

# Metal Dragons at High Altitude



## China's Armour in Ladakh

The Sino-Indian stand-off in June 2020 took an ugly turn when 20 soldiers of the Indian Army lost their lives in brutal face off with PLA members. According to open sources, China had earlier also moved mechanised and armoured forces into the Ladakh region and even though precipitous mountainous country is not an ideal place for such conflict, there are several areas which can be considered as terrain for a decisive encounter.

So what can the Chinese Army deploy here? There are five Armoured Fighting Vehicles types that they can deploy in high altitude mountain warfare against Indian forces.

### ZTZ 99A

ZTZ 99 is the most advanced main battle tank presently deployed by the PLA, which was developed to counter advanced MBTs from the West and Russia. Development history of this tank goes back to the late

80s and has its origins from the Type-90 II platform, from which the Type-98G itself was developed and ultimately entered service as the Type-99A. The tank is equipped with a 125 mm smoothbore gun which can fire APFSDS, HEAT and HE-FRAG as well as anti-tank guided missiles. According to Chinese media, the new domestically developed APFSDS can penetrate more than 700 mm of RHAe armour at ranges of upto 2000 meters thus enabling it to counter a wide range of armoured threats. This composite armour is also protected by Explosive Reactive Armour plates, the GL-5 active protection system giving it extra protection from incoming enemy anti-tank missiles. Along with the new fire control system, navigation system, data-link and a battlefield management system, the ZTZ 99A has hunter killer capability as well. As part of PLA's 76 Group, these MBTs have been recently seen in exercises in the Tibetan Plateau.

### ZTZ 96A

While the Type-99 tank is spearhead of the Chinese armoured forces, the Type-96 is its backbone. Like the Type-99, this third generation MBT was developed in the late '80s, the definitive Type-85-IIM inducted under the new name. Equipped with a 125 mm smoothbore gun, it can fire similar ammunition as the Type-99 but according to reports, its firepower does not match that of the Type-99.

The Type-96A is a further upgraded variant which can be deployed at high altitudes and is powered by a 780 hp engine, this platform too protected by explosive reactive armour. These tanks as part of China's 72 Group have also been observed during recent exercises in Tibet.

### ZTQ 15

The Type-15 light tank was developed specifically for operations in the environment and terrain where PLA MBTs have problems in operation and are specially designed for