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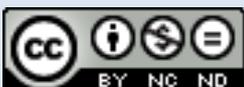
Ex-Pitch Black: IAF Operating in the Indo-Pacific Region

Gp Capt (Dr) DK Pandey

Senior Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies



Source: [RAAF Base Darwin - Exercise Pitch Black](#)



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The Indian Air Force (IAF) detachment is at the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base in Darwin, Australia, to participate in the multi-national Exercise Pitch Black 2024. Ex Pitch Black is the Air Force's premier flying operation for reinforcing international engagement. Held every two years, it is a testament to global cooperation, focusing on large-force employment missions involving large numbers of international aircraft.

This edition of Ex Pitch Black, with an unprecedented scale of two hundred aircraft and associated military personnel from a variety of air forces, is expected to be the largest in more than four decades of the exercise's history, demonstrating the magnitude and impact of the operations. The RAAF is the host organisation for this exercise, which runs from July 12, 2024, to August 02, 2024. Ex-Pitch Black is part of Ex-Pacific Skies 24, a combination of several Air Force exercises.¹

Dimension of the Operations

The edition of the exercise is a truly international affair, with participation from 20 nations. Together, they'll operate from three major RAAF air bases. This year's exercise will primarily be conducted from AF Base Tindal and AF Base Darwin in the Northern Territory, with additional aircraft operating from RAAF Base Amberley in Queensland. These Bases—Darwin, Tindal and Amberley—will be the hubs for large-force employment missions in military airspace over the Northern Territory for three weeks.

Air Commodore P Robinson is leading Exercise Pitch Black 24 as the Officer Conducting the Exercise. "It is a tangible example of how the Air Force contributes to stability in the region," Air Commodore Robinson said. "Especially in how we engage in multilateral defence partnerships."²

The exercise includes first-time participation by aircraft from the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Italy, and Spain and teams from Fiji and Brunei, marking an important milestone for Australia's key Indo-Pacific partners.³

Objectives

The primary emphasis of the exercise will be the large-scale employment of warfare strategy. It will also attempt to improve international collaboration, strengthen relationships, and enhance interoperability with overseas partners.

The exercise is a good opportunity to increase the capabilities of the participating nations to deploy across wide distances, support coordinated operations in the Indo-Pacific area, and develop strong aviation associations in an environment that is considered to be extremely demanding. It is assessed to promote international cooperation and a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

Exercise Pitch Black has to be well planned and requires the involvement of many pilots from different countries and a lot of assistance from the supporting workforce. Large packages of fighters will fly over the Australian territory away from cities and densely populated areas, following the strictly defined controlled airspace while avoiding various obstacles during the day and at night.

This embraces the high level of cooperation among the participating countries and further cements the importance that has been accorded to security at the regional level, hence enhancing cooperation at the regional and international levels throughout the Indo-Pacific region and the rest of the world.⁴

Exercise Pitch Black 24 involves some of the most advanced air combat capabilities in the world, flown and supported by a highly skilled workforce in a challenging training environment. Once they arrive, international participants conduct force integration with other nations and their capabilities and work first-hand with their foreign counterparts.

This exercise provides an environment for training and integration that directly supports the training requirements of international participants and their ability to support operations in the Indo-Pacific. At the individual level, the exercise builds strong relationships between aviators and personnel from across the Indo-Pacific region and further abroad in Europe.

It also recognises the strong relationships among participating nations, reinforces the value placed on regional security, and fosters closer ties throughout the Indo-Pacific region and around the world.

IAF Detachment

Ex Pitch Black exposes the IAF and other participants to intricate scenarios while using modern means of aircraft and tactical space in one of the largest military training airspace zones in the world. Therefore, the IAF Su-30 MKI fighters combating advanced fighter aircraft like the F-35, Gripen, and Typhoon enhance the productive training value. The IAF has previously participated in this exercise in the years 2018 and 2022.⁵ International participation in Exercise Pitch Black provides a unique

opportunity for the participating nations to experience mutual cooperation and strategic understanding.

The IAF fleet consists of the C-17 Globemaster and the IL-78 Air-to-Air Refuelling aircraft in combat-enabling roles. Over 150 highly skilled Air Warriors of the IAF contingent, including pilots, engineers, technicians, fighter controllers, and other domain experts, will operate the formidable Su-30 MKI multirole fighters. The exercise would offer the International Air Force a chance to integrate its forces with those of the participating nations and share and learn from each other's best practices.⁶

IAF's partnership with NATO partners will allow the Air Forces to broaden their horizons and build trust and respect with these other nations. The exercise will provide a number of important lessons to the participants, including an awareness of interoperability with foreign partners and a knowledge of employment philosophy in a global setting through a collaborative effort. Especially for the younger crew members, the experience of ferrying great distances while engaging in air-to-air refuelling operations along the way is enlightening and fascinating.

Conclusion

Ex Pitch Black 24 exercise provides a great opportunity for the participating nations to coordinate their strategies and achieve common strategic objectives. This is an opportune moment for air forces to synchronise their Concept of Operations (CONOPS), mobilising and maintaining detachments at distant locations.

For the IAF, the exercise is one more occasion to hone their capabilities in different environments with a new CONOPS. The exercise lessons included interoperability with foreign partners and a collaborative employment philosophy in a global workplace. Ferrying great distances while air-to-air refuelling has been stimulating and exhilarating, especially for the younger crew.

Notes:

1 Yuvraj Tyagi, "European Air Forces Unite for Landmark Pacific Skies 24 Deployment", The Republic, June 30, 2024, <https://www.republicworld.com/defence/global-defence-news/european-air-forces-unite-for-landmark-pacific-skies-24-deployment>. Accessed on July 13, 2024.

2 Ibid.

3 Flight Lieutenant Imogen Lunny, "Philippines lands a first at Pitch Black", Australian Govt Defense, July 12, 2024, <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2024-07-12/philippines-lands-first-pitch-black>. Accessed on July 12, 2024.

4 Ibid.

5 "Indian Air Force Ex Pitch Black 2024 At Darwin, Australia", PIB, July 11, 2024, [https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2032522#:~:text=An%20Indian%20Air%20Force%20\(IAF,exercise%20hosted%20by%20the%20RAAF](https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2032522#:~:text=An%20Indian%20Air%20Force%20(IAF,exercise%20hosted%20by%20the%20RAAF). Accessed on July 13, 2024.

6 Ibid.

