



Is the Chinese Air Force Ramping up for Further Action Following the 2017 Doklam Standoff?

OE Watch Commentary: The 2017 Doklam standoff between Chinese and Indian troops, according to the follow extracts, seems to have sparked a series of upgrades and increased activity for the Chinese Air Force in Tibet. As the author explains in this opinion piece from India, “This is part of a pattern of China stepping up its military presence in the region in the aftermath of the bitter standoff with India in the tri-junction area near Bhutan.”

There are several big changes, noted in the article, since the Doklam standoff, which took place between June and the end of August 2017. For example, there was a notable jump in air traffic from October through January. Also, flights that reached the periphery of Tibet in October and December are now extended further, with new flights to Lhasa. There have also been observations of early warning aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, and new testing facilities for China’s most modern and stealth aircraft at certain air facilities, as well as newly extended airport runways and facilities and other upgrades. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: Vinayak Bhat, “Tibet Sees Sharp Jump in Chinese Air Force Activity After Doklam Standoff with India,” *The Print Online*, 14 February 2018. <https://theprint.in/2018/02/14/tibet-sees-jump-in-chinese-air-force-activity-after-doklam-standoff>

The analysis of data of the last one year shows three big changes. First, that in the months of October and December 2017 as well as January 2018 there has been a sudden jump in air traffic. Second, a new flight has been scheduled from Lhasa to Ngari (Shiquanhe) in January. And finally, flights that reached the periphery of Tibet have now been extended up to Lhasa in October and December 2017.

One factor could be that tourism has been subsidized in Tibet and that more cargo is arriving on a daily basis. However, given the modernization and upgradation of the dual-use airports as well as the creation of new heliports by the PLA, there are strong indications of a military preparation that can’t be called a routine affair.

China, which has five operational airports in Tibet, upgraded four of them last year. Two of these are now being used for testing its most modern and stealth aircraft.



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KJ-500: According to the article, at least two KJ-500 AEW aircraft have been observed permanently deployed at the Lhasa Gonggar Airport, the largest airport in Tibet.

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