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Beyond Exhibitionism: AERO INDIA 2021 & ARMS DYNAMICS

DEBA R MOHANTY, DSR, MARCH 06, 2021

The thirteenth edition of Aero India 2021, the biennial event organized by the Ministry of Defence, Government of India in collaboration with industry associations and government entities, was held in early February at the Yelanka Air Force Station, Bengaluru. Due to the continuing pandemic scenario, the event witnessed limited participation, most deliberations through virtual platforms, fewer flight displays and still fewer exhibition stalls. A total of 602 exhibitors from 14 countries participated in the event, in which Indian participants numbered 524, which outnumbered foreign participants (78) by a huge margin. Pandemic did not deter the seriousness of the event as it attracted 338 numbers of virtual exhibitors, and many of the seminars and



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conferences were held online.

The Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated the event, and delegates and dignitaries from 44 countries participated in this year's Aero India. The previous edition had attracted more than 600 Indian companies and 200 plus foreign companies. In terms of flight demonstrations, company exhibition halls, business-to-business chalets, number of seminar deliberations and media interactions between the government, companies and customers, the latest edition was visibly smaller than the previous editions' pomp and glitter. The theme of the show was 'conceive, indigenize, collaborate'. It denoted efforts toward domestic innovation and indigenous military-industrial prowess, thus making India more self-reliant. It also reflected the national urge for collaborative efforts with willing foreign manufacturers on mutually agreed terms, thus boosting local capabilities.

From a larger strategic-commercial prism, the event may have attracted less participation but was significant for several reasons. First, the message from the Indian government was apparent – demonstration of its indigenous platforms, including Tejas fighters and indigenous variants of helicopters aimed at meeting domestic needs and aim for exports to interested customers. If the Indian armed forces' relatively large orders for products like Tejas fighters (both Mark I and Mark IA) or Arjun Mark 1A main battle tanks are of any indication, this strategic move to use these products forces will propel interests in potential customers for exports. Gone are the days when India was constrained to sell weapons to countries for politico-ideological reasons. At best, what India used to do was to gift some of these systems as gifts to friendly countries. The current government's intents are clear – shed ideological baggage, make the domestic military-

industrial and scientific ecosystem be a part of the global supply chain from maintenance to sub-systems to complete systems production and sales, which would not only make the industry be treated as a real national strategic asset but more importantly bring in financial dividends and lessen import dependency significantly. For far too many decades, India has been practically dubbed as a 'weapons merchants' paradise'. Both Aero India and Def Expo (for land and naval systems exhibition) now attempt to be business-oriented rather than just display fancy foreign products for prospective buyers.



IOR Defence Ministers Conclave 2021, Source: AeroIndia.gov.in

Second, exhibitions like Aero India and Def Expo could evolve further to become a platform not only for the best available products and their validating demonstrations but, more importantly, serve as a special place for both sellers and buyers to exchange notes on their intents. These events could also be a large ground for smaller companies and young/nascent innovators to display their products. Aero India 2021 was different from all previous editions as it gave reasonably large space to small and medium-sized companies, and interestingly a few young startup entrepreneurs. Serious customers always look for perfect products for their needs. But, they also look for futuristic platforms and show interest in new technologies. In comparison to several editions of Aero India shows between 2004 and 2012, the event was overwhelmingly dominated by aerospace majors like EADS, Boeing, Lockheed, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Rosoboronexport and others because this time coincided with India's acquisition tender process for 126 medium multi-role combat aircraft (MMRCA), the current edition was focused mainly on indigenous products for prospective customers.

Third, Aero India 2021 not only brought products and producers and customers, but it also was explicitly designed to play arms dynamic for India. The flagship Indian product – Tejas – was the main attraction. In addition, seminars and conferences during and prior to the show specifically emphasized arms exports strategies, augmentation of the domestic aerospace sector and arms dynamics of a particular region – the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Thus the show blended scientific/conceptual aspects of the aerospace domain, display of contemporary and futuristic products, efforts toward indigenization and most importantly, gave India an opportunity to woo prospective customers from the IOR countries, some of whom have already shown expression of interest to buy the Tejas. While previous editions showed India as a buyer, Aero India 2021, for the first time, overtly displayed its intent for India as an emerging supplier/exporter.

Last but not least, the show distinctly showed its intent on collaborations – not only between large advanced OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) and Indian companies but also within Indian companies. More than two hundred Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed during the show, many of which concentrated on collaborations between large foreign and Indian conglomerates. However, what escaped our attention was the fertile ground for small and medium companies (MSMEs) to forge ties with their foreign counterparts and startups, especially by young innovators. Indian Prime Ministers call to the nation to become 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India), and other themes like Make in India and Digital India were visible during the event.

Military exhibitions must go beyond mere exhibitionism. They should be focused on themes, business models and strategic intents. Aero India 2021 appears to have achieved a reasonable degree of success in all these aspects. However, it is only at a nascent stage in its new posture. It must further refine its entire show in future in all areas – display stalls, seminars, press briefings and B2B/B2C meetings. As Def-Expo has gone to many places beyond New Delhi, like Goa, Lucknow and Chennai, Aero India is still held at the same venue for the last 25 years. The government should also think of holding Aero India in cities like Hyderabad, Pune or a major city in North India.

BRIEF: No.1**New Expression of Strategic Intent:
THEATRE COMMAND BASED MILITARY STRUCTURE FOR INDIA**

DEBA R MOHANTY

On February 16, 2020, India's Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat made a big announcement that India will set up two to five Theatre Commands in the near future. Elaborating on the necessity of such Commands, he said, "We may have a separate Jammu and Kashmir theatre, but the shape would be finalized later. We are also working on separate Joint-Commands for logistics and training. The Military theatre commands are planned to be rolled out by the year 2022. The shape of different theatre commands would be clear after the studies to be ordered in this regard are completed. Apart from Theatre Command, the country will also have a Peninsula Command. This Command will integrate the Indian Navy's Eastern and Western Commands under it. The area of the Command is planned to start from Sir Creek area in the west to Sunderbans in east and further downwards".



These commands are considered a corollary of India's growing military power and expanded strategic interests. As India aspires to be a 'global strategic stabilizer' in future, its military ought to restructure accordingly. Military institutions of most countries are considered antediluvian as they witness very little changes in structural or even ideational terms for decades. Reforms in military institutions thus become an arduous task. While smaller necessities are incrementally pushed through with the institutions, more significant concepts like CDS, Theatre Commands or integration of services take long and happen after decades of deliberations.

Although the Indian military sector has received recommendations on a number of issues from government-appointed committees, eleven committees in the last 20 years alone, significant changes have been witnessed only after two important committee recommendations. First is the Group of Ministers' (GoM) Committee on national security management in 2002, and the second is the Sekhatkar (Lt General, retired) Committee Report submitted in 2017. The first one ended up with the creation of a Joint Command in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a strategic forces command for the operational management of nuclear assets, and a rudimentary aerospace command under the Indian Air Force, apart from the integration of three branches of armed forces, among others. Such changes came with much deliberations and strong opposition to some of the proposals. Although the GoM Report strongly recommended the creation of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), due to various factors, the government ended up creating the position of a Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (CIDS), which ultimately was tasked with overall defence planning. Modi government announced the creation of CDS (typically, CDS is a Five Star General, who is senior to all Chiefs), which was a Four Star position (thereby locating his status as 'first among equals' only) and the then retired Army Chief Bipin Rawat was appointed as the first CDS. Although locations, importance and influences of top-level positions within the Indian security sector are still evolving, the CDS appears to be doing a good job.

CDS' biggest challenge will be, apart from planning, visions and structural changes, how to seamlessly integrate various aspects of three services otherwise known to be at either loggerheads or competition. As the permanent Chief of Chiefs of Staff Committee, he may be well-positioned as a single point between the government and the military; he is likely to face and resolve structural overlapping within the joint structure. As Theatre Commands and Regional Commands from each service redefine their roles, it would be interesting to see how single service commands like aerospace embed themselves in a joint structure. It may take some more time, but as new institutions come up, evolve and mature over time, aspirations of joint-ness or unified structure to take on existing and futuristic security challenges would be fructified. The creation of new and domain-specific Theatre Commands, among different necessities, reflects the expression of national intent for meeting challenges and, more importantly, conveying a message, a bigger role in global affairs.

BRIEF: No.2**Evolving Geopolitical Calculus in Indo-Pacific: LOCATING INDIA IN QUAD**

DEBA R MOHANTY

Unless otherwise rattled by natural calamities or prolonged war, geo-economic, geopolitical and geostrategic environments undergo periodic alignments and re-alignments of actors in international relations. One such evolving geostrategic model that is evolving within the Indo-Pacific region, a region comprising of 24 states, including the United States, aims at the convergence of national interests in a collective manner. As a sub-set of Indo-Pacific geopolitical arrangements, a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (known as Quad) - an informal strategic forum between the United States, Japan, Australia and India that is pursued through informal summits, information exchanges and military drills between member countries. While the strategic dimension of Quad is perceived to be a counterforce to the rise of China on a global stage, current developments within Quad draw the

attention of both members and other players.



QUAD Head of States: Biden, Modi, Morrison and Suga

Although the informal dialogue among the members started in 2007 with the initial call given by former Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe for 'seas of freedom and prosperity, the quadrangular relations between members have seen ups and downs since 2007. The dialogue started in a positive manner but soon went into hibernation from 2008 till 2017

for a variety of reasons. It has come back to centre stage again since 2017, referred to as Quad 2.0, which started from the ASEAN and East Asian Summits, where members pledged to strengthen their partnerships further. The Quad met five times between 2017 and 2019. Finding common grounds and congruence of strategic interests continued by Quad members ever since. Even during the onset of the Corona pandemic in early 2020, the Quad members discussed implications of the pandemic,

conducted phased naval exercise – named Malabar – in November and December 2020, held the second ministerial meeting and regularly kept in touch throughout 2020. In early 2021, with the change of administration in the US, deliberations between member countries continued.

Most importantly, in the latest round of quadrilateral ministerial talks, which took place virtually on February 18, 2021, all members agreed to oppose vigorously any attempts by China to alter the status quo in the Indo-Pacific region by force. The underline theme for the Quad and even enlarged Quad like proposed groups like D-10 has been China's rise, aggressive behaviour and their strategic implications. On its part, China terms Quad as a militarized Asian NATO. In sum, a core group of countries are coming together to counter Chinese influence on global geopolitics.

This process necessitates India not only to position itself as a key player but more broadly as a global power of reasonable capabilities. A portion of India's strategic interests may bring in intangible diplomatic and political dividends. Still, at the same time, India can not afford to ignore the current reality on its Himalayan border and even within the country. India and China have been engaged in a military standoff since June 2020, including skirmishes, and the problem is still unresolved despite some initial movement toward de-mobilization in Pangong Tso. Indian leaderships have time and again emphasized Chinese stubbornness and avow that the situation may take a long time to improve. In the meantime, instances of involvement of Chinese nationals in hawala/money laundering have come to notice in 2020. Possibilities of Chinese cyberattacks against critical power infrastructures in Indian states like Maharashtra and Telangana are being discussed in the Indian media. Such instances or moves are often deliberately supported by the state, implying a well crafted 'no-contact warfare' through the cyber domain and overt aggressive posturing by China. While India needs to wait and watch the evolving developments within Quad or elsewhere, it must not lower its guard in military and societal spheres. This necessitates the eventual attainment of Atmanirbhar (self-reliant), which serves as the core of India's comprehensive national power.

DSR NEWS DIGEST

February 2021

February 01: "FM SITHARAMAN ALLOCATES RS 4,78 LAKH CRORE TO DEFENCE BUDGET FOR FY 2021-22"

India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an allocation of Rs 4,78,195.62 crore for the defence sector for FY 2021-22 as against last year's Rs 4,71,378 crore (including Defence Pension). Excluding pensions, it is pegged at Rs 3.62 lakh crore from last year's Rs 3.37 lakh crore. The budget includes capital expenditure worth Rs 1.35 lakh crore. It is nearly 19 percent increase in Defence capital expenditure from previous year's budget estimates. "This is highest ever increase in capital outlay for defence in 15 years," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said. Modernization fund for the armed forces has gone up from Rs 1,13,734 last year to Rs 1,35,060 crore for the FY 2021-22. In the last year's budget, defence forces were provided Rs 20,776 crore additional funds under the capital budget meant for modernization of armed forces.



In 2020-21, the three defence forces were also given emergency procurement powers in view of the situation along the China border. **(UNI/PTI/Business World)**

February 02: "AERO INDIA 2021: A BIG STEP TOWARD ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT"

Inspired by the Hon'ble Prime Minister's call for Aatmanirbhar Bharat, the flying display at Aero India 2021 featured formations showcasing India's cutting edge technology and capabilities in the aerospace sector. Aero India 2021 is being organized this year amidst the challenging circumstances created by the COVID-19 situation. Shri Rajnath Singh commended the organization of the biennial event this year amidst such challenges. He hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and said that the Ministry of Defence was relentlessly giving impetus to domestic manufacturing of defence equipment, not only to fulfil the demands of our armed forces, but also to make India a net exporter of defence equipment and platforms to friendly foreign countries. **(Press Information Bureau)**

February 04: "IOR SEMINAR: BUILDING COLLECTIVE MARITIME COMPETENCE TOWARD SECURITY AND GROWTH FOR ALL IN THE REGION (SAGAR)"

Indian Navy conducted a seminar on Building Collective Maritime Competence towards Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) on February 4, 2021, during the Aero India 2021. The seminar was attended by Defence Ministers / Service Chiefs / Delegations from Friendly Foreign Countries, Academia, Diplomats from various Missions and media personnel. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh delivered the Keynote Address. Quoting historic wisdom from Indian scriptures, he said that 'Unity is Strength of any Society, and a Society is weak without it'. The prominence of Indian Ocean Region in global strategy has mandated many nations establishing a presence in the region to ensure their strategic interests and assist in overcoming challenges in the maritime domain viz., piracy, maritime terrorism, human trafficking, illegal unreported and unregulated fishing, loss of bio-diversity and battling climate change. **(Press Information Bureau)**

February 05: "201 MOUS, PRODUCT LAUNCHES AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFERS CONCLUDED AT AERO INDIA 2021"

A total of 201 MoUs, product launches and technology transfers were concluded at the Bandhan ceremony held on the last day of Aero India 2021 at Yehalanka, Bengaluru on February 5, 2021. These included the formal handing over of the Advanced Light Helicopters MK-III to the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard (ICG), commencement of Performance based logistics of ICG fleet, initial operational clearance of Army version of Light Utility Helicopter etc. In his address,

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said Bandhan exemplifies the spirit of public-private partnership in defence and aerospace sectors and have forged strategic ties that are poised to transform defence and aerospace manufacturing. He said that 128 MoUs, 19 ToTs, 4 Handing Overs, 18 Product Launches and 32 major announcements were made at Aero India this year. **(Press Information Bureau)**



DRDO: <https://drdo.gov.in>

February 05: "DRDO HANDS OVER LICENSING AGREEMENTS FOR TRANSFER OF TECHNOLOGY FOR 14 TECHNOLOGIES TO 20 INDUSTRIES"

The DRDO handed over Licensing Agreements for ToT (LATOt) for 14 DRDO developed technologies to 20 industries. The technologies transferred were from the area of electronics, laser technology, armaments, life sciences, materials science, combat vehicles, naval systems, aeronautics, sensors, etc. The product technologies transferred were Low Level Transportable Radar (LLTR), Inertial Navigation System for Ship Application (INS-SA), Long Range Optical Target Locator (OTL 1500), Hand Held Through Wall Imaging Radar (HH-TWIR) and Commander TI (Thermal industries. NMRL-Fuel Cell based Air Independent Propulsion Technology for Naval Submarines named NMFCAIP is a unique capability developed by DRDO and now transferred to the industry. **(Press Information Bureau)**

February 08: "HAL SIGNS AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL'S ELBIT SYSTEMS FOR DOHS SUPPLY"

Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) said it has entered into an agreement with Elbit Systems Electro Optics Elop Ltd., Israel, for supply of Digital Overhead Head Up Display Systems (DOHS) during the recently concluded Aero India-2021. The Digital Overhead HUDs will be initially manufactured in the existing facility of HAL's Division at Korwa, HAL said in a press release. It said a dedicated facility will be augmented progressively in proportion to manufacturing volume. HAL said the company and Elbit Systems have envisaged a mutual co-operation to upgrade its technological base and acquire high end technology on Digital Overhead HUD System which is primarily used in transport aircraft worldwide. **(Press Trust of India/ Hindustan Times)**

February 08: "INDO-US JOINT MILITARY EXERCISE 'YUDH ABHYAS' BEGINS IN RAJASTHAN"

The 16th edition of the Indo-US joint military training exercise 'Yudh Abhyas' commenced at the Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in the western sector of Rajasthan on February 7 2021. Brigadier Mukesh Bhanwala, Commander of the 170 Infantry Brigade of the Indian Army, welcomed the US contingent at the firing range and impressed upon both the armies to achieve optimum cohesion and interoperability during the exercise. **(Press Trust of India/ Hindustan Times)**

February 12: INDIA HAS NOT CONCEDED ANY TERRITORY: DEFENCE MINISTRY

Ministry of Defence on February 12 said that India has not conceded any of its territory as a result of the disengagement agreement with China. The Defence Ministry's statement came hours after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi held a press conference, alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "ceded" Indian territory to the Chinese. "India has not conceded any territory as a result of this agreement. On the contrary, it has enforced observance and respect for LAC and prevented any unilateral change in the status quo," the Defence Ministry said in a statement. Permanent posts of both sides at the north bank of Pangong Tso are longstanding and well- established. On the Indian side, it is Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3 and on the Chinese side, east of Finger 8. The current agreement provides for cessation of forward deployment by both sides and continued deployment at these permanent posts, it added. **(United News of India)**

February 18: "3RD INDIA-AUSTRALIA-JAPAN-USA QUAD MINISTERIAL MEETING"

Dr. S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs participated in the 3rd India-Australia-Japan-USA Quad Ministerial Meeting held on February 18, 2021 with his counterparts Foreign Minister Marise Payne (Australia), Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi (Japan), and Secretary of State Antony Blinken (USA). The Ministers highlighted their shared attributes as political democracies, market economies and pluralistic societies. They recognized that the changes underway in the world makes a strong case for their countries working closely together. It was important for the international community that the direction of changes remains positive and beneficial to all. The Ministers emphasized their commitment to upholding a rules-based international order, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international seas and peaceful resolution of disputes. **(MEA Press Release)**

February 19: "SUCCESSFUL USER TRIALS OF DRDO-DEVELOPED ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILE SYSTEMS' HELINA' AND 'DHURVASTRA'.

Joint user trials for Helina (Army Version) and Dhruvastra (Air Force Version) Missile Systems had been carried out from Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) platform in desert ranges. The missile systems have been designed and developed indigenously by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Five missions were carried out for evaluating the missile capabilities in minimum and maximum range. ([Press Information Bureau](#))

February 20: "ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT: GSL BUILDS DAMAGE CONTROL SIMULATOR FOR THE INDIAN NAVY AT PORT BLAIR"

The Indian Navy will soon get a State-of-the-Art Damage Control Simulator (DCS) which is going to be built indigenously by the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL). On February 19 2021, the foundation stone for Damage Control Simulator for Indian Navy at Port Blair was laid by the Commander in Chief, Andaman and Nicobar Command Lt Gen Manoj Pande, and the CMD of Goa Shipyard Ltd Cmde B B Nagpal (Retd), was present also present. According to GSL, this DCS is a training system which will simulate a realistic and stressful but controlled environment for the crew in the ship. This will help in training the crew in repairing in various damage scenarios. ([Financial Express](#))

February 22: "SUCCESSFUL LAUNCHES OF VL-SRSAM "MISSILE SYSTEM"

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted two successful launches of Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM). The launches were carried out on February 21 2021 from a static vertical launcher from Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur off the coast of Odisha. Indigenously designed and developed by DRDO for Indian Navy, VL-SRSAM is meant for neutralizing various aerial threats at close ranges including sea-skimming targets. The current launches were carried out for demonstration of vertical launch capability as part of its maiden launch campaign. On both occasions, the missiles intercepted the simulated targets with pinpoint accuracy. ([Press Information Bureau](#))



Pangong Tso (ladakh.nic.in)

February 24: "AUGMENTED REALITY HEAD MOUNTED DISPLAY (ARHMD) SYSTEM FOR INDIAN ARMY UNDER AATMANIRBHAR BHARAT ABHIYAN"

Indian Army is in the process of acquiring niche technology by procuring 556 number of Augmented Reality Head Mounted Display (ARHMD) Systems under Make-II Category. After successful evaluation of vendor responses, project sanction order (PSO) had been issued on February 22 2021 to six vendors to start developing the prototype. The contract will be placed with one of the firms post successful development of prototype as per provisions of Buy (Indian-IDD) category of DAP 2020. Development of ARHMD Make-II will be a game changer for Indian Army. It will be in sync with

"Atmanirbhar Bharat" policy of the government and will lead to "Self Reliance" by giving boost to the Indian Defence Industry. ([Press Information Bureau](#))

February 25: "WE HAVE STRATEGIES FOR DEPSANG... TRUST DEFICIT EXISTS: ARMY CHIEF"

Describing the disengagement of Chinese and Indian troops at Pangong Tso in Ladakh as "a win-win situation... a very good outcome" where "both sides should feel they have achieved something," Army chief General MM Naravane said on February 24, while responding to questions during a webinar organised by the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), New Delhi. "we have our strategies in place" to resolve "some issues that remain such as the area of Depsang... and pending issues in other areas along our northern borders". Acknowledging there is a "trust deficit" between the two sides, General Naravane said: "We still have a long way to go. We now have to move on to the stage of de-escalation. And after that, moving back of the troops and the de-induction of the troops which went to the higher reaches... We have to be wary... we will be very cautious... there is a trust deficit..." ([Indian Express](#))

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SSPC Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict

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About SSPC

The Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (SSPC) is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan research organization based in New Delhi, dedicated to conduct rigorous and comprehensive research, and work towards disseminating information through commentaries and analyses on a broad spectrum of issues relating to peace, conflict and human development. SSPC has been registered under the Societies Registration Act (XXI) of 1860. The SSPC came into being as a platform to exchange ideas, to undertake quality research, and to ensure a fruitful dialogue.

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