

Flagging the

Emerging Issues of Air Power

Excerpts from the Workshop on 29 March 2019



Organised by The Society for Aerospace Studies and the Observer Research Foundation, and held at the latter's Conference Hall on 29 March 2019, this workshop was planned under the compelling circumstances in which the Indian Air Force finds itself today, with predicted depletion of combat squadrons taking place without credible replacements in the foreseeable future.

The Backdrop

The score of MiG-21 variants and MiG-23/27 squadrons, which constituted bulk of the IAF combat force for decades, are predictably and relentlessly being phased out. Their intended successor, the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) programme has had a prolonged gestation period and the very first operational squadron will achieve unit establishment (still of IOC standard) by 31 March 2019, at least a decade after that planned. The next tranche of 20 (FOC standard aircraft) will only commence delivery from late 2019, and the improved Mk.1A will follow after a decade.

Genesis of the MMRCA programme is well known, which began at start of this Century and after due procedure, was virtually short closed with only 36 Rafales ordered, far from making up the numbers required. Even with additional LCAs, Su-30s and Rafales, by 2021-22 the IAF's frontline combat strength will have been alarmingly reduced to some 26 combat squadrons, or just 60% of the force levels required.



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