



New Chinese Two-Seat Carrier-based Fighter Enters Next Phase of Testing

OE Watch Commentary: Reporting in official Chinese media indicates that a new variant of China's J-15 carrier-based fighter jet is likely undergoing testing with the PLA Navy. The new aircraft has been variously called the J-15D and J-15S. Similar variants are typically designated S for "shuang" [双], two-seat.

Beyond the additional seat, the new variant incorporates a number of other noteworthy features. Commenters note that the new fighter uses two indigenously-produced WS-10A engines. Early versions of the J-15 relied on imported Russian engines. While some two-seat aircraft are used for training, other details point toward the likely mission set for the new aircraft. Most variants of the J-15 have rails on the wingtips for weapons, but images of the new two-seater appear to include electronic countermeasures pods similar to the Russian-designed "Khibiny" series. China has also deployed Su-35s, Su-30s, and J-16s (a copy of the Su-30) with similar modules. In the accompanying excerpted article, Wei Dongxu, a frequent media commentator on military issues, suggested that the second seat position could be for a dedicated specialty. This might include a role such as a weapon systems officer or electronic warfare officer, though there is insufficient information to be certain.

The creation of a dedicated role would fit with observable trends. Chinese military writings emphasize the importance of electronic warfare to improving the survivability and effectiveness of aircraft, and new jamming pods have been shown on JH-7A fighter bombers, H-6 bombers, and even UAVs in recent years.

The J-15 itself has faced several hurdles, including two high-profile crashes due to technical problems, and insufficiently powerful engines. This has led to speculation that an entirely new aircraft would be developed (possibly based on the J-31 stealth fighter). Regardless of the J-15's final fate, creation of a dedicated carrier-based electronic warfare variant and attendant pilot specialties will help the PLA Navy move toward a more modern and effective carrier aviation force. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

Source: "Two-seat J-15 fighter jet boosts carrier capability: experts," *China Military Online*, 13 December 2018. http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-12/13/content_9377182.htm

A modified two-seat variant of the J-15 fighter jet was spotted at a Chinese aircraft carrier training base in a recent TV program, suggesting the carrier-based warplane is already being tested and expected to greatly expand the carrier's combat capability with electronic warfare equipment that one pilot cannot manage.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy only operates the single-seat J-15 fighter jet on the Liaoning aircraft carrier at the moment, but military analysts predict the two-seat variant of the warplane would be able to join the ranks within two years.

The new fighter jet, which resembles the J-15 but with a larger cockpit, was seen parked in a hangar at an unspecified Chinese carrier-based aircraft training base in a Sunday China Central Television (CCTV) program.

CCTV's website, cctv.com, published a separate report on Tuesday titled "China's most mysterious carrier-based fighter jet quietly appears, greatly accelerating the pace of aircraft carrier's combat capability," saying the aircraft in the program is a modified two-seat version of the J-15.

The variant might already be undergoing tests with the PLA Navy, the cctv.com report said.

It is painted with military camouflage instead of the flight test color, which further supports the speculation, military experts said.

Modifying the single-seat J-15 into a two-seat version can greatly increase the combat capability of the fighter jet and the aircraft carrier, cctv.com reported.

The new aircraft can also conduct electronic jamming missions, the report said.

In April, photos of the variant equipped with wingtip electronic warfare pods surfaced online, but their authenticity could not be verified.

A single pilot cannot manage to fly the jet and engage in complicated electronic battles at the same time, Wei Dongxu, a Beijing-based military expert, told the Global Times on Wednesday.



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