

INDIA-RUSSIA DEFENCE COOPERATIONS - DEFENCE

NEWS: *Recently, Russia's state-owned defense export company (Rosoboronexport) proposed a partnership with India on the Russian fifth-generation fighter aircraft (FGFA), the Su-57E.*

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India-Russia Defence Cooperation: A Strong Strategic Partnership

India and Russia share a long-standing **strategic partnership**, with **defence cooperation** being one of its most crucial aspects. This partnership is **guided by the Agreement on the Programme for Military Technical Cooperation**, which outlines the **supply, development, and maintenance of military equipment and technology**. Over the years, the relationship has **evolved from a simple buyer-seller dynamic to one of joint research, co-development, and local production** of advanced defence systems.

Key Frameworks for Defence Cooperation

1. Agreement on Military-Technical Cooperation (2021-2031)

- Signed during the **India-Russia 2+2 Dialogue in 2021**, this agreement focuses on **strengthening cooperation in research and development (R&D), production, and after-sales support** for armaments and military equipment.
- It aims to **deepen defence ties** by promoting **technology transfers and indigenous production** under India's "**Make in India**" initiative.

2. India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC)

- Established in **2000**, this **bilateral commission** plays a key role in **structuring defence cooperation** between the two countries.
- It facilitates **policy discussions, reviews ongoing projects, and identifies new areas for collaboration**.

3. Annual Defence Ministers' Meetings

- The **Defence Ministers of India and Russia meet annually** to **review the progress of existing defence projects and discuss new initiatives** to strengthen military cooperation.
- These meetings also address concerns related to **supply chain management, military training, and defence exports**.

4. Major Bilateral Defence Projects

India and Russia have collaborated on **several landmark defence projects**, including:

- **S-400 Triumf Missile System** – Advanced air defence system acquired from Russia.
- **Licensed production of T-90 Tanks and Su-30 MKI Fighters** – Russia provides technology for manufacturing these platforms in India.
- **MiG-29 and Kamov Helicopters** – Procurement and servicing agreements between both countries.
- **INS Vikramaditya (formerly Admiral Gorshkov)** – Aircraft carrier supplied by Russia, extensively modernized for Indian Navy use.

- **Production of AK-203 Assault Rifles** – India and Russia have established a **joint venture in Amethi, Uttar Pradesh**, to manufacture these rifles under India's "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiative.
- **BrahMos Missile** – Jointly developed **supersonic cruise missile**, successfully deployed by the Indian Armed Forces.

5. Joint Military Exercises

India and Russia conduct **various military exercises** to strengthen interoperability between their armed forces:

- **"INDRA" Exercises** – Tri-service joint exercises involving **Army, Navy, and Air Force units**.
- **International Army Games** – India regularly participates in **Russia-hosted military competitions** to enhance combat skills and cooperation.
- **Exercise Vostok** – India joined **Russia's large-scale military drills**, highlighting strategic alignment.
- **Exercise Aviaindra** – A **biennial Air Force-level exercise** focused on aerial combat training and cooperation.

6. The Fifth-Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) Program

- In **2010**, India and Russia signed a deal to **jointly develop a fifth-generation fighter aircraft**.
- However, India **withdrew from the project in 2018** due to concerns over **technology transfer, cost overruns, and performance limitations** of the aircraft prototype.

Latest Developments in India-Russia Defence Relations

1. Potential Local Production of Su-57E in India

- **Russia's state-owned defence export company has offered India a proposal to localize the production of the Su-57E** (a fifth-generation stealth fighter jet) at the **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) plant**.
- The project, if approved, could commence as early as **2025** and will provide India with **advanced fighter jet technologies**, including:
 - **Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radars**
 - **Next-generation engines**
 - **AI-driven avionics**
 - **Enhanced weapons systems**
- These **technological advancements** could significantly contribute to India's **Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) program**, which aims to develop an **indigenous fifth-generation fighter jet**.

2. Strengthening India-Russia Defence Logistics Cooperation

- Russia has **proposed a logistics support agreement** similar to India's **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the US**.
- This agreement would allow both nations to **use each other's military bases for refueling, repairs, and resupply operations**, improving operational efficiency.
- Russia recently authorized the **signing of the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS)**, which will facilitate:

- **Military exchanges and training programs**
- **Naval port calls for resupply and maintenance**
- **Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations**

Strategic Importance of India-Russia Defence Cooperation

- **Long-Standing Alliance:** India considers Russia a **time-tested ally**, especially given their **Cold War-era partnership**.
- **Military Hardware Compatibility:** India's military largely depends on **Russian-origin weapons and platforms**, making cooperation essential for continued operational effectiveness.
- **Arctic Region Presence:**
 - The proposed logistics agreement with Russia could enhance **India's strategic presence in the Arctic**, where **Russia has significant military infrastructure**.
 - This would provide India with **geopolitical leverage** in a region of growing global interest.

INDIA-RUSSIA DEALS IN THE PIPELINE



AKULA CLASS NUCLEAR-POWERED ATTACK SUBMARINE

\$3 bn or ₹21,000 cr
(to be delivered by 2026)
STATUS: Signed



KAMOV KA-226 LIGHT UTILITY HELICOPTERS

JV between HAL and Russian helicopters for production

(200 Kamov Ka-226)

\$1 bn or ₹7,000 cr

STATUS: MoU signed in June 2018

AK-203

\$1.6 bn or ₹12,000 cr
(700,000 rifles)



Indo-Russian joint venture to make AK-203 rifles at an idle Ordnance Board Factory in Korwa

STATUS: Signed. JV to be established soon

4 KRIVAK CLASS FRIGATES

Two built in Russia, two to be built at the Goa shipyard

\$2.5 bn or ₹17,000 cr

STATUS: Signed



18 ADDITIONAL SUKHOI SU-30MKI AIRCRAFT

\$700 mn or ₹5,000 cr

STATUS: Being negotiated

21 MOTHBALLED MIG-29 AIRFRAMES

\$800 mn
or ₹5,600 cr

STATUS: Being negotiated



10 KAMOV KA-31 AEW&C HELICOPTERS

\$500 mn or
₹3,600 cr

STATUS: Approved.
Contract yet to be signed



Challenges and Concerns in the India-Russia Defence Partnership

1. Dependence on Russian Defence Imports

- India aims to **reduce its reliance on foreign arms suppliers** by becoming a **defence manufacturing hub** under the **Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative**.
- However, India **still lacks a robust domestic defence industrial base**, making Russian imports necessary for the foreseeable future.

2. Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War

- The **Russia-Ukraine conflict** has raised concerns about **Russia's ability to meet its defence supply commitments** to India.
- Delays in the **delivery of spare parts, weapons, and maintenance support** have been reported due to Russia's **diversion of resources for its own military needs**.

3. Western Sanctions on Russia

- The **US and European Union sanctions on Russia** have affected the **financial and logistical aspects of defence cooperation**.
- Transactions between India and Russia have faced hurdles due to **restrictions on payment mechanisms** and supply chain disruptions.

4. Russia's Growing Ties with China

- Russia's **increasing defence and economic engagement with China** presents a strategic challenge for India, given **India's ongoing border disputes with China**.
- India must **balance its defence ties with Russia while managing geopolitical complexities in Asia**.

Conclusion: The Future of India-Russia Defence Cooperation

India-Russia military relations have **evolved beyond a buyer-seller dynamic** into a more comprehensive framework of **joint research, co-development, and local production** of military equipment. Despite emerging challenges such as **supply chain disruptions, geopolitical shifts, and India's push for defence self-reliance**, Russia remains a **crucial defence partner for India**.

To **sustain and strengthen this relationship**, both nations must:

- **Address emerging supply chain issues** and ensure timely military deliveries.
- **Enhance technology transfer agreements** for greater self-reliance in defence production.
- **Explore new areas of collaboration**, such as space defence, cyber warfare, and AI-driven military systems.

India-Russia defence cooperation will **continue to play a critical role in shaping regional and global security**, ensuring **strategic stability and mutual defence preparedness** in an increasingly complex international environment.

What is the History of India-Russia Defence Ties?

- India was reliant, **almost solely on the British**, and other Western nations for its arms imports immediately after Independence.
- However, this dependence weaned, and by the **1970s India was importing several weapons systems from the USSR (now Russia)**, making it the country's largest defence importer for decades.

- Russia has provided some of the **most sensitive and important weapons platforms** that India has required from time to time including **nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, tanks, guns, fighter jets, and missiles.**
 - According to one estimate, the share of Russian-origin weapons and platforms across **Indian armed forces is as high as 85%.**
- Russia is the **second-largest arms exporter in the world, following only the United States.**
- For Russia, **India is the largest importer**, and for India, **Russia is the largest exporter when it comes to arms transfer.**
 - Between 2000 and 2020, Russia accounted for **66.5% of India's arms imports.**
- Russia's share in Indian arms imports was down to about **50% between 2016 and 2020, but it still remained the largest single importer.**

What Defence Equipment does India procure From Russia?

- **Submarines:** The **first submarine India ever got was also Soviet.**
 - The first **Foxtrot Class** submarine bought from the USSR entered Indian service in 1967 as **INS Kalvari.**
 - Of the total 16 conventional diesel-electric submarines with the Indian Navy, eight are **Kilo class, of Soviet origins.**
 - India has **one indigenously manufactured nuclear ballistic submarine (INS Arihant)** commissioned, of the four that are being built. However, a lot of the technology is based on Russian platforms.
- **Frigates & Guided-missile Destroyers:** Four of the Navy's 10 guided-missile destroyers are **Russian Kashin class**, and 6 of its 17 frigates are **Russian Talwar class.**
- **Aircraft Carrier:** The only aircraft carrier in service with India, **INS Vikramaditya** is a **Soviet-made Kiev-class vessel** that came into service for the **Indian Navy** in 2013.
- **Missile Program:** India's missile programme has been developed with significant help from Russia or the Soviets earlier.
 - The **BrahMos missile**, which India will begin exporting soon, has been developed jointly with Russia.
- **Fighter Aircraft:** Russia has also been one of main exporters of fighter aircraft to India, including hundreds of **Sukhoi and MiG jets.** All six of the **service's air tankers** are **Russian-made Il-78s.**
- **Arms and Ammunitions:** According to the **International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS)**, India's present military arsenal is heavily stocked with Russian-made or Russian-designed equipment.
- **Tanks:** Indian Army's **main battle tank force is composed predominantly of Russian T-72M1 (66%) and T-90S (30%).**

- **Favourable Russian Military Exports to India:** Much of Russia's influence in India comes through its willingness to provide weapons systems and technologies that no other country will export to India.
 - The US only provides **non-lethal defence technology like C-130j Super Hercules, C-13 Globemaster, P-8i Poseidon etc.**
 - While Russia provides high-end technology like **Brahmos supersonic missile, S-400 anti-missile system.**
 - Russia also continues to offer **advanced weapons platforms at relatively attractive rates.**

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/aero-india-2025-russia-keen-to-revive-fifth-gen-fighter-aircraft-project-with-india-offers-su-57e/articleshow/118155309.cms>