

Air Marshal (Retd) Anil Chopra writes on Multiple Origin Fleets and Complexities for IAF; Time to Rationalise



Current fighter fleet of IAF

The Sepecat Jaguar, the Anglo-French deep strike ground attack aircraft was ordered in 1978, and 120 were built by HAL under license. India made major avionics updates including the inertial attack system (DARIN), autopilot, cockpit avionics, weapons and radar. IAF still flies nearly 140 aircraft in 6 Squadrons and plans to operate till 2030. IAF operates 36 French Dassault Rafale. It had earlier bought Dassault Mirage-2000 in 1984 and the same has been upgraded to Mirage-2000-5 Mk II standards. Mirages will fly in IAF beyond 2030. HAL carries out Mirage aircraft and engine overhauls. Most components and spares still come from abroad. 63 of the 80 MiG-29s procured from the Soviet Union have been upgraded recently. Three upgraded MiG-21 Bison are still with IAF and will phase out by 2025. India has nearly 260 Sukhoi Su-30MKI, most of which have been licensed-produced in India. The aircraft will soon be upgraded as 'Super Sukhoi' with AESA radar and will be the backbone of the IAF's fighter fleet for at least the next two decades.

At the time of independence, Indian Air Force (IAF) inherited some of the aviation assets left by the British including Hawker Tempest and Spitfires. India also procured more British aircraft like the Hawker Hunter, the Gnat, Devon and Vickers Viscount. The USA was reluctant but offered some helicopters. The French offered fighter aircraft in the 1950s such as Dassault Ouragan (Toofani) and Mystere. By the late 1950s, India had inducted Soviet medium transport aircraft IL-14 and Mi-4 helicopters, and in the 1960s An-12 and a topline MiG-21 fighter. India also procured many Soviet air defence systems and weapons. With this began a relationship of "Bear Hug" that even today nearly 65% of the IAF aircraft fleet is of Soviet/Russian origin. Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) also initially began manufacturing foreign aircraft under license production, including the French Allouette, British Gnat and Russian MiG series, Jaguars, among many others. Sourcing from different countries had its own complexities of mixed spare inventories and overhaul management. This sometimes resulted

in lower aircraft serviceability and higher maintenance cost. Also in many cases, the Life Cycle costs went up.

