



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on January 5, 2023

China Lambastes U.S. for Twisting Facts After Aircraft Clash

SINGAPORE — On Dec. 21, a U.S. military plane embroiled in a showdown with Chinese aircraft in the disputed South China Sea breached international law and undermined the safety of Chinese pilots, China's Defense Ministry spokesman claimed.

However, the U.S. military asserted that a Chinese Navy J-11 fighter jet came within 10 feet of a U.S. Air Force RC-135 aircraft, prompting it to take circumventing measures to prevent a collision, and a U.S. military spokesman said that the Chinese jet came within 20 feet from the nose of the plane.



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The confrontation between the aircraft came after U.S. accusations of increasing pugilism by Chinese military aircraft.

Senior Colonel Tian Junli, spokesman for China's Southern Theatre Command, said in a statement that the U.S. had deceived the public about the aforementioned incident.

Tian said the U.S. plane breached international law, ignored multiple warnings by China, and made risky maneuvers that put the safety of China's aircraft at risk.

"The United States deliberately misleads public opinion ... in an attempt to confuse the international audience," Tian accused. "We solemnly request the U.S. side to restrain the actions of front-line naval and air forces, strictly abide by related international laws and agreements, and prevent accidents in the sea and the air."

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, which is part of the U.S. Armed Forces, announced in a statement that it encouraged all states in the region "to use international airspace safely and in accordance with international law." However, "We have seen an alarming increase in the number of unsafe aerial intercepts and confrontations at sea by PLA [People's Liberation Army] aircraft and vessels. So this latest incident reflects a concerning trend of unsafe and dangerous intercept practices by the PLA that are of grave concern to the United States," said a command spokesman.

Explaining why the U.S. military waited eight days to publicize the confrontation, another spokesman posted, "Disclosure of this type takes time to verify details, obtain and declassify imagery and make proper notifications to other government agencies."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters at a regular briefing that Washington's instigative and risky action in the disputed waters will be the "root of maritime safety problems" and "seriously endangers China's national security."

Pointing out that the U.S. has regularly deployed military ships and aircraft to the area to conduct



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surveillance operations, Wang called on Washington to halt “making such dangerous provocative moves, as well as smearing China.” “China will continue to take necessary measures to defend its sovereignty and security, and, together with countries in the region, safeguard the peace and stability of the South China Sea,” he said.

In a talk with his Chinese counterpart in November, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin mentioned the importance of boosting crisis communications, and also highlighted what he termed as dangerous behavior by Chinese military planes.

The U.S. is not the only country to accuse the Chinese military of perilous behavior. Australia’s defense department said that a Chinese fighter aircraft dangerously intercepted an Australian military surveillance plane in the South China Sea region last year. Australia accused the Chinese jet of flying close in front of the Australian Air Force plane and emitting a “bundle of chaff” containing small pieces of aluminum that were ingested into the Australian aircraft’s engine. In response, Senior Colonel Tan Kefei, a spokesman for the Chinese Defense Ministry, retorted that Australia had “seriously threatened China’s sovereignty and security.”

Canada’s military also blamed Chinese warplanes for menacing its patrol aircraft as they surveilled North Korea sanction evasions, sometimes coercing Canadian planes to change flight routes.

In another bid to deter the U.S. from participating in matters in the South China Sea, China in March 2022 said that parties discussing the South China Sea Code of Conduct (COC) need to avoid “external interference” in the vicinity.

“We have seen that some non-regional countries are not happy to see the norm being reached and do not want the South China Sea to be calm, because this will make them lose the excuse to meddle in the South China Sea for personal gain,” said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. “It is hoped that ASEAN countries can see this clearly and jointly resist external interference and sabotage.”

Beijing and the 10 ASEAN member states have been negotiating the code for almost 20 years. Although they had initially planned to complete talks by the end of 2022, “In the past two years, mainly because of the impact of [Covid-19], the pace of the consultation process has indeed slowed down. However, China is always confident in the prospect of reaching the COC, because advancing the COC consultation is in the common interests of China and the ASEAN countries, and is also a key move to ensure that the South China Sea becomes a sea of peace and cooperation.” Beijing has expressed its displeasure regarding ASEAN nations continuing military exercises with “third-party nations,” namely the U.S.

While China asserts its sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei are also contesting some areas.



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