

The F-16 vs MiG-21bison imbroglio



Air Marshal Harish Masand queries why there are More Questions than Answers

An analysis of the much-reported air combat between the IAF and PAF on 27 February as a fall-out of the Balakot strike the previous morning, has thrown up a number of theories, conjectures and scenarios particularly with regard to the brief but sharp dogfight between an F-16 against a vintage although upgraded, MiG-21 Bison. Claims and counter-claims have flown thick and fast, perhaps as thick and fast as a modern day aerial engagement between high-speed jets in some numbers.

Very little has been confirmed by the officials concerned on both sides, except for the claim of an F-16 shot down by the IAF as per India's Defence Minister, Ms Sitharaman at a Conclave on 12 March. From the Pakistan side, Prime Minister Imran Khan initially claimed two Indian aircraft as shot down, with two pilots in their captivity. Shortly this turned out to be just one aircraft and one pilot, the newest "hero" of India, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman whose capture and interrogation were soon flashed on social media and TV.

Thereafter, no further information emerged from Pakistan on its claim of the second IAF aircraft and the mysterious second pilot. However, just as I was writing this, I received pictures of some damaged but unfired missiles reportedly carried on Abhinandan's aircraft, as put out by

Pakistani sources. From the Indian side, little has been in public domain, except for the early display of an AIM-120C-S AMRAAM which can only be fired from the F-16, thus confirming the use of this type in this engagement but little to confirm any downing of any F-16.



PAF F-16 of No.9 Squadron ('Griffins')