

China centenaries pose triple threat

Written by Huang Wei-ping 黃偉平
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The Legislative Yuan on Nov. 23 approved a bill authorizing the government to draft a special budget of up to NT\$240 billion (US\$8.66 billion) for arms procurements through the end of 2026.

The law allows the government to tap into a special budget to fund increased production of a range of important indigenous military armaments, including Hsiung Feng III (“Brave Wind”) supersonic anti-ship missiles, Tien Kung (“Sky Bow”) air-defense missiles and the Hsiung Feng IIE cruise missile, which possesses a medium-range ground attack capability.

The government’s 2026 target to reinforce and re-equip Taiwan’s military dovetails neatly with an assessment made in March by US Navy Admiral Philip Davidson, who was commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command from May 2018 to April, that Taiwan could face an attack by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) within the next six years, or before 2027.

That year — 2027 — happens to mark the 100th anniversary of the PLA’s founding. There are two other anniversaries of significance to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): This year, which marks the 100th anniversary of the CCP’s founding, is when Chinese officials consistently said they would achieve a “moderately prosperous” society, and 2049, which would mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, by when the party plans to have turned China into a “powerful modern socialist country.”

These two major milestones are abbreviated as the “two 100s” by the party, but there is now one more. To realize Chinese President Xi Jinping’s (習近平) “dream of strong armed forces,” the party at the end of last year announced the goal of achieving a “comprehensive improvement of training and war preparations, and improve the military’s strategic ability to safeguard China’s sovereignty, security and development interests.”

The year set to achieve the goal is the 100th anniversary of the PLA’s founding, or 2027. In other words, the “two 100s” has been expanded to the “three 100s.”

Former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping’s (鄧小平) policy of covertly building up China’s strength — tao guang yang hui (韬光養晦, “keep one’s sword sheathed during daylight hours and hone one’s

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skills after dark”) — has been supplanted by Xi’s overt approach: ostentatious displays of military might and “wolf warrior” diplomacy.

The government’s decision to set aside a special defense budget at this moment is clearly a response not only to Beijing’s hue and cry, but also Washington’s stark warnings. Increasing defense spending and upgrading military hardware demonstrates to regional allies that Taiwan has the resolve to defend itself, and raises Beijing’s cost calculus for an attack on Taiwan. The budget raises vigilance and functions as a deterrent.

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Translated by Edward Jones

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