

# “Flanker to Flanker”

## How to tell the PLA Sukhois apart!

A news item dated 1 June 2020, had Chinese fighters flying 30-35 kms from Eastern Ladakh, India watching closely. The flight of Chinese fighters some 100-150 kms from the LAC, operating from PLAAF bases at Hotan and Gargunsa, and continued that “the IAF was keeping a watch on such movements”.

On 26 May, a twitter user @detresfa, who specialise in IMINT/OSINT, showed at least 4 Chinese *Flankers* (most likely J-11s) deployed at Ngari Gunsa dual use airport as tensions between India and China were increasing. On 2 June, another twitter user @RupprechtDeino, who specialises in PLAAF equipment, reported the presence of more aircraft at Hotan including some J-16s. Not long after, the Indian Air Force deployed its own *Flankers* (Su-30MKIs) in this theatre.

As more and more *Flankers* are airborne on both sides of the LAC, one can reasonably

ask as to how many *Flankers* do both sides operate and which variants? This article aims to help!

The PLAAF has over the last two decades, evolved considerably and is now equipped primarily with local variants of the *Flanker*. The Chinese *Flankers* trace their lineage to the Su-27SK, which was export version of the Su-27 for China and Vietnam (SK = *Sereynyuy Kommebrcheskiy* or Customer Version). The Su-27SK had a higher MTOW (33,000 kg) compared with baseline Su-27s with a reinforced landing gear but avionics were ‘downgraded’.

In the first half of the 1990s, China bought 48 Su-27s from Russia in two batches, which included 36 Su-27SKs and 12 Su-27UBKs. This was followed by negotiations for local co-production of Su-27SKs, but simultaneously a deal for Su-30s was also being negotiated between China and Russia. An initial order of 40 was

placed and followed by another batch of 40, with first 10 Su-30MKKs being delivered by December 2000.

In July 2002, talks were reportedly on concerning possible sale of 30 Su-30MK2s, a naval derivative of Su-30MKK with a new radar, modified HUD and to be integrated with the Kh31A AShM. The deal was finally signed in August 2003 for 24 Su-30MK2s.

### Shenyang J-11

With negotiation for local production conclusive, the Chinese contracted in 1996 for licenced manufacture of about 200 Su-27SKs to be known as the Shenyang J-11, with Russian avionics, radars and engines. The PLAAF received an initial batch of Russian built Su-27SKs and then CKD kits for further production which began in 1998, but stopped after some 100 aircraft were built. These were the original J-11As, however the PLAAF was reportedly not satisfied with these.

