



PLAN Special Mission Aviation Air Base Renovation and Expansion Activities

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Introduction

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Naval Aviation forces have been undergoing a large scale divestment of its shore based aviation capabilities through 2023. However, since then, PLAN Aviation has clearly sought to retain not only its fixed wing anti-submarine warfare (ASW) assets, but also its other shore based special mission aircraft (SMA), notably its intelligence collection aircraft and airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) fleet of KJ-200s and KJ-500s. These aircraft enable the PLAN to conduct modern combined arms tasks such as ASW, supplement a currently non-operational carrier based fixed wing AEW capability, continue to collect electronics intelligence (ELINT) and signals intelligence (SIGINT), and enable further range and jointness when fulfilling air defense and domain awareness tasks in the last PLAN controlled air defense area, the South China Sea. Given the importance of these capabilities, the PLA has been undertaking an effort to expand the land-based facilities which support these aircraft to allow for more airframes to operate from these bases. Since 2021, airfields supporting PLAN SMA in the Eastern Theater Command (ETC) and Northern Theater Command (NTC) have completed or started renovations of their runways or expansions of apron space to enable airfields to house more aircraft or to otherwise continue to generate sorties. Southern Theater Navy (STN) subordinate airfields supporting this type of aviation do not appear to have started renovations within this time frame targeted at supporting SMA.

Eastern Theater Command Airfield Activity

Starting at the southernmost end of the ETC, the Shantou Waisha Air Base, which is likely to be a PLA Air Force (PLAAF) facility but is home to a persistent forward deployed two ship formation of KQ-200s for operations around Taiwan, began taxiway renovations in late winter or early spring of 2023, with overhead imagery from March 2023 displaying taxiways having been under construction for some time. There has been significant clearing of land to the west of this airfield, on the other side of the road from the airfield station's garrison facilities, in preparation for construction going back to 2022, but it is unclear if that is related to the runway and taxiway construction at the airfield. Interestingly, Shantou Waisha Air Base appears to retain its civilian terminal, despite not being a commercial airport. While the PLAAF and PLAN share airfields with civilian airports across the PRC, it is relatively rare for a military facility to retain a civilian terminal that it could otherwise demolish and replace with its own facilities to better support military operations out of these facilities. It is likely that this terminal building may be demolished or modified to suit the PLA's requirements.



China: Shantou Waisha Air Base Undergoing Renovation Construction likely began sometime in 2023

GEO: 232805N/1164801E | MGRS: 50QML 78189 91880 Geographic coordinates are approximate and should not be used for navigation or targeting purposes.



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Moving north to the Ningbo Zhuangqiao Airbase, this facility underwent major renovations to its aprons and added additional hangars for helicopters and sunshades for its fixed wing SMA from 2020 to 2022. Additionally, garrison and other supporting infrastructure was also expanded at this time.



China: Ningbo Zhuangqiao Air Base Undergoing Expansion Construction likely began in 2020

GEO: 295513N/1213419E | MGRS: 51RUP 62146 10797 Geographic coordinates are approximate and should not be used for navigation or targeting purposes.



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China: Ningbo Zhuangqiao Air Base Construction Nearing Completion Renovation likely completed in 2022

GEO: 295511N/1213419E | MGRS: 51RUP 62149 10738 *Geographic coordinates are approximate and should not be used for navigation or targeting purposes.*



Moving North, Shanghai Dachang Air Base underwent a renovation and expansion of its facilities beginning in late 2021 and finishing sometime in late 2022. This facility is likely the home garrison of the Eastern Theater Navy (ETN) SMA division. These construction efforts involved renovating the runway and taxiways and expanding apron space and support facilities to accommodate more SMA airframes as well as constructing more sunshades for these aircraft.



China: Shanghai Dachang Air Base Undergoing Renovation in Late 2021

GEO: 311859N/1212451E | MGRS: 51RUQ 49095 65764 Geographic coordinates are approximate and should not be used for navigation or targeting purposes.



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China: Construction Completed at Shanghai Dachang Air Base in Early 2023

GEO: 311858N/1212451E | MGRS: 51RUQ 49105 65736 *Geographic coordinates are approximate and should not be used for navigation or targeting purposes.*



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As there is some overlap between the Shanghai Dachang Air Base and Ningbo Zhuangqiao Air Base construction activity, ETN SMA aircraft may have had to shuffle between these facilities or operate out of other airfields until Ningbo Zhuangqiao Air Base was completed to the point where operations could have resumed from that facility.

Northern Theater Command Airfield Activity

The two airfields associated with the Northern Theater Navy's Second Aviation Division, Laiyang Air Base and Dalian Tuchengzi Air Base, have both been undergoing expansions of their facilities since early 2022. These two air bases have thus far only been expanding their facilities to host more airframes and have not shown signs of imminent efforts to renovate runways or taxiways, allowing for continued operations out of these airfields. The PLAN is constructing 11 shelters at Laiyang Air Base in addition to its existing six. Dalian Tuchengzi Air Base is home to an ongoing effort to construct 16 aircraft shelters.



China: Laiyang Air Base Construction Construction began in late spring 2022

GEO: 385828N/1203447E | MGRS: 51STA 84572 94784 Geographic coordinates are approximate and should not be used for navigation or targeting purposes.





China: Dalian Tuchengzi Air Base Construction Construction began in early 2022

GEO: 385457N/1211348E | MGRS: 51SUD 46549 08934 *Geographic coordinates are approximate and should not be used for navigation or targeting purposes.*



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Conclusion

While the past several years of construction at ETN SMA airfields has required aircraft to relocate to operate, the NTN SMA airfields appear to have maintained the ability to support operations out of both airfields. While Southern Theater Navy (STN) airfields home to SMA have yet to display signs of expansion or renovation, these construction efforts in the other two coastal theater commands indicate preparations for continued expansion of PLAN shore based ASW and SMA capabilities. Expanding and improving air based ASW and C4ISR capabilities have long been a priority of the PLAN and these facilities improvements are an indication of continued commitment to this goal. Retention and expansion of these capabilities is unlikely to hinder the PLAN's shift towards a carrier aviation centric force in the future.

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