

# IISS

## **Aeroengine concerns thrust Ukraine into broader US–China struggle**

The MS400 turbofan engine is one of a broad range of Motor Sich aerospace engines. At just under four kilonewtons, it provides roughly a 50th of the thrust of the company's larger turbofan engines. The MS400, however, is not intended to power an aircraft. The company's website says it is suited for applications in civilian uninhabited aerial vehicles. In fact, it was designed initially as a cruise-missile powerplant (another term for engine). A version of the MS400 is reported to power the R-360 Neptune anti-ship cruise missile being developed by Ukraine.

Currently, a bid by Chinese firm Skeyrizon for a controlling stake in Motor Sich is the subject of an ongoing legal dispute in Ukraine. Ukrainian authorities are investigating whether the sale will provide a foreign state with access to sensitive technology. The sale has also become ensnared in a wider struggle for influence in Ukraine between Beijing and Washington, reflecting the broader great-power rivalry between them.

China's early cruise missiles, such as the YJ-62 and YJ-63, used turbojet engines since the domestic aeroengine sector was not able to produce a sufficiently small turbofan for such applications. Beijing's first turbofan-powered system was likely the CJ-10 ground-launched cruise missile, which is estimated to have entered service around 2010. While full access to the MS400 would provide China with insight into Motor Sich's design, it is likely that Beijing's own domestic capability has already surpassed this.

The MS400 is, of course, only a small element of Motor Sich's engine portfolio, and China would also gain insight and benefit from access to a broader range of powerplants. China's L-15 advanced jet trainer already uses a Motor Sich product, the AI-222-25 turbofan, while Beijing may also be looking for a more fuel-efficient engine for its Y-20A heavy-transport aircraft, which again Motor Sich could address. Whatever the outcome with regard to Motor Sich, the row will likely be a pattern that is repeated as the United States and China tussle over influence, access to military technology and differing positions on arms exports.

## **What the latest India–China border crisis tells us about Beijing’s broader ambitions**

China’s behaviour along the border with India departs in some respects from Beijing’s customary ‘grey zone’ modus operandi employed elsewhere to change the territorial status quo below the threshold of armed conflict. From early May, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) began launching multiple incursions across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at several locations, while a significant build-up of forces was undertaken to the rear.

Given the scale and duration of PLA operations across a swath of the Himalayas, this was not a spontaneous or low-echelon development. According to media reports, Indian patrols noted the presence of unfamiliar PLA units along the Galwan River shortly before the most serious clashes occurred. Fresh forces may have been redeployed from exercises in Tibet for the purpose of challenging Indian control in disputed parcels of territory.

Given the escalation risks attached to conflict with a nuclear-armed neighbour, President Xi Jinping would certainly have been aware of this activity in his capacity as Chairman of the Central Military Commission. While attention has focused on India’s upgrading of infrastructure in Ladakh as the trigger for China’s move, there is also the timing to consider.

China’s military intrusions across the LAC were a demonstration of power, first and foremost, but Beijing’s likely objective was not territorial annexation, per se, but psychological dominance. Unlike its many disputes in the maritime domain, China has settled most of its land borders through negotiation. The Himalayas are the major exception.

In Beijing’s thinking, China does not have a border dispute with India, it has a frontier – a rolling extension of ‘ethnic’ hinterlands in Xinjiang and Tibet. This can loosely be considered as a continental analogue to the South China Sea, China’s principal maritime frontier. Beyond military considerations or the control of marine resources, China’s activities in the South China Sea serve to ‘condition’ the Southeast Asian coastal states into gradual submission to Beijing. Whenever they weigh actions that Beijing is likely to oppose, they must do so against the possibility of retaliatory Chinese encroachments.

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