



A Block-III variant of the JF-17 (Photo by David McIntosh)


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# Pakistani JF-17 Fighter Jet Crash Confirmed but PAF Remains Silent

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Today, Martin-Baker, the British manufacturer of ejection seats who reports all ejections, confirmed the ejection of a JF-17 Pakistani fighter jet on June 5th, nearly a week after it happened. Videos purporting to show the crash and the ejected pilot began to circulate on social media last week after the crash, but Pakistani media remained silent. The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) has yet to acknowledge the crash.



## A Joint Force Jet

The video of the pilot after the crash purportedly shows the No. 14 Squadron patch on the pilot's uniform, a squadron of JF-17 pilots nicknamed the "Tail Choppers" that is stationed at Rafiqi Air Base, near the Jhang district in the Punjab Province of Pakistan, where the jet reportedly crashed.



This is the fourth known crash of a JF-17, and the most recent since 2021. "JF" stands for "Joint Force," and "17" signifies Pakistan's belief that the jet succeeds the F-16. The JF-17 was a project designed by both China and Pakistan in 2007. Since then, it has been upgraded several times. The JF-17 only costs around \$25 million to make, significantly less than the cost of an F-16. Yet the JF-17 is still a highly versatile jet, capable of loading up to 3,400 lbs (1,542 kilograms) of air-to-ground, air-to-surface, and anti-ship missiles on its seven hardpoints, in addition to a 23mm GSh-23-2 twin-barrel cannon. It can carry medium-range to short-range homing missiles like the Chinese-made PL-5E or PL-9C, and each of the jet's hardpoints can carry two 500 lb guided or unguided bombs. It also has a top speed of Mach 1.6.

The primary use of the JF-17 is for defensive interception, not long-range missions. Newer versions of the jets are equipped with relatively new active electronically scanned array (AESA) radars. A Russian RD-93 engine powers the jet; a cheap but fast engine that requires more service, leading some to worry that Pakistan's financial woes prevent it from servicing the jets as often as they need, causing crashes.

## Sales & Crashes

Reportedly, Myanmar, a buyer of Pakistani JF-17 jets, had significant malfunctions with the jet that reportedly caused the jets to be grounded last year. After Pakistan sent aircraft technicians to Myanmar to fix the jets, they returned unsuccessful. Reportedly, the Chinese ambassador to Myanmar also got involved, given China's role in the development of the aircraft. Some Pakistani media outlets have reported that Myanmar technicians lack knowledge of how to operate the aircraft. Regardless, any technical failures or malfunctions in the aircraft are of interest to Beijing.

Most recently, Islamabad sold 12 of the jets to Iraq for \$1.8 billion. In addition, Pakistan has sold JF-17s to Nigeria and Azerbaijan. Nigeria, which purchased three of the jets in 2016, is reportedly updating its fleet again with different Italian M-346 fighter jets. Critics of the JF-17 speculate that Nigeria might be having its own issues with the jet, although Pakistani media reports that the Nigerian military was completely satisfied with the performance.

Only a few weeks ago, on May 21st, another Pakistani fighter jet crashed, albeit a different model.

Exporting the relatively cheap jet to other countries looking to supply their developing air forces is turning out to be profitable for Pakistan, but many deals have fallen through. Argentina, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Sri Lanka were all reported by Pakistani media to have been interested in the JF-17 but settled for other options. Argentina, notably, turned down buying the JF-17s from China last year in favor of buying F-16 jets from the US.

Why Martin-Baker took a week to confirm the crash is unclear; perhaps they had difficulty confirming the crash with the PAF. Reportedly, Martin-Baker relies on operator data to confirm ejections. The reason for the PAF's public silence, meanwhile, is probably either to avoid a decrease in Pakistan's significant international sales of the JF-17 or simply for military security reasons.

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