**Pakistan Air Force: Second to none**

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Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, while visiting PAF Station Risalpur on 13 April 1948 said,

“A country without a strong Air Force is at the mercy of any aggressor. Pakistan must build up her Air Force as quickly as possible. It must be an efficient Air Force, Second To None.” Quaid’s saying laid the foundations of the core values that Pakistan Air Force (PAF) would follow for all times to come, and professionalism would hold supreme alongside integrity and duty.

On 25th February 2021, President of Pakistan Dr ArifAlvi read out Quaid’s above quote, while addressing a select gathering at the Mirage Aircraft Golden Jubilee celebrations at PAF Base Rafiqui. The President showered heaps of praise to PAF leadership, past and present, with specific reference to professionalism as dictated by the Quaid. Dr Alvi’s statement was not overstated because PAF has produced some of the best leaders of Pakistan’s history for service to PAF and for service to other national departments. He specifically mentioned two outstanding PAF Commanders: Air Marshal Asghar Khan and Air Marshal Nur Khan. While Air Marshal Asghar Khan laid the foundations of a principled politics, even at the cost of losing the elections, Air Marshal Nur Khan excelled in fair governance. Nur Khan not only led PAF to victory in 1965 war against much bigger Indian Air Force (IAF), but also revived the spirits of hockey and cricket as an able manager. Dr Alvi rightly stated that whichever assignment was given to Nur Khan by the state, he accomplished it with effortless ease and without a blemish.

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Coming back to recent times, the President acknowledged the dynamism of incumbent Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan. President Alvi referred to Air Chief’s courageous response to Indian challenge on the night of 26th February 2019, when IAF crossed into Pakistan’s airspace to throw bombs on Pakistani territory, though without causing any damage to life and property. PAF responded in record time, in accordance with Prime minister Imran Kahn’s pledge of not just thinking of retaliation to India’s misadventure but an assured retaliation.

PAF, like always proved itself ‘second to none’ by a measured response, which ensured that the conflict does not expandhorizontally, and escalation ladder is not overstepped. However, PAF proved its point by pinpointed off the target attacks against extremely important military targets in the area of interest, concurrently shooting down two IAF fighter jets, just to remind them of its glorious past. In fact, India’s Prime Minister accepted the superiority of PAF when he said that the result could have been different if Rafale were on the inventory of IAF. There is no doubt that PAF was lucky on the day, as President also mentioned that if the wreckage of the downed aircraft had not fallen inside Pakistan’s part of Kashmir, India would have never accepted that its aircraft had been shot down by Pakistani pilots. Secondly, the capture of Indian pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan also proved extremely useful for Pakistan’s cause of claiming victory in the air combat. Subsequently, Pakistan’s decision to return the Indian pilot after necessary documentation also gave Pakistan a huge moral victory.

Two years on, the relationship between India and Pakistan remain at the lowest ebb of bilateral engagements. While PAF has reasons to celebrate victory of 27th February aerial engagement, it must not lower guards to give space to IAF for another Balakot. India will not sit quiet for too long, and in my opinion no sooner it is free from Ladakh imbroglio, it will have another false flag or stage-manageplan ready to revenge for its losses of February 2019.

PAF was at its usual best during Mirage Golden Jubilee celebrations as it honoured its heroes who fared exceedingly well against IAF while flying magnificent Mirages. The speech by Air Chief Marshal Mujahid was heart-warming, motivating, and reassuring of PAF’s operational preparedness.

President Alvi’s speech was an outright recognition of PAF, for its professionalism and duty to national cause. President spoke out of his heart without a glance on his prepared speech. He gave a fair assessment of PAF’s performance over the years in general and February 2019 in particular.

It is always a welcome sight to have national leadership in military gatherings especially when they are seen sincerely involved and taking the ownership of the task they have assigned to the military establishments, as was the case today. Full marks to the President and the PAF which has proved to be second to none.

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