



## Dedicated OPFOR Unit Helps PLAAF Improve Skills

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted article profiles the PLA Air Forces' (PLAAF) dedicated "Blue Force" air brigade. In the Chinese military, the colors are the opposite of NATO countries, with the "red team" being representing the PLA, and "blue" a notional opponent. The PLAAF takes great pride in this unit as representative of its transformation from an inward focused force, to one that is able to effectively learn from and emulate enemy tactics to become more effective. This air brigade was only made public in 2015 during the annual "Firepower" [火力] exercise. While the PLA ground force also have a brigade size dedicated "blue team," its profile is much higher and it appears in media more frequently. Other services have smaller teams that are even more camera-shy.

Based at the Flight Test and Training Center [飞行试验训练基地] in Cangzhou, Hebei province, the PLAAF blue team falls under the Central Theater Command. The article notes that the OPFOR team is equipped with China's most advanced fighter aircraft. While unspecified, this likely includes the advanced variants of the J-10 interceptor, the J-20 stealth fighter aircraft, the Su-30 and its Chinese-produced copy the J-16, as well as newly purchased Su-35 aircraft. In addition to training with air units cycled through Cangzhou and helping test new aircrafts capabilities, the OPFOR unit also participates in annual large-scale OPFOR exercises with other branches and services. This includes both the "Red Sword" [红剑] and "Blue Shield" [蓝盾] exercises. "Red Sword" is a comprehensive test of the PLAAF's ability to conduct a campaign. "Blue Shield" tests the PLAAF's Air Defense brigades' ability to successfully defend objectives.

The brigade also brings in outside experts on various topics to enhance the realism of their training. In one instance, when working to simulate an "enemy air to air missile" the unit sought the input of the "chief designer of a certain aircraft." From context, this is very likely Yang Wei, lead designer of the J-20.

Over the course of the past three years Chinese media has been granted much greater access to PLA OPFOR units across the PLA Ground Forces, Air Force, Navy and Rocket Force than in previous years. At the same time, the tempo of confrontation exercises and their attention to realistic scenarios has been increasing. Instructed by senior Chinese Communist Party officials to rapidly improve the capabilities of the PLA, these moves indicate a military-wide embrace of opposition force training as a way of enhancing the PLA's readiness. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

**Source:** "飞行蓝军的思考 | 从研究队友到研究对手的转变 (Reflections on the PLAAF Blue Force — Transforming from Learning from Your Team to Learning From the Enemy)," *PLA Daily*, 8 January 2019. [http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2019-01/08/content\\_9398616.htm](http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2019-01/08/content_9398616.htm)

*In the spring of 2018, after several years of training, the Blue Army traveled west to Yangguan [阳关] (a remote desert area in western China), and began a confrontation exercise with an unidentified Air Force brigade.*

*The significance of this exercise is extraordinary. In the past, they participated in opposition training as part of a larger group of different units. This exercise marked the first time that the brigade individually held an exercise with another PLAAF unit...*

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*"We need to need to focus on improving combat effectiveness as our only goal" said Wang Long [王龙], the unit commissar. Before departing, he made two demands of pilots participating in the exercise. "First, you must teach you colleagues in the brigade everything you learn from the exercise without holding anything back; Second, we must make it clear that our purpose is not to demonstrate our skill to other units, but to give them the full sense of fighting a real enemy."*

*Facts have proved that both sides of the exercise benefited a lot from this attitude.*



J-20 fighter.

Source: by emperornie, CC BY-SA 2.0, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chengdu\\_J-20#/media/File:J-20\\_fighter\\_\(44040541250\).cropped.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chengdu_J-20#/media/File:J-20_fighter_(44040541250).cropped.jpg).

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