

# India-Russia Defence Cooperation: Issues and Way Forward

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## [GS Paper 2 - Bilateral Relations]

**Context** - As the war in Ukraine stretches over four months with no end in sight, it has given rise to apprehensions on Russia's ability to adhere to timely deliveries of spares and hardware to India.

### Background of Cooperation

- 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, 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.

## Period of Decline

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.

## Current Status of Defence Cooperation

- When the war began, Indian armed forces had stocks of spares and supplies for eight to ten months and the expectation was that the war would end quickly.
- However, as it stretches on with no clear endgame, there are apprehensions on Russia's ability to adhere to the timelines for both spares as well as new deliveries.
- Armed forces are looking at certain alternative mitigation measures and identifying alternate sources from friendly foreign countries.
- However, in the long term, this is also an opportunity for the private industry to step up production and meet the requirements.

## Impact of the War

- While some timeline lapses and shipping delays were possible, there would not be any dent on the Army's operational preparedness along the borders.
- In addition, the armed forces have also made significant emergency procurements since the standoff in Eastern Ladakh and have stocked up on spares and ammunition. However, Russia has assured India that it would adhere to delivery timelines.
- Since the war sees no end, Russian industry would be caught up in replenishing the inventories of their own armed forces.

## Status of Pending Deals

- The defence trade between India and Russia has crossed \$15 billion since 2018, in the backdrop of some big deals including the \$5.43 billion S-400 long range air defence systems.
- Other major contracts currently under implementation are construction of four additional stealth frigates in Russia and India,
- There is a licensed production of the Mango Armor-piercing fin-stabilized discarding sabot (APFSDS) rounds for the T-90S tanks as also additional T-90S tanks, AK-203 assault rifles among other.
- There are several big deals deferred by the Defence Ministry as part of the review of all direct import deals. This is in conjunction with efforts to push the 'Make in India' scheme in defence.
- Russian deals have also been deferred including the one for 21 MiG-29 fighter jets for the Indian Air Force (IAF) along with the upgradation of 59 existing Mig-29 jets.
- This also includes the deferment of the manufacture of 12 SU-30 MKI aircraft by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).

## Status of Payments

- While India continues to remain Russia's largest arms buyer with a major chunk of legacy hardware from Russia and the Soviet Union, the volume of imports has reduced in the last decade.
- With Russia being shut out of the global SWIFT system for money transfers, India and Russia have agreed to conduct payments through the Rupee-Rouble arrangement.
- With several big ticket deals including the S-400 under implementation, there are large volumes of payments to be made.