**Did Pakistan establish ‘deterrence’ during the recent crisis with India?**

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A recent article published by the Foreign Policy magazine in the United States exposed India’s claims of downing one of Pakistan’s F-16 fighter jets during the recent crisis. The article states that the U.S. carried out a count of Pakistan’s F-16 fleet and none was found missing. Moreover, the story also makes it clear that the count was not just carried out of the direct sales that the US made to Pakistan but the third party transfers as well. A few years ago, Pakistan bought around 12 F-16 fighter jets from Jordon when the former’s deal with Washington couldn’t materialize.

This situation has not only vindicated Pakistan’s position that none of the country’s aircraft was targeted by the Indian Air Force but has also raised questions for India’s military and civilian establishment. Was the Indian military aware that their Air force could not succeed in targeting any of Pakistan’s aircraft? After the Foreign Policy article, India media has gone into overdrive to produce material which in any way contradict the publication’s authenticity and validity. One of the articles published by the Hindustan Times claims that when asked by Indian authorities about the count of Pakistan’s F-16 fleet, the Pentagon said this: ‘Not Aware.’

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To begin with, the Pentagon’s statement ‘Not Aware’ doesn’t reject the claims made by the Foreign policy magazine. On the other hand, the response is an effort to let the issue disperse, for the US wouldn’t like to see one its closest defense partners to go through further humiliation. Already, its huge humiliation for India that none of its claims have found any validity or approval internationally. Irrespective of Pakistan’s own effort to counter Indian media and the state’s narrative of punishing Islamabad, independent observers and sources confirm that Modi’s so-called muscular action against Pakistan was one of India’s weakest military responses again its neighbor.

Following India’s incursion into Pakistan’s territory, there were observations, indicating that New Dehli may have been able to challenge Pakistan’s pre-emption limitations. There were also arguments that Modi was able to do what India couldn’t do after Pakistan became a nuclear superpower. And that is finding space under the nuclear threshold to act against Pakistan. While India’s military planners may not like to admit, the recent incursion and what followed have exposed India’s ability to carry out any such strikes further. There are two major Why Indian politicians claims of punishing Pakistan are not going to become a convincing case or experience which could embolden India’s response. One, for scholars which were fervent about India’s fly pass across the Line of Control (LoC) and termed it ‘a new punishing space for India’ under the nuclear threshold, the action itself proved a farce. When Indian Air Force struck some trees in Pakistan before hissing out, the fear of hurting a single civilian life let alone a military man or target in such an encounter was a key factor in India’s calculations. You go for a military or civilian hit, you go for an all-out escalation. This is what India feared and worked to avoid. Arguably, this is where the deterrence was in play: Indian Air Force considered a fly-pass on the insistence of an outgoing government which was under pressure domestically and whose chances of winning at polls looked feeble.

Two, New Dehli’s action on the night of 27th February showed that the country, despite spending around $62 billion on its military every year, doesn’t have the ability to carry out even a fly pass. What happened afterword further discloses the state of India’s Air Force and the military. Pakistan not only penetrated into Jammu and Kashmir when India’s military and defense systems were expecting a response but also shot down one of India’s Air Craft and captured its pilot. In the panic, Indian commanders on the ground, using an Israeli supplied weaponry, shot their own MI-17 helicopter and killed around 6 soldiers. Furthermore, the last month of lies and their exposition have all been factors that have not only put in place the concept of deterrence which Pakistan wants to maintain but has created new doubts in India.

“If that’s how India wants to become a regional power where it cannot even win a dogfight from a country which is much smaller in size and resources then we need serious introspection,” said one Indian analyst on the condition of anonymity. There have been many lessons for India and one of the lessons is clear is this: Pakistan has not only established deterrence but exposed India’s military fragility. For Pakistan, the lesson is clear: as long as we are able to deter and expose India’s designs the way we did in the recent crisis, Pakistan doesn’t need to worry about any challenge from the East.

While India learns its lessons from the recent blunders, Pakistan should be innovating, improving and building on its capabilities.