



China and Pakistan Hold 8th “Shaheen” Joint Air Exercise

OE Watch Commentary: China recently held the eighth of its “Shaheen” joint air exercises with Pakistan. The exercises are named after the Shaheen falcon native to South Asia.

The exercises included Pakistan Air Force Mirages, Chinese-built J-7s, and JF-17 fighters. Chinese Air Force (PLAAF) and PLA Naval Aviation aircraft including J-11s, J-10Cs and J-7A fighter-bombers participated. This was the J-10C’s first appearance. An upgraded version of the J-10 multi-role fighter that joined the PLAAF in 2006, the “C” variant includes important upgrades to avionics and defensive systems, making it a much more effective fighter.

While few details of the particulars of the training are available, the inclusion of elements from PLA Naval Aviation is noteworthy, as joint PLAAF-Navy exercises are relatively rare.

Dissimilar air-to-air training is relatively new for Chinese pilots, and the PLAAF has only conducted joint training with a small number of countries, mostly after 2014. Since 2015, the PLAAF has participated in “Falcon Strike” joint exercises with the Royal Thai Air Force. The other major exercise, held with Russia, is called “Aviadarts.”

The Chinese military refers to these “named exercises” as brands [品牌] and according to the article, considers Shaheen to be similar to its own domestic series of combined air training. Most prominent of these are the “four key training brands” (四大品牌): The “Golden Helmet” air-to-air competition, “Golden Dart” [金飞镖] air-to-ground attack competition, “Blue Shield” [蓝盾] air-defense exercise and Red Sword [红剑] system-of-systems confrontation exercise.

These exercises give Chinese pilots the ability to test their aircraft against modern Western aircraft similar to those fielded by China’s likely adversaries in a future conflict. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



Graphic by Peter Wood.

“The Shaheen series has become a real combat training brand of the PLAAF, effectively deepening and promoting the cooperation and exchanges between the two air forces.”

Source: “中巴空军在中国边境举行联合训练 (China and Pakistan Conduct Joint Training in a Border Area),” PLAAF Weixin account (kj81cn), 23 August 2019 http://www.guancha.cn/military-affairs/2019_08_23_514966.shtml

According to the PLA Air Force’s Public WeChat account “Air Force News” (ID: kj81cn) on August 23, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and Pakistan Air Force began a joint training exercise in northwest China. This is the 8th time that the Chinese and Pakistani air forces have held the “Shaheen” [雄鹰] joint training exercise. The exercise between the China and Pakistan Air Force is an annual routine training and is not directed against third parties.

The Chinese Air Force sent multiple types of aircraft such as the J-10C, J-16, the J-7A and Early Warning Aircraft. Ground units such as surface-to-air missiles, radars, airborne and communications also participated. PLA Naval Aviation units also participated. The Pakistani Air Force also sent multiple types of aircraft including JF-17 and Mirage fighters as well as their own Early Warning Aircraft to participate in the training. and the Chinese Navy Air Force sent aircraft to participate in the joint training of the China-Pakistan Air Force.

For this 8th joint training, the air forces of China and Pakistan have taken the entire process of back-to-back systems confrontation, highlighting operational command, systems operations, and research on other difficult issues, included larger numbers of troops and additional elements aimed at mutual learning to enhance the two countries’ level of realistic air force combat training level ability to use air power to achieve victory.

China and Pakistan are connected by mountains and rivers and have developed into “all-weather” friendly neighbors since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1951, and the two peoples enjoy a profound traditional friendship. The air forces of China and Pakistan have maintained friendly and cooperative relations and have carried out a series of practical exchanges and cooperation in recent years. The two countries conducted the first Shaheen joint exercise in March 2011 and have since organized eight exercises so far. The Shaheen series has become a real combat training brand of the PLAAF, effectively deepening and promoting the cooperation and exchanges between the two air forces.