



The Y-20 Participates in Airborne Training for the First Time

OE Watch Commentary: As China modernizes its military, new equipment is being deployed to units across all services and branches. While new fighter jets and ships tend to receive the spotlight, new capabilities are rapidly enhancing other parts of the Chinese military. The accompanying excerpts from Chinese sources show how the PLA Air Force is attempting to transform itself into a “strategic service” (战略性军种) and a core part of this is improving its power projection capabilities, particularly strategic airlift and airborne operations.

China’s Airborne Corps has been reorganized, shifting from three division-level units into a number of brigades. The airborne force has also begun receiving important upgrades, such as China’s domestically produced heavy lift aircraft, the Y-20. While the Y-20 formally entered service with the PLA in July 2016, and participated in the 2017 Military Review held to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of the founding of the PLA, this is the first time it has participated in airborne training. Though exact numbers are unclear, the Y-20 can carry upwards of 100 paratroopers and has roughly double the range of China’s other mainstay military transport aircraft, the Y-9.

During crises in Libya, Yemen and Kyrgyzstan when China needed to evacuate its citizens, it relied on chartered flights to bring them home, although available naval forces participated when possible. With a range over 10,000 kilometers, the Y-20 gives China a truly global lift capability. As more Y-20s are produced and join transport units, they can be expected to begin supporting Chinese forces operating abroad, filling an important gap in China’s strategic power projection capabilities. Additionally, the Y-20 is expected to supplement the Y-9 and imported Russian Il-76 aircraft and be used as the basis for a range of other aircraft types, including airborne early warning and control. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

Source: “战略空军来了！6架运20运输机扎堆机场停机坪, (Strategic Airforce Has Arrived! 6 Y-20 Transports Gather Around the Tarmac),” *Global Times*, 14 May 2018. <https://3w.huanqiu.com/a/a-XDHTCGD1145CFF54A89AC7?p=3&agt=8>

PLA Air Force Y-20 Pilot Teng Hui [腾辉]: For this training, our unit transited unfamiliar airspace, and set up systematic coordinated training with other transport aircraft and airborne units. We set up a difficult set of exercises to strengthen our ability to conduct airborne operations under different conditions and in different environments. By doing so, we improve our aerial “3-Dimensional” force projection.

Source: “运 20飞机与空降兵首次‘实战’ ((Y-20 Aircraft Conducts First ‘Actual Combat’ Training With Airborne Troops),” *CCTV*, 9 May 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzUmOX7_P8k

PLA Air Force Senior Colonel Wang Mingzhi [王明志]: The Y-20 is a large, strategic transport aircraft, and can carry out long distance power projection and high speed, nonstop airborne operations such as parachute and aerial resupply missions. The Y-20 can quickly transport airborne forces to a strategic area, seize an area or for example carry out large-scale airborne operations in the enemy’s rear.

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China - Air Force - Xian Y-20.

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