

A MARCH WEST:



THE WESTERN THEATRE COMMAND AND CHINA'S POWER PROJECTION

PART 2

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THE first serial of this *In-Depth Briefing* reviewed the Western Theatre Command (WTC) of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), its training and testing facilities, and role in the Joint Operational Command system. The second and third serials will examine the WTC's ability to project combat power beyond China's north-western borders. The baseline scenario to do so is an armed insurrection in a Central Asian Republic or the Russian Federation's Central Military District, with a mandate from the host government or direction from the Central Military Commission to intervene through offensive operations. The opposing force is assumed to have seized control of a local or regional political centre and constitute anywhere between a brigade and an army-sized element of a national force, though lacking strategic offensive capabilities that would threaten Chinese

territory. This meets the PLA doctrinal definition of a 'local war under informatized conditions' as opposed to a border skirmish or counter-terrorism operation delegated to the Military Sub-Districts and the People's Armed Police.

The hypothetical battlespace may be conjectured along four separate axes. To the North, across the Altai Mountains, the Russian 41st Guards Combined Arms Army is concentrated around Novosibirsk – the administrative centre of the Siberian Federal District. To the North West is the Kazakh political capital of Astana and Omsk – a Russian industrial and transportation hub, home to the 33rd Guards Missile Army Headquarters as well as a railway logistics brigade and an air assault regiment. Directly West lies Kazakhstan's economic hub – Almaty, followed by Bishkek and Tashkent: the capital cities of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan respectively.

Along a more South-Westerly axis lies the Fergana Valley – a locus for Islamist militancy and border clashes between Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz forces, as well as Gorno-Badakhshan – a Tajik Autonomous Oblast that has been engaged in a long-standing political, and at times violent, conflict with a regime in Dushanbe seen as dependent on Beijing's largess.

While this geography implies the primacy of the 76th, a PLA Group Army is not intended to deploy as a standalone campaign-level force but to act as a pool from which an ad-hoc task-organised suite of capabilities – referred to in PLA doctrine as an 'operational combat system' – can be constructed. The novelty of continental warfare on such a scale, for the present generation of Chinese leaders, means that additional land, air and specialist formations would be surged from across the five theatres, and a dedicated operational command post established, likely

at Urumqi. While this scenario assumes the absence of a conflict on any of China's other borders, the ability of the other Theatre Commands, the 77th GA, as well as the Xinjiang and Tibet Military Districts, to support the operation is nevertheless limited by strategic risk.

LONG-RANGE BALLISTIC STRIKE

PLA 'system warfare' defines a node as a critical component of an enemy information network that either provides a capability or links other nodes. Target sets prioritise C4ISR [Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance] and integrated air defence, with long-range ballistic fires used to prepare the battlespace for follow-on air and ground operations. Theatre commands, and even individual brigades, will also coordinate their operations with electro-magnetic spectrum and network attack capabilities previously held under the Strategic Support Force but, since 2024, re-allocated among separate Information, Aerospace and Cyber Support Forces.¹ With little to no open-source reporting, however, these will not be incorporated into the scenario.

Nevertheless, it is assumed that individual brigades may passively access national-level intelligence data and solicit direct support from a space-based asset for a high-priority mission.² The PRC operates more than a hundred 'Yaogan' Synthetic Aperture Radar satellites, several of which pass over the operational area in roughly 90-minute low-Earth orbits. Contrary to Beijing's official line, the Yaogan constellation is widely believed to be used for military reconnaissance and may be considered secure by comparison with a hypothetical space-contested scenario, such as a conflict with the United States in the First Island Chain.

The PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) tripled in size during the 2010s and now fields approximately 3,000 ballistic missiles, organised under six corps-leader grade 'bases'. The brigades under the command of 'Base 64', headquartered in Lanzhou, mostly operate nuclear-armed road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile variants, which for the purpose of this scenario will be disregarded.³ The 646th Brigade at Korla (the only PLARF brigade in China's Far West), however, operates an assessed six

battalions of DF-26 launchers – a dual-capable, intermediate-range ballistic missile. Base 69, as a dedicated training establishment, does not field operational launchers of its own.⁴ While able to range all operational areas in this scenario, as well as the Caspian and Black Sea basins, the most likely mission set for the DF-26 at Korla is to hold Indian forces and cities at risk in depth from the LAC [Line of Actual Control].

The PLARF fields its Short Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBM) primarily in the Eastern and Southern theatres but during the Galwan standoff launchers were surged to pre-surveyed sites in Tibet. PLARF battalions often operate far from brigade headquarters and road-mobile SRBMs, such as the DF-11B, DF-15C and the Medium-Range (MRBM) DF-16, would be able to engage targets near Novosibirsk, Omsk and Astana, if launchers took forward positions in Xinjiang's mountainous Ili and Altai prefectures.⁵ From Urumqi and Kashgar, SRBM battalions could comfortably support operations in the vicinity of Almaty or the Fergana Valley with conventional, bunker-busting and cluster munitions.

The PLARF would also likely exploit the operational tempo to test concept weapons such as the hypersonic DF-17 and prototype DF-27, against high pay-off targets, as well as its modest inventory of Land Attack Cruise Missiles (LACM). In the case of both the DF-26 and DF-16, stockpiles are not exhaustive as these systems are a significant, if not decisive, factor in any Taiwan contingency so the PLARF, able to mobilise additional launchers through its reserve programme, would likely also opt to expend stockpiles of the largely-retired DF-21C.⁶

LONG-RANGE AIR STRIKE

The PLAAF had previously stationed relatively few aircraft in the Lanzhou and Chengdu

¹CASI, *PLA Aerospace Power: A Primer on Trends in China's Military Air, Space, and Missile Forces*, 4th Edition, Printed in the United States of America by the China Aerospace Studies Institute July 2024, airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/Other-Topics/2024-07-16%20Primer%204th%20ed.pdf; US Department of the Army, *Chinese Tactics*.

²US Department of the Army, *Chinese Tactics*.

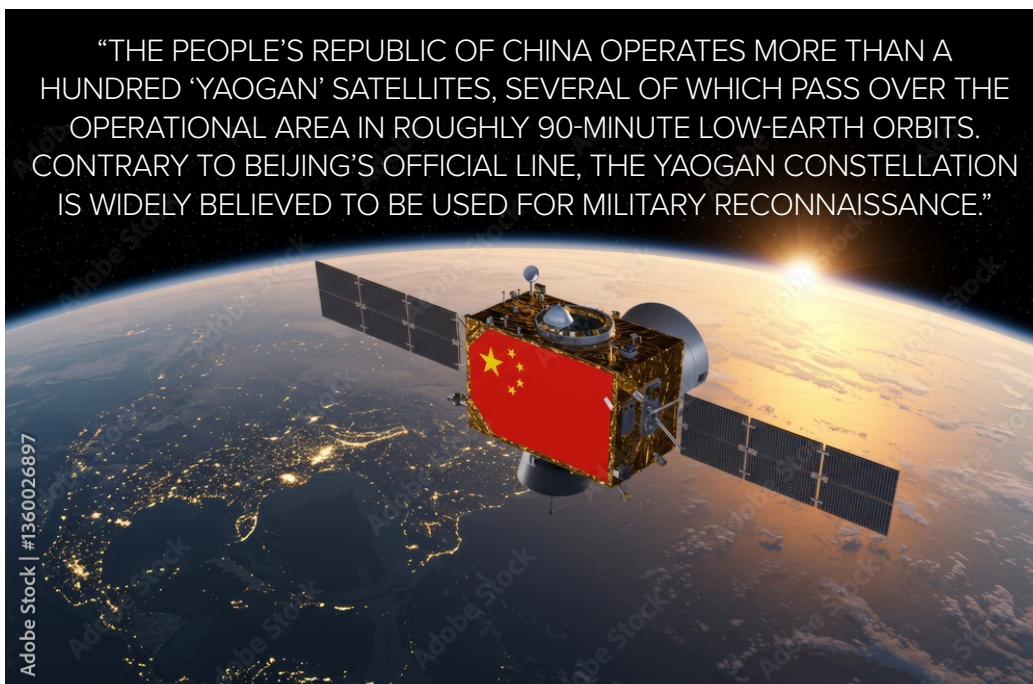
³CASI, *PLA Aerospace Power ; Decker Eveleth, People's Liberation Army Rocket Force Order of Battle*, July 2023, Centre for Naval Studies, James Martin Centre of Non-proliferation Studies, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, nonproliferation.org/wcp-content/uploads/2023/07/web_peoples-liberation-army-rocket-force-order-of-battle_07102023.pdf, 31.

⁴Ma Xiu, *PLA Rocket Force Organization, Executive Summary*, China Aerospace Studies Institute (2022), airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/PLARF/2022-01-05%20PLARF%20Organization%20ExecSum.pdf; Janes, *Major facilities in the PLARF's 64th Base*, Janes Activity Analysis, January 2024, Janes Defence (2024), customer.janes.com/display/BSP_75457-7SIA.

⁵CASI, *PLA Aerospace Power ; V K Saxena Lt Gen, The Power Behind Arrogance: Assessment of China's Air and Missile Arsenal*, (Vivekananda International Foundation, 2020), vijindia.org/sites/default/files/Power-behind-Arrogance.pdf

⁶Janes, *Major facilities in the PLARF's 64th Base ; Decker Eveleth, People's Liberation Army Rocket Force Order of Battle*.

“THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA OPERATES MORE THAN A HUNDRED ‘YAOGAN’ SATELLITES, SEVERAL OF WHICH PASS OVER THE OPERATIONAL AREA IN ROUGHLY 90-MINUTE LOW-EARTH ORBITS. CONTRARY TO BEIJING’S OFFICIAL LINE, THE YAOGAN CONSTELLATION IS WIDELY BELIEVED TO BE USED FOR MILITARY RECONNAISSANCE.”



Military Regions but, from 2011, began rotating an increasing number of airframes through Tibetan airfields.⁷ The WTC now has three deputy corps-grade PLA Air Force (PLAAF) bases and like the Southern and Eastern Theatre Commands, receives a higher proportion of advanced aircraft. Since 2017, the WTC's airbases have also received a relatively-high share of investment but most of the upgraded military and dual-use facilities on the Tibetan plateau would be impractical in this scenario given the payload limitations associated with high-altitude take-offs.⁸ Xinjiang, on the other hand, sits in a topographical depression with most of its airfields below 4,000 feet in elevation. Smaller dual-use airfields in the PRC's frontier regions are mostly manned by poorly-resourced reservists, but the WTC has been experimenting with the Agile Combat Employment concept, using mobile combat-support elements to operate airframes from 'unfamiliar' rather than 'home' airfields.⁹

This study identifies five airfields that would likely play a prominent role in the given scenario. Urumqi South and Urumqi-Changji each host an PLAAF air brigade – typically 24 or more aircraft supported by a regiment-grade 'air station' that coordinates everything from flight control and meteorology to fuel and ammunition resupply.¹⁰ Korla-Licheng airport hosts one of the 13 brigades nationally, operating the J-20 – China's fifth generation air superiority fighter with precision-strike capability (pictured above). A day west by rail, Kashgar supports an air detachment and is situated in close proximity to a major logistical centre and that facilitates truck-borne trade between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and the Chinese rail network. Primarily supporting operations on the LAC, Hotan is more



remote, but hosts both an air detachment and the 99th Air Brigade, with their complements of J-11 and J-16 fourth-generation-multi-role fighters. Like Korla and Kashgar, Hotan is dual-civil-military use and has a recently upgraded runway along with additional tarmacs and hangars.¹¹ While detachments report directly to WTC Air Force HQ, the four air brigades are subordinate to the PLAAF base at Urumqi South, which hosts an operational command and control centre.¹²

As per the Joint Island Landing Campaign, the first line of a PLAAF strike package will consist of cover formations of multi-role aircraft, followed by standoff jammers, airborne ISR and Airborne Early-Warning and Control (AEW&C) platforms.¹³ In the rear are bomber groups equipped with standoff munitions such as the CJ-20 Air-Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) or, in the case of secondary targets, free-fall bombs.¹⁴ Depending on the opposing force's size and capability, PLAAF sorties in this scenario would likely be smaller, more intermittent and geographically dispersed but nearly all operational areas lie within the combat radius of a fully-armed J-16 or J-20 based at Urumqi.

Target areas further than 1,500 kilometres away, Omsk for example, would require the PLAAF's dedicated and long-

serving strategic bomber – the H-6. A deployed force of roughly 200 is organised into three 'air divisions' – a legacy structure, across the Central, Southern and Eastern Theatre Commands but H-6 variants have been routinely sighted at Yinchuan, Malan, Korla, Kashgar and Golmud in Qinghai Province, which, like its counterparts on the Tibetan plateau, has an extended runway to compensate for its 9,000-foot elevation. Other airframes, including the J-20, have also been surged during exercises or tensions with India, and it is highly likely that fourth- and fifth-generation aircraft from other theatres would be rotated with the WTC's ageing J-8s and JH-7s. Radar profile would be a particularly significant factor if PLARF and special operations forces (SOF) operations had failed to destroy any Kazakh S-300 or Russian S-400 battalions, such as those deployed around Almaty and Novosibirsk, that had come under opposing force control. The suppression or destruction of opposing force strategic air defence would also enable the PLAAF to deploy and refine its nascent mid-air refuelling capability – based on a fleet of around 35 tankers, roughly half of them Y-20Us – permitting longer loitering times and a greater number of airframes to operate directly from air bases in central China.¹⁵

SPECIAL OPS FORCES

PLA Group Armies do not have a

dedicated ground-reconnaissance unit, as do US corps, but field a SOF brigade, each with theatre-specific training and equipment, and a force strength of between 1,000-2,000.¹⁶ Focusing less on interaction with foreign militaries, deep reconnaissance is a core mission for PLA SOF, as well as commando operations against enemy command posts, artillery and missile positions, ammunition depots, transportation lines, oil depots and airfields.¹⁷ Teams are capable of conducting days-long patrols in depth and are

⁷ Kenneth W. Allen and Cristina L. Garafola, "70 Years of the PLA Air Force", China Aerospace Studies Institute, April 2021.

⁸ China Power Team, "How Is China Expanding its Infrastructure to Project Power Along its Western Borders?" China Power, March 16, 2022. Updated November 9, 2023. Accessed January 20, 2025. chinapower.csis.org/china-tibet-xinjiang-border-india-military-airport-heliport/; V K Saxena Lt Gen, 'The Power Behind Arrogance'.

⁹ Derek Solen, "The PLA Air Force's Efforts Toward Agile Combat Employment", Jamestown Foundation China Brief Volume: 21 Issue: 17, 10 Sep 2021, jamestown.org/program/the-pla-air-forces-efforts-toward-agile-combat-employment

¹⁰ Kenneth Allen, Current Overview of the PLA Air Force's Organizational Structure, Centre for Intelligence Research and Analysis, August 2023, cira.exocera.com/news/current-overview-of-the-pla-air-forces-organizational-structure

¹¹ China Power Team, "How Is China Expanding its Infrastructure to Project Power Along its Western Borders?" James, "Chinese airpower update", Activity Analysis, James Defence (2020).

¹² Kenneth Allen, Current Overview of the PLA Air Force's Organizational Structure

¹³⁻¹⁴ CASI, PLA Aerospace Power.

¹⁵ Brian Hart, Bonny Lin, and Matthew Funaiolo, "The PLA's Growing Airpower Projection Capabilities in the Western Theatre Command", Chapter 7 in PLA Logistics and Sustainment, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, February 2023, media.defense.gov/2023/Sep/26/2003308978/-1/-1/0/PLA%20LOGISTICS%20AND%20SUSTAINMENT%20PLA%20CONFERENCE%202022.PDF; James, "Chinese airpower update", Activity Analysis, James Defence (2020).

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ US Department of the Army, Chinese Tactics.

equipped with long-range satellite communications capabilities, as well as organic surveillance UAVs to aid target acquisition.¹⁸

The vast expanse of open steppe between Almaty and Astana offers virtually no rural cover from opposing force reconnaissance but, with assumed-PLAAF air superiority, mobile units from the 76th Group Army's SOF brigade would likely deploy under the umbrella of continuous intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and long-range fire support. The 500-kilometre stretch north, from the Russian border in the Altai Mountains to Novosibirsk, is quite different – a heavily-forested, mid-alpine landscape giving way to cultivated flatlands and a string of Siberian market towns along the upper reaches of the Ob river. Likewise, beyond the 100-kilometre extension of the Alay mountains, that stretch westwards from the Irkeshtam border crossing with Kyrgyzstan, is the densely-settled agrarian plain of the Fergana Valley.

The average elevation in both the Kyrgyz Alay and the Pamir of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast is between 10,000 and 16,000 feet, but the operational system would be able to draw from the Xinjiang and Tibet Military Districts, which both field SOF brigades specialising in winter and mountain warfare. All four of these border regions are, to varying degrees, home to a Chinese commercial diaspora present since the early 1990s. Those employed by China's State-Owned Enterprises involved in raw material extraction are largely segregated from the population, but the greater part are small communities invested in the cross-border trade in low-cost Chinese consumables, within which PLA SOF could manoeuvre and self-sustain with relative ease. Kyrgyzstan also has a relatively high concentration of Chinese private military

contractors, whose carriage of arms under licence is an anomaly in the Chinese private security company sector.¹⁹

Group Army SOF brigades conduct both airborne and air assault training but typically deploy using Army helicopter aviation. The density of helicopters in the PLA is relatively low – roughly a tenth of the US Army's helicopter-to-troop ratio, but the 76th SOF Brigade based at Qingtongxia operates its own light helicopter fleet and the 76th Aviation Brigade based near Lanzhou and the Xinjiang Military District Aviation Brigade at Urumqi each field four utility and two attack helicopter battalions.²⁰ While built around Mi-8 (pictured below) and Mi-17 variants, the 76th also operates the Z-20 – a new indigenous medium-lift helicopter capable of operating in high-altitude environments that has been largely operationalised by the Tibet Military District's Army Aviation brigade, and which would play a pre-eminent role in resupplying forward troops beyond China's borders.²¹

Other WTC units capable of conducting what PLA academics refer to as 'integrated reconnaissance and strike', include the 178th Unmanned Aerial Vehicle brigade, based at Uxxaktal Air Base, North West of Korla, and also under the command of the Urumqi Base. The 178th operates a mixture of

Wing Loong medium-altitude variants which can carry a 200-480kg payload to a combat radius of 1,500 kilometres – just about encompassing Astana, Omsk and Novosibirsk. The 178th also fields the WZ-8 hypersonic reconnaissance drone which would play an important role in targeting and battle damage assessment, as the WTC possesses limited strategic fixed-wing ISTAR or AEW&C.²² Two KJ-500s and two Y-8G ECM platforms were, however, surged to Hotan during the Galwan standoff, and a similar reinforcement can be assumed for the present scenario, to potentially include the KJ-700 and KJ-2000, as well as any number of specialised platforms from the PLA's vast inventory of reconnaissance and strike drones.²³ China's new electronic warfare FH-95 UAV – capable of performing electromagnetic jamming and armed reconnaissance – was field tested by the Xinjiang Military District.²⁴

AIRLIFT AND AIRBORNE ASSAULT

A PLA ground operational system is organised into five separate 'groups' – command, offensive, defensive, firepower strike, and support.²⁵ Where they relate to operations in extreme depth, the strategic reconnaissance-strike capabilities discussed above would come under the management of the command group's 'Reconnaissance and Intelligence',

'Firepower Coordination', and 'Electronic and Network Warfare' sub-groups.²⁶ For the seizure of opposing force strategic key points, however, a campaign-level force could request the Airborne Corps (PLAAFAC), headquartered in Hubei Province and directly subordinate to PLAAF HQ. 'The Corps' – in practise a Group Army – is comprised of four rapid-reaction infantry brigades and one air assault brigade, each with a howitzer battalion, as

¹⁸US Department of the Army, *Chinese Tactics*.

¹⁹Philip Reid, *Contractors and Contiguity: Assessing China's Private Security presence in Kyrgyzstan, The Changing Character of War Centre, University of Oxford, 2023.*

²⁰US Department of the Army, *Chinese Tactics*; *The PLA Battalion Template, #88 PLA Army Battalion in the Offense - Mobile Assault, Vermilion China, January 2025, vermilionchina.com/p/the-pla-battalion-template*

²¹Brian Hart, Bommy Lin, and Matthew Funaiolo, "The PLA's Growing Airpower Projection Capabilities in the Western Theatre Command", Chapter 7 in *PLA Logistics and Sustainment, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, February 2023, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Sep/26/2003308978/-1/-1/0/PLA%20LOGISTICS%20AND%20SUSTAINMENT%20CONFERENCE%202022.PDF>*; Anushka Saxena, 'Integration' in the PLA Western Theatre Command: Practices and Patterns, *Article, LifeofSoldiers.com, October 21 2024, lifeofsoldiers.com/2024/10/31/integration-in-the-pla-western-theater-command-practices-and-patterns/#:~:text=Since%20wide%20sweeping%20reforms%20of%20the%20PLA%20prepare%20for%20achieving*

²²James, "Satellite imagery shows UAV display at China's Malan airbase", *Activity Analysis, Janes Defence (2019).*

²³James, "Satellite imagery highlights PLAAF buildup in western China", *Event Analysis, Janes Defence (2020)*; James, "Satellite imagery shows UAV display at China's Malan airbase"; James, "Chinese airpower update", *Activity Analysis, Janes Defence (2020).*

²⁴Anushka Saxena, "Assessing Operations and 'Jointness' in the PLA Western Theater Command," *Takshashila Discussion Document No. 2024-07, May 2024, The Takshashila Institution.*

²⁵⁻²⁶US Department of the Army, *Chinese Tactics, Army Techniques Publication, Headquarters Department of the Army Washington, DC, August 2021.*



well as an airborne-mechanised brigade equipped with the air-droppable ZBD-03 infantry fighting vehicle. The PLAAFAC also fields a SOF brigade, and has additional specialisations in chemical defence, communications and engineering.²⁷

PLA doctrine appears to acknowledge the complexity and risk of airborne infantry operations and, unless directly supported by host-nation forces, cross-border airborne or air assault operations as distant as Novosibirsk and Omsk should be discounted.²⁸ Due to Kazakhstan's unique geography it is not inconceivable that, if Southern Kazakhstan were secure, the PLAAFAC might be tasked to secure a major airport in the country's North such as Astana or Karaganda in advance of a 1,000-kilometre thrust by one or more combined arms brigades. Certainly, PLAAFAC brigades conduct airborne drops at similar distances to training areas inside China, typically to the PLAAFAC's training area in Qinghai. During the Galwan confrontation, an airborne brigade, including hundreds of armoured vehicles, manoeuvred from Hubei to the WTC in just a few hours. This was, however, within the boundaries of the PRC's joint logistics network and the exercising force heavily relied on civilian airlines and railways.²⁹

Nevertheless, strategically-important airfields at Almaty, Tashkent, Namangan, Osh, Khorog, Ayni and Kant (the latter two presently hosting Russian forces) all constitute reasonable objectives, within a 600 kilometre radius for a PLAAFAC air assault operation launched from Kashgar in order to secure an air point of disembarkation for mechanised infantry. A precedent for how the latter might unfold is offered by the CSTO [Collective Security Treaty Organization] intervention in Almaty, in



January 2022, when the Russian Federation utilised more than 70 transport aircraft to airlift 2,500 soldiers from special forces, airborne and air assault brigades across Russia to Kazakhstan following a request from the Kazakh leadership, which believed that rioting in Almaty and other cities constituted a coup attempt. The Zhetygen air base, 50 kilometres north of Almaty and previously used for CSTO exercises, was chosen as a home base from where the intervening force was able to disembark and secure critical national infrastructure.³⁰

It was assessed in 2021 that the PLAAF has the air transport capacity to deploy either two light combined arms brigades simultaneously or half of a mechanised brigade.³¹ By 2024 this had increased to two light-airborne brigades and one light-mechanised-airborne brigade if the entire inventory of transportation aircraft were utilised.³² The WTCAF's air transport and search and rescue brigade is co-located at Lanzhou-Xiaquanying with the Lanzhou PLAAF Base, operating a contingent of passenger-transport aircraft and medium-lift helicopters; and an air transport division – the 4th – is based at Chengdu-Qionglai. The 4th reports to WTCAF HQ but, with its mixture of roughly 60 Y-9 and Y-20 airframes the largest concentration of airlift in the PRC, is in reality a strategic asset not only factored into the Joint Island Landing Campaign but attesting the regimes vulnerability to Uighur or Tibetan secession.

The airlift of WTC troops to the Kavkaz 2020 exercises in Russia's southern Astrakhan region marked the first PLAAF transnational airlift for heavy equipment using the Y-20 (pictured). The PLAAF has also used its Y-20s, which are routinely sighted at WTC airfields, to deliver supplies to China's near abroad, during the Covid-19 pandemic for example.³³

The PLAAFAC operates its own organic lift capability in the form of a transport brigade, primarily for training purposes but also for limited operations.³⁴ In July 2025, a hacker group published files revealing an alleged-Russian initiative to provide the PLAAFAC with battle management software.³⁵ The agreement also discusses Russian provision of sufficient weaponry and equipment to equip an airborne battalion.³⁶ A similar leak in October 2025, cited Chinese plans to purchase Russian air-to-air refuelling tankers.³⁷ Both stories were seen by analysts as unusual given China's indigenous capabilities but were interpreted *prima facie* as corroborating the suggestion that China is preparing for an imminent invasion of Taiwan. These leaks, however, may also have been a political ploy, intended to demonstrate only tacit Russian support for a future invasion of Taiwan at a time when Chinese support for the Russian war economy is coming under scrutiny.

As the most ballistic-centric armed force in the world, the PLA possesses an impressive

range of options for the conduct of firepower strike operations within 1,500 kilometres of the WTC's North-Western border. There exists also a capacity, albeit untested, to effect a limited political outcome in support of the host nation, through the deployment of airborne, air assault or special operations forces. In extremis, however, the restoration of regional stability would necessitate a cross-border ground offensive, the likes of which the PLA has not undertaken since the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War. The final part of this series will therefore examine the ground force component of a hypothetical WTC operational system and discuss how PLA combined arms manoeuvre would likely unfold in the given scenario.

²⁷US Department of the Army, *Chinese Tactics*; Kenneth Allen, *Current Overview of the PLA Air Force's Organizational Structure*.

²⁸CASI, *PLA Aerospace Power*. “

²⁹China army conducts high-altitude manoeuvres amid border tensions with India”, *Global Times*, 07 Jun 2020, [monitoring-bbc.co.uk/product/f201schp](https://www.monitoring-bbc.co.uk/product/f201schp)

³⁰Florian Kriener and Leonie Brassat, *Quashing protests abroad: The CSTO's intervention in Kazakhstan*, *Journal on the Use of Force and International Law*, 2023, Vol. 10, No. 2, 271–298.

³¹US Department of the Army, *Chinese Tactics*.

³²CASI, *PLA Aerospace Power: A Primer on Trends in China's Military Air, Space, and Missile Forces*, 4th Edition, Printed in the United States of America by the China Aerospace Studies Institute July 2024, airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/Other-Topics/2024-07-16%20Primer%204th%20ed.pdf

³³Kenneth W. Allen and Cristina L. Garafola, “70 Years of the PLA Air Force”, 329; United States Department of Defence, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021*, Office of the Secretary of Defence Annual Report to Congress.

³⁴CASI, *PLA Aerospace Power*.

³⁵The Insider, *Documents confirm Russia is helping China develop a system for managing landing operations — potentially for use in a Taiwan invasion*, 14 Aug 2025, theinsider.ru/en/inv/284047