

## **China announces double-digit hike in its defense budget**

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### **Additional spending is in response to US military build-up in Pacific Region**

BEIJING -- China announced on Sunday an 11.2% increase in its defense budget for 2012, the latest in a string of double-digit hikes in recent years.



For the first time, China's defense spending will top \$100 billion and that figure is believed by international experts to omit such large-ticket items as its space program.

Although the increase is not as large as last year's, it is enough to provoke anxiety at a time that the United States is shifting military resources to the Asia-Pacific.

The budget was unveiled, as in past years, on the eve of the opening session of the National People's Congress, China's equivalent of a legislature, which meets annually in March.

At a news conference Sunday, Li Zhaoxing, a spokesman for the congress, announced the \$110-billion budget, while stating that the spending "constitutes no threat to other countries."

"You can see that we have 1.3 billion people with a large land areas and a long coastline, but our outlays on defense are quite low compared to other major countries," said Li.

By way of comparison, the U.S. Congress has approved \$662 billion in Pentagon spending for next year, \$43 billion lower than this year's budget.

China has been trying to upgrade its naval forces and in August unveiled an aircraft carrier it is developing -- a refurbished Soviet model acquired from Ukraine. It also did a test flight early last year of a prototype of a stealth fighter jet.

China is "growing bolder with regard to their expanded regional and global presence, and China continues to challenge the United States and our partners in the region in the maritime, cyber and space domains," Adm. Robert Willard, U.S. commander for the Asia-Pacific region, told the Senate Arms Services Committee last week. "They continue to advance their capabilities and capacities in all areas."

In recent years, China has made more assertive maritime claims, unnerving neighbors, particularly

Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Last year at this time, Beijing announced a 12.7% increase in military spending, resuming double-digit expansion after a more modest 7.5% increase in 2010.

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