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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 planning new bilateral technology-sharing and defense co-production agreements 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 and is expected to spend about \$220 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) has 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 nearly \$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) for more than \$3 billion. 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 Biden Administration continues to offer India “state-of-the-art capabilities,” including F/A-18 *Super Hornet*, F-15EX *Eagle II*, and F-21 *Fighting Falcon* combat aircraft.

Major U.S. Arms Orders from and Deliveries to India by Use, 2000-2022

(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 (12 delivered)
- 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 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 155mm 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 19th edition of the leading bilateral ground forces exercise was held in Alaska in October 2023. Elements of the U.S. Army's 11th Airborne Division participated. The exercises are held at the battalion-level (roughly 250 troops from each army), along with brigade-level mission planning.

Vajra Prahar (Army Special Forces): U.S. and Indian Special Forces soldiers have held 14 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 northeastern India in November 2023.

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. The exercise, designed to develop interoperability for humanitarian and disaster relief operations, involved more than 500 U.S. Marines and Sailors, and about 1,200 Indian soldiers, sailors, and airmen, along with U.S. and Indian Navy vessels.

Other notable bilateral exercises include ***Tarkash*** joint ground force counterterrorism exercises which involve U.S. Special Forces and India's elite 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 relief operations conducted following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Malabar's 27th edition, hosted for the first time by Australia in August 2023, involved several surface ships, along with maritime patrol aircraft, helicopters, and submarines. Participating U.S. forces included a guided-missile destroyer, a fleet oiler, a submarine, and aircraft. India sent a destroyer, a frigate, and a P-8I *Poseidon* aircraft.

Rim-of-the-Pacific (RIMPAC, Navy): The biennial RIMPAC reportedly is the world's largest maritime exercise. The 28th edition, held near Hawaii with the participation of 26 countries in summer 2022, included an Indian Navy frigate and a maritime patrol aircraft.

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 the early

2022 edition—the largest-ever—sending a destroyer and a maritime patrol aircraft. This iteration included 42 nations, 26 warships, 21 aircraft, and a submarine. Over 50 countries are expected to join a February 2024 edition.

Cutlass Express (Navy): In 2019, an Indian Navy frigate participated in maritime exercises held near Djibouti and sponsored by the Pentagon's Africa Command. The March 2023 edition—sponsored jointly with the U.S. Central Command—took place off Djibouti, Kenya, and Mauritius, and again included an Indian Navy frigate.

La Perouse (Navy): A two-day 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): This anti-submarine warfare theater exercise held near Guam in March 2023 included forces from the Quad (among them an Indian Navy P-8I maritime patrol aircraft), plus Canada and 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 aircraft and tankers joined in 2008 and 2016.

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 34 members and oversees four 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 October 2022 edition, held in western India, was the 12th 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 southern India, and organized by India's Ministry of Defense and Air Force. Reportedly Asia's largest air show, the February 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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