Seventy six years of India: Sovereignty, autonomy and the new architecture of power

Shield AI's V–BAT: V–BAT delivers combat proven, expeditionary, strategic and tactical–level ISR and targeting at a fraction of both the cost and logistical footprint of larger Group 4 and 5 drones with similar capabilities. Designed, tested and deployed for the electronic warfare battlefield, V–BAT has demonstrated real–world mission impact in GNSS–denied and comms–contested environments.

On 26 January 1950, India adopted its Constitution and began the great experiment of building not only a vast democratic state, but a sovereign one. As our nation approaches the seventy sixth anniversary of that momentous day, it is only natural to reflect on how a polity as large, diverse, argumentative and aspirational as ours has not merely survived but strengthened with time. That endurance, however, cannot be attributed solely to the foresight of a constitution that set us on firm institutional footing. It is equally the result of a country that has evolved in tandem with a world transforming around it. For, sovereignty itself does not mean what it once did. Its definition has shifted, its demands have multiplied, and its substance now lies in realms the drafters of our Constitution could scarcely have imagined.

If the mid–twentieth century conception of sovereignty was primarily political, the twenty first century version is decisively technological. It is no longer enough to govern oneself; the real test is whether a nation possesses meaningful control over the architectures, whether industrial, digital, military or economic, that determine its freedom to act. Yet the paradox of our age is that this form of sovereignty is rarely won alone. It often emerges through precisely the kind of partnerships that allow nations to master, rather than depend upon, complex capability stacks.

A nation that attempts to build every technology alone risks becoming slower, more brittle and less adaptive. But a nation that enters thoughtful co–development arrangements, where the foundations of the system are shared, but the mission layer is sovereign, can achieve a degree of capability that neither autarky nor one sided dependence allows. Within the defence industry, some of India's emerging collaborations in autonomy, advanced aircraft, and AI–enabled teaming reflect precisely this pattern: a disciplined technical architecture that preserves Indian freedom of action while ensuring predictability and trust in coalition environments. This is the modern expression of sovereignty.

The hardware imperative

Modern defence sovereignty begins with credible hardware underpinned by strong propulsion, sensing and materials technologies. No country builds all this alone; even technological superpowers absorb inputs from multiple geographies. The question is not whether a nation touches every component, but whether it shapes the architecture, performance, adaptation cycles and mission relevance of the finished platform.

This is exactly where co–development becomes not merely useful, but essential. Joint hardware programmes allow India to incorporate global engineering expertise while simultaneously deepening domestic capability in assembly, integration, simulation, testing, sustainment and certification. Instead of insulated, linear, self–contained development cycles, co–development creates iterative feedback loops between foreign partners and