



## Is US playing a dangerous spy plane game?

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US spy plane activity is on the rise over areas of China and Russia, but this time, China is pushing back — not with missiles, but with a vocal protest.

China is protesting the alleged incursion of a US Air Force U-2 spy plane into a no-fly zone imposed during live-fire military exercises in the country's north, [Military.com](#) reported.

In a statement issued late Tuesday, the Ministry of National Defense said the action had “seriously interfered in normal exercise activities” and “severely incurred the risk of misjudgment and even of bringing about an unintended air-sea incident.”

“This was a naked act of provocation,” the ministry said, quoting spokesperson Wu Qian. China has lodged a stern protest and demanded the US cease such actions, Wu said.

The statement did not give details on the time and place of the drills, but the information matches exercises the Maritime Safety Administration said started Monday and would run through Sept. 30 over the Bohai Gulf east of Beijing, [Military.com](#) reported.

Relations between the US and China have sunk to their lowest in decades amid disputes over myriad issues including trade, technology, Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Meanwhile, just days earlier, on August 19, a Russian Su-27 fighter [intercepted](#) two US surveillance planes flying near Russia's Black Sea coast, [Ted Galen Carpenter](#) of [National Interest](#) reported.

It was the sixth such incident in that region over the past four weeks, and it followed a similar foray earlier in the day farther north off the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea.

The use of spy planes in that fashion is not terribly unusual to test the radar defenses and gain additional intelligence on countries that are considered US adversaries, [National Interest](#) reported.

But such a flurry of flights over a short period of time is not typical, and it raises questions about the possible rationale.

Both sides can be faulted for the provocations that arise from intrusive flights near the borders of the other country, but the US deserves the bulk of the blame, [Carpenter](#) writes.

Granted, Russian aircraft have sometimes conducted provocative aerial approaches to US territory, especially near Alaska, and the frequency of that behavior seems to be growing.

Nevertheless, the number of such incidents is dwarfed by the surge in US military activity along Russia's borders. In other words, most of the encounters are taking place near Russia and thousands of miles away from the American homeland, National Interest reported.

According to Tyler Rogoway of The Drive, the northeastern reaches of the South China Sea, in particular, has experienced a massive uptick in military activity in recent weeks, with Chinese forces and US forces flooding the area with military capabilities.

The US has placed a near-constant stream of surveillance aircraft over the area and Taiwan has raised its alert status due to the activity level of PLAN assets.

The latest Chinese drills in that region are slated to run from the 24th to the 29th, but in the case of the supposed U-2 mission in question, the Yellow Sea exercises seem most likely where the high flying spy aircraft crashed the PLAN's party.

While China can issue a notice to airmen (NOTAM) warning of live-fire drills, the vast majority of the exercise would have taken place in international waters.

So, the U-2 may have waltzed into or near China's air defense identification zone, and the airspace it "closed" for the exercise, but that doesn't mean it broke any territorial boundaries.

The US has placed a near-constant stream of surveillance aircraft over the South China Sea and Taiwan has raised its alert status due to the activity level of PLAN assets. Credit: Lockheed Martin.

Still, doing so is undoubtedly a bold move. If China was executing live-fire drills, placing an aircraft in that area ups the risk of a mistake being made.

Analysts say China has no fighter aircraft capable of physically intercepting a U-2 and harassing it, but that doesn't mean they can't shoot it down.

The U-2 "Dragon Lady" is a single-seat and single-engine high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft. U-2, which has a glider-like body structure, can perform signal intelligence (SIGINT), image intelligence (IMINT), electronic intelligence (ELINT), and measurement and signature intelligence (MASINT), according to Inceptive Mind online.

The pilots of U-2 spy planes, which can climb above 70,000 ft altitude during the mission, wear flight clothing similar to those worn by astronauts due to pressure.

U-2 reconnaissance aircraft entered service with the US Air Force in 1956. They are able to reach speeds of up to 805 km/h (500 mph) and fly over distances of up to 960 km (596 miles). Currently, the US Air Force has 30 in-service U-2S aircraft, whose average age is 36.6 years.