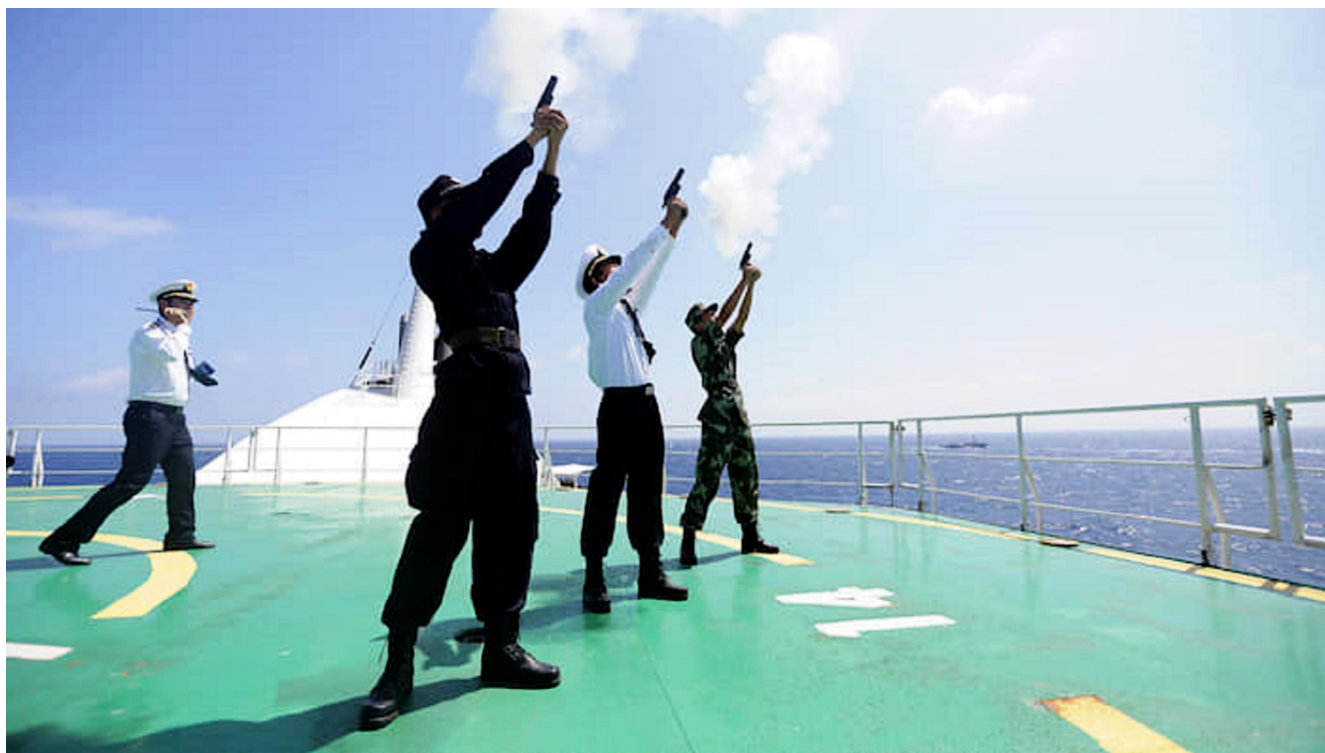


Asia maritime tensions

Beijing seeks new ways to assert South China Sea authority

Academic floats plan for controversial measure to control airspace



Soldiers from China's People's Liberation Army on exercises in the South China Sea earlier this year © Reuters

3 HOURS AGO by: **Charles Clover** in Beijing

Beijing could employ controversial measures to control the disputed airspace over the South China Sea, according to a leading expert with close ties to the Chinese government, as it seeks new ways to assert its authority in the [contested region](https://www.ft.com/indepth/asia-maritime-tensions) (<https://www.ft.com/indepth/asia-maritime-tensions>).

Wu Shicun, head of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, said Beijing “reserves the right” to impose a so-called [air defence identification zone](http://next.ft.com/content/26cf55ce-58da-11e3-a7cb-00144feabdco) (<http://next.ft.com/content/26cf55ce-58da-11e3-a7cb-00144feabdco>) (ADIZ) once it has finished building its second aircraft carrier.

Although about 20 countries, including the US and Japan, use ADIZs to control access to their airspace, employing such a measure over the South China Sea,

where nine countries have competing territorial claims, would be regarded by Beijing's neighbours and Washington as extremely provocative.

Mr Wu, who made the comments at a military forum in Beijing, is not an official government spokesman, but he has a record of floating proposals that later turn out to be policy. His observation suggests China is maintaining — or even strengthening — its assertive strategic stance in the Pacific Ocean.

“I don't think this is just his opinion,” one US analyst said of Mr Wu's statement.

Beijing's previous experience of employing an ADIZ, which requires foreign aircraft to identify themselves, could mean it will refrain from declaring a new one before it can properly enforce it. When China sought to impose the measure in the East China Sea in 2013 it was immediately challenged by the US, which flew two B-52 bombers through it. Beijing proved unable or unwilling to scramble aircraft to intercept them.

The construction of a second Chinese aircraft carrier was revealed in March 2015. Latest photographs show the hull is nearly complete and analysts expect it could be completed by 2018. However, training naval aviators and crews could mean it will be a decade before the carrier is fully functioning.

Tensions have been rising in the South China Sea. Beijing has been irked by repeated efforts by Washington to test its territorial claims by moving ships and aircraft close to artificial islands claimed by Beijing.

Declaring an ADIZ would in theory offer Beijing a way to cement further control over the sea, which it claims as its territorial waters.



That claim was repudiated (<http://next.ft.com/content/989c849c-4847-11e6-8d68-72e9211e86ab>) earlier this year by an international arbitration court, which ruled in favour of a Philippine challenge to China's claims in the South China Sea — a decision that infuriated Beijing.

The comments from Mr Wu were made at the Xiangshan Forum, an annual three-day gathering held at the campus of the Academy of Military Science in Beijing that offers an annual window into the strategic thinking of China's military.

In another apparently orchestrated message to the US, Chinese and Russian military officials held a joint briefing on their opposition to Washington's plans to deploy an [anti-ballistic missile system \(http://next.ft.com/content/acfb5ebo-44cb-11e6-864d-01c0167ff470\)](http://next.ft.com/content/acfb5ebo-44cb-11e6-864d-01c0167ff470) in South Korea. Seoul requested the Terminal High-Altitude Air Defence (THAAD) system following successive nuclear warhead tests this year by North Korea.

Cai Jun, a general in the People's Liberation Army, said Russia and China would hold a second set of missile defence joint manoeuvres next year, following a first round held in Moscow in May. The joint drills underline how opposition to the US has driven Russia and China closer together on military matters.

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BY **Capgemini**

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