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**Mark Milley**

### US military chief warns of 'significant' increase in Chinese aircraft intercepts

Mark Milley says Chinese forces are conducting unsafe air and sea manoeuvres



General Mark Milley, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, said China was conducting 'dangerous intercepts' against American military aircraft and ships © AP

**Demetri Sevastopulo** in Jakarta 8 HOURS AGO

The US military's top officer said China was becoming more aggressive in intercepting military aircraft and undertaking unsafe aerial manoeuvres over the past five years.

General Mark Milley, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, said China was conducting "dangerous intercepts" against American military aircraft and ships, and was also targeting Canada, Australia, Japan and other US partners.

"The number of Chinese intercepts at sea and in the air has increased significantly over five years," Milley told the Financial Times and The Associated Press aboard his aircraft as he flew to Asia for visits to Indonesia and Australia.

The Chinese military has become "noticeably more aggressive in this particular region", he said.

[Milley](#) declined to provide specific figures about the total number of incidents, but said the volume of unsafe intercepts — such as when a Chinese fighter jet comes close to a US aircraft — had risen in "equal proportion". It was unclear to what extent the rise was due to China responding to expanding US activity in the region.

In May, a Chinese J-16 fighter flew very close to an Australian spy plane, releasing chaff, including pieces of aluminium, that was sucked into the engine of the P-8 surveillance aircraft.

Milley said he discussed unsafe intercepts when he spoke to his Chinese counterpart, General Li Guocheng, in the first call between the generals since President Joe Biden took office.

Li responded by warning the US not to engage in “provocations”. The Pentagon stresses that it is operating in international waters and airspace, but China wants the US to reduce its activity in the region.

Intercepts are just one of many contentious issues in the strained [US-China relationship](#). Biden and Chinese president Xi Jinping are expected to hold a call in the coming days.

Beijing warned the US after the FT reported that Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives, would next month visit Taiwan, a country over which China claims sovereignty.

China has signalled that it might respond with more than rhetoric [if Pelosi visits Taipei](#), sparking concerns that Beijing could take military action, such as intercepting her plane with fighter jets.

The White House is worried that the visit has the potential to [spark a crisis](#) across the Taiwan Strait.

Milley visited Jakarta on Sunday as part of the effort by the Biden administration to strengthen alliances in the Indo-Pacific. The push is partly designed to reassure countries that the US intends to remain a strong presence in the region to counter China.

Ahead of his meeting with his Indonesian counterpart General Andika Perkasa, Milley said Indonesia was “strategically critical” to the Indo-Pacific given its size and geography. The four-star general is the first chair of the joint chiefs to visit Indonesia since Admiral Michael Mullen travelled to the south-east Asian nation in 2008.

Milley will travel from Indonesia to Australia to attend a regional meeting of military chiefs. He will be accompanied by Admiral John Aquilino, head of US Indo-Pacific. Milley said the chiefs would discuss the situation surrounding Taiwan.

Speaking about the conference, which will be held in Sydney on Tuesday and Wednesday, Milley said the “vast majority” of countries in the region wanted the US military to be engaged.

“We want to work with them to develop interoperability and modernise our militaries collectively, in order to make sure that, geostrategically, we’re able to meet whatever challenge that China poses,” Milley said.

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