

Falcons over the Karakoram



A decade of ‘Shaheen’ air exercises

Shahin or Shaheen or Shaahiin or francized Chahine (from the Persian: Shāhīn) is a name of Persian origin, referring specifically to the Barbary falcon utilized in falconry. ... In Persian, Shahin literally mean “like a king”, “worthy of a king”, “majestic” or “kingly”.

The Air Forces of Pakistan (PAF or *Pakistan Fiza'ya*) and China (PLAAF or *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Kongjun*) have been carrying out air exercises coded *Shaheen* now for nearly a decade, beginning in March 2011, when for the very first time in history, the PLAAF had deployed fighters on Pakistan's soil, in the Punjab.

As recorded in *Vayu Issue III/2011* “A contingent of Chinese PLA Air Force

comprising combat aircraft, pilots, technicians arrived at an operational base of the Pakistan Air Force. The exercise has been designed to share mutual experiences, hone professional skills, and accrue maximum benefits from the expertise of two air forces,” according to the spokesperson, who did not disclose details about the types of aircraft involved, the missions performed, the location of the exercise or the total number of personnel involved.

Later, from images released, it appeared that PAF F-16s (*Falcons* of No. 9 Squadron) and JF-17s (*Thunders* of No. 26 Squadron) operated alongside J-10s of the PLAAF, probably at Sargodha or Shorkot Road in the Punjab. However other reports mentioned deployment of Su-27UBKs while others also referred to J-11s. The possible presence of F-16 Fighting Falcons during the exercise certainly evoked great concern in Washington DC as potentially