

BE PREPARED FOR BATTLE: XI

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China's armed forces must strengthen their sense of urgency and do everything they can to prepare for battle, President Xi Jinping told a meeting of top brass on Friday.

China is keen to beef up its armed forces amid territorial disputes in the South China Sea and escalating tension with the U.S. over issues ranging from trade to the status of Taiwan.

Meeting with top brass

The official Xinhua agency said Mr. Xi told a meeting of the top military authority that China faced increasing risks and challenges, and the armed forces must work to secure its security and development needs.

Mr. Xi, who is also chairman of the Central Military Commission, said the armed forces must devise strategies for the new era and take on responsibilities for preparing and waging war.

"The world is facing a period of major changes never seen in a century, and China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for development," he was quoted as saying. He said the armed forces needed to be able to respond quickly to emergencies, needed to upgrade their joint operations capabilities and nurture new types of combat forces.

Mr. Xi signed Friday an order to open the annual training session of the armed forces. The order demands that troops hone their combat capability and that military units organise events on a regular basis to verify soldiers' ability.

Mr. Xi's comments followed his remarks on Wednesday that China still reserved the right to use force to achieve "reunification" with Taiwan and prevent the island's independence. The Taiwan speech came just days after U.S. President Donald Trump signed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act into law, reaffirming the U.S. commitment to its security.

Mr. Xi's call for battle preparedness also came as acting U.S. Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan told the U.S. forces that he sees China as a key priority. "While we are focused on ongoing operations, Acting Secretary Shanahan told the team to remember China, China, China," reports from Washington quoted a U.S. defence official as saying.

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