



Moscow Says India Still Keen on Defense Cooperation With Russia

New Delhi is still keen on defense cooperation with Moscow, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko told TASS, remarking on a Reuters report claiming that India is "seeking to distance itself" from Russia, which remains its key partner for military procurements.

Reuters' report cited four unnamed sources in the Indian government and in think tanks based there, who alleged that India, the world's biggest importer of arms, is "slowly turning West" as Washington moves to contain China by "weaning [New Delhi] off a traditional dependence on Russia."



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"We do not have such information. This is all on Reuters' conscience. Our Indian partners, as before, are interested in cooperation, including in this area," Rudenko replied.

One specialist quoted by Reuters, Nandan Unnikrishnan of the Observer Research Foundation, said that Moscow and New Delhi aren't likely to sign any major military deals, as this would be considered a "red line for Washington." Unnikrishnan later told TASS, however, that although the report did not misquote him, he was at odds with the conclusion presented by Reuters.

"I am absolutely confident that the Russian-Indian defense partnership will definitely continue for many more decades," Rudenko told TASS, adding that the future of defense cooperation between the two countries will depend on the ability of Russian weaponry manufacturers to find their niche in New Delhi's expanding "Make in India" program, which aims to increase the share of locally developed and manufactured defense systems.

Previously, during an [interview](#) with RT in New Delhi, Unnikrishnan said that both countries have a "realistic" understanding of where bilateral ties stand and are discussing ways to enhance their defense relations.

While India's reliance on Russia has been reduced in the past several years, as it increased domestic manufacturing of major defense systems and diversified its export sources, Russian products still account for 50 percent of the arms imported by New Delhi, based on figures by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, a global think tank.

Some of India's key imports from Russia are fighter jets and warships, as well as the Triumph S-400 air defense system, the last units of which are expected to arrive in India by the end of 2024. Notably, Russia was one of the first countries to co-develop arms with India, before the "Make in India" program started in 2014. The two countries [jointly produce](#) the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles that New Delhi now exports to third countries. India has been one of the major licensed producers of Russian MiG-21 and Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighter jets, T-90 tanks, AK-series rifles, and various other military equipment.



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At the moment, the aircraft with the Indian Air Force (IAF) are rapidly aging and in need of immediate replacement. Import dependency to address this deficit is strategically risky for India, just as it would be for other countries, particularly when regional wars are spreading across the world.

In November last year, Tejas, India's domestically built light combat aircraft (LCA), obtained the biggest endorsement in its short history when Prime Minister Narendra Modi undertook a sortie in it. Soon after landing, Modi posted on social media:

A flight to remember! Tejas is India's pride, a manifestation of the strength and skills of 140 crore Indians.

Tejas, manufactured by the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), is part of the solution to the country's aging air fleet. The craft made its maiden flight in 2001, and limited production of the aircraft commenced in 2007. Although touted as the world's smallest and lightest supersonic fighter jet, it wasn't inducted into the IAF until 2016, due to pressure from former Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar to overcome resistance from within the government and the IAF.

In October, India's top commander, Chief of Defense Staff General Anil Chauhan, suggested at an event in Bengaluru that although Russia's geopolitical influence would decrease, the world would witness an assertive China in the years to come.

"The current geopolitical environment is in a state of flux. The old order is withering away and the shapes and contours of the new world order are yet to stabilize. The geopolitical importance of Russia will go down in times to come. It is in spite of being a nuclear power. The Wagner rebellion indicates the internal weakness and is indicative of what may lie in store for the future as far as Russia is concerned," Chauhan stated while speaking on the topic of "Inevitability of Changes in the Defense Forces" at an event organized by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.

Chauhan's statement came days after Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar [said](#) during a visit to the United States that India's ties with Russia are "very, very stable." For almost two years now, Jaishankar has single-handedly handled Western leaders and media, clarifying India's position of "strategic autonomy" with regard to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

New Delhi withstood brickbats from Kyiv's Western backers for not openly slamming Moscow for its decision to conduct its military operation against Ukraine in February 2022. The West views India as being too reliant on Russia for weapons and other needs, and hence not being able to oppose Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions. Ukraine also accused India of taking crude oil from Russia stained with "blood."

For India, ties with both of its nuclear-armed neighbors — China and Pakistan — remain tense and could, Delhi fears, spark into a two-front war on its borders.

In particular, relations between India and China have headed south since the deadly June 2020 Galwan Valley clash, when both nations' armies engaged in a bloody fight in the high-altitude region of Ladakh, adjoining Aksai Chin. New Delhi considers the area to be an integral part of India, while China also claims it as its own. A five-point plan to diffuse tensions at the India-China border after the clash was [signed](#) by New Delhi and Beijing in Moscow.

Notably, Russia has been acting as a facilitator for India in the latter's ties with China. Moscow convinced India and China to deploy military contingents for Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)



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exercises in 2017 and 2021, even though both countries had earlier canceled a bilateral military exercise at the zenith of another border dispute in Doklam along Bhutan (tri-junction of India, China, and Bhutan) in mid-2017.



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