

Lt Gen Kamal Davar's analysis on

What IAF needs to transform into to develop as an aerospace power



Meanwhile, Pakistan retains the ability to indulge in terrorist activities or provoke incidents, especially along the Line of Control in J&K.

Importantly, Pakistan has also enunciated a “first-use” nuclear option against India, that cannot be taken lightly. Meanwhile, the vast Indo-Pacific region is emerging as a major arena for military and economic contestation between the United States and China, where India will have a vital role to play, and apart from its maritime muscle, India's air power will come into reckoning in furtherance of its strategic interests.

The global geopolitical trajectory in recent years has shown an intense competition between the US and China. The US desires a “unipolar world but a bipolar Asia”, whereas China is striving for a “bipolar world but a unipolar Asia”. Invariably, India is a principal player in this rivalry. India therefore has to ensure that its overall military preparedness at the desired levels is ensured across the entire spectrum of warfare, including in its air power. Also, it is well-known that aerospace systems comprising manned aircraft, micro-satellites, diverse forms of spacecraft, unmanned aerial vehicles and ballistic and cruise missiles are evolving at a rapid pace.

For the Indian Air Force to truly live up to its motto of “Touching the Skies with Glory”, some critical transformational imperatives are needed. While the IAF is sincerely trying to move from air power to being an aerospace power, these imperatives have to be implemented with vision and alacrity. Faced with China's rapidly growing military assertiveness and its unbridled ambitions, supplanted by a traditionally hostile Pakistan, the challenge to the IAF by both nations, individually and collusively, in the aerospace domain are indeed formidable. Aerospace is unquestionably the domain of the future.

To successfully confront a two-front threat, the IAF needs a frugal 42 fighter squadron strength, if not more. Successive Air Chiefs have publicly lamented that they are down to a strength of 31–32 squadrons, which is woefully inadequate to meet the emerging challenges from the Chinese PLAAF (Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force) and the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). India's strategic area of interest spans the entire region from the Malacca Strait to Strait of Hormuz, where China is gradually expanding its naval footprint.

The Chinese, in recent years are threatening our territorial integrity in Arunachal Pradesh, in areas adjoining Bhutan and Sikkim, in the central sector and in the eastern Ladakh region. They are also endeavouring to link the Xinjiang region in western China with Gwadar port in Pakistan, near the Strait of Hormuz via the overly ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

