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Modern Chinese Warplanes: Chinese Air Force – Combat Aircraft and Units

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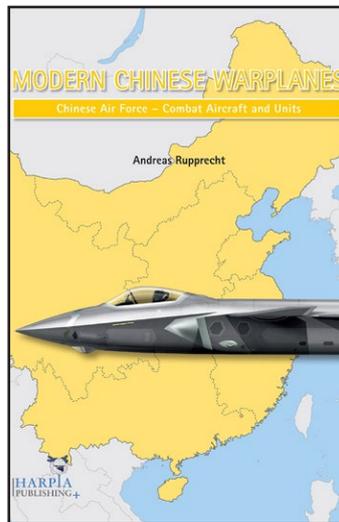
Reviews

changes that can improve rapid decision-making capabilities in democracies at a time when authoritarian regimes have greater leverage in employing political warfare.

The detailed case studies – together with the excerpts from 40 interviews conducted with experts and practitioners both in the US and in other countries – demonstrate the authors' meticulous work. Evidence is skilfully combined throughout the study and each component of political warfare is supported with real-life examples. This study deserves to be a reference book for those interested in political warfare in action. However (and ironically helped by the success of this study), there is a risk that new terms – such as 'political warfare' – are being developed and applied in response to each new conflict. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, 'political warfare' is the third term used to describe the behaviour of Russia, China, Iran and Daesh – other, closely related labels have been 'hybrid warfare' and 'grey-zone warfare'. Perhaps a more cautious approach to the use of these labels is needed – one which conceptually captures contemporary behaviour but is less sensational than the ideas evoked by 'political warfare'. ■

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Modern Chinese Warplanes: Chinese Air Force – Combat Aircraft and Units

Andreas Rupprecht
Harpia Publishing, 2018

The Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) is a crucial and much under-studied element in Western defence and security discourse. While the rise of China as a global economic and political power is regularly cited as one of the defining trends of international politics over the coming decades, the modernisation of its armed forces is usually only discussed with relation to specific equipment purchases or as context for discussions of potential flashpoints such as Taiwan or the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Part of the reason for this is that, aside from displays of modern hardware at increasingly frequent airshows, arms exhibitions and military exercises, China prevents many details on the actual nature of reforms and capability growth within its armed forces from being released. Andreas Rupprecht's

book, *Modern Chinese Warplanes: Chinese Air Force – Combat Aircraft and Units*, therefore, is notable for its attempt to provide a genuinely comprehensive overview of PLAAF modernisation and capabilities, which is particularly rare for publications that rely on open-source data.

Modern Chinese Warplanes is a new edition of a book first published in 2012, which has been almost totally rewritten to keep pace with the rapid changes within the PLAAF since then. It first examines the notable historical phases of the PLAAF's development, from the period following the Second World War to the present, and provides an overview of the dynamics of each one. This is welcome, especially given the intimate relationship between national-level political developments and the PLAAF within the rigid Communist Party-controlled system, and is kept concise to allow the reader to move on swiftly to the main substance of the book.

Chapter 3 is a detailed examination of each of the major combat aircraft and support types flown by the PLAAF, and how they differ from the predominantly Soviet and later Russian aircraft from which they have been developed. Each entry covers not only the characteristics and history of the aircraft in question, but also notable variants, weapons options, targeting pods and planned future developments. The limits of open-source information – even after considering that the author has drawn mainly on Chinese-language sources – mean that a fair amount of the detail is, at least, partly speculation and logical deduction. Nonetheless, this is probably as close to authoritative as is possible without access to highly classified information. This is also the case for Chapter 4, which addresses Chinese missile and

precision-guided munition types, with performance details and analogies to Western equivalents unavoidably veering well into the territory of speculation at times, but still providing the reader with an excellent overall picture. Both these chapters, and the book more generally, are filled with high-quality photographs to illustrate aircraft, weapons, stores and unit markings for the reader, which is a great help with such technical subject matter.

In Chapters 2 and 6 Rupprecht provides guidance for researchers for understanding PLAAF unit markings and organisational structures. With few distinctive unit emblems or markings besides special commendations, and a complex numerical code making up the identification numbers of individual aircraft, Rupprecht's work is invaluable for professional and amateur spotters alike who are trying to situate sightings or new equipment configurations within the PLAAF. A detailed description and diagrams also explain the politically entangled and recently reformed structure of the PLAAF within the joint theatre command system which covers all branches of the People's Liberation Army.

Chapter 5 provides an interesting but relatively brief look at the equipment, syllabus changes and general progression in PLAAF training programmes in recent years. The much more ambitious exercise programme being developed under the auspices of Blue Sword and Red Sword, as well as the likely impact of the long-awaited JL-10 advanced jet trainer, are important insights given the extremely demanding tasks expected of pilots operating fourth- and fifth-generation fighter aircraft in complex environments today. However, the comparisons drawn between the PLAAF's training programme and those of competing air forces such as the

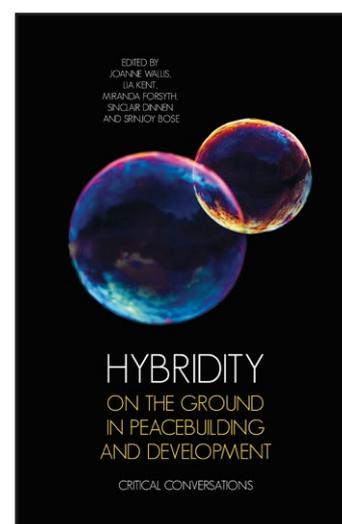
US Air Force, the US Navy, the Russian Air Force and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force could stand to have been fleshed out more beyond the simple syllabus timescale and pilot flight hour measures discussed.

The penultimate Chapter 6 is, along with Chapters 3 and 4, where the enduring value of *Modern Chinese Warplanes* most likely lies. It provides a comprehensive overview of the force structure of the PLAAF as of late-2018, with theatre commands, airbases, units and assigned aircraft, roles and notable features and markings laid out in great detail with photography and graphical illustrations of ranges and deployed locations throughout. As an open-source assessment of where the PLAAF sits as a force at the operational level at the end of the 2010s, this section is unlikely to be bettered and will remain a reference work for years to come.

For those interested in the growth of Chinese military capability, as well as the shifting balance of hard power in the Asia-Pacific, *Modern Chinese Warplanes* is essential reading. The limited availability of information results in somewhat sparse referencing and speculation on technical details. However, this is unavoidable when dealing with the Chinese defence sector. Rupprecht's evident understanding of modern fast jets and weapons systems is blended with Chinese sources to create an authoritative account despite these limitations. ■

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Hybridity on the Ground in Peacebuilding and Development: Critical Conversations

Joanne Wallis et al. (eds)
Australian National
University Press, 2018

‘Hybridity’ has been in vogue in peacebuilding and development circles for over a decade. Described in the introduction to this collection as a combination of formal and informal modes of governance, of liberal and illiberal approaches, of local and global actors, and often forming out of ‘resistance to hegemony’ (p. 4), this book investigates the concept of hybridity through 16 chapters, each speaking to and of this phenomenon in different ways. This diversity is both its strength (in terms of content) and weakness (in terms of structure).

The book is arranged into four sections: theorising about hybridity; hybridity in post-conflict settings; hybridity in relation to security and politics;