



# China's Rocket Forces Conduct Readiness Training

**OE Watch Commentary:** China is testing its Rocket Forces' combat readiness through opposition force (OPFOR) exercises involving special forces. This February an unidentified Rocket Force OPFOR team conducted drills in a snow-covered mountainous part of China where temperatures reached -20 °C.

While this accompanying excerpted article is written in an approved style meant to focus on the contributions of individuals rather than the unit training itself, it provides some useful details. First, it further emphasizes the importance of OPFOR training across all Chinese services, including the Rocket Force. While the 2nd Artillery, and its reorganized form the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF), maintained an OPFOR training base in northeastern China, it appears that more units are being exposed to the training and the testing itself has become stricter. The article also suggests that this special forces team travels around China conducting exercises with various units, in addition to less frequent set piece training where a unit travels to a designated training area or live fire range.

The focus on special forces is also noteworthy. Chinese media previously revealed the existence of the PLARF's "Sharp Sword" [利刃] unit, though others likely exist. There appears to have been an increase in special forces' participation in OPFOR training. Special forces are considered to be a fundamental part of Rocket Force operations both as a defense against enemy special forces operating within Chinese territory and operating in some capacity within enemy territory, helping to call in and evaluate strikes.

Interestingly, the special forces team appears to draw heavily on soldiers who have served in conventional missile launch units elsewhere in the Rocket Force, perhaps with the mindset that the blue force (OPFOR in China) should fully understand normal Rocket Force doctrine. The PLA Rocket Force is an integral part of most PLA offensive campaigns. Adding realism to exercises and increasing the tempo the drills—especially an OPFOR component to help launch units better prepare for threats, will undoubtedly contribute to their operational effectiveness. **End OE**

**Watch Commentary (Wood)**

*“Only when I joined the blue force did I understand that being skilled at fighting arts isn't enough, especially if a war breaks out, you have to use your head, and use technology.”*



Graphic by Peter Wood  
 Recreated from CCTV13 video footage  
 "PLA Rocket Force OPFOR 'Blue Force'"

**Source:** “火箭军某蓝军部队严寒条件下进行特战训练 (Rocket Force OPFOR Carries Out Special Forces Drills in Extreme Cold),” *Xinhua*, 4 February 2019. [http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-02/04/content\\_4835817.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-02/04/content_4835817.htm)

*This is the account of a reporter accompanying a special operations OPFOR element and participated in a confrontation drill in extreme cold conditions.*

*Zhang Tan [张坦], commander of the special forces element said “Rocket Force red vs blue confrontation exercises are non-contact, as is the special forces’ sabotage operation. For this exercise, if the defending ‘red team,’ discovers the ‘blue’ special forces team they will be counted as killed. In order to complete the sabotage mission, the team members must develop a strong skill and extraordinary will.”*

*This young commander originally served with an (unidentified) “new type” missile brigade in the Rocket Force. He was a missile launch battalion [弹发射连] commander and served in training roles and as a staff officer in a combat support unit. In 2016, he and his missile brigade came [to the training area] to participate in a confrontation exercise. As a member of the “red force,” he advised the group and made a good account of himself.*

*Now he is confident in his skills and leads the “blue force” special forces team visiting guided missile units across China to help sharpen their skills.*

*Sun Jintao [孙晋涛] is a squad leader in the unit. He joined the PLA from a military school in 2013, and is both of high character and a skilled mixed martial artist. While skillfully operating the special combat equipment he carried with him, he said: “Only when I joined the blue force did I understand that being skilled at fighting arts isn't enough, especially if a war breaks out, you have to use your head, and use technology.”*

*As soon as he finished speaking, he and his teammates exchanged a few hand signals. In an instant, he grabbed his heavy rucksack and quickly jumped over a hillside and moved to the front to hide.*

*Under a few big trees, Rong Chenglin [荣成林], dressed in a white snowsuit, was lying motionless in the snow, blending in with the surrounding environment. Through the special reconnaissance equipment he carried, he observed and judged the surrounding situation and slowly approached the target accompanied the other team members.*

*Rong came from the “1st Conventional Missile Brigade” [常规导弹第一旅] (China's first such unit established in the early 1990s). He has traveled to the Gobi Plateau with the missile troops (for live fire exercises) and into the jungles of the South, and has directed command post defense operations during previous exercises.*

*He has totally switched roles from defense to offense like today's sabotage attack, becoming special forces squad leader, and writing up a series of targeted reconnaissance tactics that have been adopted by special forces elements...*

*Last year, during the Rocket Forces' confrontation exercise, these blue team officers and soldiers who were special in the special skills, cleverly used the night-time conditions to quietly approach the “enemy force” and carry out precision harassment and planting traps, inflicting losses and hindering the enemy missile brigade.*