

First PLA Rocket Force CJ-100 Unit Likely Identified

There is a limited body of evidence that strongly suggests the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) is equipping its 656th Brigade with the CJ-100 cruise missile (alternatively known as the DF-100). This assessment is based on an image of a probable CJ-100 transporter-erector-launcher (TEL) located at the 656th Brigade's home garrison in Laiwu, Shandong.



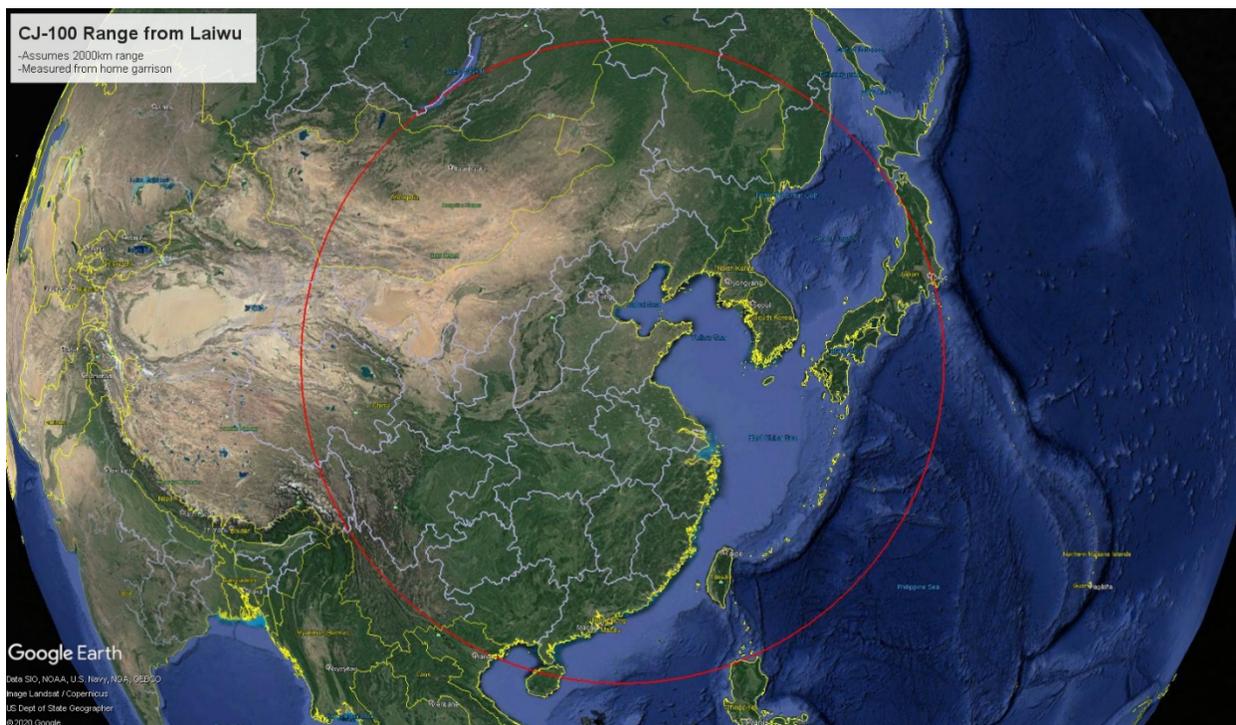
Figure 1: CASI has identified a vehicle located at the 656th Brigade's home garrison in Laiwu that is nearly identical to these known CJ-100 TELs featured in the People's Republic of China's October 2019 military parade.

Many non-authoritative references suggest that the PLARF's 623rd and or the 635th Brigade are also equipped with CJ-100s because personnel from these units participated in the October 2019 military parade. Although it is possible that one or both brigades have also received CJ-100 cruise missiles, CASI is currently unable to corroborate such reports with direct evidence. Given the lack of direct evidence suggesting that the 623rd or 635th Brigade is equipped with CJ-100 cruise missiles, the 656th Brigade may be the first operational unit to receive CJ-100s.

By using the known PLARF timelines for introducing other types of new missiles into the force, it may be possible to project when the 656th Brigade will reach full operational capability (FOC). PRC media reporting suggests that the first PLARF unit to receive a new type of missile typically spend four to

five years as a testing and training unit within an operational base before converting to an official brigade. The PLARF will then gradually equip the brigade with a full complement of equipment over the span of two to four years before publicizing the unit.

PRC media reporting states that the 656th Brigade achieved “brigade” status sometime in late 2019. This suggests the unit has already been upgraded from a testing and training unit to a full brigade. If the 656th Brigade is in fact being equipped with CJ-100 cruise missiles and follows previous trends for a new missile system introduced into the force, it may reach FOC sometime in 2022 or 2023.



Assuming a maximum kinematic range of 2,000km, A CJ-100 equipped unit in the Laiwu region would be able to strike targets anywhere in Taiwan, Korea, and most of Japan from its home garrison. If the CJ-100 can target maritime targets, the 656th Brigade would also be able to threaten vessels well outside the first island chain north of the Babuyan Channel up to the Sea of Japan.

Although the CJ-100 cruise missile does not provide the PLARF with the ability to strike new targets previously beyond the range of conventional missile systems, it does provide the PLARF with a multi-axis attack capability against some targets previously only within range of ballistic missiles. A PLARF capability to conduct simultaneous time-on-target strikes consisting of both CJ-100 cruise missiles and DF-21 or DF-26 ballistic missiles almost certainly complicates US and partner nation missile defense considerations.

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