



## **Russia-India Defence Relationships: After the *Sindhurakshak* Accident**

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Since the last few years, the defence relationship between India and Russia is witnessing a slow down since India is trying to diversify its defence market. India is moving beyond the 'one supplier' country dependency to diversified supplier countries.

During the Soviet period, Moscow enjoyed 80 per cent share of India's defence imports. However, with Russia's 'new thinking' or 'Atlanticist' foreign policy during 1990s, there was a diversion to the West that slowed the cooperation between India and Russia. With the end of the Cold War, Russian defense plants lost nearly 80 per cent of their funding from the Russian government that reduced the production capacity of the industries. The inability of the Russian industry to supply spares on time and the persistent problems with spare parts and maintenance support for the Soviet/Russian equipment forced India to diversify its markets elsewhere.

India has promulgated a new Defence Procurement Procedure effective from June 1, 2013 that focuses on promoting indigenisation and creating a level playing field for the Indian industry. Russia is concerned about the decision on diversification of India's defence market to other international suppliers such as US, Israel, UK and Europe as it might lose its markets, affecting its economy.

In spite of the past and present challenges in their defence cooperation, India-Russia partnership remains unaffected. India and Russia are charting new opportunities for strengthening their collaboration and Russia is trying to regain its lost footprint in the Indian defence market. Dmitry Rogozin, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of defence industry, on August 16, 2013 offered to help India in investigating the fatal explosion on INS Sindhurakshak and vowed to expand defence cooperation between the two countries. It may be mentioned that the Russian-built INS Sindhurakshak, sank on August 14, 2013 in Mumbai port following a series of explosions and a ravaging fire. The Russian-built boat—commissioned in 1997—had earlier undergone a refit for more than two years (June 2010- January 2013). This accident and challenges such as cost-overruns and delays in deliveries, for example, the delay of aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya can raise troubling questions.

According to media reports, India and Russia want to sign a deal on another nuclear submarine. For Russia, it will help in boosting its economy.

India signed two additional contracts with Russia's MiG fighter jet maker worth a total US\$ 55 million on August 28, 2013. In Russia's leading aerospace exhibition and air show—'MAKS 2013' (August 27, 2013 to September 1, 2013), India showcased the aerial version of the Brahmos, a supersonic cruise missile, for Sukhoi Su-30MKI multi-role fighter. The missile has been developed by BrahMos Aerospace Limited, a joint venture between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Moscow-based NPO Mashinostroyeniye. Likewise, India and Russia have jointly developed the air defence system. Russia's TOR-1 ME air defence surface-to-air missile system has been mounted on India's TATA cross-country 6×6 and 8×8 truck chassis. There are good examples of the robustness of the defence partnership between India and Russia.

India is the second largest market for Russia's defence industry. It supplies over 60 per cent of India's military hardware needs and its defence portfolio in India is worth US\$20 billion. India and Russia have an institutionalised politico-military-technology structure to oversee the complete range of issues of military technical cooperation. The defence partnership between India and Russia is guided by the "Programme for Military Technical Cooperation" that was

signed in 2005 and is valid till 2020. It enshrines the interest of the two governments to further develop and strengthen the military and technical cooperation in the sphere of research and development, production and after sales support of armament systems and various military equipments. The two sides also conduct periodic exchanges of armed forces personnel and military exercises such as *Indra*, a joint military exercise conducted by India and Russia since 2003. The last joint exercise *Indra-2012* between the two armies was held in Russia in 2012 and *Indra-2013* military exercise is scheduled to take place in October 2013.

India-Russia defence partnership has been termed as the traditional ‘seller-buyer’ model. However, the Russians feel that the relationship is based on collaboration as India bought licenses to produce military equipment domestically which it acquired from both the Soviet Union and later Russia. For instance, MiG21/MiG 27 fighter aircraft, Sukhoi-HAL Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) (a futuristic advanced stealth combat aircraft) and the BrahMos anti-ship missile are results of India’s indigenisation with Russia’s help. Hence, India and Russia share a relationship of advanced close industrial cooperation, integrating the two countries’ scientific, resource and human potential.

Despite the challenges, India and Russia are enhancing their defence partnership. What is worthwhile is to study the depth of the relationship in future, which seems to be flourishing at present.

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