

---

## **CHINA STRENGTHENING AIR DEFENSES WITH EYE ON INDIA, SAYS STATE MEDIA**

-

22.02.2018

---

CNN, 22 Feb 2018

Border tensions between China and India could again flare-up, say analysts, following a report in Chinese state media detailing the country's build-up of air defense capabilities close to its western frontier.

According to a Global Times report, reposted on the English version of the People's Liberation Army's website Tuesday, China is upgrading air defense in its Western Theater Command -- the strategic area covering security along the country's mountainous far western border -- "in order to confront any threat from India."

The article notes that images of Chinese J-10 fighter jet and J-11 fighter jets conducting aerial combat training exercises in western China were released by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), on February 13, two days before the traditional Lunar New Year holiday.

"With India importing new jets, China will continue strengthening its fighter jets in the Western Theater Command," military expert Zhongping Song was quoted as saying.

The announcement is an important signal after last summer's territorial standoff between the two countries in Doklam, near the borders of India, China and Bhutan, analysts say.

Speaking to CNN, Kanti Prasad Bajpai, the director of the Centre on Asia and Globalization at Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, said the article could be interpreted as China signaling to India that Doklam "isn't over" and that India shouldn't "get too complacent."

"It's fairly clear they (the Chinese) are trying to send a message in the post-Doklam period about their resolve to be strong," said Bajpai.

According to M. Matheswaran, a retired Indian Air Force marshal who previously commanded forces in India's northeast, China's J-11 fighter jets have been in use for at least five years in the Tibetan area, and therefore the timing of the media report may be viewed as a "hint."

"It's not India threatening China, it's that they're threatening India," said Matheswaran. "I don't think India has the force size to threaten China at the moment."

The J-11 jets are China's answer to India's Sukhoi-30 fighters, which are Russian in origin. While the Chinese report claims the J-11 are "3.5 generation jets" and outclass India's third generation jets, Matheswaran said that both sides are in actual fact operating "fourth-generation jets."

Earlier this month, China announced its newest domestic stealth fighter jet, the fourth-generation J-20, was combat ready.

Seen as China's answer to US F-22 and F-35 stealth fighter jets, the J-20 is intended to improve the air force's overall fighting ability.

A spokesperson for India's Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on the report, saying they only comment on official statements from the Chinese government.

### Territorial flare-ups

The newest media reports are just the latest step in a decades-long contest between the two rivals for dominance in South Asia, and come at a time of steadily deteriorating ties, say analysts, who point to Chinese investment in countries in the Indian Ocean like the Maldives and Sri Lanka, and Chinese frustration with India's unwillingness to join its One Belt One Road (OBOR) development initiative as recent points of contention.

In 2017, the two countries were involved in a tense months-long border dispute in Doklam -- a thin strip of land bordering both countries and Bhutan, in the Himalayas. Though not a part of Indian territory, the area is close to the "chicken's neck," a strategic corridor that serves as a vital artery between Delhi and its far northeastern states.

The stand-off was sparked after Bhutan accused China of constructing a road inside its territory in "direct violation" of treaty obligations. China, which does not have formal diplomatic relations with Bhutan, denied the accusation, contending that Doklam is part of Chinese territory.

Beijing accused India of sending troops into Bhutan, further escalating the dispute and resulting in both sides temporarily upping their military presence in the region.

---

Kaynak/Source: