

## **China's first aircraft carrier the Liaoning now 'ready to fight enemies'**

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**Beijing:** China's first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning is now ready to engage in combat, marking a milestone for a navy that has invested heavily in its ability to project power far from China's shores.

**In this May 2012 file photo provided by China's Xinhua News Agency**

Senior Captain Li Dongyou, the political commissar of the Liaoning, told the Global Times on Monday that "as a military force, we are always combat ready and our combat capacity also needs to be tested by war. At this moment, we are doing our best to promote our strength and use it to prevent war. But we are preparing for actual combat at any time."

Senior Captain Li Dongyou's comments appear to indicate that the ship has taken on its full aviation complement. Purchased as an incomplete hull from Ukraine more than a decade ago, it was commissioned in 2013.

China hasn't described specifically how it intends to use the Liaoning, but it is seen as helping reinforce China's increasingly assertive claims in the South China Sea in the face of challenges from the United States Navy and others.

The Liaoning is also seen as a training platform for officers and sailors who will serve on China's rapidly expanding fleet. China is currently building its second, fully "homegrown" aircraft carrier.

Mr Li said that the Liaoning's combat capabilities still lag behind U.S. carriers, but its training and maintenance operations have been praised by senior Pentagon officials who have visited during military exchanges.

"Weaponry is the key for combat capability on the carrier. As China's first generation of NCOs on the carrier, these officers' capability on how to operate, repair and maintain equipment is irreplaceable. And they are the source of our confidence," Li said.

Mr Li also said that more than 1,000 non-commissioned officers serve aboard the Liaoning.

- AP inputs