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Beyond Symbolism: Tejas' Induction Denotes Multiple Messages

DEBA R MOHANTY , DSR, February 11, 2021

On 13 January 2021, Indian Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), the highest decision making body on military and security affairs headed by the Prime Minister, approved procurement of 73 Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mk-1A fighter aircraft and 10 LCA Tejas Mk-1 Trainer aircraft for the Indian Air Force (IAF) at the cost of INR 45,696 Crore along with design and development of infrastructure sanctions worth INR 1,202 crore. With this order, IAF will have a total of 123 LCA Tejas in its inventory (IAF had ordered 40 LCAs earlier), equivalent to seven squadrons in future.

If future projections for the next two decades are considered, two different variants (Mark 1, Mark 1A and Mark II) of Tejas, whose squadron strength could touch about 20, could complement the existing



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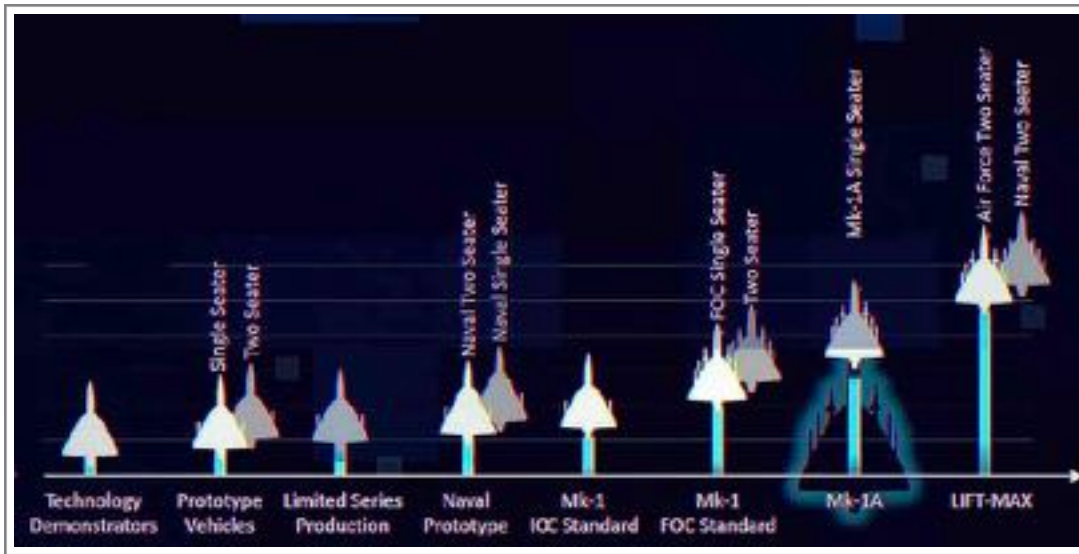
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squadrons of Sukhoi MK-I and future squadrons of Rafale fighters. Unless combat versions of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) develop to make the bigger systems irrelevant, fighters of different classes will always have different degrees of relevance, including LCA. With progress in next-generation avionics, composite materials and a robust aero-engine, the LCA could well be considered a potential competitor to aerospace majors of the world. With enhanced production capacities to 16 per year by HAL alone, a possible combined public-private partnership model could produce 30 jets per annum, thus meeting emerging and existing export demands. Potential Indian aerospace majors include Tatas, Mahindras, and Adani Group, who have demonstrated their capabilities while existing listed companies like Dynamatic Technologies are embedded into the global supply chain.

The journey of India's indigenous fighter aircraft programme had started in the late 1950s with the HF-24 Marut programme, which was abruptly shelved in early 1960s. Consequent induction of fighters from the 1960s onward primarily consisted of different variants of MiG, supplied by Russia, in addition to existing fighter fleet procured from Western sources. The second phase of indigenous efforts in design, development and manufacture of fighters started in 1983 when the preliminary design

of an LCA was approved. By mid-1990s, the design and development of LCA had slowed down. By the late 1990s, the project was criticised for technological inadequacy of all kinds, including inability to develop a stealth airframe and an indigenous aero-engine. For different reasons, the LCA project story has been a concocted misinformation campaign, including overlapping vested interests between competing foreign fighter suppliers, customer and the indigenous manufacturer Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). Flagship programmes like the Kaveri engine project did not yield positive results for years, leading to a long-held perception of India's inability to produce modern military systems. Most importantly, the state took a back seat in the internecine conflict. At the same time, foreign suppliers were happy



minting money, and the customer was pleased to get imported systems with an inflated price.

HAL's fortunes plummeted consequently as not only the state became its bitter critic for some time, but more importantly, the manufacturer did not get requisite support from the customer throughout past decades. Amid criticism, the Modi government took a decision that not only re-energised the designer and producer but more importantly sent multiple messages to multiple stakeholders in this whole story. First, the Modi government accelerated the process of Initial Operational (IOC) and Final Operational Clearance (FOC) of LCA, which saw a grudging placement of order of 40 LCAs in 2016. It hauled up the entire design and development eco-system, whereby both designers and manufacturers were in sync with each other. Second, enhanced production capacity from 8 to 16 aircraft per annum made the first phase of acquisition in the shortest possible time, unprecedented in the history of military system acquisitions. While the first batch order for LCA came in 2016, the second batch came in January 2021.

Third, the government was serious enough to put in place a set of reforms in the national sector, where self-reliance became a central theme. In addition to indigenous production of equipment and services, exports were also encouraged. In addition to LCA, a bulk order of Arjun Mark 1A Main Battle Tank (MBT) for the Army is on its way. Domestic market apart, India is seriously looking at arms exports, for which even an exports policy has been formulated. Countries from South East Asia, Middle East and Indian Ocean Region (IOR) are seen as potential buyers of this jet. It is no surprise that the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will host Defence Ministers of 27 out of 29 IOR countries at the Aero Show 2021 in Bengaluru. The government has recently cleared approval for exports of 156 types of military systems.

Finally, the government is serious about reducing arms imports, thus saving considerable amount of money and increasing acquisition from domestic sources, thus encouraging the domestic military-industrial sector. If the Indian defence budget for Financial Year 2021-22 is of any indication, the capital acquisition allocations have not seen any increase from the previous year's revised estimates. However, if one looks at the allocations earmarked for the private sector in the defence budget and projected investments by the government in private defence industrial sector, it gives an imposing picture.

Tejas' induction into the IAF has gone beyond symbolism. If its future variants are of any indication, IAF could eventually receive the Mark II version, followed by possible induction of fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (ACMA) in time to come. With such an ambitious landscape, Indian aerospace sector could get a new lease of life, which will not only take HAL to the next phase of evolution but also could propel large Indian private companies to get a slice of the domestic as well as exports market. In addition, more than 800 small and medium-sized industries could benefit from such a rosy scenario. Induction of future naval versions of LCA and different variants of combat and non-combat helicopters could complement the aircraft manufacturing locomotive in the future.

A determined state will lie at the core of military industrialisation of an emerging power like India. If the state will is there, attendant necessities like industrial ecosystem, investments, and supply chain will fall in place. The Government's call for Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) would be a challenge test case for the Indian aerospace industrial sector.

DSR: *About the Initiative and Vision Plan*



Friends and foes both strive to understand a country's grand strategic mindset, especially in military domain, in order to fashion their respective strategies in global affairs. While democracies like US or UK provide reasonable data for scholastic endeavour, such is not the case with countries like Russia or China, from where least amount of data emanate, forcing scholars to rely more on Western sources that fall short of reliability. India is situated somewhere between abundance and absence of data in specific military domains.

Knowledge on Indian defence sector thus eludes scholarship despite proliferation of information available in public domain and lack of a trained gene pool of national security analysts for both subjective as well as objective interpretations. This is the biggest challenge that academia and public policy research institutions confront in India.

SSPC has strived to fill the knowledge gap in this important subject through dissemination of various research publications. It feels much more can be done in this effort. It is now high time that a monthly review of developments taking place in Indian defence sector, which capture core ideas and issues in a particular month. It intends to reflect on their implications in Indian context.

SSPC hopes that this monthly review, to be published in the first week of every month, will be of immense value not only to analysts across scholastic and business domains but also to important stakeholders like national governments and international organizations interested in Indian military affairs. Needless to mention, the review can also be useful to stakeholders including military and dual-use industries, investors, domestic and foreign supply aspirants as well as larger citizenry.

Deba R Mohanty

BRIEF: No.1

Deja vu! Martial Law in MYANMAR

On 1 February 2021, Myanmar's powerful Tatmadaw (combined armed forces under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defence, which reports to the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC), the highest decision making body and authority in Myanmar) detained the country's top leader Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other senior politicians from the governing party, National League for Democracy (NLD). Effectively, Tatmadaw seized the civilian government power in a coup. This development happened after ten years when the same military authorities had handed over power to a democratically elected civilian power in 2011. Soon after Suu Kyi's detention, Tatmadaw declared a yearlong state of emergency and declared that power had been handed to the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.



Myanmar has always been a fragile democracy in short periods with a strong military-led government during most parts of its independent history. The last national elections held in November 2020 were termed as chaotic and rigged, which also gave rise to speculations in some quarters of an eventual military takeover. The seizure of power by the military also strengthened the position and stature of Senior General Hlaing, who was supposed to retire soon. The chances are that the General would now be the supreme leader for the foreseeable future. Most international community members have criticized the coup and demanded the restoration of democratic practice in Myanmar. Looming threats of sanctions and vocal critique of human rights violations may lead the international community to take some concrete action against the state.

For keeping its national interests in mind, India has not been overtly critical of the situation in Myanmar. It has rather taken a very carefully designed stance as both military, and civilian leaderships in Myanmar have maintained good relations with India. Close relations between top military leaderships of both countries, Myanmar's handing over of 22 Indian insurgents to India, India's gift of INS Sindhuvir – a Kilo-class submarine – to Myanmar Navy, India's hot pursuits against insurgents in the India-Myanmar borders with active support from the Myanmar military, bilateral

military exercises (called IMBAX), Myanmar as the starting point of India's Look East Policy and India's vaccine diplomacy (India has supplied 1.5 million doses of vaccines), which is likely to be unaffected even in current conditions - all these suggest India's cautious stance on Myanmar.

On the contrary, Chinese media - Xinhua - termed the recent military takeover as a 'major cabinet reshuffle'. In contrast, prominent Chinese newspaper Global Times quoted an unnamed Chinese high ranking official saying that the power grab in Myanmar could be seen as 'an adjustment to the country's dysfunctional power structure'. China is very likely to protect the Myanmar military's interests at the international stage, which could be a diplomatic thorn for most stakeholders in Myanmar.

Possible scenarios in the near future suggest the following: a) the military rule in all probability could prolong beyond the declared one-year emergency, making it difficult for the international community to contribute to meaningful changes in the country; b) although protests of different kinds are growing now, such activities could be considerably weakened by the military through suppression and similar steps, which could simultaneously weaken democratic institutions further; c) business risks by foreign companies either present or willing to gain a foothold in Myanmar could be high in the medium-term future; d) Chinese influence in Myanmar could grow again, which could make India and international community uncomfortable; e) possible sanctions could prove to be ineffective again, as proved in the past; and f) last but not the least, Myanmar economy and business environment could show stagnation for at least a couple of years unless the military manages it with serious proactive efforts. It is indeed, challenging times for the people of Myanmar.

BRIEF: No.2

IMPORTANCE OF 'TIBETOLOGY'!

On 27 January 2021, it was widely reported in the Indian media that the Indian Army is seriously contemplating introducing an intense study course on Tibet in the Army. Termed 'Tibetology' by the military, the idea of introducing such a course to familiarize soldiers directly or indirectly dealing with China at the borders or elsewhere, thus creating a gene pool of sinologist soldiers to take on China in both combat and non-combat necessities/exigencies. Mooted during the first annual Army Commanders' Conference during



27-29 May 2020 and further refined during consequent Army Commanders' Conference during 26 - 29 October 2020, the idea will be implemented through a carefully crafted course prepared by Shimla based Army Training Command (ARTRAC). This idea has the approval of the Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat and Chief of Army Staff General M M Naravane.

There are seven institutes ARTRAC has identified. It includes Department of Buddhist Studies (Delhi University), Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies (Varanasi), Nava Nalanda Mahavihara (Bihar), Visva Bharati (West Bengal), Dalai Lama Institute for Higher Education (Bengaluru), Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (Gangtok) and Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies (Dahung, Arunachal Pradesh) where officers from different departments can study behavioural, sociological and related soft aspects of Tibet and its people across both sides of Himalayas to enable them to devise appropriate reactive and proactive responses to the Chinese threats.

It is a standard politico-diplomatic and military necessity that requires countries – both friends and adversaries – to know each others' cultural and ideational mindsets, which enable the militaries and states to devise their strategies according to demands of time. Study of Tibetology becomes essentially important for Indian armed forces as it has thus far been either neglected or given very low importance thus far. While diplomats and language experts contribute their understandings to respective domains, the military has lagged in this strategic domain. Study of Tibetology will fill the knowledge gap between hard and soft aspects of military power.

Countries like China have been proactive in devising, experimenting, and employing newer warfare methods in cyber, unmanned, space and traditional domains. India must not only catch up with emerging demands but also take steps to think beyond unthinkable in both ideational and scientific space. Although Tibetology or even more extensive study of Chinese mindsets has been a neglected area, the Indian Army's latest efforts should be earnestly pursued. Over a period of time, the Indian forces can give a better response to threats from across the Himalayas. Needless to say, Tibetology is a study whose time has come.

DSR NEWS DIGEST January 2021

January 06, 2021: “India, Israel successfully test cutting edge MRSAM air and missile defence system”

India and Israel successfully tested a Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) defence system last week, a press release by the Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) said on January 05. Jointly developed by the two countries, the defence system can shoot down enemy aircraft at a range of 50-70 km. Currently being used by all three wings of the Indian Army as well as Israel Defence Forces (IDF), the air and missile defence system was a joint venture of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the IAI. The MRSAM includes command and control, an advanced phased-array radar, mobile launchers and interceptors with advanced RF seeker. President and CEO of Israel Aerospace Industries, Boaz Levy was quoted as saying, "MRSAM Air and Missile Defense System is a cutting edge, innovative system

that once again has proven its advanced capabilities against a variety of threats. Every trial in an air defence system is a complex operational event and the Covid-19 limitations significantly increase the complexity" ([India Today](#))

January 13, 2021: "Prepared To Hold Ground As Long As It Takes": Army Chief M M Naravane on Ladakh

Indian Army chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane on January 12, said that the Army was prepared to hold ground in eastern Ladakh "for as long as it takes" to achieve national objectives in case the ongoing military and diplomatic talks with China to reduce tensions in the sensitive sector are "prolonged," even as he described a joint threat from China and Pakistan as "very potent". He said India should not read too much into the recent withdrawal of Chinese troops from depth areas on the Tibetan plateau as there has been absolutely no reduction of troops by either side at friction points in the Ladakh sector, where the border standoff between the two nuclear powers is in its ninth month ([ANI/NDTV](#)).



January 20, 2021: "French A-400M tactical aircraft arrived at Jodhpur"

French A-400M tactical aircraft arrived at Jodhpur on Tuesday to participate in the Indo-French bilateral exercise Desert Knight 21. "Today, French A-400M tactical aircraft arrived at Jodhpur. Welcome to India!" tweeted Indian Air Force (IAF). The bilateral exercise is being held at Air Force Station Jodhpur from January 20 to 24. "The bilateral Air Exercise, Desert Knight Exercise between Indian Air Force and French Air and Space Force will commence from Wednesday. The Exercise marks an important milestone between the two forces," said the IAF's Mirage 2000, Su-30 MKI, Rafale, and IL-78 Flight Refuelling Aircraft are a feature in the exercise ([ANI News](#))

January 23, 2021: "India to host Indian Ocean Region defence ministers' conclave next month"

India will host the defence ministers of the countries of the Indian Ocean Region at a conclave during the upcoming Aero India in Bengaluru, officials said January 22. India is organising the conclave in the backdrop of growing Chinese military assertiveness in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). "Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is hosting the IOR defence ministers' conclave on February 4. It will be held during the Aero India 2021," said an official. The conclave is being organised as part of an initiative to promote dialogue in an institutional and cooperative environment that can foster peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region, the official said. "The broad theme of the conclave will be 'Enhanced Peace, Security and Cooperation in the Indian Ocean'. The conclave would address aspects related to synergising the resources and efforts in the Indian Ocean," the official said. "The IOR conclave is an effort towards India's commitment and continued engagement in the Indian Ocean both for defence diplomacy as also for economic prosperity through sustained engagement, dialogue, experience sharing and exchange of best practices," he said ([Press Trust of India/ Business Standard](#)).

January 25, 2021: "Baby TAR: India's smallest assault rifle"

Developed by the Indian Ordnance Factory Tiruchirappali, the 'Baby TAR', India's smallest assault rifle, is a compact version of the legendary AK-47, which the factory has been mass-producing since 2017. This in-house OFB innovation comes soon after the Indian Army unveiled a 9x19mm carbine developed in-house. The TAR-3, a compact, fully automatic version of the Trichy Assault Rifle (TAR), recently passed a series of trials at the Ordnance Factory Trichy (OF Trichy). A dozen prototypes have been produced during the lockdown. The weapon is currently undergoing 'unofficial trials' with the Indian Army, where three prototypes are believed to have fired over 2,000 rounds each without stoppages ([India Today](#)).

January 25, 2021: "Armed forces 'adequately mobilised' to thwart any bid to undermine national security": President RN Kovind

President of India, Ram Nath Kovind on January 25, asserted that while India remains committed to peace, its armed forces are "adequately mobilised" in a "well-coordinated" move to thwart any attempt to undermine national security as he referred to the "expansionist" move by China in Ladakh. "Our national interest will be protected at all costs," the President declared in his address to the nation on the eve of the 72nd Republic Day during which he also sought to allay fears of farmers over the three contentious farm laws. "The path of reform at the initial stages may cause misapprehensions but the government is singularly devoted to the farmers' welfare," he said, as the protests by the farmer unions demanding repeal of the three laws continues at border points in Delhi ([Press Trust of India/ CNBC-TV18](#)).

January 26, 2021: “Indian forces to get local choppers even before formal contract”

Indian forces facing China's aggression in Ladakh will shortly receive indigenous attack helicopters which have proven their worth in high altitude areas during recent tests, adding muscle to the airborne fleet that currently consists of AH 64E Apache choppers. Officials said the Army and Air Force will receive a light combat helicopter (LCH) each by March, even before formal orders have been placed, as the production programme is on and necessary certifications have been received. “In recent tests by the armed forces in high altitude areas of Ladakh, the helicopters demonstrated that they can operate with adequate payloads,” Hindustan Aeronautics Limited chairman R Madhavan told ET. He said the helicopters can be produced in quantities required by the forces. The LCH will also be among the premium offerings by India at the upcoming AeroIndia show, where potential foreign customers are expected to go for test flights as well. Officials believe the LCH has good export potential in the region ([Economic Times](#)).

**Jan 28, 2021: “Lloyd Austin commits to US-India Major Defense Partnership”**

Highlighting the need to build on shared values between US and India, newly-appointed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday emphasised Washington's commitment to the Major Defense Partnership with New Delhi, during his phone conversation with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. "Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with Indian Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh today. During the call, Secretary Austin emphasized the Department's commitment to the U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership, observing that it is built upon shared values and a common interest in ensuring the Indo-Pacific region remains free and open," Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said. "Secretary Austin noted the great strides made in the US-India defence relationship, and he pledged to work collaboratively with the Defence Minister to sustain progress,"

Kirby added. Rajnath Singh on Wednesday received an introductory telephone call from the US Secretary of Defence and the two leaders discussed bilateral, regional and global issues. They also reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries. The Defence Minister had earlier congratulated Austin on his appointment. ([ANI News](#))

January 28, 2021: “India stands firm on S-400 purchase: Defence needs are determined independently says envoy to Moscow”

Indian envoy to Moscow Bala Venkatesh Varma has asserted that New Delhi makes its defence choices independently and based on its security needs and its key partners are aware of this fact indicating that the Modi government is going ahead with purchase of S-400 missile defence system considered best in its category. “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke in detail about the essence of the Russian-Indian partnership at a press conference on January 18. He called it very close, special and privileged and strategic, which is a very accurate description. As for your question about military-technical cooperation, India-Russia ties go back decades. This is one of the pillars of our strategic partnership. India also has a global strategic partnership with the US. New Delhi's relations with each country are independent. India has an independent policy, and we make every decision in the military sphere in accordance with the interests of our defense and national security. This principle is relevant for military-technical cooperation with all our partners,” Varma said in an interview with Russian state news agency TASS ([Economic Times](#)).

January 29, 2021: “Any military confrontation between India, Pakistan would be disaster of unmitigated proportion”, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said it is “absolutely essential” for India and Pakistan to be able to come together and seriously discuss their problems, cautioning that any military confrontation would be a “disaster of unmitigated proportions” for both countries and the whole world. “I do believe that it is absolutely essential to have a de-escalation of the situation, namely in the Line of Control,” the UN chief said. Guterres was responding to a question by a Pakistani journalist on tensions between India and Pakistan over the situation in Kashmir. The question also referred to the statement Guterres had issued in August 2019 on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir where he had appealed for maximum restraint. "I think it's absolutely essential for the two countries to be able to come together and seriously discuss their problems, and I think it's essential that human rights are fully respected in all territories that you mentioned," Guterres said during his press briefing on January 28 ([Economic Times](#)).

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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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