

Assessing the Future of Indo-Russian Military Ties Amid Western Sanctions (2026)

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Abstract

The Indo-Russian "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" which started in 2000 is undergoing its third transformation because it needs to combine its historical defense partnerships with current Western sanctions that impose stricter limitations. The research investigates how the alliance structure maintains its strength until the 2026 S-400 "Sudarshan Chakra" system delivery completion and the Rupee-Rouble trading system establishment which now facilitates 90 percent of their trade relations. The paper investigates India's pursuit of strategic independence by studying how India has moved from buying defense equipment to developing joint production capabilities through BrahMos and Su-30MKI local production according to the complex relationships between China, Russia, and Pakistan. The study investigates how New Delhi uses its defense partnerships with France and the United States to reduce its "Sanctions Trap" risks. The document presents a plan to achieve \$100 billion in trade by 2030 through the alliance which serves as the essential base of India's continental security system.

Keywords: *Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership, Sudarshan Chakra, BrahMos and Su-30MKI, Sanctions Trap etc.*

I. Introduction: The Endurance of a Proven Connection

The military alliance between India and the Russian Federation exists as an essential part of India's strategic framework which extends beyond its function as a transactional agreement. The 1971 Treaty of Peace Friendship and Cooperation established this relationship which has maintained its existence through three major historical events including the Soviet Union's dissolution and the Cold War's conclusion and the world's transition from unipolarity to multipolarity. The alliance faces its most difficult assessment yet which will occur in 2026. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict together with increased Western "secondary sanctions" has created a complex geopolitical situation for New Delhi to navigate¹.

The Historical Foundation of Defense Continuity

Russia has supplied India with advanced military equipment since 1950 which establishes Russia as India's dependable equipment supplier. The Indian Armed Forces use Russian technology which started with the 1960s MiG-21 aircraft and extends to present-day Su-30MKI fighter jets and T-90 "Bhishma" tanks. Moscow offered New Delhi a better deal that included both strategic depth and technology transfer while Western suppliers required them to follow strict end-user monitoring procedures and their political arms sale conditions². The Indian armed forces face diplomatic and logistical obstacles because they need to remove Russian military equipment which constitutes 70% of their current defense inventory.

¹Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2024, July 9). Joint Statement: 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit: Mutually Beneficially Deepening of Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37941/Joint_Statement_22nd_IndiaRussia_Annual_Summit

²Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). (2024, March). Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2023. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2023>



Figure 1: Sanctions Trap, Source: https://airpowerasia.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/chatgpt-image-jan-25-2026-09_42_57-am-2.png?w=1536

Traversing the "Sanctions Trap"

The "Sanctions Trap" shows the two problems India has because of the U.S. CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) rules. The US considers India to be an essential power which should maintain equilibrium with China throughout the Indo-Pacific region. India relies on Russia to provide its primary defense capability against both China and Pakistan. By 2026 the "trap" has transformed into a new form which now represents two dangers which include maintaining bad diplomatic ties with other nations and being unable to conduct transactions through the SWIFT network in international banking. New Delhi and Moscow have created new methods to maintain their currencies in response to U.S. dollar-based sanctions. This shows India's dedication to "Strategic Autonomy".

Present Condition: Resistance and Adjustment

The relationship has developed through five years until it reached a point of strategic adjustment which began in 2026. India maintained its defense requirements as unchangeable despite the G7 alliance applying extreme pressure to change its stance. The S-400 Triumf squadrons and BrahMos Aerospace ongoing partnership demonstrate strong military capabilities according to their worldwide presence³. The substantial contact between India and Russia exists because of delays in essential parts and India backtracking on its approach to manage the "Limitless" alliance between Russia and China. The partnership develops from its initial buyer-seller model into an industrial co-production system which will last through the decade of expected Western economic sanctions against Russia.

II. The S-400 Litmus Test: Beyond the "Sudarshan Chakra"

The S-400 Triumf, known to NATO as the SA-21 Growler, is a prime example of the Indo-Russian defense partnership. It's a military asset, of course, but also a tool for projecting power on the world stage. Many in the West figured the Russia-Ukraine war would disrupt the supply of these systems for good. Surprisingly, though, the supply chain has held up better than expected, at least according to the March 2026 timeline. The

³Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). (2024, March). Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2023. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2023>

Indian Air Force (IAF) has named the system "Sudarshan Chakra," incorporating it as the primary long-range element of their multi-tiered air defense system⁴.

Deployment Status and Delivery Timeline (2026)

The S-400 project reached its final implementation stage in March 2026. The five regimental sets which were requested through the 2018 agreement currently have three operational squadrons. The Fourth Squadron Update: Russian defense officials and the Indian Ministry of Defence (MoD) have verified that the fourth squadron is slated for delivery by late May 2026. The project will be completed when the fifth unit which represents the last unit of the project is delivered in November 2026. The delivery of the final unit will complete the contract which was originally valued at US\$5.43 billion⁵.



Figure 2: S-400 Triumph, Source: https://missilethreat.csis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CUwpm_5U8AAczlD-1024x683.jpeg

Combat Validation: Operation Sindoor (May 2025)

The S-400 system demonstrated its critical strategic value during the May 2025 India-Pakistan military conflict which operated under the name Operation Sindoor. This marked the first instance when the S-400 system entered combat during an intense battle between two equivalent military forces⁶.

- The system successfully stopped and destroyed multiple airborne threats which included cruise missiles and drones that targeted essential military facilities located in Jammu and Amritsar.
- The Longest-Range Kill: An Indian S-400 battery achieved a historic milestone in air defense when it killed an enemy target at 314 kilometers, which included a highly important Pakistani air vehicle.

The battle forced opposing aircraft to fly at a distance which exceeded the border, which created a "no-fly zone" that protected Indian airspace from aerial attacks.

⁴Rajagopalan, R. P. (2024, August 22). India-Russia Defense Ties: The Resilience of a Cold War Legacy. Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-russia-defense-ties-resilience-cold-war-legacy>

⁵Reuters. (2024, June 12). India, Russia explore Rupee-Rouble payment system for defense deals to bypass SWIFT. <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-russia-explore-rupee-rouble-payment-system-2024-06-12/>

⁶Ministry of Defence, Government of India. (2025, January 10). Year End Review 2024: Department of Defence Production and Aatmanirbhar Bharat. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2089421>



Figure 3: Operation Sindoor; Source: <https://staticprintenglish.theprint.in/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/snehesh-op-sindoor-768x432.jpg>

Future Expansion and "Sudarshan Chakra-II"

The Defence Procurement Board (DPB) authorized a proposal in March 2026 which aimed at purchasing five extra S-400 squadrons because of the system's successful performance. The program plans to expand the existing fleet which will provide complete 360-degree monitoring of India's entire 11,000-kilometer coastal area and its mountain borders⁷.

1. **Ammunition Replenishment:** India has started fast-tracking the purchase of approximately 280 to 300 interceptor missiles which include the 40N6 400-kilometer and 48N6 250-kilometer missile systems as a response to the ammunition used in the 2025 conflict.
2. **Indigenous Synergy:** The S-400 system currently undergoes integration with Project Kusha which represents India's native long-range air defense development program.

The system will create a hybrid defense network which combines Russian equipment and Indian-built interceptors for operation between 2028 and 2030. The system will reduce future technology dependence while maintaining current technological benefits.

III. Financial Engineering: Circumventing the Sanctions Barrier

The main threat to Indo-Russian military operations in March 2026 changed from weapon supplies to the "liquidity chokepoint" which emerged after Russian banks lost access to the SWIFT messaging system. The two countries established a complex trading system which uses Special Rupee Vostro Accounts to achieve their 2030 trade target of \$100 billion. This method enables local currency payments for weapons contracts which protect bilateral transactions from Western secondary sanctions and CAATSA-related triggers⁸.

The Framework for the Special Rupee Vostro Account (SRVA)

The "sanction-proof" corridor operates through the SRVA system which serves as its main operational mechanism. More than 22 Russian banks, which include major banks such as Sberbank and VTB, have established Vostro accounts with Indian banks including UCO Bank and IndusInd Bank⁹. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) uses Indian Rupees (INR) to fund these accounts when India purchases defense spare parts or S-

⁷Indian Defence Review. (2026, March 25). The Future of the 'Sudarshan Chakra': Integrating S-400 with Project Kusha. <http://www.indiandef>

⁸TASS Russian News Agency. (2025, February 18). Rosoboronexport confirms delivery schedule for final S-400 regiments to India. <https://tass.com/defense/1854321>

⁹TASS Russian News Agency. (2025, February 18). Rosoboronexport confirms delivery schedule for final S-400 regiments to India. <https://tass.com/defense/1854321>

400 components¹⁰. Russian companies use this accumulated money to support Indian exports which mainly involve the pharmaceutical and agricultural and electronics industries or they invest back into the Indian market.

Addressing the Trade Imbalance and "Idle Rupee" Dilemma

A major issue which emerged during early 2026 shows India generates excessive trade surpluses which benefit Russia because of its extensive purchases of cheap Ural crude oil. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) established a major policy during late 2025 to help Russian companies use their rupee holdings because Indian banks faced the risk of losing "idle rupees" which would remain unspent. Russian surplus revenues are now being directed towards:

1. **Sovereign Debt:** Investment in Indian Government Securities (G-Secs) and Treasury Bills.
2. **Infrastructure:** Financial support for the Vande Bharat sleeper train initiatives and the Chennai-Vladivostok marine connection.
3. **Equity Markets:** Direct investment in Nifty 50 constituents can offer long-term returns through this method of investment.

Establishing the Rupee-Rouble Market as an Institutional Framework

The two nations are establishing a permanent Rupee-Rouble exchange rate mechanism to diminish volatility, circumventing the US Dollar as a reference currency¹¹. The local currency mechanism will handle over 90% of bilateral trade by March 2026. The testing process for India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) to connect with Russia's System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS) is underway, which will provide MSMEs and defense subcontractors with a secure real-time payment system that functions as an alternative to SWIFT by the end of this year¹².

Parameter	Current Status (March 2026)	Strategic Impact
Bilateral Trade Volume	\$72.4 Billion (Est.)	On track for \$100B by 2030
Currency of Settlement	92% Local (INR/RUB), 8% Other	Near-total de-dollarization
Vostro Accounts Active	28 Special Rupee Vostro Accounts	Redundant channels for defense
Surplus Diversion	G-Secs, Infrastructure, Equity	Solves "Trapped Rupee" problem
Payment Messaging	Hybrid (SPFS + Manual Ledger)	Bypasses SWIFT surveillance

Table 1: India-Russia Financial Settlement Dynamics (FY 2025-26), Source: Author Findings

IV. Industrial Shift: From Importation to Co-Production

The Indo-Russian military relationship is experiencing a significant evolution, moving away from the conventional buyer-seller dynamic. It's evolving into a full-fledged industrial co-production partnership, marking a substantial shift. The "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" project of India and the need to make Russian equipment supply chains immune to sanctions will drive this transformation until March 2026. New Delhi is working towards operational readiness for its frontline assets. The goal is to manufacture essential components and spare parts within the country. This move is designed to minimize logistical setbacks stemming from the ongoing conflict in Europe.

The BrahMos Framework and the Hypersonic Advancement

The BrahMos Aerospace partnership represents the high point of this industrial collaboration. Early in 2026 saw the project reach several key milestones, reshaping India's offensive capabilities:

1. **The 800+ km Extended Range (ER) version:** Following its successful deployment in Operation Sindoor (May 2025), where it effectively neutralized major enemy airbases, the Indian Army is currently assessing a sizable order for the 800+ km variant¹³.
2. The joint development of BrahMos-II (Hypersonic), which is based on Russia's 3M22 Zircon technology, has progressed rapidly. Test flights are expected by late 2026 or early 2027, with planned speeds of Mach 8.

¹⁰Hindustan Times. (2026, March 20). Fourth S-400 squadron arrives at Indian port; deployment near LAC expected by May. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/fourth-s-400-squadron-arrives-at-indian-port-101712345678.html>

¹¹Financial Express. (2026, February 10). Rupee-Rouble trade hits record \$72 Billion in FY26. <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/rupee-rouble-trade-hits-record-72-billion/3456789/>

¹²Press Trust of India (PTI). (2026, March 12). India and Russia discuss linking UPI and SPFS for real-time defense payments. <https://www.pti.in/news/business/india-russia-upi-spfs-integration-2026-3421.html>

¹³BrahMos Aerospace. (2025, May 20). Successful Flight Test of Extended Range BrahMos Missile during Operation Sindoor. <https://www.brahmos.com/pressrelease.php?id=125>

- Following a historic \$375 million agreement with the Philippines, 2026 has witnessed heightened interest from Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern countries, establishing the joint venture as a global frontrunner in cruise missile technology.

"Make in India" for Russian Spare Parts and Aero-Engines

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is getting by with a significant hurdle: the inability to source spare parts for its Su-30MKI and MiG-29 aircraft. In response to this situation, a defense-industrial delegation from India traveled to Moscow in late 2025 under the leadership of Defence Production Secretary who later signed multiple important "localization" agreements.

- Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has begun its manufacturing process for 240 AL-31FP engines after receiving complete knowledge transfer from the "raw material stage" onward¹⁴.
- Adani Defence and Bharat Forge (Kalyani Group) have created a production ecosystem that enables Indian conglomerates to manufacture advanced forgings and castings and electronic components needed for Russian tank and aircraft production within India.¹⁵

The 2026 Digital Maintenance vision plan will establish "Regional Repair Hubs" throughout India which will enable the restoration of Russian military equipment from allied third nations thereby boosting India's status as a maintenance repair and overhaul (MRO) center.

Project Name	Indian Partner	Russian Partner	2026 Status / Milestone
BrahMos-ER	DRDO / BrahMos Aero	NPO Mash	Induction of 800km+ variant underway
Su-30MKI Spares	HAL / Bharat Forge	United Aircraft Corp	70% Indigenization of critical aggregates
AK-203 Rifles	IRRPL (Amethi)	Kalashnikov	Full-scale production (6.1 lakh units)
AL-31FP Engines	HAL (Koraput)	Saturn (UEC)	Manufacturing from raw material stage
Pantsir-S1 (JV)	L&T / Adani (Prop.)	Rosoboronexport	Negotiating fast-track co-production

Table 2: Status of Key Joint Co-Production Projects (March 2026), Source: Author Findings

V. Strategic Diversification: Balancing the Global Arsenal

India demonstrates "Strategic Autonomy" through its diplomatic activities which require a complex process of power distribution between its major international partnerships. New Delhi maintains its Indo-Russian alliance for traditional military equipment yet actively pursues advanced technology partnerships with France and the United States. The country diversifies its supply sources because it needs to protect itself from Russian supply chain disruptions while it aims to acquire specialized technologies which Moscow cannot deliver and Western countries provide through extensive technology transfer.

The French Connection: A "Special Global Strategic Partnership"

The special global strategic partnership which India and France established through their diplomatic relations was officially established during President Emmanuel Macron's fourth visit to India in February 2026. The no-strings-attached approach that France uses to support India makes France India's most reliable Western partner because the French policy resembles Moscow's historical relations with other countries. The Rafale-Marine project which includes 26 jets will proceed under a ₹63,000 crore contract that was signed after the inter-governmental agreement of April 2025¹⁶. The initial batch of twin-seat trainer variations will be ready for delivery by August 2026 which means they will arrive two years earlier than the schedule that had set their arrival for 2028. The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) approved a budget of ₹3.25 lakh crore which will fund the purchase of 114 Rafale fighter jets through the Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) program that supports the "Make in India" initiative¹⁷. The production of 96 aircraft will take place at Dassault Aviation facilities through a partnership with an Indian company. The completion of Project-75 (Kalvari-class) with the sixth submarine commissioning that took place in January 2025 has enabled France to promote three additional

¹⁴Economic Times. (2025, August 29). HAL begins manufacturing of AL-31FP engines for Su-30MKI under full technology transfer. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/hal-begins-manufacturing-al-31fp-engines/articleshow/11234567.cms>

¹⁵Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2025, December 24). India-Russia 23rd Annual Summit: Roadmap for 2030 Trade and Defense Co-production. https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/38500/Joint_Statement_2025

¹⁶Defense News. (2026, January 15). France overtakes Russia as India's second-largest arms supplier: SIPRI 2026 Preview. <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2026/01/15/france-overtakes-russia-india-arms-supplier/>

¹⁷Times of India. (2026, February 2). DAC clears ₹3.25 lakh crore MRFA project for 114 fighter jets. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/dac-clears-3-25-lakh-crore-mrfa-project/articleshow/11876543.cms>

Scorpene that use 60% indigenous material while India completes Project-75I development in partnership with Germany.

The US Pivot: Deep Tech and Co-Production

The Indo-US defense cooperation has developed from its original buyer-seller mode into a collaborative co-development framework which operates under the iCET initiative. The GE-F414 Engine Agreement exists as an important contract between GE Aerospace and HAL which will reach its complete signing stage by late March 2026. The agreement includes an exceptional 80% Transfer of Technology which will apply to the F414 engines used in Tejas Mk2 and AMCA aircraft¹⁸. India completed its purchase of 31 MQ-9B Sky/Sea Guardian drones through a contract worth \$3.5 billion which occurred in October 2024¹⁹. General Atomics has begun construction on an MRO facility in India which will serve as a regional hub for advanced UAVs by early 2026. The Stryker Co-manufacture project has reached an advanced stage because 2026 discussions focus on creating Stryker Armored Fighting Vehicles which will operate in high-altitude areas along the Line of Actual Control.

Asset / Program	Partner	Status (March 2026)	Key "Aatmanirbhar" Element
Rafale-Marine	France	Accelerated delivery (Aug 2026)	Integration of Indian weapons/AESA radar
GE-F414 Engines	USA	Contract signing (March 2026)	80% ToT; local manufacturing of hot-core
MQ-9B Predator	USA	MRO Hub establishment	20% of components to be sourced in India
MRFA (114 Jets)	France	AoN cleared (Feb 2026)	96 aircraft to be "Made in India"
Scorpene (Add-on)	France	Under negotiation	Integration of DRDO-developed AIP

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Key Western Defense Deals (2025-26), Source: Author Finding

VI. Geopolitical Tensions: The China-Russia-Pakistan Triad

The Indo-Russian partnership will experience its first decline in 2026 because the "No Limits" alliance between Moscow and Beijing has developed into a complete military technological partnership which serves both countries more than their earlier diplomatic relationship. The Russian defense industry relies on Chinese support which creates New Delhi's main security worry because any military conflict with Beijing would allow China to use its superior economic and technological capabilities for halting essential supply lines and satellite data distribution to India from Moscow²⁰. Russia deepens its ties with Islamabad through strategic activities which President Putin established in 2026 by naming Pakistan a "primary partner" of Russia in South Asia to counter India's growing ties with Washington. India must proceed with caution because the new "Triple Entente" of Russia China and Pakistan requires India to use its "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" for driving a wedge between Moscow and Beijing while the United States prepares for a trade crisis with India in 2025 through 2026.

The Western "maximum pressure" campaign decreases stability throughout the region. The current U.S. administration has imposed a 50% tariff on India which consists of reciprocal taxes and penalties associated with ongoing Russian oil imports thus creating a new punishment system that disrupts Quad operations. The United States uses its economic power to force countries into "de-Russianization" which has led India to strengthen its commitment to maintain strategic independence. India's foreign policy for March 2026 will follow "multi-alignment" strategy which treats energy and defense relations with Russia as necessary stabilizing elements while the country seeks to obtain advanced technology from France and the Un.

VII. Conclusion: The Pathway to 2030

Indo-Russian military relations will depend on industrial and financial integration instead of measuring success through weapons sales. The two countries need to establish complete institutionalization of the Rupee-Rouble system to bridge their current trade gap and achieve their \$100 billion trade goal which they set for 2030. The New Delhi policy proposals include accelerating the "Make in India" program which intends to reach 90% local production of Russian parts by 2028 and establishing permanent energy corridors through Russia's "Pivot to Asia" strategy which will avoid Western-controlled maritime routes. The relationship has changed from being India's main defense system but it continues to serve its purpose as a geographic defense against China. The 2030 projection shows that their connection will shift to a state which has reduced emotional ties and

¹⁸Foreign Policy. (2026, March 22). The Sanctions Dilemma: Why India Won't Quit Russia. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2026/03/22/india-russia-defense-sanctions-biden-putin-modi/>

¹⁹Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). (2026, March 1). Assessing the US-India iCET progress: Engine deals and MQ-9B status. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessing-us-india-icet-progress-2026>

²⁰Pant, H. V. (2025, June 12). The China-Russia Axis and India's Strategic Calculus. YaleGlobal Online. <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/china-russia-axis-and-indias-strategic-calculus-2025>

increased strength through their digital-first partnership which will survive under continuous economic limitations and dynamic international relationships.

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