China’s Activities in East China Sea, Pacific Ocean, and Sea of Japan

September 2021
Japan Ministry of Defense
**Summary: PLA Activities around Japan**

- China has broadly and rapidly reinforced its forces, based on high-level increase of its national defense budget
- It is believed that China aims to build up capabilities to conduct operations in more distant waters and airspace
- China has rapidly expanded maritime activities both in qualitative and quantitative ways

---

**Examples**

- Aircraft
- Vessels
- Passage through territorial waters

*Broken lines represent activities of information gathering ships*

---

**Activities in Sea of Japan**

**Advancement to Pacific Ocean**

**Activities in East China Sea**

**Activities in South China Sea**

---

Descriptions and locations of each event are solely for illustration purpose, based on media reports. Locations of Island Chains are based on U.S. DoD Reports.
Increase of National Defense Budget
Some think that China’s announced defense budget is a mere part of China’s real defense-related expenditures and does not include major categories such as R&D expenses and foreign procurement.

It is pointed out that actual military-related spending is higher than stated in the official budget, estimated at more than $200 billion in 2019 (U.S. DoD “China Military Power Report 2020”).

There are limits to the comparisons of national defense budgets which have simply been converted into foreign currency when the different elements are taken into consideration, such as each country’s price levels. However, to simplify the comparison, this graph dares to represent the Japan’s defense-related expenditures and China’s announced defense budget that has been converted into yen using the exchange rate published by the Ministry of Finance Japan (MOFJ) each fiscal year (FY).
East China Sea, West Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan
China’s Activities in East China Sea

- China’s naval vessels have recently tended to expand the area of their regular activities to the south.
- They are continuously operating in the area near Japan’s Senkaku Islands.
- In June 2016, a frigate of the PLAN entered Japan’s contiguous zone around the Senkaku Islands (This was the first time when a PLAN combatant vessel entered Japan’s contiguous zone around the Senkakus) (Shown as an orange arrow in the figure).
- PLAN intelligence gathering vessels (AGIs) have also been found conducting activities near the Senkaku Islands multiple times (Shown as blue arrows in the figure).
- In January 2018, a Chinese submerged submarine entered the Japanese contiguous zone around the Senkaku Islands. (This was the first time for MOD to confirm and announce it.) On the same day, a frigate of the PLAN entered the Japanese contiguous zone (Shown as a green arrow in the figure).
- In June 2020, a submarine, which is assumed to be affiliated with China, navigated underwater within Japan’s contiguous zone (Shown as a pink arrow in the figure).

The number of scrambles by the ASDF against Chinese aircraft remains big ⇒ Hitting the biggest in FY 2016.
- The scope of activities of PLA aircraft in the East China Sea has tended to expand eastward and southward.
- The scope of activities of PLA aircraft near the Senkaku Islands has tended to expand southward.
  - In June 2016, PLA aircraft flew southward closer to the Senkaku Islands.

Examples of military aircraft confirmed near Japan.

The number of Japan’s press releases of Scrambles against Chinese Aircraft (by FY)
China’s Advancement into Pacific Ocean

Naval Forces

【Enhancing deployment capabilities to the open ocean】
- Advancement of Chinese naval fleets to the Pacific Ocean with high frequency
- More diverse routes
  - ① The Tsugaru Strait, ② Waters between the Okinawa Main Island and Miyako Island, ③ The Osumi Starit, ④ Waters between Yonaguni Island and Nakanokami Island, ⑤ The Soya Strait, ⑥ Waters between Amamioshima Island and Yokoatejima Island

【Enhancing operation capabilities on the open ocean】
- Three naval fleets’ joint exercise in the PO
- In December 2016, April 2018, June 2019, April 2020 and April 2021, the aircraft carrier “Liaoning” advanced to the PO（★）
- In April 2018, April 2020 and April 2021, flights by probable carrier-borne fighters from CV “Liaoning” were spotted for the first time（★）

Air Forces

【Flights to/from the Pacific Ocean through the main island of Okinawa and Miyako Island】
- More diverse types of aircraft
  - Y-8 AEW, H-6 bombers, Y-8 SIGINT, Y-9 SIGINT, Tu-154 SIGINT, Su-30 fighter, Y-8 EW
- More diverse routes

【SDF’s Response】
- SDF aircraft conduct scrambles in accordance with international law and the SDF Law

As of August 31, 2021

The number of Japan’s press releases that surface combatants operate in WPO passing through Nansei Islands (Fiscal Year)

Chinese aircraft carrier “Liaoning” transitting the sea area between the main island of Okinawa and Miyako Island

Flight paths near Japan (Examples)

A H-6 bomber that advanced to the sea near the Kii Peninsula

The number of Japan’s press releases on China’s military aircraft’s flights through the strait between the main island of Okinawa and Miyako Island (Fiscal Year)
China’s Advancement into Sea of Japan

China’s sea and air forces have further intensified activities in the Sea of Japan. It is considered that the PLA will continue to expand and intensify its activities.

Naval Forces

- “Confrontation exercise”※ by the Chinese naval fleet was announced for the first time in August 2016. Naval vessels and aircraft conducted joint training in the same area in January 2017 as well.
  ※Practical exercises in the form of confrontation
- China and Russia held the naval joint exercise “Joint Sea” in the Sea of Japan off the coast of Vladivostok in 2013, 2015, and 2017.
  ※ After “Joint Sea 2015”, Naval vessels passed through the Soya Strait to the Bering Sea (★)

Air forces

- In January 2016, Chinese aircraft for the first time operated in the Sea of Japan.
- China and Russia made a bombers’ long range joint flight (July. 2019: The East China Sea ~ Sea of Japan. Dec. 2020: The East China Sea ~ Sea of Japan ~ the Pacific Ocean)

※ Image. The routes and areas of exercises are estimates