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

In October 2025, India’s defense minister—in the course of inking a third 10-year defense framework agreement with the United States—called defense “the major pillar” of bilateral ties. The latest pact, meant to strengthen “interoperability across all domains, including land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace,” is described by the Pentagon as “the most ambitious and wide-ranging [bilateral] document yet.” In the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2026 (P.L. 119-60), Congress called for “broadening United States engagement with India, including through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue” (“Quad”), to “advance shared interests in a free and open Indo-Pacific region” and to “enable greater cooperation on maritime security.”

Since 2008, defense trade has emerged as a key aspect of the U.S.-India 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. U.S.-India security relations became a high-profile aspect of U.S. Asia policy during the first Trump Administration. The Biden Administration launched new technology-sharing and defense coproduction initiatives with India that the second Trump Administration is building upon. Legislation in the 118th Congress would have enhanced India’s eligibility for arms sales. The 119th Congress may wish to consider adjusting U.S. laws and regulations to shape U.S.-India defense trade. Arms sales to and collaboration on advanced defense technologies with India may require congressional approval.

From 2016 to 2020, the United States and India concluded several “enabling” defense cooperation accords which in many cases provide the legal framework for an intensified defense partnership, including a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA); a Communications, Compatibility, and Security Agreement (COMCASA); and a Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Cooperation (BECA). In 2018, the United States elevated India to Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1, allowing it to receive license-free access to some military and dual-use technologies regulated by the Commerce Department. In 2019, the two countries inked an Industrial Security Annex to enable transfers of classified technology between private entities. In 2024, the governments concluded a Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) to facilitate defense industrial collaboration. Negotiations on a Reciprocal Defense Procurement (RDP) agreement began in 2023. Many analysts contend that an RDP is needed to gain full SOSA benefits.

Major Arms Transfers

According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) data, India has been the world’s leading importer of major arms (by value) since 1950, with

purchases of nearly \$140 billion through 2025. For the period 2008-2025, India accounted for 10% of global arms imports—\$51.8 billion worth—well ahead of #2 Saudi Arabia. India’s current defense arsenal is heavily stocked with Russian-supplied equipment. Since 2008, about 59% of India’s defense imports (by value) have come from Russia; other top suppliers include France (12%), the United States (10%), and Israel (9.5%). The U.S. government has actively encouraged India to reduce its dependence on Russian-origin defense articles, and India’s suppliers are becoming more diverse: for the period 2021-2025, 40% of India’s imports came from Russia.

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 combined value of these three deals was roughly \$233 million. India has since contracted for at least \$25 billion worth of U.S.-origin defense articles, purchasing items through the Foreign Military Sales and the Direct Commercial Sales processes. Major U.S. deliveries since 2008 include transport and maritime aircraft; transport, maritime, and attack helicopters; anti-ship missiles; and howitzers, among others. India is now the largest operator of C-17 Globemaster heavy transport and P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft outside of the United States.

In 2023, India approved procurement of 31 armed MQ-9B SeaGuardian and SkyGuardian uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) for about \$4 billion; deliveries are set to begin in 2029. In 2025, India signed a five-year sustainment package for its Seahawk helicopters; the estimated \$946 million deal would upgrade its anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities. India in 2025 ordered an additional 113 F404 engines for indigenously produced combat aircraft for about \$1 billion, and Delhi reportedly will procure another six P-8I aircraft (~\$3 billion). Other proposed sales include ASW sonobuoys (~\$251 million), Maritime Domain Awareness equipment (~\$131 million), Javelin anti-armor missile systems (~\$46 million), MK 54 torpedoes (~\$175 million), and Excalibur guided artillery rounds (~\$47 million). The United States also offers India advanced combat aircraft such the F-21 Fighting Falcon, the F/A-18 Super Hornet, and potentially the fifth-generation F-35 Lightning II.

The United States and India launched a Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) in 2023 to expand technology and defense industrial cooperation; this was redubbed INDUS Innovation in 2025. At the time, General Electric proposed to jointly produce—with technology transfer—its advanced F414 jet engine in India. Discussions on coproduction of Stryker infantry combat vehicles and Javelin anti-tank missiles are ongoing.

Major U.S. Arms Purchases, 2000-2025

(Deliveries completed unless otherwise noted.)

Air

- 28 AH-64 Apache combat helicopters
- 1,456 AGM-114 Hellfire anti-tank missiles
- 245 Stinger portable surface-to-air missiles
- 12 APG-78 Longbow combat helicopter radars
- 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)
- 762 JDAM and CBU-97 guided bombs (612 delivered)
- 212 F404 jet engines (~70 delivered)

Sea

- 1 Austin-class amphibious transport dock
- 24 MH-60R Seahawk naval helicopters (20 delivered)
- 6 APS-153 maritime aircraft radar (5 delivered)
- 12 P-8I Poseidon patrol and ASW aircraft
- 62 MK 54 ASW torpedoes
- 6 S-61 Sea King ASW helicopters
- 63 Harpoon anti-ship missiles
- 24 naval gas turbines (18 delivered)

Land

- 12 Firefinder counterbattery radars
- 145 M-777 towed 155 mm howitzers
- 1,300 M-982 Excalibur guided artillery shells
- 145,400 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 21st edition of the premier bilateral ground forces exercise, held in Alaska in September 2025, included jointly planned and executed battalion-level tactical maneuvers.

Vajra Prahar (Army Special Forces): U.S. and Indian Special Forces soldiers have held 16 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 India in February-March 2026.

Cope India (Air Force): First held in 2004 as a fighter jet training exercise, in 2018 the two countries relaunched these exercises after a nine-year hiatus. Cope India 2025 saw Quad partners Australia and Japan attend as observers.

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 humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) operations. A fourth iteration was held in April 2025.

Other bilateral exercises include ***Vajra Prahar*** for U.S. and Indian Special Forces; ***Tarkash*** joint counterterrorism exercises involving U.S. Special Forces and Indian National Security Guard troops; and ***Sangam*** exercises for U.S. Navy SEALs and India'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. Australia's participation began in 2020, bringing together naval forces from all four of the Quad countries for the first time since joint HADR operations in 2004. Malabar's 29th edition, the sixth to include all Quad navies, was held near Guam in November 2025.

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 2024 with the participation of 29 countries and 40 surface ships.

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 13th edition in February 2026 was the largest ever with ships, submarines, aircraft, and personnel from 52 nations.

Other multilateral maritime exercises include ***Cutlass Express***, sponsored by the Pentagon's Africa Command; ***La Perouse***, sponsored by France; and ***Sea Dragon***, an annual ASW theater exercise. Multilateral air force exercises include ***Pitch Black***, a biennial low-light warfare exercise hosted by Australia, and ***Red Flag***, U.S. Air Force aerial combat exercises held with units from allied and partner countries several times each year in the United States.

Other Notable Defense Cooperation

India became a full member of the U.S.-commanded, Bahrain-based Combined Maritime Forces in 2023. This multinational naval focuses on counter-narcotics, counter-smuggling, and counter-piracy. India has received at least \$1 million in U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding annually since 2003. U.S. defense firms have established Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) agreements in India, contributing to the development of a bilateral defense ecosystem. Since 2023 the U.S. Navy has reached Master Ship Repair Agreements with Indian firms, allowing U.S. warships to undergo service at Indian shipyards. In February 2026 the two governments launched the Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance for co-development and co-production of autonomous defense platforms.

Selected Legislation in the 118th Congress

S. 2096 and **H.R. 4312** would have enhanced the eligibility of India for Foreign Military Sales and exports under the Arms Export Control Act.

Note: Arms purchase listings are sourced to SIPRI with further inputs from the U.S. Departments of Defense and State.

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