



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES  
मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

# Strategic Digest

Vol. 3 | No. 2 | 29 January 2021

**China Unveils Turbojet Powered Armed Drone WJ-700**

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## China Unveils Turbojet Powered Armed Drone WJ-700

On 11 January 2021, China undertook the maiden test flight of its high-altitude, long-endurance (HALE) and high-speed armed reconnaissance remotely-piloted aircraft (RPA), designated *WJ-700*. The RPA, or drone or Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), was first unveiled as a full-sized model by China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC) at the *China 2018* air show in Zhuhai.

*WJ-700* is said to be capable of carrying large payloads and launching large munitions from stand-off ranges on ground, ship and anti-radiation targets. It has a maximum take-off weight of 3,500 kilogrammes and a maximum endurance of 20 hours.



Source: CASIC via Global Times

Like in the case of the currently operational Chinese drones – *CH-5* and *Wing Loong II* – the *WJ-700*'s airframe design also bears a striking resemblance to the American *MQ-9 Reaper*. There is, however, a key difference between the *WJ-700* and the other three RPAs. Whereas the *MQ-9 Reaper*, *CH-5* and *Wing Loong II* are all fitted

with piston or turboprop engines, the *WJ-700* is powered by a turbojet engine.

However, the capabilities of the *WJ-700* are far removed from those of the US Air Force's *RQ-4 Global Hawk* which is also a jet powered RPA. In operation since 2007, the *Global Hawk* has a maximum take-off weight of 14,628 kilogrammes, an endurance of 32-plus hours, and a range of 22,780 kilometres. It was the first RPA to fly non-stop across the Pacific Ocean from a US Air Force base in California to an Australian Air Force base in Edinburgh, Australia.

It is estimated that, by 2024, China would command 25 per cent of the global military-use UAV market, benefiting to the tune of 17 billion yuan (USD 2.6 billion). The publicity department of the People's Liberation Army is expecting total revenue from the sale of military-use drones to exceed 110 billion yuan in the next 10 years.

## China Adopts New Coast Guard Law

The 25th session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) has adopted a legislation to clarify the functions and authority of China's Coast Guard, provide the legal basis for the coast guard's law

enforcement operations, and help the force better fulfil duties and obligations mandated by international treaties.

Set to take effect on 1 February 2021, the new law's most important provision is the explicit authorisation to use "all necessary means" including weapons to protect China's sovereignty and sovereign rights from being infringed or threatened by foreign individuals and organisations at sea. According to media reports, the law authorises maritime law enforcement personnel to use small arms if considered necessary, depending upon the "nature, degree and urgency" of the situation, and employing their own "reasonable judgement". Even deck guns may be used if the situation so demands. At the same time, however, the law recommends that fire be directed at targets above the waterline "as much as possible".



Source: asianmilitaryreview.com

Further, the law permits China's Coast Guard to halt the construction of or destroy structures being built by other countries on Chinese-claimed land features. It also grants the force "broad discretion" to establish temporary exclusion zones and board and inspect foreign vessels in waters claimed by China.

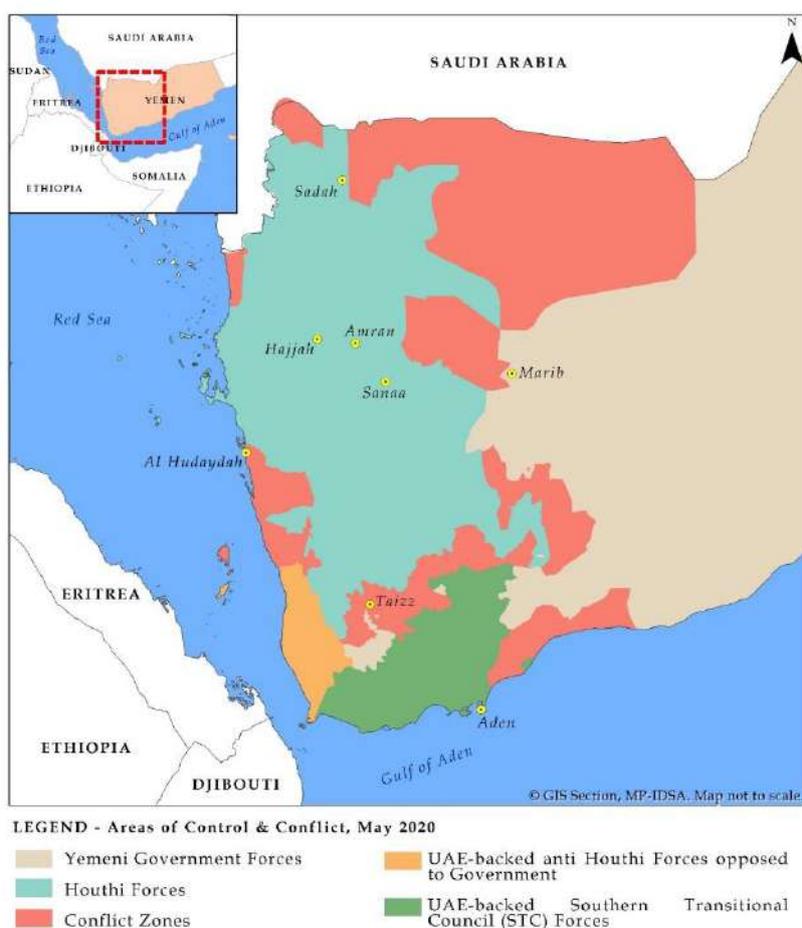
Today, China possesses the world's largest coast guard fleet with 130 vessels, with the newer ships being larger, more capable, and equipped with helicopter facilities, water cannons, and guns ranging from 30 to 76mm. During the course of the last 10 years, China has been increasingly using the coast guard to assert legally invalid sovereign claims and rights in the East and South China Seas. This has resulted in a series of armed incidents and crises in China's relationships with Japan in the East China Sea and with Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea. China did not even relent from its provocative claims and actions after the COVID pandemic broke out in early 2020. Under the circumstances, China's new law granting authorisation to its Coast Guard to resort to armed violence is bound to further vitiate the atmosphere of conflict in East and South East Asia.

## Houthis Designated as Terrorist Group

On 10 January 2020, the Trump administration declared Yemen's Houthi rebels as a "Foreign Terrorist Organisation" for their involvement in terrorist acts, including cross-border attacks threatening civilian populations, damaging infrastructure, and commercial shipping. Announcing the designation, Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also stated his intention to list three top Houthi leaders as 'Specially Designated Global Terrorists'.

Yemen's government as well as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council welcomed the US designation, believing that it would bring an end to Houthi violence. However, Iran, which backs the Houthis, condemned the US move as "doomed to failure". The United Nations has expressed concern that the designation would have implications for the peace talks as well as for the humanitarian efforts underway in Yemen.

Houthis now control most of the north and east of Yemen, including the capital Sanaa. The Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi government is in control of the south of the country, with Aden serving as the temporary capital. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) also controls large territories in the southern part of Yemen.



Saudi-Iran competition has had a significant impact upon the civil war in Yemen. Viewing the Houthis in its southern neighbourhood as a major national security challenge, Saudi Arabia has been supporting the Hadi government. Houthi rocket and drone attacks on Saudi territory have accentuated Riyadh's threat perception. Saudi Arabia and its allies allege that Iran has been supporting the Houthis by providing them political, financial and military support including weapons and training. While rejecting such allegations, Iran

continues to hew to the position that the Houthis should be a part of Yemen's future roadmap.

The United Nations has made several attempts to bring about a ceasefire and resolve the conflict through negotiations between the Hadi government and the Houthis. Its most recent effort was the Stockholm Agreement of December 2018 between the Houthis and the Yemen government, which put a stop to a military offensive on Hudaydah, Yemen's fourth largest city, and alleviated humanitarian suffering. Despite slow progress on the various commitments that the Houthis and the Hadi government made in this agreement, there was promise that the political process might begin to bring an end to the country's internal conflict. The US designation of the Houthis as a terrorist organisation may introduce another hurdle in the path towards peace.