



NATO Foundation  
Defense College

China July 2017

## **China's air force continues conducting large-scale drills far from its shores**

China's air force conducted multiple drills far out at sea, with H-6K bombers and many other types of aircraft flying through the Miyako Strait – which lies between two southern Japanese islands – and the Bashi Channel that separates Taiwan and the Philippines.

A spokesman for China Defense Department said that "it is legitimate for Chinese military planes to fly through the strait, and more similar training will be conducted on the high seas as needed. The parties concerned don't need to overreact and make a great fuss about it. They will feel better after getting used to such drills."

Ahead of these exercises, the Chinese military last sent ships and planes through the international but politically sensitive waters and airspace in April as part of its continuing push to hone its ability to operate further from its shores.

Exercises through the Miyako Strait have become more and more commonplace as China seeks to project its military clout farther into the Pacific.

In early March, Japan scrambled fighter jets after a total of 13 Chinese naval aircraft were spotted flying through the strait. That large-scale drill featured fighters, bombers and early warning aircraft.

Beijing blasted Tokyo for hyping the exercises, calling them part of "regular" drills, while Japan said it will keep a vigilant eye on the "expanding and increasing" actions of the Chinese military in the area.

China is in the midst of an ambitious military modernisation programme that includes building aircraft carriers and developing stealth fighters, to give it the ability to project power far from its shores.

**Elenoire Laudieri di Biase** - *Sinologist at Ca' Foscari University, Venice, and at Melbourne University. Senior Analyst on China at NATO Defense College Foundation*