

Why India cannot afford to delink from Russia for its defence needs

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Maj Gen (Dr) GG Dwivedi, retd

New Delhi

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India has a time-tested relationship with Russia since the Soviet days. Under the spirit of “India-Russia Strategic Partnership” signed in October 2000, India has consolidated defence and military-technical cooperation with Russia in a long-term perspective. Currently, around 70 percent of India's military arsenal is of Russian origin. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia is the most important suppliers of defence equipment to India, commanding nearly two-thirds share of the latter's total arms imports.

Indian Army's ‘Main Battle Tank’ (MBT) force comprises predominantly of Russian T-72M1 and T-90S tanks. Indian Navy's sole operational aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya is a refurbished Soviet-era ship and its fighter fleet comprises of 43 MiG-29K. Of the 10 guided-missile destroyers, four are Russian Kashin class and six of its 17 frigates are Russian Talwar

class. Indian Navy's sole nuclear-powered submarine is on lease from Russia; besides eight of the 14 other submarines are of Russian origin-Kilo Class. The Indian Air Force 667 FGA (Fighter Ground Attack) fleet is 71 percent of Russian-origin. All the six air refueling tankers are Russian-made Il-78.

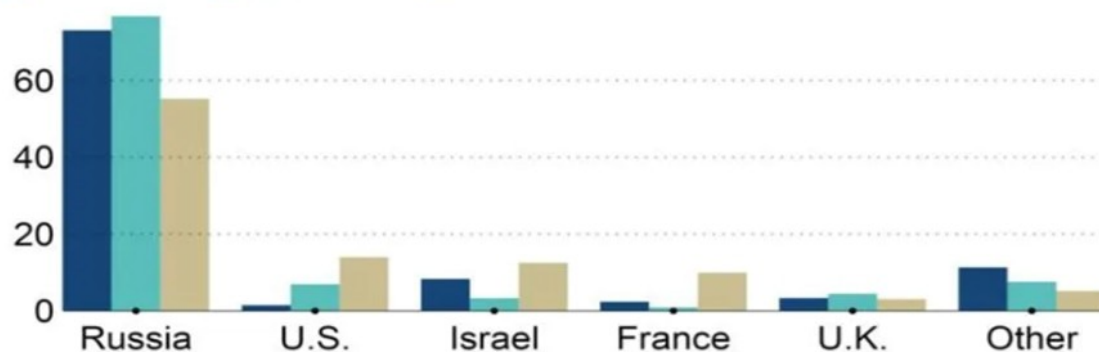
In 1991, about 70 percent of Indian Army armaments, 80 percent of its Air Force systems and 85 percent of its Navy platforms were of Soviet origin. However, of late India's dependency on Russian arms has reduced because of diversification of defense procurement from countries like the USA, Israel, France and Italy. Besides, under the "Make in India" initiative, the nation is moving towards self-reliance in the field of defence. According to SIPRI, India's arms import fell by 33 percent between 2011-15 and 2016-20. During 2016-20, Russia accounted for nearly 49 percent of India's imports while French and Israeli share was 18 percent and 13 percent, respectively. Purchase of Russian arms by India has dropped significantly, although there is planned defence procurement from Moscow by Delhi in the coming years.

Indian arms suppliers since 2002 to 2019

India's arms suppliers

(In percent of total)

■ 2002-07 ■ 2008-13 ■ 2014-19



Over the years, India-Russian military-technical cooperation has evolved from a 'buyer-seller' framework to one involving joint research, development and production of advanced defence technologies and systems. There are number of joint projects that are underway, key ones being:-

- Four Grigorivich-class stealth frigates, of which two are to be built in India for around \$4 billion.
- Joint production of 200 Kamov-226T light utility helicopters of which 140 would be built in India at a cost \$1 billion.
- Of the five S-400 Triumf air defence systems part of \$ 5.5 billion deal, only one has been delivered and remaining four are in the pipeline..
- Four Admiral Grigorivich Project 1135.6M Frigates,
- Leasing of one more Project 971 'Akula' (Schuka-B)-class nuclear powered submarine (SSN)
- Provisioning of 20,000 Kalashnikov AK 203-7.62x39mm assault rifles; 601,427 to be locally built under license at Amethi arms factory.

Additionally, India had concluded assorted deals with Russia to provide varied missiles, including man-portable 'Very Short Range Defence Systems' (VSHORADS), ammunition and ordnance stores. India was also in advanced stage of discussions with Russia to procure 464 Russian T-90MS-MBTs and 12 Sukhoi Su-30MKI to be built locally at HAL.