

**Chinese military**

## China moves to counter India with arms sales to Pakistan

Beijing's first export of J-10C jets marks step-up in decades-old arms relationship with Islamabad



Chinese J-10 fighter jets practice a manoeuvre in Islamabad in 2019. China is also selling Pakistan frigates and submarines © Anjum Naveed/AP

**Kathrin Hille** in Taipei, **Farhan Bokhari** in Islamabad and **Benjamin Parkin** in Delhi  
YESTERDAY

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China will deliver 25 J-10C fighter jets to Pakistan within weeks as part of a deal that will bolster Islamabad's military capabilities against mutual rival India.

Beijing's first export of the advanced jets marks a big step-up in its decades-old arms relationship with Islamabad and entails providing [its ally](#) with some of the latest equipment that China's own armed forces are using. China will also broaden its support to Pakistan's navy.

The first batch of the combat aircraft is being tested in Chengdu, the base of its manufacturer Chengdu Aerospace Corporation, according to a journalist at a Chinese military publication.

"They will be transferred to Pakistan once Pakistan air force pilots and technicians have completed an introduction to the aircraft," he said.

Senior officials in Islamabad said the jets would be delivered before the end of the month.

Last week, Chinese and foreign military watchers posted photos and a [video](#) showing several J-10C aircraft flying the colours of the Pakistan air force on social media.

China is also selling Pakistan four Type 054A frigates, the first of which began service

China is also selling Pakistan four Type 034 frigates, the first of which began service in November, and is expected to begin delivery of up to eight Type 041 submarines, its quietest attack submarine, this year.

India, which has been engaged in a [stand-off](#) on its Himalayan border with China for nearly two years, believes the arms deliveries to Pakistan are an attempt to amplify the threat from Islamabad. India shares long land borders with both Pakistan and China.

“There’s a clear strategic nexus between China and Pakistan,” said Brahma Chellaney, a professor of strategic studies at the Centre for Policy Research, a New Delhi think-tank. “That nexus is clearly designed to contain India, to pin India down and keep it preoccupied. That’s the Chinese strategic aim.”

He described the latest arms deals as a significant shift, adding that “China is now selling or transferring its top of the line weapons systems to Pakistan”.

The J-10C aircraft will help Pakistan close the air-power gap with India following New Delhi’s acquisition of 36 Rafale fighter jets from France. “This is our response to [India’s] Rafale,” Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed, Pakistan’s interior minister, said when he revealed the J-10C agreement in December.

The new Chinese ships would boost Pakistan’s capabilities in the Indian Ocean, an area of strategic importance for Beijing.

“They want Pakistan to have naval bases ready that China could also use, and to be able to protect them,” said Siemon Wezeman, an arms trade expert at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

“The Chinese have shown that they will sell to Pakistan when others won’t. I suspect that China is very easy to persuade [to sell], not only for commercial but also for political reasons,” he said.

India is also planning a naval expansion. The navy’s deputy chief said late last year that it aimed to increase the size of its fleet from 130 vessels to 170 by 2027, including four frigates being developed in partnership with Russia.

Despite the upgrades, Chellaney said the Himalayan stand-off was draining India’s defence resources. “The Indian navy is supposed to be undergoing modernisation, but the modernisation is happening at a relatively slow pace, largely because of the land military confrontations that India faces,” he said.

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