



Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies

REPORT ON THE NO. 4 WASP CAPSTONE SEMINAR

AEROSPACE POWER: PRESERVING INDIA'S SOVEREIGNTY AND FURTHERING NATIONAL INTERESTS

(Organised by the Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies and the Indian Air Force on July 25, 2025, at the Air Force Auditorium, Subroto Park, New Delhi)

1. The No. 4 WASP CAPSTONE Seminar, held on July 25, 2025, at the Air Force Auditorium, Subroto Park, New Delhi, centred on the theme “Aerospace Power: Preserving India’s Sovereignty and Furthering National Interests.” Organised jointly by the Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies (CAPSS) and the Indian Air Force (IAF), the seminar brought together senior experts, uniformed personnel and research scholars to explore the evolving role of aerospace power in furthering national objectives. The seminar was the culminating exercise of the Warfare and Aerospace Strategy Programme (WASP), a comprehensive programme spanning six months with ten participants from the Indian Air Force and two from the Indian Navy. The programme supports the Indian Air Force’s path to build intellectual depth within its leadership and embed nuanced thinking into military planning and execution.

Welcome Address

Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd), Director General, Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies

2. The seminar commenced with an opening address by Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd), Director General (DG) of the Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies. Reflecting on the wide arc of themes covered during the programme, from classical conflicts such as the Peloponnesian War to contemporary challenges including the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the crisis in West Asia, and India’s own Operation *Sindoor*, he stressed the relevance of historical knowledge in shaping effective leadership. Emphasising the importance of reading for intellectual growth, the DG stated, “*Extensive reading leads to knowledge, and knowledge leads to wisdom. It is this knowledge and wisdom that will empower you, and the process is never-ending.*” He urged participants to understand their roles within the organisational structure and the need to cultivate both humility and decisiveness. While empathy, he noted, is essential, it should not cloud judgment. Before closing, the DG also shared a significant institutional update: a decision has been taken to rename the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) as the Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies (CAPSS), a move reflecting the broader remit and evolving focus of the organisation.



Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies

Session I: Contours of the Security Environment

Chaired by Dr Constantino Xavier, Senior Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)

3. Session I, titled “Contours of the Security Environment,” was chaired by Dr Constantino Xavier, Senior Fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP). Opening the session, Dr Xavier observed that the scholar warrior must be prepared for many forms of battle, and in this case, it was a battle of intellect, fought through the reading of more than fifty books over the three-month duration of the course. Describing it as a rare and rigorous exercise in knowledge-building, he praised the participants’ commitment to reading each book in full and engaging deeply with the ideas and arguments presented. He noted that reading, as a serious practice, is increasingly fading, and expressed appreciation for the course’s ability to push participants to go beyond quick fixes and instead grapple with substance. Dr Xavier especially commended the openness of the curriculum, pointing out how it effectively balanced perspectives from within India with global viewpoints on India. He remarked that “books tell us the story of the India way” and highlighted how the programme offered a commendable model of strategic education that was anchored in India’s own experiences while also engaging with external ideas. Such balance, he added, is not commonly found in military education systems globally, making the approach all the more noteworthy.

4. The first presentation examined the evolving contours of the international security environment through a structured lens. The speakers began by outlining the broader dynamics shaping the current world order, tracing developments from the Treaty of Westphalia through the world wars, and into the post-1991 unipolar moment. They noted that India’s decision to remain non-aligned during the Cold War stemmed from a conscious resistance to a world governed by any dominant power. Today, with the resurgence of multipolarity, they argued that India faces a distinct set of regional and global challenges. These include Pakistan’s continued sponsorship of terrorism, the rise of China as a global competitor, and the rapid proliferation of emerging technologies. The presentation emphasised that diplomatic strength rests not in fancy diplomatic speeches alone but in tangible national power and strategic will. Acknowledging the absence of an explicitly defined National Security Strategy, the group referenced two key sources to anchor their framework: the *Viksit Bharat 2047* vision and a 1995 parliamentary statement by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. While the presentation’s focus remained limited to military security, the presenters called for a systematic approach to addressing contemporary threats, particularly in an era shaped by misinformation and disinformation.



Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies

5. Building on the earlier analysis, the latter part of the presentation highlighted the importance of steady, long-term investments in military preparedness. Having established why India requires credible hard power, the speakers turned to the equally vital question of *when* and *how* to employ it. They proposed a proactive approach to threat assessment and outlined a framework comprising thirteen risk factors - including precision, escalation control, strategic impact, intelligence, and deterrence - to guide decisions on the use of force. Emphasising the inevitability of future conflicts, the presenters warned of an exponential rise in aerial threats and urged timely adaptation through greater investment in indigenous technologies. Throughout the presentation, references to a wide range of books reflected the team's strong research foundation and deep engagement with the subject matter.
6. The Q&A session that followed touched upon the shifting character of military relevance in an era where non-state actors and smaller states can pose significant threats with relatively limited means. Members of the audience raised questions about how India's military strategy should evolve to meet policy objectives under such conditions. One observation highlighted the need for a balanced approach between manned and unmanned systems, cautioning against overreliance on the latter given their cost and limitations. In his concluding remarks, Dr Xavier reflected on the transitional nature of the current global order and noted that India is well-positioned to navigate this moment of change with purpose. He described India's diplomatic posture as rooted in realism, grounded in regional awareness, particularly concerning its neighbourhood and China's rise. He also noted the value of the proposed risk assessment framework and encouraged its application across the armed forces, civil society, and academic institutions to refine strategic assumptions.

Session II: Aerospace Power: Imperative for Deterrence and Victory in War

Chaired by Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari PVSM AVSM VM (Retd), Former Chief of the Air Staff

7. Session II, titled "Aerospace Power: Imperative for Deterrence and Victory in War," was chaired by Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari PVSM AVSM VM (Retd), Former Chief of the Air Staff. Opening the session, he noted that the theme rested on two essential pillars: deterrence and the decisive role of air power in securing victory during armed conflict. He described the WASP programme as an outcome of the understanding of the need for cognitive diversity within a traditionally hierarchical organisation. Commending the participants for revisiting the evolution of air power across history, he highlighted their attention to a critical quality of the domain: its fungibility, reflected in features such as agility, flexibility, adaptability, and innovative synergy. These characteristics, he argued, must be embedded into the larger strategic narrative of national security. Any conceptualisation of warfare, he cautioned, that neglects air power is likely to fall short. He remarked that given the dynamic nature of



Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies

the future battlefield, air power would retain its tactical, operational, and strategic relevance.

8. The presentation in Session II began by reflecting on the unexpected alignment of their academic programme with a period marked by multiple ongoing global conflicts. They noted that this coincidence offered a rare opportunity to observe the theoretical principles of aerospace power play out in real time. The group began by defining aerospace power as the strategic use of the vertical domain - air and space - which offers essential operational advantages such as speed, reach, ubiquity, and agility. These attributes, they argued, enable air forces to establish superiority and execute long-range precision strikes that can paralyse enemy capabilities. Describing aerospace power as the backbone of modern military operations, the speakers emphasised its role in amplifying the overall effectiveness of joint campaigns. Highlighting the concept of fifth-generation strategy, they framed its central aim as the ability to disrupt, disorient, and paralyse adversaries. Drawing lessons from the Gulf War, the presenters explained how aerospace power could bring about decisive outcomes through real-time information dominance, standoff precision, and strategic reach. This evolving framework shifts the focus from traditional notions of territorial sovereignty to domain sovereignty, where the control of air and space becomes central to shaping the battlespace. Far from being limited to advanced platforms alone, this new approach is rooted in sensor-driven, transparent, and synchronised multi-domain operations.
9. The final segment of the presentation examined recent operational developments, with particular focus on Operation *Sindoor*. Described as more than a tactical success, the Operation was viewed as a significant reorientation of India's strategic posture. The participants argued that it not only countered adversarial disinformation but also enabled India to shape its narrative. It brought aerospace power from the margins to the core of national security thinking. Historically, air power in India had been employed with caution, due to concerns that it could trigger rapid and uncontrollable escalation, combined with earlier technological limitations. In contrast, the current environment demands a more assertive and integrated approach. The speakers noted that the speed, reach, and flexibility of aerospace power, particularly in multi-domain operations, enabled India to achieve unified combat outcomes, including surgical strikes designed to deliver calibrated strategic messaging. They cautioned that the challenges of operating across multiple fronts highlight the need for urgent capacity building. Presenting a forward-looking set of recommendations, the group called for increased investment in defence innovation, greater integration of air and space operations, and expanded presence in the Indian Ocean Region and Indo-Pacific. The presentation concluded by stressing that multi-domain warfare will define future conflicts, and that aerospace power should be seen not as an escalatory, but as a strategic tool available to policymakers that, in reality, limits escalation.



Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies

10. In his closing remarks, Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari (Retd) observed that characterising the future of warfare will become increasingly difficult due to the rapid and complex evolution of air power technologies. He appreciated the syndicate's candid examination of both the potential and the limitations of air power, particularly in the context of escalation control. He noted that the presentations had coherently outlined the key determinants of aerospace power and its role in enabling national deterrence and achieving victory in conflict.
11. The Q&A session raised questions on the strategic role of aerospace power. One audience member highlighted that a nation's strategic offensive capability remains its most vital asset and asked whether this area should receive greater focus in future capability building. Questions were also asked on the distinction between deterrence and escalation control, and the unique ability of air power to project force rapidly.
12. General Anil Chauhan, Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Armed Forces, was invited on stage to present certificates to the graduating class of participants from the No. 4 WASP programme.

Address by the CDS on “Scholar Warriors”

General Anil Chauhan, Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Armed Forces

13. General Anil Chauhan, Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Armed Forces, delivered an address on the concept of the “Scholar Warrior,” the central ethos of the WASP programme. He congratulated the graduating officers on the successful completion of their course and described the scholar warrior as a military professional who combines intellectual depth with operational combat skills. Tracing the evolution of this ideal from ancient Indian traditions such as the *Gurukul* system, through the times of Chandragupta Maurya, and later military eras including the Napoleonic wars and the world wars, he noted how the modern military must work to overcome the historical separation between strategy and practice. He observed that the current era marks a transition into the 3rd Revolution in Military Affairs, characterised by the convergence of kinetic and non-kinetic domains, the fusion of tactical and strategic elements, and the integration of hybrid warfare across land, sea, air, cyber, and cognitive spaces. General Chauhan emphasised the need for today's officers to become not only scholar warriors, but also “tech and information warriors” capable of contributing meaningfully to national security. He stressed that this intellectual foundation must be instilled at all levels of all the officers. Concluding his remarks, he stated, “The more you learn, the more you know, and the more you know, the more you realise how little you actually know.”



Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies

Closing Address

Air Vice Marshal Prashant Wadodkar, Commandant, College of Air Warfare

14. Delivering the closing address, Air Vice Marshal Prashant Wadodkar, Commandant, College of Air Warfare, described the occasion as a testament to the collective efforts of a diverse external faculty drawn from serving, retired, and civilian subject matter experts across multiple domains. On behalf of the Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies and the College of Air Warfare, he expressed sincere gratitude to the mentors who contributed to this edition of WASP through their scholarship and guidance. He noted the evolution of the programme was initially exclusively for the officers from the Indian Air Force, but later expanded to include participants from the Indian Army, Navy, and research institutions. This interdisciplinary and inter-service diversity, he remarked, has significantly enriched the learning experience. Looking ahead, he expressed hope that future versions of the programme would welcome officers from friendly foreign countries as well. He concluded by congratulating the graduating class of scholar warriors on their successful completion of the course.

Report prepared by Sanaa Alvira, Research Associate at CAPSS.