



The contested airspace in South Asia



The war clouds forming over India and Pakistan are always a hot topic of discussion on various forums at the global level. Since the very inception of the two nations in the year 1947, the phenomenon of an arms race in South Asia always remained centric to these two states. Back in the phase of the Cold War, the top-notch types of equipment that were produced on both sides of the Iron Curtain always managed to find their place in this part of the globe as well. This is true in the field of Air Force which was filled with renowned solutions of air combat. It is noteworthy to realise that during the same period, the subcontinent arena saw two major conflicts, and aircraft designed by French, British, American, Chinese and Soviets were fielded on the frontlines and battle-tested up to their limits.

While in the past, generally each nation had its favorable partner, India with the Soviet Union and Pakistan with the United States, the modern-day weapon acquisitions by both nations are now promoted at a grand level, with manufacturers from both West and East entering the competition to secure orders for their products, some of them generally advertised as the “flagship” of their establishment. We are going to take a look at similar procurements of three jets which are backed by similar large-scale promotion and often asserted as “gamechanger” due to their ability to “turn

the table” or the status quo established in terms of airpower strength and deterrence. We are going to analyse how well these newcomers, JF-17 Block III, J-10CE, and Rafale F3R offer their owners the lot and versatility that they seek to counter their respective adversary.

Rafale F3R(I): the French Falcon that dominates

The flagship of Dassault Aviation, Rafale came out on top in India after competing with some of the most excellent and battle-proven fighters produced by renowned aerospace giants. The 36 fighters were distributed among two squadrons of the Indian Air Force, which are No.17

“Golden Arrows” and No.101 “Falcons”, are no less than an attraction for not just spotters but analysts around the world as well. The twin-engine canard delta-wing aircraft, in one line, is an “Omni-role” fighter that can be summarised in the form of capability that allows the Air Force to deploy the aircraft for multiple mission profiles in the same sortie. This is not often advisable for standard multirole fighters considering it requires compatibility of the mission computer onboard the aircraft to be optimised as per the flexible mission demands, that is from switching to between roles of air-to-air, air-to-ground, anti-ship or more. Though not referenced much often on mainstream, this capability is best



Photo: IAF