THE REAL CHINESE 'DRAGON': EXPOSING THE POWER OF CHINA'S DEADLY AIR FORCE

News / Manufacturer



Tensions in the South China Sea and continued warnings about Chinese militarization of the disputed areas has led many Pentagon planners and analysts to sharpen focus on Chinese Air Force acquisitions and technological advances.

The U.S. Air Force's technological air power superiority over China is rapidly diminishing in light of rapid Chinese modernization of fighter jets, missiles, air-to-air weapons, cargo planes and stealth aircraft, according to analysts, Pentagon officials and a Congressional review released several years ago.

The 2014 U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission recommended that Congress appoint an outside panel of experts to assess the U.S.-Chinese military balance and make recommendations regarding U.S. military plans and budgets, among other things.Despite being released in 2014, the findings of the report - if slightly dated - offer a detailed and insightful window into Chinese Air Force technology, progress and development.

The Commission compiled its report based upon testimony, various reports and analytical

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assessments along with available open-source information. An entire chapter is dedicated to Chinese military modernization.

The review states that the Chines People's Liberation Army currently has approximately 2,200 operational aircraft, nearly 600 of which are considered modern.

"In the early 1990s, Beijing began a comprehensive modernization program to upgrade the PLA Air Force from a short-range, defensively oriented force with limited capabilities into a modern, multi-role force capable of projecting precision airpower beyond China's borders, conducting air and missile defense and providing early warning," the review writes.

Regarding stealth aircraft, the review mentions the recent flights of prototypes of the Chinese J-20 stealth fighter, calling the aircraft more advanced than any other air platform currently deployed in the Asia-Pacific region. The Chinese are also testing a smaller stealth fighter variant called the J-31 although its intended use is unclear, according to the report.

In 2014, China displayed the Shenyang J-31 stealth fighter at China's Zuhai Air show, according to various reports. However, several analysts have made the point that it is not at all clear if the platform comes close to rivaling the technological capability of the U.S. F-35.

Nevertheless, the U.S. technological advantage in weaponry, air and naval platforms is rapidly decreasing, according to the review.

To illustrate this point, the review cites comments from an analyst who compared U.S.-Chinese fighter jets to one another roughly twenty years ago versus a similar comparison today.

The analyst said that in 1995 a high-tech U.S. F-15, F-16 or F/A-18 would be vastly superior to a Chinese J-6 aircraft. However today -- China's J-10 and J-11 fighter jet aircraft would be roughly equivalent in capability to an upgraded U.S. F-15, the review states.

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