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## China to boost military spending by 10%

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Chongqing municipality Communist Party secretary Sun Zhengcai, left, and vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission Xu Qiliang attend the opening session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference at the Great Hall of the People on Tuesday in Beijing

China, home to the world's largest standing military, will increase its military budget in 2015 by about 10%, a legislative spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Outpacing China's slowing economy, which grew 7.4% last year, the hike underscores Beijing's commitment to modernizing its armed forces and taking on a more global role.

The planned military expenditure and the economic growth target for 2015 will both be confirmed Thursday when Chinese Premier Li Keqiang makes a "State of the Union"-style address at the start of the annual session of China's legislature — the National People's Congress, which functions under the firm control of the ruling Communist Party.

The 10% jump, down from the 12.2% increase in 2014, will represent the lowest in the past five years, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. The Pentagon has previously estimated China's actual spending could be up to 50% more than the declared total. The increase will bring China's military budget to \$145 billion, the second-highest worldwide and far behind the USA's annual expenditure. Last month, the White House proposed a \$534 billion Pentagon budget for fiscal year 2016 with an additional \$50 billion in funds for its war and training efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

As a big country, China needs an army able to safeguard its national security and people, said Congress spokeswoman Fu Ying. The People's Liberation Army, which operates under tight Party control, has about 2.3 million personnel.

"Lagging behind leaves one vulnerable to attacks. That is a lesson we have learned from history," Fu said.

Fu Ying described China's military policy as defensive in nature, but the continued double-digit budget increase will concern Japan, Taiwan and other regional neighbors who regard China's expanding military and its growing assertiveness over territorial disputes with unease.

The increased budget could fund key Chinese projects such as new submarines, stealth fighters and a second aircraft carrier.

China's submarines now outnumber those of the U.S. fleet, although their quality is inferior, U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Joseph Mulloy told U.S. lawmakers last month, according to Reuters. China has been expanding the geographic areas where the subs operate, he added.