

India's Defence Paradigm: Evolution And Strategic Shifts In Defence Landscape Since Independence

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1. Abstract

The Indian Armed Forces, comprising over 1.4 million active personnel, stand as the world's fourth-largest military. Post-independence, India's defence framework has significantly evolved manpower, operational readiness, procurement, and domestic production capabilities. This paper delves into the historical context and significance of military development in safeguarding national security focusing on the post-independence era. It explores the formation and organizational structure of the Indian Armed Forces comprehensively, the integration and joint operation of tri-forces, and the country's contribution to UN Peacekeeping. This paper also examines India's defence approach across distinct phases, from 1947 till the present, analyzing the shifts in policy, strategy, and military engagements. Furthermore, the paper provides a comparative analysis of defence policies under the UPA and NDA governments, focusing on budget allocation, indigenization efforts, and geopolitical alliances and strategic partnerships with various countries.

2. Introduction to the post-Independence Era

A. Historical Context:

Rooted in ancient civilizations, India's defence system has undergone significant transformations influenced by colonial rule and global conflicts, ultimately emerging as a contemporary structure post-independence. **The World Wars**, especially, **marked a turning point in global politics, weakening colonial powers like Britain** and reshaping historical trajectories, particularly in Asia.

During World War II, the British extracted an enormous price from India and mobilized the resources extensively, with the army extending up to 2,065,554¹. However, this rapid militarization of inexperienced troops led to early setbacks. **Indian forces were deployed** across diverse battlegrounds, including **North Africa, the Middle East, and Persia**. Despite initial challenges, their **perseverance turned the tide** in critical battles, particularly **in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy**, solidifying their role in the Allied victory and instilling a sense of pride and competence within Indian military ranks.

In the early years of the 1940s, India was on the edge of a dominant political shift, with many eminent nationalist leaders either imprisoned or in exile due to British suppression. Amid these circumstances, the Indian National Army (INA) was formed in 1942 under Captain Mohan Singh to fight for India's independence from British rule.

In 1943, Subhash Chandra Bose, also called Netaji, **revitalized the INA** by taking the army's leadership. Although the army lost most of the battles against British forces at Imphal and Kohima, their bravery and dedication inspired many Indians and made them realize the potential and capabilities of their military.

These key phases along with India's extensive military experience from past conflicts such as the **Third-Anglo-Afghan War (1919)**, the **Waziristan campaign** that the British Indian Army conducted during (1936-1939), and **World Wars I and II** laid the foundation for a well trained and, somewhat,

¹ <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2017/01/world-war-two-provides-the-indo-british-breaking-point/>

professional defence force for India post-1947 which became pivotal in shaping India's identity as a sovereign nation and helped unify the country.

B. Importance of Military Development in National Security:

Post-independence, India's military was pivotal in consolidating national security and establishing stability amid challenges like the **integration of 600 princely states** and **domestic and national security post-partition**. The 1947 partition, marked by the demarcation of the Radcliffe Line, triggered widespread displacement, violence, and bloodshed, particularly in Punjab and Bengal. The **military played a critical role in managing this upheaval, providing stability and mitigating chaos** in the newly formed Indian Union.

Post-independence, **India's defence strategic outlook** has largely been **shaped** by the complex relations it bears with its neighbouring countries, primarily **China and Pakistan**. Despite initiatives like the Lahore Declaration of 1999 and ceasefire agreements along the Line of Control (LoC), persistent conflicts and Pakistan's strategic policies necessitate a robust defence posture. The need for vigilance remains paramount in light of historical tensions and recurring security challenges.

China further tested India's territorial integrity. The construction of a Chinese-built road connecting Xinjiang to western Tibet, running through the Aksai Chin region, which China considered as its territory while it made fresh claims over Arunachal Pradesh as its territory. These disputes led to the 1962 Sino-Indian War which highlighted vulnerabilities in India's defence preparedness, solidifying China as a long-term security concern.

Since Independence, **India's evolving defence approach has developed** a more **self-reliant** and **multi-dimensional** military strategy. This approach combines traditional defence postures with economic diplomacy and strategic alliances. The **country's defence policies** are moulded by its **immediate regional threats** and the **need to engage in a broader security framework** that asserts the voice of India, promotes stability and counterbalances powers.

3. Formation and Structure of Indian Armed Forces

A. Establishment of Indian Armed Forces:

The foundation of the Indian Army, as an institutional force, was laid in 1895 with the amalgamation of the Bombay, Bengal, and Madras armies. With India's independence in 1947, the division of the Indian Armed Forces was a complex process dictated by the Mountbatten Plan. The British Indian Army, with over 500,000 personnel and 11,800 officers, was split between India and Pakistan, allocating approximately 64 % to India and 34 % to Pakistan.

The division also included military equipment, arsenal, assets, factories, and major training areas, like all 16 artillery factories were kept with India, while a lump sum payment was made to Pakistan to build its infrastructure. Command structures were divided, with Northern Command going to Pakistan and Eastern and Southern Command going to India. Henceforth, the Indian Army was left with 88 infantry divisions, 12 armoured troops, and 19 weaponry regiments. While the Gorkha Regiment was split between India and Britain.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) inherited nearly two-thirds of the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) assets, which included 820 civilian staff, 900 officers, and 10,000 non-commissioned officers. Similarly, the Indian Navy was reorganized to effectively oversee the vast eastern and western coastlines, along with the Andaman and Nicobar.

During this transitional phase, British officers continued to lead the armed forces until Indian commanders were sufficiently trained to assume control. This reorganization was a foundational step in establishing India's post-independence defence infrastructure.

B. Organizational Structure:

3.B.1 Indian Army:

The Indian army is divided into 40 divisions and 14 corps, and its headquarters is in New Delhi. It is operationally and geographically divided into 7 commands², with 6 operational and 1 training command. The army has further sub-divisions:

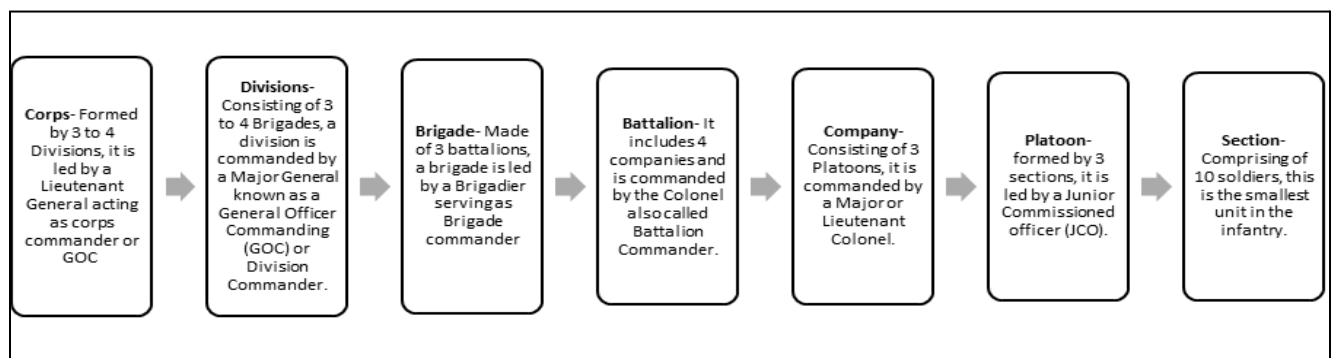


Image 1. Organisation structure of The Indian Army³

Additionally, there are Tri services Commands that comprise Strategic Force Command, Integrated Defence Staff, and the Andaman and Nicobar Command, which are led by officers from the Army, Navy, and Airforce on a rotational basis.

The Indian Army is organized in two parts: Combat Arms and Services.

² These are the Western Command, Eastern Command, Northern Command, Southern Command, Southwestern Command, Central Command, and Training Command known as Army Training Command (ARTRAC).

³ indianarmy.nic.in

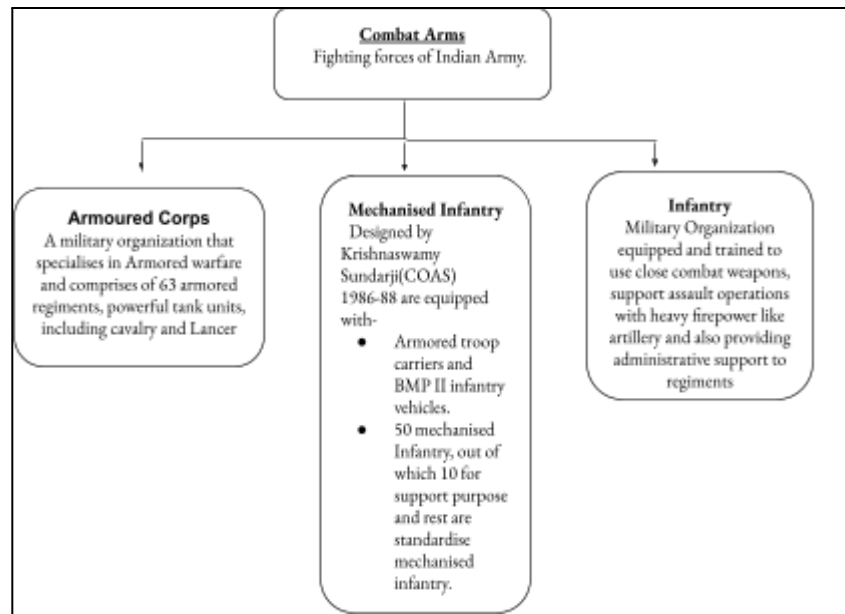


Image2. Combat Arms⁴

Services: Apart from combat and combat support arms, the remaining army is organized under service, with the main task of providing logistical (Arms, ammunition, ration) to the army.

Specialized Operation Forces⁵ in the Indian Army:

In the mid-1950s, with support from the CIA both India and Pakistan⁶ established their special forces. By 1962, under the administration of Kennedy, India formed its own Special Frontier Force(SFF) and further expanded these forces by the end of 1971, with the inclusion of the Meghdoot Force and the 9 and 10 Para Battalion. Army's SOF comprises 9 PARA SF and 5 PARA battalions, as part of a parachute regiment. **Para (SF) Battalion⁷, 31 Rashtriya Rifles Commandos⁸, Ghatak Platoons⁹**

3.B.2 Indian Airforce:

With a history of courage, resilience, and significant advancement in military aviation, the Indian Air Force (IAF), has evolved since its inception on 8 October 1932, as a formidable and integral force in India's defence, acquiring Jets and advancing aircraft like Jaguars and MIGs.

The Indian Airforce is divided into three branches namely,

⁴ [Defence Research and Studies](#)

⁵ India's Special Operational Force has a commendable record history of participating in notable missions like Operation Pawan(Sri Lanka), Operation Cactus (Maldives), and Operation Khukri in Sierre Leone. In 2015, 21 Para (SF) led a cross-border raid into Myanmar targeting terrorist bases and in 2016, Surgical Strikes.

⁶ [QRE](#)

⁷ **Para(SF) Battalion**, are the Indian Army's very special forces specializing in high-stakes covert missions. They operate in small and highly trained teams capable of gathering intelligence far into enemy territory, direct action, and unconventional warfare.

⁸ **31 Rashtriya Rifles Commandos** is a specialized unit within the Rashtriya Rifles that is a counter-insurgency force, primarily working in Jammu and Kashmir. These commandos are trained for Counter-insurgencies and counter-terrorism in volatile areas/regions. Unlike PARA SF, they operate more within India's border, often engaging in operations that require high adaptability and local area knowledge. The RR is commanded by the Additional Director General Of Rashtriya Rifles.

⁹ **Ghatak Platoons**, are the commandos unit attached to regular infantry battalions that take most challenging missions in combat such as raids on enemy artillery positions, and airfields, special gathering intelligence information of the enemy, and also capable of directing artillery and air attacks on targets deep with enemy lines.

1. Flying Branch
2. Technical Branch, and
3. Ground Branch.

The force is further divided into 5 operational¹⁰ and 2 functional commands, with the functional Command being the training command at Bangalore and the Maintenance Command at Nagpur. Similar to the Indian Army, the IAF comprises fighting units. Each of these units is grouped into a larger force and placed under a Command. The sub-divisions are:

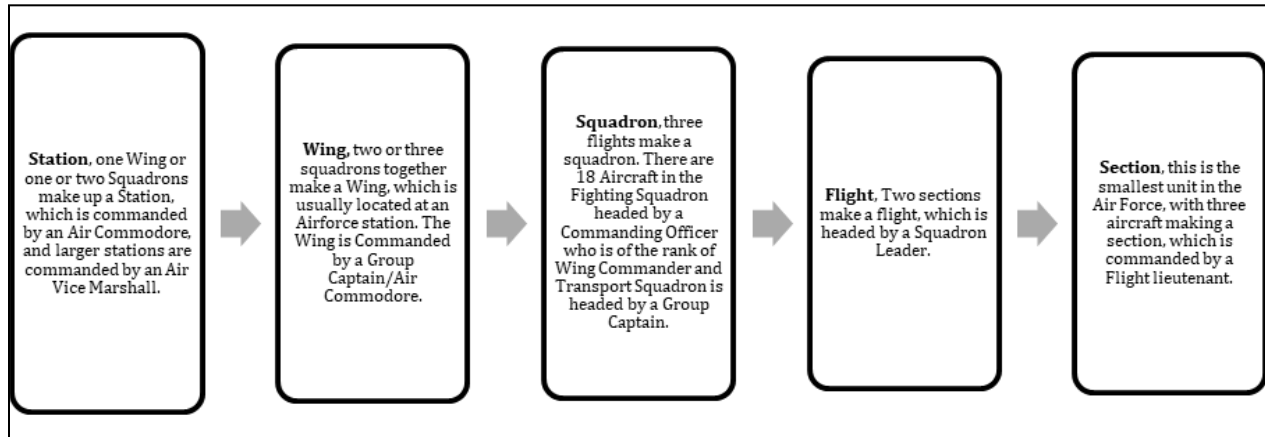


Image 3.

❖ **Specialized Force in the Indian Air Force:**

The Garud Commando Force created in 2004, is the special force of the Indian Air Force. This force is involved in Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR), protecting air bases and other vital air force infrastructure.

3.B.3 Indian Navy:

Indian Navy acts as the prime enabler and guarantor of the country's maritime sovereignty and myriad use of sea activities. With 67,252 personnel in service and a fleet of 150 warships and submarines, 300 aircraft, and an operational fleet consisting of 2 active aircraft carriers named- **INS Vikramaditya** and **INS Vikrant**, 1 amphibious transport dock of **Austin class** named **INS Jalashwa**, 4 landing ship tanks, 8 landing craft utility, 12 destroyers, 12 frigates, 2 basaltic missile submarine, 16 conventionally attacked power submarine, 18 corvettes, one mine countermeasure vessel, 4 fleet tankers, the Indian Navy is a well balanced three-dimensional force. The Indian Navy is divided into three commands.¹¹

❖ **Specialized force of the Indian Navy:**

¹⁰ The 5 operational commands are- Central Air Command(HQ Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh), Eastern Air Command (HQ Shillong, Meghalaya), Western Air Command (HQ Delhi), Southern Air Command (HQ Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala), and South Western Air Command (HQ Gandhinagar, Gujarat).

¹¹ - Western Naval Command (HQ at Mumbai), Eastern Naval Command(HQ at Vishakhapatnam), and Southern Naval Command(HQ at Kochi), where the Indian Navy maintains strategic coverage across its region to ensure national security and safeguard areas of interest, with its core strength lying in two primary fleets Western fleet based in Mumbai, and Eastern Fleet is based in Vishakhapatnam.

The **Marine Commando force** also called **Marcos**¹² is a special operation unit of the Indian Navy that was created in 1987, for Amphibious warfare, Direct action, special reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, and combat search and rescue.

C. Integration of Forces and Joint Operations:

The **1947-48 Indo-Pak War** marked the Indian military's **first post-independence joint operation**, where the **army** and **air force** collaborated despite shortages in supplies, ammunition, and communication. Key victories at **Budgam, Poonch, Uri, and Zoji La** were achieved through effective **air support** and a critical airlift mission that recaptured Kargil and safeguarded Leh.

In the 1971, **Bangladesh War all the tri-services-** Indian Army, Indian Navy, and Indian Airforce worked together closely, with strong leadership and well-planned strategy. As a result, the army got strong support from the Air Force, which carried out powerful air strikes that weakened the enemy.

Subsequent operations, such as **Operation Meghdoot in 1984**, showcased the synergy between the Army and Air Force in securing the **Siachen Glacier against Pakistani advances**. Similarly, **Operation Cactus** in 1988 highlighted tri-service coordination, with the Air Force swiftly deploying parachute brigades to restore order during the Maldives coup attempt.

In the **Kargil war of 1999**, the IAF played a crucial role in flying 7631 sorties significantly reducing casualties and helping speed up the Army's progress on the ground, with the Navy supporting ground operations with its electronic warfare aircraft. In **2015, Operation Agent Lima** underscored modern joint-strike capabilities, with Air Force helicopters deploying **72 commandos to neutralize militant camps along the India-Myanmar border within 40 minutes**, reflecting precision and coordination in cross-border operations.

D. UN Peacekeeping forces:

For centuries, Indians have lived by the idea of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam- the whole world is my family.*" This belief remains a key part of India's policy even today. The partnership between the UN and India to promote global peace is a great example of how India integrates its traditional values with modern responsibilities.

With a proud history of contributing to UN Peacekeeping missions, **India has been the second-largest contributor of troops with 7,676 personnel deployed in 10 out of 16 active UN peacekeeping missions**¹³ of which 760 are police personnel. The most significant contribution of the Indian troops has been to ensure peace and stability in **Africa and parts of Asia**. So far over 2,58,000 Indians have served in these missions, showing great dedication and earning praise and recognition worldwide for their efforts.

India's commitment to global peace also extends to training future peacekeepers. The country established the

¹² Since its origin, MARCOS has indulged in various operations and wars, notably- Operation Pawan, Operation Cactus (1988), UNOSOM-II (1995), Kargil War(1999), and Operation Black Tornado (2008).

¹³ <https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/>

Training Institute **Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in Delhi** in 2000, which plays a vital role in building the UN's capability by training peacekeepers from various member states. This comprehensive approach strengthens India's contribution to International peace and security.

Defence Approach of India Since Independence

A. Period I: 1947 - 1962

Following World War II, **as former British colonies gained independence, they emerged within a global arena defined by Cold War hierarchies.** In this context of world affairs having a well-shaped military strategy was the first step **India had to take to firmly place its national interests** at the international stage of affairs. India's post-1947 military approach reflects the strategic legacy inherited from British rule.

Under British rule, the **army** was the administration's second-most crucial pillar, following the civil services. It **served four key purposes: suppressing Indian powers, defending the Empire from foreign threats, safeguarding British supremacy from internal uprisings, and securing and expanding British territories across Asia and Africa.**

Devised by Warren Hastings, the "**Ring Fence**"¹⁴ approach was one of the most distinctive features of the British Indian Military strategy that contributed to the stability of the British Empire in India and overseas. This approach required protecting neighboring territories to secure one's own. Consequently, **allied states maintained subsidiary forces, commanded by British officers but funded by local rulers.**

The major turning point in British Military Strategy came due to and during World War I. The post-war period witnessed the realization by **British Policymakers to restrict the Indian Army's functions to maintaining internal security only and changes were accordingly incorporated.**

In essence, the British Indian Military Strategy relied on mutual dependency, with Britain defending India from external and internal threats in exchange for India's support in protecting British interests abroad. Post-independence, **India's 1947-1962 military strategy** emerged from two primary influences: **Nehru's political philosophy** and **perception of India's military needs** and **nationalist sentiments** from pre-independence.

India gained independence with a defence policy that had no substance in it and it was made a **primary goal to secure peace, which in turn was viable for India's much-needed economic and industrial development** and brought a major chunk of the Indian population above the poverty line.

¹⁴ The Ring Fence strategy comprised two rings—**Inner Ring and Outer Ring.** The former comprised the **Himalayan kingdoms of Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, NEFA in Assam, and NWFP;** while the latter comprised the **Persian Gulf Sheikhdome, Persia, and Afghanistan.** The British managed the Inner Ring via sheer **direct control** and the Outer Ring via various **diplomatic measures.**

Nehru thus “intervened extensively in military affairs. **He sharply limited military spending based on his belief in the necessity of using those funds for developmental tasks combined with his assessment that Pakistan** was the principal threat to India and one that could be managed with modest defence funding.” (Clary 2017). In the ensuing environment, India moved forward with a lack of serious introspection toward their defence strategy.

It was only after the war India fought with Pakistan during 1947-1948 that the need to have a policy of forward defence concerning Pakistan was duly realized by the Government. “In the aftermath of the war, India’s strategic thinking rested on four pillars: to **maintain conventional military superiority over Pakistan**; to **maintain friendly relations with China**; to stay free of **Cold War politics and entanglements**; and to promote solidarity and **cooperation among developing countries**.” (Ganguly 2015).

Beyond Kashmir, India also managed the Hyderabad accession in 1948 and Goa’s liberation in 1961, applying a relatively restrained military strategy. The major turning point for independent Indian Military Strategy started showing its mark from the **1950s onwards when the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** was founded and it began to play a crucial role in India’s role in global affairs as a voice that does not belong to either of the blocs of the Cold War.

It was also in 1950 when **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel wrote a cautionary letter to Nehru**, warning of potential conflict with China in Aksai Chin. Ironically, this came a year after India became the second non-Communist nation to recognize the People’s Republic of China. **However, Patel’s concerns went unheeded.**

“The 1962 directive to an ill-prepared and ill-equipped Army to throw the Chinese out was ill-advised, besides air power was not used to support ground operations. The operation stank of political unilateralism, lack of strategic thinking, planning, and vision.” (Katoch 2012).

B. Period II: 1963 - 1971

The **1962 Sino-Indian War shattered Nehru’s “Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai” ideal**, revealing critical flaws in his foreign policy. This **conflict underscored the inadequacy of nonalignment and weak military capabilities**, highlighting India’s vulnerability. The crisis proved that **moralpolitik and Third Worldism were ineffective**, compelling Delhi to re-evaluate its defence priorities as limited military power and allies were insufficient safeguards. It was after the **1967 Nathu La Conflict** that India reclaimed its lost confidence in China.

Post-war, India adopted a unified approach to strengthen its military. This was seen in three major ways. Firstly, in 1963, **defence spending increased to 4% of GNP from 2.7% in 1962**, shifting military strategy to an **“Offensive defensive Posture”** from the prior **“defensive Posture.”** Secondly, the 1962 conflict sparked defence consciousness, leading to the **Five-Year Defence Plans in 1964**, emphasizing modernization.

Thirdly, In **1965, a Planning Cell was established** within the Ministry of Defence to handle comprehensive defence planning, including developing five-year plans.

The period of **1963-1971** also witnessed **India's relationship with the Soviet Union grow significantly**, rooted in mutual support on international issues like Kashmir and Korea in the late 1940s. This partnership advanced India's technological capabilities and boosted its economy through **low-cost Soviet-assisted industrial projects**. The Sino-Indian Conflict further strengthened this bond, with India benefiting from arms trades on deferred rupee payments, which eased foreign exchange pressures, and **Soviet support that imposed no constraints on India's independent foreign policy**.

In 1964, the **U.S. declined India's request for F-104 fighter jets for political reasons**, paving the way for a significant arms deal with the USSR. This agreement proved crucial in the fall of 1965, when, after failing to incite insurrection in Kashmir, Pakistan exploited border ambiguities in the Rann of Kutch to launch its second war against India.

While Kashmir was Pakistan's main motivator, India's 1962 defeat and vulnerable defences influenced Pakistan's decision, believing it an opportune time to strike. The 1965 Indo-Pak war began with Pakistan penetrating six to eight miles into Indian territory in the Rann of Kutch, followed by an incursion into Kashmir through Operation Gibraltar. In the **"full-scale conventional war lasting 22 days, India captured some 1,920 sq km of Pakistani territory ...(as against)the loss of almost 550 sq km of its territory"** (Raghavan 2015).

Hostilities between the two countries ended after a ceasefire was declared by **UNSC Resolution 211**, following a diplomatic intervention by the Soviet Union and the United States, and the subsequent issuance of **the Tashkent Declaration**.

The conflict marked a **strategic and political defeat** for Pakistan, **failing to incite unrest in Kashmir or secure international support**, while **India regained confidence and honor after the 1962 defeat**. Post-war, both nations recognized the need to prioritize economic rebuilding.

The 1965 war, following the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 and Nehru's death in 1964, led to **questioning India's Non-Alignment strategy** for national security. **While it strengthened India's global standing, it failed to address domestic security concerns**, as India faced border conflicts with both Pakistan and China, without superpower support.

The post-1965 war period saw a decline in India's economic development due to the 1965-1967 drought, reduced foreign aid, and economic contradictions. The direct implication of this was a shift in the focus once again from **Defence Planning to Economic Management**. At the same time taking a major lesson of inadequacies in Indian Intelligence during the 1965 war, the need for a more structured intelligence wing was strongly felt, which led to the establishment of the **Research And Analysis Wing (R&AW) in 1968**.

In the late 1960s, East Pakistan faced a Constitutional Crisis as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman demanded equal rights, while Zulfikar Ali Bhutto sought dominance. This led to severe repression of Bengalis, causing around **nine million refugees to flee to India, which was already struggling with inflation, food shortages, and economic instability.**

Indira Gandhi tried her best to mobilize international sympathy for the people of East Pakistan. In the backdrop of this, India also signed the **Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the USSR in August 1971**, thereby assuring itself of military support in case Pakistan decided to attack India.

The War of 1971 showcased the use of a balanced strategy, encompassing an **Offensive Approach in the East and a defensive Approach in the West.** The IAF in this respect played a quintessential role and aimed to eliminate the PAF at the earliest in the east. In other words, Indian military strategy inculcated the idea of “**obstacle-based defence**” during the 1971 war, which involved “**penetration and maneuver warfare to destroy enemy forces and capture territories.**” (Banerjee 2017)

C. Period III: 1972 - 1980

From 1971 onwards, India’s military strategy increasingly focused on the **concept of deterrence**¹⁵. During this phase, the relationship between deterrence and dissuasion emerged in India’s strategic planning, with **deterrence aimed at Pakistan and dissuasion directed toward China.**

This period marked a significant evolution in India’s defence approach, particularly regarding China. **Two key developments** shaped this approach: first, the **advancement of India’s nuclear weapons program**, highlighted by the **1974 Pokhran I test**, which sought to deter China from nuclear blackmail; and second, the **enhancement of India’s conventional military capabilities**, particularly in high-altitude mountain warfare and air support, to counter the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) potential incursions across the contested Sino-Indian border (Ganguly, 2015)

From 1972 to 1980, India focused on modernizing its armed forces. **The army invested in advanced equipment, including new tanks, armored fighting vehicles, modern artillery, and attack helicopters.** With Soviet support, the navy began enhancing its capacity to patrol the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, securing India’s extensive coastline. The air force also upgraded its fleet of **Soviet-built MiG-21 and Sukhoi Su-7 fighter jets**, which had performed effectively during the 1971 Bangladesh War (Ganguly, 2015).

However, **in 1977**, under Prime Minister Morarji Desai, India’s defence and intelligence services faced setbacks. **Desai viewed the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) as a mere police force**, undermining its capabilities. Despite this, R&AW succeeded in infiltrating Pakistan’s nuclear program, but Desai’s decision to inform Pakistan of India’s knowledge led to the loss of valuable intelligence assets. The Janata Government

¹⁵ defined as policies aimed at discouraging adversaries from military action by raising the cost of such actions beyond any potential gains.

lacked a clear vision for military strategy, leading to disjointed foreign policy and defence planning, including inefficient arms imports that ignored operational costs.

D. Period IV: 1980 - Present

India's defence strategy since the 1980s reflects an **adaptive approach to regional security challenges**. In this period, India saw several strategic shifts under changing leadership, marked by **heightened conflicts with Pakistan**, intervention in **regional crises**, and a **strong drive toward self-reliance and nuclear capability**. This trajectory began under Rajiv Gandhi, who initiated bold military operations aimed at securing India's interests against evolving threats.

In 1984, the Indian Armed Forces launched **Operation Meghdoot** to secure the Siachen Glacier from Pakistan. Following Meghdoot, **Operation Brasstacks**¹⁶ in 1986 served as a large-scale military exercise along the Pakistani border, showcasing India's readiness to counter potential hostilities. Rajiv Gandhi continued this assertive posture with **Operation Pawan**¹⁷ in 1987. This mission, however, highlighted the complexities of regional peacekeeping and would later prove a costly lesson in intervention politics.

The focus on regional security continued with **Operation Cactus**¹⁸ in 1988. This operation reinforced India's role as a **security guarantor in the Indian Ocean**, projecting its influence and military reach beyond its immediate borders.

By the 1990s, India was entrenched in a **"low-intensity conflict" with Pakistan over Kashmir**, a protracted struggle that drew heavily on Indian military resources. **Pakistan's "moral and diplomatic" support for the Kashmiri insurgency compelled India to form the Rashtriya Rifles**, an elite counter-insurgency force, which played a vital role in curbing militancy in Kashmir. This period saw a large deployment of Indian forces in Kashmir, straining resources but establishing India's counter-insurgency capability and military control in the region.

A major turning point came in **1998 with the Pokhran-II nuclear tests**, where India reaffirmed its nuclear capability and secured a place in the global nuclear order. However, this new deterrence status was tested in **1999 during the Kargil War when Pakistan infiltrated the Kargil region**. Through **Operation Vijay**, India not only recaptured strategic points but also gained two key insights: first, **nuclear deterrence did not preclude the necessity of a strong conventional military**; second, both **countries recognized the risk of nuclear escalation and avoided broadening the conflict**.

¹⁶ Brasstacks involved a massive military exercise on the Indo-Pak border in Rajasthan. The essence of the plan was to have a "highly mobile strike corps of mechanized and armored infantry backed by air power that could potentially strike deep inside Pakistan with lightning speed without the need for elaborate and time-consuming mobilization." (III 2007) The result of this was Pakistan's threat to use nuclear weapons, forcing India to back down.

¹⁷ It involved deploying of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka in an attempt to mediate peace between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers

¹⁸ It involved Swift intervention of India in the Maldives to thwart a coup attempt by PLOTE mercenaries against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

India's defence doctrine evolved significantly in the 2000s with the adoption of the **Cold Start Doctrine**¹⁹ following the December 2001 Parliament attack, which led to a massive troop mobilization under **Operation Parakram**. Concurrently, **India shifted** from “**non-alignment**” to “**poly-alignment**,” significantly expanding its defence partnerships. Defence agreements grew from seven in 2000 to 26 by 2008, complemented by increased military exercises with global partners.

India's nuclear diplomacy also expanded during this period, beginning with the **landmark civilian nuclear deal with the United States in 2008, followed by similar agreements with France, Russia, Canada, Australia, and Japan**. This series of agreements highlighted India's growing integration into the global nuclear framework and reinforced its strategic autonomy.

Under the **Narendra Modi administration**, there was a renewed emphasis on **defence modernization** and **self-reliance**. A turning point occurred with the 2016 Surgical Strikes across the Line of Control following the Uri attack, signaling a break from India's traditional restraint and highlighting a more assertive defence posture against cross-border terrorism.

The 2017 Doklam standoff with China further underscored India's readiness to defend its territorial claims. This period culminated in the establishment of the **Defence Policy Committee (DPC)**²⁰ in 2018, aimed at enhancing strategic planning under the National Security Advisor.

Overall, India's defence strategy since the 1980s reflects a **complex balance between conventional military strength, nuclear deterrence, and proactive regional influence**, underscoring its pursuit of security in a dynamic and often adversarial environment.

5. India's Defence Sector: A Comparative Review of UPA and NDA Eras (2004-2024)

A. Defence Budget Allocation and its Fiscal Implications

A country's defence budget is a critical indicator of its commitment to safeguarding national security, maintaining territorial integrity, and supporting global peace initiatives. **Analyzing defence budgets** offers insights into **policy priorities** and **helps evaluate strategic priorities**, funding **allocations for modernizing armed forces**, and **investments in research and development**. In India, the Defence's budget encompasses allocations for the three armed forces, as well as expenditures on critical domains such as research and development and infrastructure development, including border roads.

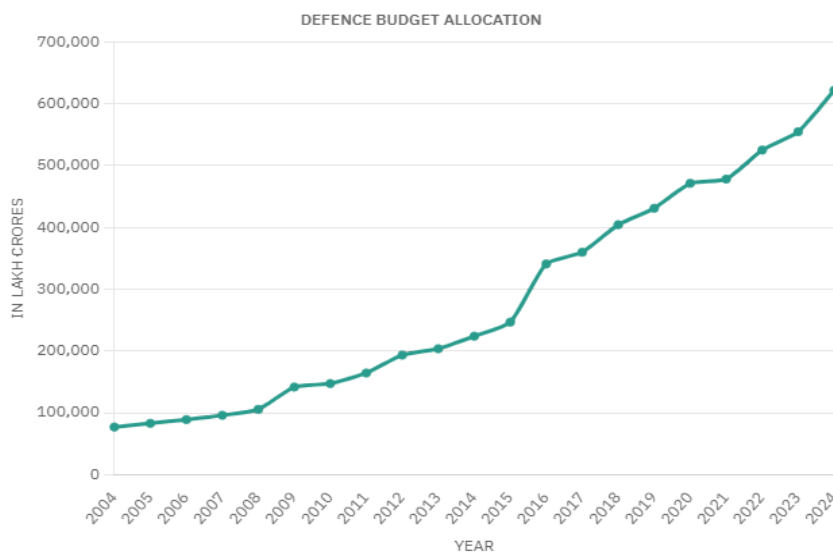
¹⁹ **Cold Start Doctrine** emphasized rapid mobilization and limited offensive capabilities aimed at short, high-intensity conflicts and thus implies swift deployment of forces on India's western borders in case of a full-blown war. It aimed at developing a model of network-centric warfare based on a well-planned geographical distribution of forces. (Desk 2017).

²⁰ Set up as a permanent body, the DPC aimed at facilitating comprehensive and integrated defence planning in order to enhance India's defence preparedness. The fundamental duties of the DPC are two-fold and comprise analysis and evaluation of all relevant inputs to defence planning along with preparing drafts for India's national security strategy, strategic defence reviews, and international defence engagement strategy, to mention a few. (L. K. Behera 2018)

For the fiscal year 2024-25, the Ministry has been allocated ₹6,21,941 crore, with a substantial focus on capital expenditure to modernize defence capabilities and big-ticket acquisitions. **Almost a third of the budget—Rs 1.72 lakh crore—is the capital outlay for modernization.** As per the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), **India’s military spending was the fourth highest in 2023.**

Though the defence expenditure in absolute terms is increasing, in recent years, **the central government’s expenditure on defence has decreased as a share of its total expenditure.** In 2014-15, the Centre spent 17.1% of its total expenditure on defence. This increased to 17.8% in 2016-17. However, since then, the share of defence in total central government expenditure has steadily decreased. In 2024-25, the Centre is estimated to spend 12.9% of its total expenditure on defence. **The dip, in part, may be explained by the exigencies of running a coalition government,** compelling the finance minister to keep the balance sheet intact with a limited increase in spending in absolute terms, while **simultaneously allocating more concessions to the key allies of the Modi government.**

India’s defence budget demonstrated a clear upward trajectory over the past two decades, increasing substantially from ₹77,000 crores in 2004 to ₹6.21 lakh crore in 2024, reflecting an eightfold growth. **The budget during 2004-10** steadily grew from ₹77,000 crores to ₹1.47 lakh crores, **driven by post-Kargil War modernization programs** such as the **acquisition of T-90S tanks²¹, Sukhoi-30MKI jets,** and advancements in surveillance technology. It was during this period (2004-2014) when **India signed a \$4.1 Billion Agreement to acquire 10 C-17 Globemaster in 2011.** In addition, **INS Vikramaditya was commissioned in 2013,** the entire deal of which cost India \$2.33 Billion.



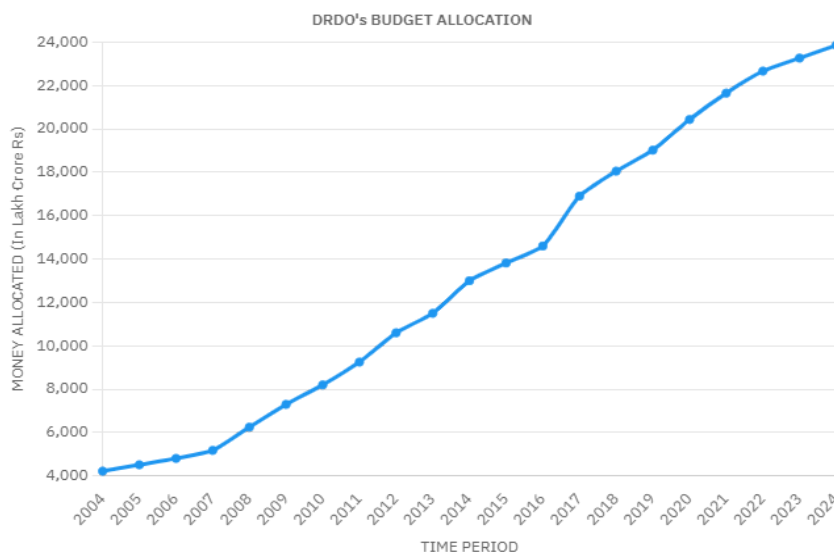
Source: [IDSA Publications](#)

However, the UPA Government faced several strong criticisms too, such as **UPA’s defence minister AK Antony’s statement** on the lack of infrastructure building in Border areas. He said in the **parliament** that the **best defence, for India’s borders, is to not develop them** i.e. an underdeveloped border is better than a developed border. In addition, the Manmohan Singh government also faces backlash over the **prolonged delay** in the decision **to procure 126 Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA)** for the Air Force.

²¹ In February 2001, the Indian Army signed a contract for 310 T-90S Tanks with Russia. In November 2006, India ordered another 330 T-90 tanks, which were licence built in Heavy Vehicle Factory (HVF), Tamil Nadu and cost \$800 million dollars.

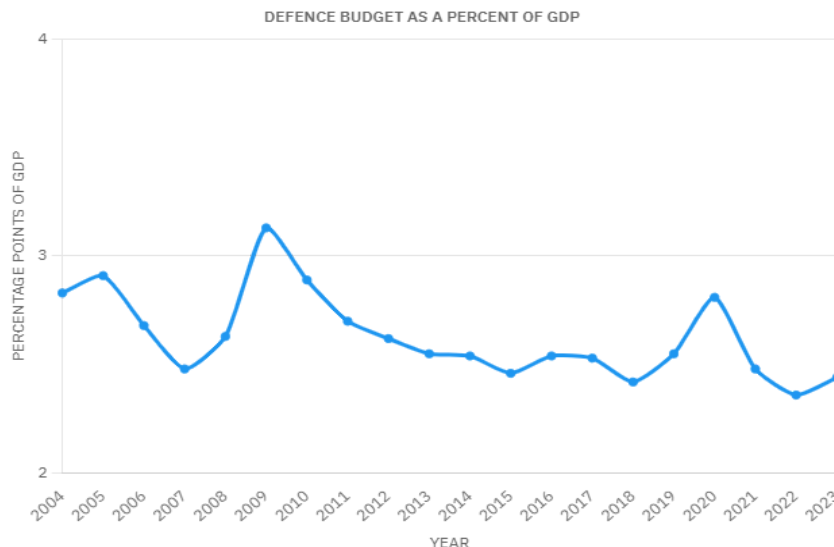
A significant leap in allocations is observed, particularly post-2019, with the budget crossing ₹3.59 lakh crore in 2019 and reaching ₹6.21 lakh crore in 2024. Prominent factors for this phenomenon include **The 2016 Uri attack and subsequent Balakot air strikes** which necessitated higher spending on defence preparedness, **The 2020 Galwan Valley clashes with China** which prompted India to strengthen its border infrastructure, and the **NDA government's "Atmanirbhar Bharat" push for self-reliance** increased spending on indigenization, R&D, and defence manufacturing.

Now Focusing on DRDO's Budget allocation from 2004 to 2024 reveals significant contrasts in spending priorities under the two governments. **During the UPA period, DRDO's budget increased from ₹4,222 crores in 2004 to ₹13,820 crores by 2014.** The focus was primarily on foundational research, missile programs (**Agni-III, Akash**), and indigenous systems like the **Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas**. However, **budget constraints and delays hampered major projects.** For example, the **Arjun Tank and Kaveri engine** faced extended development timelines. Strategic programs like **ballistic missile defence (BMD)** saw incremental progress but remained in nascent stages.



Source: [IDSA Publications](#)

Under the NDA, the budget increased from ₹13,820 crores in 2014 to ₹23,855 crores, emphasizing self-reliance under Atmanirbhar Bharat. Key investments were directed toward, **Missile Programs** such as the Development of **Agni-V, BrahMos-II, and hypersonic systems**, **Indigenous Platforms** such as the **Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA)** and UAVs like **Rustom and Ghatak**, and **technology Initiatives** such as Projects under **iDEX**.



Source: [IDSA Publications](#) and [PRS](#)

Though the Standing Committee on Defence (2018) recommended that the Ministry of Defence should be allocated a fixed budget of about 3% of GDP, to ensure adequate preparedness of the armed force, over the last decade India's spending on Defence has consistently been lower than this recommended level. As per a report by PRS, in 2024-25, India is estimated to spend 1.9% of its GDP on defence which is the lowest since 2013-14.

In reply to a question about allocating 3% of GDP to the Ministry of Defence, the Government said that this could not be ensured as resource allocations are set on a need basis and with competing priorities.

As far as the **Exports of Defence Equipment** are concerned, **comparative data for two decades, i.e., the period from 2004-05 to 2013-14 and 2014-15 to 2023-24**, reveal that **defence exports have grown 21 times**. Total defence exports from 2004-05 to 2013-14 were ₹4,312 crores, which increased to ₹88,319 crores from 2014-15 to 2023-24.

Another key aspect of the Defence budget is pensions. Between **2013-14 and 2024-25, defence pension has increased at an annual rate of 11%**, the **consequence of which gets reflected in the Capital outlay** which has been on a decreasing trend over the past many years. In 2013-14, 32% of the defence budget was spent on capital outlay. This share has declined and between 2014-15 and 2023-24 less than 30% of the defence budget involved spending on capital outlay. In 2024-25, the Ministry is estimated to spend 29% of its budget on capital outlay.

B. Indigenization Efforts in Defence

During the UPA regime (2004–2014), India made strategic defence procurements worth around \$3 billion, securing essential equipment across multiple domains. Key acquisitions included **250 Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighters, 75 Pilatus PC-7 Mk-II trainer aircraft, and 10 Boeing C-17 Globemaster-III transport planes** for the Air Force. The Navy received **six French Scorpene submarines, INS Jalashwa, and six Talwar-class frigates**. Notable domestic defence projects included the Basaltic Missile Submarine Program and the **Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA) project**, though Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) was

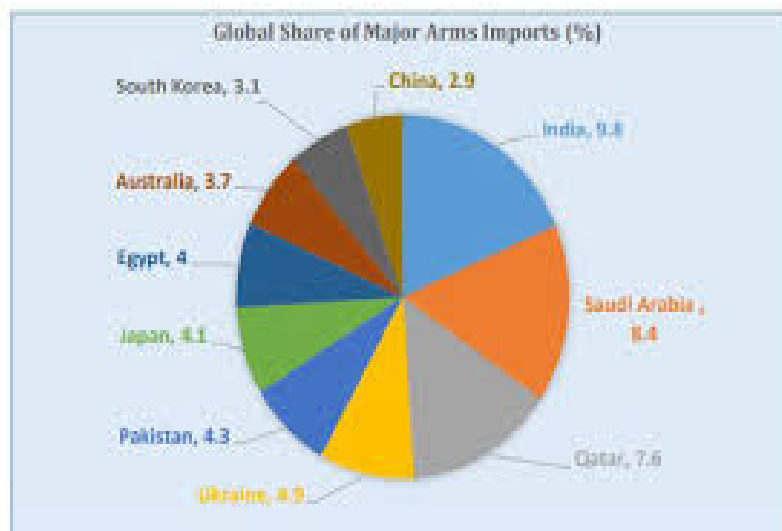
excluded from the MTA deal. The UPA government also fostered private sector involvement, established offset policies, and enhanced R&D. Despite these advances, arms imports surged, with \$5.57 billion in 2012, mainly from Russia and the USA.

THE MAIN IMPORTERS AND EXPORTERS OF MAJOR ARMS, 2009-13			
Exporter	Global share (%)	Importer	Global share (%)
1. USA	29	1. India	14
2. Russia	27	2. China	5
3. Germany	7	3. Pakistan	5
4. China	6	4. UAE	4
5. France	5	5. Saudi Arabia	4
6. UK	4	6. USA	4
7. Spain	3	7. Australia	4
8. Ukraine	3	8. South Korea	4
9. Italy	3	9. Singapore	3
10. Israel	2	10. Algeria	3

Source: *Sipri*

In 2018, India signed 106 contracts with Indian vendors and 62 with foreign vendors²² including Russia, Israel, and Germany. Defence imports steadily increased, with procurement values rising from ₹30,677 crore in 2017-18 to ₹40,840 crore in 2021-22²³.

Source: *SIPRI Factsheet, March 2024*



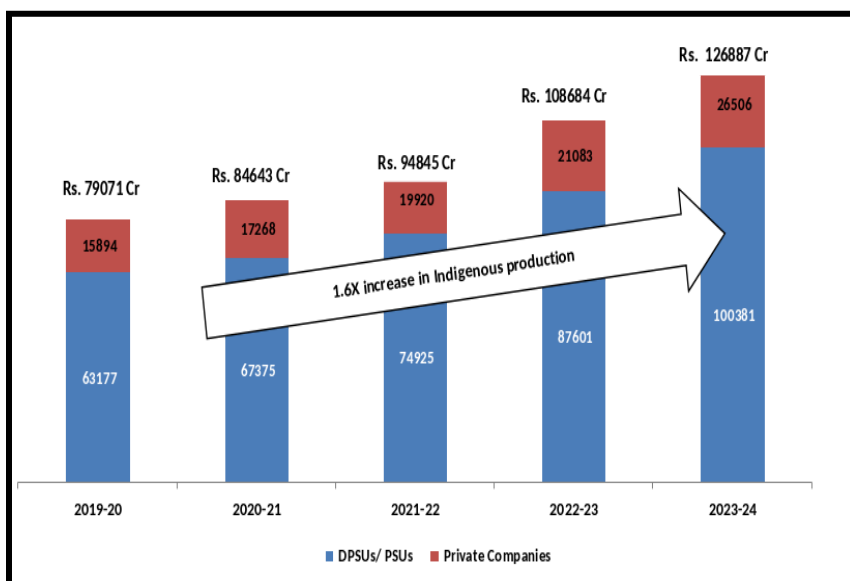
The NDA's indigenisation efforts included boosting self-reliance by inheriting **18 ordnance factories and expanding to 41 factories and 16 defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) by 2007**. Key public entities like Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Bharat Electronics Limited traditionally dominated India's defence landscape. However, the 2014 Make in India initiative fostered private sector involvement, contributing 20% of defence production by 2022-23.²⁴ As per reports, the government has issued around 606

²² <https://pib.gov.in/>

²³ In the financial year of 2017-18, India procured goods worth Rs. 30,677 crores from foreign vendors, with further this amount increasing to Rs.38,116 crore in (2018- 2019), Rs 40,330 crore in (2019-2020), 43,916 in (2020-21) and 40,840 crores in (2021-22).

²⁴ [Observer Research Foundation | ORF](https://www.orf.org.in/)

licenses to 369 companies²⁵



Source: [PIB](#)

With an exemplary reliance on India's procurement of arms from various nations, the NDA government initiated some major reforms to reduce India's arms import and revitalize India's arms production. These reforms included-

Institutional Reforms

1. **Creation of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS):** Established in 2019 to enhance coordination among tri-services and promote the use of locally produced defence equipment.
2. **Department of Military Affairs (DMA):** Entrusted with facilitating indigenous procurement. Public-sector ordnance factories were privatized into seven Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) for operational autonomy and accountability.

Acquisition Reforms

- **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020:** Replaced the 2001 framework, prioritizing Indian firms in defence contracts. It mandates indigenous companies to lead projects, with foreign firms serving as secondary partners holding 49-74% project stakes.

Ease of Doing Business

- **Simplified Industrial Licensing:** Streamlined approvals for private defence manufacturers.
- **Enhanced Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** Increased the FDI limit from 26% to 74%, attracting investments worth \$609 million by 2024.
- **defence Industrial Corridors:** Established in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh to foster manufacturing.
- **Defence Investor Cell:** A single-window system addressing investor queries.
- **SRIJAN Portal:** Facilitates listing of import substitution opportunities for domestic manufacturers

²⁵ Mostly including Tata Group, Larsen& Turbo, Mahindra, and Bharat Forge, with items manufacturing- Transport Aircraft (Tata Group), Artillery Guns (L&T and Bharat Forge), and Pinaka Rocket Launchers (Tata and L&T).

by DPSUs and armed forces.

India has significantly increased its focus on Research and development in the defence sector, prioritizing advanced and exportable technologies like the **BrahMos Missile System**, **Akash Air Defence System**, and **Advanced Light Helicopter**. A landmark \$375 million deal with the Philippines in January 2022 for BrahMos systems highlights India's emerging defence exports. Supported by a ₹1 lakh crore allocation in the interim budget, the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** is advancing deep-tech initiatives aligned with Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Key focus areas include **indigenization**, **futuristic and disruptive technologies**, and innovations like **quantum computing**, **blockchain**, and **artificial intelligence** to reduce reliance on imports. The **Fifth Positive Indigenization List** unveiled by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in the Swavlamban 2.0 seminar mandates the domestic production of 98 critical items under the **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020**. Additionally, the **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)** has approved anti-tank mines with seismic sensors and tactical air defence control radars to bolster defence capabilities.

C. Geopolitical Alliances and Strategic Defence Partnerships

Following the Cold War and the Soviet Union's dissolution, India redefined its defence strategy, moving beyond traditional alignments. The 1991 economic liberalization furthered India's global engagement, notably strengthening ties with the USA. This transformation prioritized regional security and advanced technology, forming the basis for modern defence partnerships. India's current geopolitical alliances and defence collaborations reflect this pivotal shift.

❖ **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD):**

India has forged over 30 strategic alliances globally, including with the USA, UK, Japan, China, France, and the EU. The Quad—a key plurilateral forum²⁶—has bolstered defence cooperation. Trilateral dialogues with the USA-Japan and USA-Australia focus on regional security and maritime stability. The Quad's initiatives, including the **2025 "Quad at Sea"** mission, address **Indo-Pacific challenges like China's military expansion**.

Strategic Ties with Russia:

India and Russia have upheld robust relations post-Soviet Union collapse, formalized by the "India-Russia Strategic Partnership" in 2000, which strengthened defence collaboration. **In 2010**, this evolved into a "**Special and Privileged Partnership**," signifying a deeper alliance. Beyond procurement, both nations now engage in joint research, design, development, and production of advanced military technologies, exemplified by BrahMos missiles and "Made in Bihar boots" for Russian soldiers.

Key bilateral initiatives include **indigenous production of T-90 tanks, SU-30MKI aircraft, Kamov-31, Mi-17 helicopters, MiG-29 upgrades, and Smerch rocket launchers**. These projects fall under the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTS), facilitating

²⁶ As a plurilateral forum, QUAD including the USA, Australia, Japan, and India has gained significant prominence in the past years for defence cooperation in peacetime. By utilizing diplomatic channels and focusing on joint initiatives, the Quad seeks to bring together these four countries to strengthen defence capabilities, collectively tackle shared security challenges, and foster stability in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

defence innovation and shared security goals.

❖ **Strategic ties with the USA:**

India and the US have deepened their defence partnership under the **New Framework for India-US Defense Cooperation**²⁷, renewed in 2015. Elevated to a Major Defense Partnership in 2016, collaboration expanded significantly, with defence procurements surpassing \$20 billion, including platforms like **C-130J, C-17, Apache, Chinook, MH-60R helicopters, and P-8I aircraft**. Additionally, since 2022, U.S. Maritime Sealift Command (MSC) ships have undergone maintenance at L&T Kattupalli, India.

The **2023 India-US Defense Industrial Cooperation**²⁸ roadmap and **INDUS-X**²⁹ initiatives further strengthened ties. Joint exercises like **Yudh Abhyas, Vajra Prahar, Malabar, and Cope India** enhance operational synergy, bolstering future collaboration.

❖ **Other Key Partnership:**

➤ **Israel:**

During the Kargil War, India's defence relationship with Israel strengthened significantly when Israel provided critical support by supplying mortars, ammunition, and laser-guided missiles. Over the last 15 years, Israel has emerged as a key player in India's Diversification Strategy, supplying advanced military technologies, including **Phalcon AEW&C systems, UAVs (Heron, Searcher II, Harop)**, and missile systems (**Spyder, Barak, Popeye I and II**). This mutually beneficial partnership also fosters domestic production through collaborations between **Israeli firms like IAI, Elbit Systems, and Rafael Advanced Defence Systems**, and Indian companies such as **Adani Defence, Tata Advanced Systems, and Tech Mahindra**.

➤ **France:**

India and France's 70-year defence partnership bolsters India's strategic autonomy through industrial collaboration, such as the **Scorpene submarines deal (2005), Mirage-2000 modernization (2012)**, and **the 36 Rafale**³⁰ jets contract (2016). Key bilateral exercises like **Garuda**³¹ and **strategic missions such as Pegasus** demonstrate operational cooperation. Programs like **P-75 Kalvari, under Make in India, further align with India's self-reliance goals**.

Conclusion

The evolution of India's defence sector since Independence highlights its journey from an emerging military structure to a formidable force that plays a key role in global peace and security. This paper has explored the historical development, organisational growth and strategic transformation of each era that has brought unique challenges and

²⁷ [MEA](#)

²⁸ The India-US defence Industrial Cooperation, seeks to fast track technology cooperation and co-production in areas of mutual interest. The roadmap outlined some principles for this cooperation, which included working on changes in policies, licensing, export controls, security of supply arrangement, FDI, and technology transfers. It sought to enhance business-to-business interactions in the public and private sectors and to promote the integration of the Indian defence industry into global supply chains

²⁹ INDUS X Acceleration System launched in 2023 to coordinate efforts in defence innovation, technology and systems, linking iDEX (Innovation in Defence Excellence) in India and defence Innovation Unit (DIU) in US.

³⁰ <https://www.icwa.in/>

³¹ **Garuda focusses on high intensity combat training and enhancing interoperability.**

milestones shaping the Indian Armed Forces into a modern, integrated and strategically aligned entity. As India moves forward under the stewardship of Honourable Prime Minister, Narendra Modi to innovate, reform and strengthen its military capabilities by prioritizing the modernization of Armed forces, advancing innovation in defence technology and strengthening partnerships with other nations, India is well-positioned to address emerging threats and maintain regional stability. In essence, India's defence journey is a testament to its unwavering commitment to safeguarding the sovereignty and integrity of the country while contributing to global peace and security.

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