



Chinese Su-35s Fly Patrols in the South China Sea for the First Time

OE Watch Commentary: On 7 February the Chinese PLA Air Force announced that five Su-35 fighter jets had participated in a joint combat patrol in the South China Sea. This is the first time that the jets, newly acquired from Russia and assigned to the Southern Theater Command, have participated in patrols over the South China Sea. Previously posted photos of the fighters appear to indicate they currently are based at Suixi Air Base, northwest of Zhanjiang in Guangdong province. Video released by the PLA Air Force also showed the aircraft training for low-level flying over the ocean and firing unguided rockets at ground targets.

China finalized a deal for 24 Su-35s in November 2015 after years of negotiation. The first four aircraft were delivered in December 2016. Ten more arrived in China in December 2017. China already possess the J-11B, a derivative of the less-capable Su-27, which has been deployed to Woody Island in the Parcel archipelago southeast of Hainan province. The Su-35's larger internal fuel tanks give it advantages in range, loiter time and performance over the J-11. China has used similar flights to demonstrate sovereignty over its territorial claims. In July 2017 China flew H-6K bombers near Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea.

In an interview with the *Xinhua* state news agency, a military expert and professor at the Air Force Command College, Wang Mingzhi, emphasized that the flight represented the PLA Air Forces' increased focus on realism in training and that they increased the Air Force's long-distance and far seas combat capability. Wang's comments suggest that China's objective in acquiring the Su-35 or other long-range aircraft is not purely about combat capability, but also has to do with the ability to conduct long-range patrols and show Chinese ability to project power over the entirety of the South China Sea. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

Source: “苏-35战巡南海与歼-20列装作战部队的时代含义 (The Significance of Su-35 Combat Patrols in the South China Sea and J-20 Being Commissioned into Service),” *www.81.cn*, 10 February, 2018. http://www.81.cn/zggcdsjd/2018-02/10/content_7941486.htm

In recent years, the Air Force has routinely conducted far-seas training based on the strategic requirements of “integrating air-space capabilities capable of offensive and defensive operations,” and safeguarding state sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

The Air Force will carry out realistic combat patrol operations in the direction of the South China Sea, which will improve Air Force maritime combat capabilities, and also realize the requirements of safeguarding national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

From now on, the Air Force will not only continue to carry out combat patrols but will frequently conduct patrols, making them a new norm in the South China Sea.

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MAKS Airshow 2015, (Russian) Su-35S in Flight.

Source: By Dmitry Terekhov from Odintsovo, Russian Federation (IMG_8624), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MAKS_Airshow_2015_\(20615630784\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MAKS_Airshow_2015_(20615630784).jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0.