



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Title: ROTARY WING CAPABILITIES OF
PAKISTAN AND CHINA

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Major highlights of the Fellow's Seminar held on March 17, 2017 are as follows:

- India's security threat perception emanates from both Pakistan and People's Republic of China (PRC) and their nexus against India. This hostile relationship continues to govern the nature of acquisitions by the Indian armed forces, including the rotary wing assets.
- Both China and Pakistan are also expanding their rotary wing capabilities, with an increasing role in the respective military operational doctrines and overall order of battle. Pakistan continues to rely on imports as the country is still deficient in indigenous manufacturing expertise. However, China is moving towards domestic manufacturing through indigenisation of design as well as manufacturing.
- The performance of a helicopter is best at sea level and at colder temperatures. Higher altitude and temperature affect the operation of helicopters. Thus, the manufacturers have to consider the "Hot", "High" and "Humid" conditions of India, China and Pakistan to sell helicopters to these countries. For example, the Indian Air

Force (IAF) could not employ Mi-25/35 gunships for operations in the Kargil War of 1999 due to higher altitude. Therefore, the terrain, environmental conditions and performance of the helicopter will govern the deployment of rotary wing capability by both China and Pakistan.

- Geographical proximity, interactions between these countries and history of conflicts determine their threat perceptions. India had fought wars with both Pakistan and China in the past. The situation is further aggravated by collusion between China and Pakistan against India, especially the construction of the Karakoram highway through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), and Aksai Chin.
- Pakistan joined the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) to counter the spread of communism during the Cold War. Being a member of these US-led treaty organisations, Pakistan received military assistance from the US. Thus, Pakistan managed to induct the rotary wing element as early as 1958 as part of the US aid package.
- Pakistan's employment of helicopters during the 1965 Indo-Pak war led to the reassessment on the part of the US as far as military assistance to Pakistan was concerned. Pakistan had expressed more concern about India while fighting against communism took a secondary priority. This dynamics provided PRC an opportunity to fill the gaps left by the US in Pakistan.
- China's military modernisation and expansion under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) also includes procurement of critical technologies through clandestine and indirect means. However, China has not succeeded in manufacturing a reliable aero-engine, and the top-down control system has been restricting innovation. Despite such pitfalls, helicopters continue to perform a range of tasks for the Chinese armed forces, including in counter-terrorism operations in Xinjiang. Most importantly, the 15th Airborne Corps of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), under direct command of the Central Military Commission (CMC), is a strategic reserve force in which the rotary wing assets of the PLAAF will play an important role.
- Both China and Pakistan have been relying on Russian helicopters for operation in the

high altitude region. Subsequently, China has been working on developing its own indigenous helicopters such as the WZ-10 and WZ-19. The Advanced Heavy Lift helicopter project of China to manufacture a helicopter having a payload capacity of 10 to 15 tons with Russian and Ukrainian support will provide the Chinese armed forces a major boost in rapid deployment of forces and equipment. Pakistan may also procure the same in future to meet its operational requirements.

