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India-U.S.: Major Arms Transfers and Military Exercises

Since 2008, defense trade has emerged as a central facet of the U.S.-India security partnership, and bilateral military exercises across all services are now routine. The U.S. Congress designated India a “Major Defense Partner” in 2016, conveying certain defense trade and security cooperation privileges. With U.S.-India defense relations becoming an increasingly high-profile aspect of U.S. foreign policy—and the Biden Administration launching new bilateral technology-sharing and defense coproduction initiatives with India—Congress may wish to consider adjusting U.S. laws and regulations in response to these plans. Possible future arms sales to and/or collaboration on advanced military technologies with India may require congressional approval. Legislation introduced in the 118th Congress would enhance India’s eligibility for arms sales.

Major Arms Transfers

India is the world’s largest weapons importer by value, accounting for 10% of global arms imports from 2008 to 2023. New Delhi is expected to spend at least \$200 billion in the coming decade to modernize its armed forces. India’s current defense arsenal is heavily stocked with Russian-supplied equipment. Since 2008, about 62% of India’s defense imports (by value) have come from Russia; other top suppliers include France (11%), the United States (10%), and Israel (7%). The U.S. government is actively encouraging India to reduce its dependence on Russian-origin defense articles. Prior to 2008, U.S.-India defense trade was relatively limited, involving modest U.S. sales of naval helicopters and counterbattery radars in the mid-2000s. In 2007, the United States also provided India with an amphibious transport dock ship under the U.S. Excess Defense Articles program—the former USS *Trenton*, now the INS *Jalashwa*.

India has contracted for more than \$20 billion worth of U.S.-origin defense articles since 2008, according to the Defense Department. India purchases these items through the Foreign Military Sales and the Direct Commercial Sales processes. India last received U.S. Foreign Military Financing in 1965. Major U.S. defense sales to India over the past 15 years include transport and maritime aircraft (C-130J *Super Hercules*, C-17 *Globemaster III*s, and P-8I *Poseidons*); transport, maritime, and attack helicopters (CH-47F *Chinooks*, MH-60R *Seahawks*, and AH-64E *Apaches*); *Harpoon* anti-ship missiles; and M777 howitzers, among others. India is now the largest operator of C-17s and P-8Is outside of the United States.

In June 2023, the United States and India launched a bilateral Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) to expand strategic technology and defense industrial cooperation. The same month, Ohio-based General Electric issued an unprecedented proposal to jointly produce its advanced F414 jet engine in India, and India approved the

purchase of 31 armed MQ-9B *SeaGuardian* and *SkyGuardian* unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from California-based General Atomics for \$4 billion. More recently, Congress was notified of a pending sale to India of anti-submarine warfare (ASW) sonobuoys. Other proposed sales include turbofans for indigenously produced Indian combat aircraft, MK 54 lightweight torpedoes, and additional *Hellfire* anti-tank missiles and *Excalibur* guided artillery rounds. The United States has also offered India “state-of-the-art capabilities” such as F-15EX *Eagle II* and F-21 *Fighting Falcon* combat aircraft for India’s air force.

Major U.S. Arms Orders from and Deliveries to India by Use, 2000-2023

(Deliveries completed unless otherwise noted.)

Air

- 28 AH-64 *Apache* combat helicopters (22 delivered)
- 1,354+ AGM-114 *Hellfire* anti-tank missiles
- 245 *Stinger* portable surface-to-air missiles
- 12 APG-78 *Longbow* combat helicopter radars
- 6 spare helicopter turboshafts
- 15 CH-47 *Chinook* transport helicopters
- 13 C-130 *Hercules* transport aircraft
- 11 C-17 *Globemaster III* heavy transport aircraft
- 2 MQ-9A *Reaper* UAVs (two-year lease in 2020)
- 512 CBU-97 guided bombs
- 234 aircraft turboprops (228 delivered)
- 147 aircraft turbofans (48 delivered)

Sea

- 1 *Austin*-class amphibious transport dock
- 24 MH-60R *Seahawk* naval helicopters (6 delivered)
- 12 P-8I *Poseidon* patrol and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft
- 48 Mk-54 ASW torpedoes (32 delivered)
- 6 S-61 *Sea King* ASW helicopters
- 53 *Harpoon* anti-ship missiles
- 1 *Harpoon* Joint Common Test Set (accepted)
- 24 naval gas turbines (6 delivered)

Land

- 12 *Firefinder* counterbattery radars
- 145 M-777 towed 155 mm howitzers
- 1,200+ M-982 *Excalibur* guided artillery shells
- 72,400+ SIG Sauer SIG716 assault rifles

Bilateral Military Exercises

Since 2002, the United States and India have been increasing the scope, complexity, and frequency of

combined military exercises, with an emphasis on maritime security and interoperability. India now conducts more exercises and personnel exchanges with the United States than with any other country. (See italicized names below.)

Yudh Abhyas (Army): The 20th edition of the leading bilateral ground forces exercise was held in western India in September 2024. Elements of the U.S. Army's 11th Airborne Division participated. The exercises are held at the battalion level (roughly 600 troops from each army), along with brigade-level mission planning.

Vajra Prahar (Army Special Forces): U.S. and Indian Special Forces soldiers have held 15 joint exercises since 2010, and hundreds of U.S. Special Forces soldiers have attended India's Counter-Insurgency Jungle Warfare School. The most recent edition of this platoon-level exercise was held in Idaho in November 2024.

Cope India (Air Force): First held in 2004 as a fighter jet training exercise in northern India; in 2018, the two countries' air forces relaunched these exercises after a nine-year hiatus. Cope India 2023, held in April, was the sixth and largest iteration ever, and included the participation of U.S. Air Force B-1B bombers and F-15 combat aircraft.

Tiger Triumph (tri-service): In 2019, U.S. and Indian forces conducted their first-ever tri-service exercise in the Bay of Bengal to develop interoperability for large-scale joint and combined humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) operations. A third iteration was held in March 2024 and involved elements of a U.S. Marine Expeditionary Unit and an Indian Army mechanized infantry battalion, along with U.S. and Indian aircraft and naval vessels.

Other bilateral exercises include ***Tarkash*** joint ground force counterterrorism exercises, which involve U.S. Special Forces and India's National Security Guard troops, and ***Sangam*** naval special forces exercises, which bring together companies of U.S. Navy SEALs and the Indian Navy's Marine Commando Force.

Multilateral Military Exercises

Malabar (Navy): The United States and India inaugurated Malabar in 1992 as a bilateral naval exercise. Japan joined in 2014 and became a permanent participant the next year. Australia's participation began in 2020, bringing together naval forces from all four Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) countries for the first time since HADR operations conducted following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Malabar's 28th edition, the fifth to include all Quad navies, was held in the Bay of Bengal in October 2024. Participating Indian forces included guided missile destroyers, frigates, submarines, and combat aircraft. The U.S. Navy sent a guided-missile destroyer and a P-8 aircraft.

Rim-of-the-Pacific (RIMPAC, Navy): The biennial RIMPAC reportedly is the world's largest maritime exercise. A 29th edition was held near Hawaii in June 2024 with the participation of 29 countries and 40 surface ships, including a guided missile stealth frigate from India.

Milan (Navy): India hosts this biennial Bay of Bengal exercise, first held in 1994 with the forces of five Southeast Asian nations. The U.S. Navy first participated in 2022.

The 12th edition in February 2024 was the largest ever, including 50 nations and the participation of a U.S. Navy guided missile destroyer.

Cutlass Express (Navy): In 2019, the Indian Navy participated in exercises held near Djibouti and sponsored by the Pentagon's Africa Command. The March 2024 edition of "East Africa's premier maritime exercise" took place near Seychelles and included units from 16 countries, India among them.

La Perouse (Navy): A biennial Indian Ocean exercise sponsored by France brought together elements from five navies (Quad plus France) in March 2023, including a stealth frigate and fleet tanker from the Indian Navy.

Sea Dragon (Navy): The fifth edition of this annual ASW theater exercise is set to be held near Guam in January 2025 to include forces from the Quad (among them an Indian P-8I aircraft), plus South Korea

Pitch Black (Air Force): Australia hosts this biennial low-light warfare exercise, held most recently mid-2022 and including forces from 17 countries, including an Indian contingent of four combat and two transport aircraft.

Red Flag (Air Force): The U.S. Air Force conducts aerial combat exercises with units from allied and partner countries several times each year in the United States. Indian combat, transport, and tanker aircraft joined in 2008, 2016, and the June 2024 edition in Alaska.

Other Notable Issues

India joined the U.S.-commanded, Bahrain-based **Combined Maritime Force (CMF)** as an associate partner in 2022. This multinational naval partnership has 46 members and oversees five Joint Task Forces focused on counter-narcotics, counter-smuggling, and counter-piracy. India's Defense Exhibition (**DefExpo**) is a biennial showcasing of Indian defense wares. The 2023 edition, held in Gujarat, was the 13th and largest ever, attracting participants from 75 countries, including the United States, and more than 1,300 companies. **Aero India** is a biennial air show and exhibition held since 1996 in Karnataka and organized by India's Ministry of Defense and Air Force. Reportedly Asia's largest air show, the 2023 iteration included more than 730 exhibitors, and the United States displayed many of its most advanced military aircraft. Numerous U.S. defense companies participated, as did the largest-ever delegation of U.S. diplomats.

Selected Legislation in the 118th Congress

S. 2096 and **H.R. 4312**, to enhance the eligibility of India for Foreign Military Sales and exports under the Arms Export Control Act, were introduced in the Senate and the House, respectively, in June 2023.

Sources: U.S. Departments of Defense and State; Embassy of India; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI); International Institute of Strategic Studies (London); press reports.

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