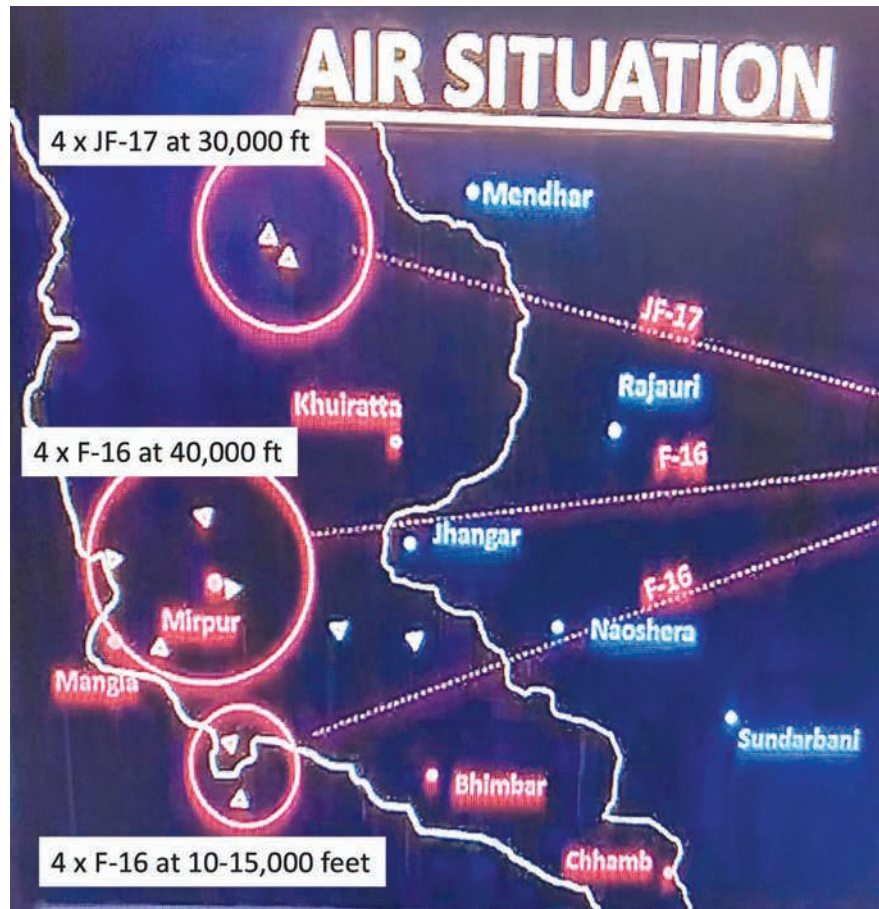


Bison vs Falcon

Sameer Joshi analyses 'that' air combat over Kashmir

Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman of the Indian Air Force's No.51 Squadron flying a MiG-21 Bison, made aviation history around 10.00 hrs on 27 February 2019, when he targeted a formation of Pakistan Air Force F-16s who were engaging IAF Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighters with their AIM-120 AMRAAM beyond visual range missiles. Closing in, he launched a Vympel R-73 heat seeking air-to-air missile at the target over the Lam valley in Nowshera sub sector of south western Jammu and Kashmir, which resulted in the shooting down of a PAF F-16. This was vigorously denied by Pakistani spokespersons, but this brief air combat has since been reported and analysed ad infinitum, well beyond the sub-continent, with claims and denials continuing till today.



What is undeniable is that Abhinandan's MiG-21 was also hit by an AMRAAM missile as he was heading back towards India, having crossed the LOC in pursuit of the F-16 just tens of seconds earlier. He ejected from the stricken aircraft and parachuted to safety, landing 4 km away from the LOC near Horan Kotla village in POK. He was brutally attacked by some locals, before being dramatically handed over to the Pakistan Army.

Abhi's ordeal made him focal point of the developing crisis, when in gross violation of the Geneva convention, the footage of his battered face was intentionally released on Pakistani television and social media by Pakistan Army affiliates shortly thereafter.

