high-level official visits with Taipei, further trade and investment liberalization, and push for Taiwan's international participation, the report suggests. (*South China Morning Post*, February 14, 2019)

U.S. SENATORS ASK HOUSE SPEAKER TO INVITE TSAI TO SPEAK TO CONGRESS

A group of U.S. senators including Ted Cruz, John Cornyn, Cory Gardner, Marco Rubio, and Tom Cotton have issued a letter calling on House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi to invite Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-Wen to address a joint meeting of Congress. The letter said such an invitation would be "consistent with U.S. law, enhance U.S. leadership in the Indo-Pacific region, and justly reward a true friend and ally of the United States and the American people." President Tsai is "a genuine democratic leader engaged in a struggle against an authoritarian and oppressive system that seeks to deny the Taiwanese people democratic rights and fundamental freedoms." The invitation would "send a powerful message [that] the U.S. and the American people will always stand with the oppressed, and never the oppressor," it said. A spokesman for Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed gratitude, but added the President Tsai currently has no plans to visit Washington, DC. (*Focus Taiwan*, February 8, 2019)

CHINA'S GLOBAL IMAGE SURPASSES THAT OF THE U.S.

China has overtaken the United States in terms of global leadership, according to a new Gallup report. Last year, China's median global approval rating across 133 countries and areas was 34%. The U.S. remains at a record-low 30%, which it hit during the first year of Trump's presidency. In several countries, China gained significant ground and did so at America's expense. In Turkey, for instance, China and the U.S. were both about 30% in 2017, but while the U.S. lost 13 points in 2018 China's ratings rose by more than 10 points. (Gallup, February 28, 2019)

BEIJING DENIES REPORTS OF SECRET MEETING WITH VENEZUELA'S GUAIDO

China has denied reports that its diplomats, concerned about oil projects in Venezuela and almost \$20 billion that Caracas owes Beijing, have held talks in Washington with representatives of Juan Guaido, the opposition leader seeking to oust Nicolas Maduro. "It's fake news," said China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson. Elliott Abrams, who is leading the U.S. response to Venezuela's political crisis, told a Congressional hearing that "discussions, sending of messages have taken place" between China and Venezuela's opposition. Guaido has said a new Venezuelan government would favor China, which has lent more than \$50 billion to Caracas via oil-for-loan agreements. (CNBC, February 13, 2019)