



EARLY PRC MEDIA RESPONSES TO THE BOEING F-47

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In March 2025, the U.S. Air Force announced that the contract award for the Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) platform would go to Boeing, which will develop and manufacture the F-47 sixth-generation fighter aircraft. Described by the Air Force Chief of Staff as the “crown jewel” of the NGAD family of systems, the F-47 represents a significant advance over the fifth-generation F-22, with cutting-edge stealth, sensor fusion, and long-range strike capabilities.¹ These capabilities will be critical in countering the increasingly sophisticated anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities that China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) would employ in a potential future conflict over Taiwan.

PRC media has primarily responded to the news of the F-47 by attempting to downplay its significance and project an air of calm confidence for its domestic audience. This is a common strategy for state media outlets, which are quick to play up perceived domestic successes (see, for example, CASI’s previous report on the state media response to Pakistan’s use of a PRC fighter to shoot down Indian aircraft²) while hand-waving perceived setbacks. While some commenters, such as former PLA general Jin Yanan, have complained that the F-47 represents the U.S. “reaffirming its hegemony to the outside world” by using the sixth-generation aircraft to maintain its superiority,³ most official commentary has sought to describe the F-47 as not being a significant threat to PLA ambitions. Criticisms of the F-47 are varied and somewhat scattershot, but include its high cost, questions around when it will achieve full operational capability, and its reliance on rare earth metals. Finally, while some media outlets did acknowledge the F-47’s impressive reported capabilities, other commenters attempted to downplay both the F-47’s known capabilities and likelihood of being deployed.

1. PRC media has emphasized the program’s high cost and downplayed capabilities

Some official media reports noted the likely high cost of the F-47, as well as its prolonged development timeline. A story from the official news agency *Xinhua* noted that the program has experienced controversies over its cost, necessity, and lack of technological innovation, all of which led it to be paused in 2024.⁴ While the F-47 is promised to be cheaper than the F-22, *Xinhua* cites other reports that indicate that it would be the most expensive aircraft in history, with a total cost as high as several hundred billion dollars over the course of the program.⁵ The *Chongqing*

Morning Post, referencing *CCTV* and *Xinhua* subsidiary *Reference News*, also referred to the F-47's costs as "exorbitant" and questioned when it would actually enter service.

Some outlets were also quick to dismiss the F-47's proposed capabilities as less than game-changing. Prominent military commentator Zhang Xuefeng, speaking to the *Chongqing Morning Post* described the U.S. Air Force's unveiling of the F-47 as reflecting a lack of confidence, given funding constraints and a lack of technological innovation that could lead to a delayed and flawed final product.⁶ Casting doubt on whether the F-47 would ever see the light of day, he pointed to a mix of high costs and budget cuts, a lack of the trust among U.S. allies needed to help shoulder those costs, and technological uncertainties.⁷ In a second appearance in the national state paper *Global Times*, Zhang further elaborated that, while the F-47 did appear to have the basic characteristics of a sixth-generation combat aircraft,ⁱ its design appeared to show a lack of technical sophistication, namely in its use of canards.^{ii,8} Likewise, the Fujian-based *Strait Herald* quoted a senior Taiwanese Air Force official who stated that the F-47's development timeline is too long, and would mean the fighter may already be out of date by the time it is deployed.⁹

This stance, however, was not universal. In most articles, state media did tacitly acknowledge advances in areas such as range, stealth, and manned-unmanned networking, oftentimes by quoting U.S. officials rather than directly making these statements themselves.¹⁰ The *Chongqing Morning Post* states that the F-47 represents significant leaps in range, namely its ability to strike the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea from more remote bases, its stealth and ability to counter the latest PLA radars, and its incorporation of human-machine synergy. Further, military expert Jin Yinan acknowledged the abilities of the F-47 but stated that the entire project was only necessary because the U.S. sensed that it was losing its technological lead to China, forcing it to embark on an enormously expensive project. In Jin's opinion, "with the rapid development of aviation industries in countries like China, the U.S. Air Force's capabilities were not only failing to maintain a lead over competitors but were at risk of being overtaken—creating an aviation equivalent of America's "Sputnik moment." In this context...the U.S. must grit its teeth and swiftly launch the sixth-generation fighter program, even if it meant cutting costs elsewhere."¹¹

Finally, state media noted that reports about when the F-47 will be operational are incongruent: according to *Xinhua*, official U.S. timelines state that the F-47 will first fly in 2028, but U.S. media is reporting that it will not be operational until the 2030s.¹² Likewise, nationalist media outfit *Guancha* noted that a Boeing executive has stated that the F-47 would fly sooner than expected, but also claimed that the company had a history of not delivering aircraft on time.¹³

2. PRC media took the opportunity to criticize U.S. company Boeing

PRC media was quick to direct criticism at Boeing, claiming it had a history of financial issues and a history of production delays. State newspaper *China Youth Daily* expressed surprise at Boeing's selection for the project,¹⁴ and Shanghai media outlet *The Paper* claimed that the

ⁱ These included a lack of vertical tailfin for stealth, as well as a flattened nose and use of a lifting body design. More generally, Zhang identified stealth capabilities, hypersonic flight, networked and intelligent systems, and advanced weaponry as hallmarks of 6th Generation combat aircraft.

ⁱⁱ This focus on the canards may also be a means of signaling the superiority of China's technology, since photos of China's own 6th-generation fighter do not appear to show canards.

decision may have been made less due to the superiority of the F-47 design and more to support Boeing financially.¹⁵ Chengdu media outlet *Red Star News* echoed this sentiment, saying that the selection of Boeing was like “sending coal in the snow” [雪中送炭] (i.e., timely help in its hour of need), and may have also been related to the U.S. government’s desire to avoid becoming overly reliant on Lockheed Martin. The article claimed that Boeing has recently faced numerous issues, including cost overruns with the KC-46 tanker, delayed deliveries, and financial troubles, and stated that observers doubted whether Boeing was up to completing the task.¹⁶ Likewise, military commentator Zhang Xuefeng, speaking in the *Global Times*, described Boeing’s ability to carry out the project on schedule as a “massive question mark” [巨大问号].¹⁷

3. Some PRC analysts predicted access to rare earth metals would be a chokepoint

PRC state television outlet *CCTV* also held up the F-47’s likely reliance on rare earth metals as a potential chokepoint, leading to further questions about when the F-47 will be produced. In an article titled, “China strikes back decisively, putting U.S. sixth-generation fighter jets in jeopardy!”, *CCTV* described U.S. government concerns about being cut off from China’s rare earths, with military commentator Wei Dongxu [魏东旭] stating that tariffs will affect U.S. defense firms’ ability to source components from China and the rest of the world.¹⁸

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ENDNOTES

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- ³ “Why Choose Boeing for Sixth-Generation Fighter Development? Jin Yanan: It Exposes the Plight of the U.S. Aerospace Industry” [研发六代机为什么选波音? 金一南: 暴露了美国航空工业的窘迫], *CNR [央广军事]*, 30 March 2025, https://military.cnr.cn/zt/ynjst/wqhg/20250330/t20250330_527118183.shtml.
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- ⁶ “The U.S. sixth-generation fighter F-47: A plane that exists only on paper—when will it take to the skies?” [美国第六代战机 F-47 “纸上”的飞机, 啥时能上天?], *Chongqing Morning Post [重庆晨报]*, 19 May 2025, https://epaper.cqcb.com/html/202505/19/content_493079.html.
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¹⁵ “Military Affairs | Why Did the U.S. Choose Trouble-Prone Boeing for Its Sixth-Generation F-47 Fighter?” [讲武谈兵 | 美官宣六代机 F-47，为什么选麻烦不断的波音？], *The Paper* [澎湃新闻], 24 March 2025, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_30469552.

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¹⁷ “The selection of Boeing faces scrutiny, its design draws criticism, and the U.S. high-profile announcement of the F-47 is deemed “premature”” [选择波音受质疑，外形设计遭吐槽，美高调官宣 F-47 被指“为时尚早”], *Global Times* [环球网], 24 March 2025, <https://news.qq.com/rain/a/20250324A01CY300>.

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