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India, Russia Sign ‘Military Cooperation Roadmap’

New Delhi and Moscow are set to deepen bilateral defense ties in the coming years.

By Franz-Stefan Gady
June 23, 2017

Indian Defense Minister Arun Jaitley and his Russian counterpart Sergei Shoigu signed a military cooperation roadmap during the 17th meeting of the Russian-Indian inter-governmental commission for military-technical cooperation, which took place in Moscow, Russia on June 23, according to Russian media reports.

“We are determined to go ahead with building up cooperation in order to enhance the combat readiness of both countries’ armed forces and to exchange experience in various defense-related matters,” the Russian defense minister said following the conclusion of the agreement, TASS news agency reports.

The roadmap is to become the basic document in planning bilateral contacts, but Shoigu did not provide details on the contents.

Shoigu also emphasized that with India’s accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, new venues for cooperation will be possible. “We welcome India’s accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as it opens up new prospects for cooperation,” he said.

“Over the past years, Russia and India have been able to develop particularly close friendly relations, consistent and trust based,” the Russian defense minister added. “It was once again

confirmed at the recent meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which took place in St. Petersburg on June 1.”

During their June 1 meeting, the Indian and Russian heads of government agreed to push for “qualitatively higher level of military-to-military cooperation” within the framework of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between the two countries, according to a joint statement issued by Modi and Putin following the annual India-Russia summit in June.

India and Russia are also set to upgrade joint military exercises. “Military cooperation is a major component and platform of Russian-Indian strategic interaction. Joint military exercises are the most important aspect of this,” Shoigu said on Wednesday.

As I explained last month, this year’s iteration of the Indo-Russian Indra bilateral military exercise will for the first time involve personnel from all three service branches from both countries. Russia and India have held the Indra exercise since 2003.

One of the major recent stumbling blocks to deeper Indo-Russian military ties remains defense industry cooperation, as I pointed out in May:

India-Russia defense relations have somewhat cooled over the last months with the cancellation of an aircraft deal and continuing disagreements over one of their most prestigious defense projects — the co-development and production of the Sukhoi/HAL Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA), known in India as the Perspective Multi-role Fighter (PMF).

On Wednesday, the Indian defense minister made an effort to mend fences by encouraging Russian defense firms to continue their engagement in India. “I invite Russian companies to come forward with proposals for technology transfer to Indian companies and facilitate manufacturing of more advanced components/parts and subsystems. This can start with platforms of Russian origin where the requirement is in large numbers and is recurring in nature,” Jaitley said.

Last month, India issued a new policy that will allow private firms to enter into agreements as “strategic partners” with non-Indian original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) for certain types of military systems including tanks, aircraft, and submarines as part of the Indian government’s “Make in India” initiative.

“Here again, Russia as India’s largest, oldest and most trusted partner in defense hardware and equipment, would have a comparative advantage in partnering with Indian companies for realizing ‘Make in India’ potential in defense production,” Jaitley said, according to the Press Trust of India.

Among other things, Russia and India are in the final stages of negotiations over the delivery date of new missile air defense systems and four *Admiral Grigorovich*-class frigates. Both sides also signed an agreement for India to lease an inactive *Akula*-class multi-purpose nuclear submarine last year. Rosoboronexport, Russian Helicopters, and India’s Hindustan Aeronautics

Limited (HAL) have also agreed to create a joint venture for the production of 140 Ka-226T helicopters in October 2016. (60 additional helicopters will be received in fly-away condition from Russia.)