

The Dragon's Claws

Assessing China's PLAAF today

With recent state-enforced organisational reforms, institutional restructuring and the induction or flight testing of a variety of fourth and fifth-generation combat platforms over the last decade, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) is on course towards becoming a most assertive instrument for regional dominance and international influence for China.

Sameer Joshi reviews the status of PLAAF restructuring & reforms, mission strategy and combat capabilities, along with focus on the PLAAF's indigenous Air Superiority Fighter (ASF) force, concluding with an assessment of the PLAAF vs IAF scenario over Tibet in the coming years.

The long-term, wide-ranging modernisation of the armed forces of the People's Republic of China (PRC) entered a new phase in end-2015, as President Xi Jinping unveiled sweeping organisational reforms to overhaul the entire military structure. These included creation of Theatre Commands in place of Military Regions and formation of the Strategic Support Force (SSF), an exclusive arm to conduct Information Warfare

along with the PLA, PLAAF, PLAN and the re-designated People's Liberation Army Rocket Forces (PLARF), formerly the Second Artillery Force. These reforms aim not only to strengthen the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) control over the military, but enhance China's ability to fight short-duration, high-intensity regional conflicts at greater distances from the Chinese mainland. China's growing military, diplomatic, and economic clout

A flight of 16th Air Regiment J-11As over Tibet near Shigatse

to advance its ambitions to establish regional dominance and international influence, will not be possible without it portraying a strong and modern military capability, a major burden of which arguably falls on the wings of the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF).