



India test launching Naval Anti Ship Missile (NASM-SR). Photo Credit: Indian Navy

Global Security Implications Of India’s Military Modernization Drive – OpEd

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By [Jawad Ali Shah](#)



Key Takeaways

- **Massive Military Modernisation** — India is undertaking a major defence upgrade (₹3.6 trillion + ₹2.38 trillion approved), including Rafale jets, submarines, artillery, S-400 systems, and advanced platforms, making it the world's second-largest arms importer and fifth-largest military spender.
- **Nuclear Expansion** — India's nuclear arsenal is growing rapidly (from 180 to 190 warheads), with new SSBNs, MIRV-capable missiles, and unsafeguarded reactors, raising concerns about regional stability beyond minimum deterrence.
- **Regional and Global Concerns** — The build-up, supported by partnerships with France and Israel, is portrayed as destabilising South Asia, threatening peace and security, and potentially institutionalising strategic instability, especially in the context of India-Pakistan tensions.

India's defence establishment is pursuing an ambitious modernisation drive, with profound implications for regional and global peace and security. On 12 February 2026, New Delhi approved a [defence upgrade plan](#) of Indian Rupee 3.6 trillion (approximately USD 40 billion) to modernise the capabilities of its army, navy and air force across multiple domains. This initiative includes the purchase of 114 Dassault Rafale fighter jets, multiple P-8I maritime reconnaissance aircraft, 6 Type-214 diesel-electric attack submarines from Germany, a significant number of artillery and rocket systems and advanced surveillance platforms from various defence partners. With these acquisitions, India aims to tilt the regional military balance in its favour and to project military power with greater reach and lethality.

On 27 March 2026, the Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, also approved [Acceptance of Necessity \(AoN\)](#) for defence proposals worth Indian Rupee 2.38 trillion (approximately USD 25.2 billion). The package spans the Indian Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard and includes air defence tracked systems, Dhanush artillery, medium transport aircraft, S-400 missile defence systems, remotely piloted strike aircraft and heavy-duty air cushion vehicles. These acquisitions reflect a significant military build-up in the wake of a crushing defeat India suffered in Operation Sindoor in May 2025.

India's military expansion carries broader implications for regional and international peace and security. According to data released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in April 2026, India was the [world's fifth-largest military spender in 2025](#). New Delhi's military spending increased from [USD 86.1 billion in 2024](#) to [USD 92.1 billion in 2025](#), placing it only behind the US, China, Russia and Germany. This level of spending reflects a sustained emphasis on force modernisation.

SIPRI Fact Sheet published in March 2026 identified India as the [world's second-largest arms importer](#) during the period from 2021 to 2025, accounting for approximately 8.2% of global arms imports, with Ukraine ranking first. Notably, India is a large arms importer despite the fact that it is not engaged in any active large-scale conflict.

According to the Global Firepower Index 2025, India fields one of the [world's largest military force](#), comprising approximately 1.46 million active personnel and around 1 million reserve troops, supported by an extensive paramilitary apparatus numbering over 1.6 million personnel. According to a report carried by *The Times of India* on 4 January 2026, India has recently raised a drone force called 'Bhairav' [with over 100,000 operatives](#), calling it the future warfare force. New Delhi has also heavily invested in many other lethal weapons platforms. These include about 4,200 main battle tanks, 522 fighter jets and a blue-water navy with two operational aircraft carriers, 18 conventional diesel-electric submarines (SSK) and 100 active surface vessels. India has also launched projects concerning space satellite systems, such as the Indian Space Research Organisation's Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) regional navigation satellite system. Consequently, this expansive military modernisation, spanning land, sea, air and space domains, reflects a shift toward power projection capabilities, which risks undermining regional peace and stability in an already fragile security environment.

India's planned acquisition of [114 additional Rafale fighter jets](#), advanced surveillance platforms, and maritime interdiction systems goes beyond routine incremental upgrades. The accelerated pace of these acquisitions appears partly driven by efforts to address capability gaps and restore military credibility following the shortcomings exposed during the May 2025 conflict with Pakistan. The scale and scope of India's modernisation may also indicate preparations for future aggression against Pakistan, particularly as Indian political and military leaders keep threatening Pakistan with Operation Sindoor 2.0.

The scale of India's military build-up and modernisation is further reinforced by its deepening partnerships with France and Israel. On 18 February 2026, during the [6th Annual Defence Dialogue](#), India and France renewed a 10-year defence cooperation agreement and signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to facilitate the domestic production of Hammer missile systems in India. Deployed on Dassault Rafale aircraft, the Hammer is a precision-guided, air-to-ground munition designed to enhance stand-off strike capabilities.

India has also maintained a deepening strategic partnership with Israel to expand defence cooperation and arms procurement. New Delhi is widely regarded as one of Israel's largest defence export destinations, contributing significantly to its defence industry. In recent years, India has continued to procure a broad range of advanced systems, including air defence, surveillance and unmanned platforms. Reported agreements and ongoing negotiations between the two sides indicate a sustained trajectory of high-value defence transactions. During Prime Minister Modi's visit to Tel Aviv on 25-26 February 2026, two days before the initiation of war against Iran, India and Israel agreed to establish the Critical and Emerging Technologies Partnership. To New Delhi, this initiative will give new impetus in areas such as military application of AI, quantum computing and critical minerals trade.

Figures from the International Defence Cooperation Directorate (SIBAT) of Israel's Ministry of Defense show that, between 2020 and 2024, India imported more than [USD 20.5 billion worth](#) of weapons from Israel. In November 2025, the two sides signed [a MoU for purchase of weapons worth USD 8.6 billion by India](#), which include SPICE 1000 precision-guided missiles, Rampage air-to-surface missiles, Air Lora air-launched ballistic missiles and the Ice Breaker missile system. Alarminglly, systems such as the SPICE 1000, with autonomous target acquisition capability independent of GPS through advanced electro-optical homing, enhance strike precision while simultaneously compressing decision-making timelines. India's expanding high-end defence acquisitions signal a shift toward integrating advanced and disruptive technologies to make up for the substandard performance of its armed forces, witnessed during the 4-Day War imposed by nuclear-armed India against nuclear-armed Pakistan.

India's modernisation of its conventional military forces is complemented by its unprecedented build-up of nuclear warheads, fissile material stockpile and missile development. India's [11 unsafeguarded nuclear reactors](#) remain outside the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), thereby retaining the technical flexibility to divert domestically processed nuclear fuel toward its weapons program. This gap in monitoring by the IAEA raises serious concerns about transparency and the broader trajectory of India's strategic capabilities.

Concurently, India continues to expand the reach and survivability of its strategic forces through the deployment of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and K-series submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). The induction of the MIRV-capable Agni-V and reports regarding the prospective [development of the Agni-VI](#) program with a range of up to 12,000 km indicate India's continued emphasis on expanding the reach, survivability and effectiveness of its strategic deterrent. Furthermore, open-source assessments have periodically referred to the proposed [Surya ICBM](#), with some estimates attributing to it a potential range of up to 16,000 kilometres. Such nuclear capabilities threaten major political and economic centers across Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. These developments indicate a strategic trajectory that extends well beyond the requirements of maintaining Credible Minimum Deterrence and addressing regional threat perception, and warrant closer international scrutiny.

According to [SIPRI Yearbook 2026](#), India's nuclear arsenal increased from 180 warheads in 2025 to 190 warheads in January 2026, making it the fastest growing nuclear weapons program in South Asia and one of the fastest growing in the world. Alarminglly, the report indicates that India had 12 deployed nuclear warheads in January 2026, and zero warheads deployed in 2025. When viewed alongside India's expanding inventory of long-range ballistic missiles and sea-based nuclear delivery systems, this development raises serious concerns regarding regional and international strategic stability, peace and security.

India's military modernisation drive is not only being left unchecked, but is being encouraged for geopolitical and commercial considerations by the West. This trajectory risks institutionalising strategic instability in South Asia, where India's rapid conventional force modernisation and nuclear expansion reinforce one another. India's military build-up, coupled with unsafeguarded fissile material production and expanding conventional and second-strike capabilities, weakens the normative foundations of regional restraint. India's military build-up not only destabilises deterrence stability in South Asia, but also poses a wider threat to global peace, security, strategic stability and survival.

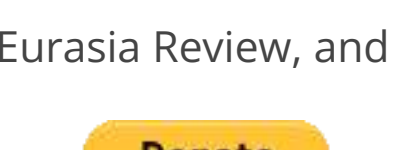
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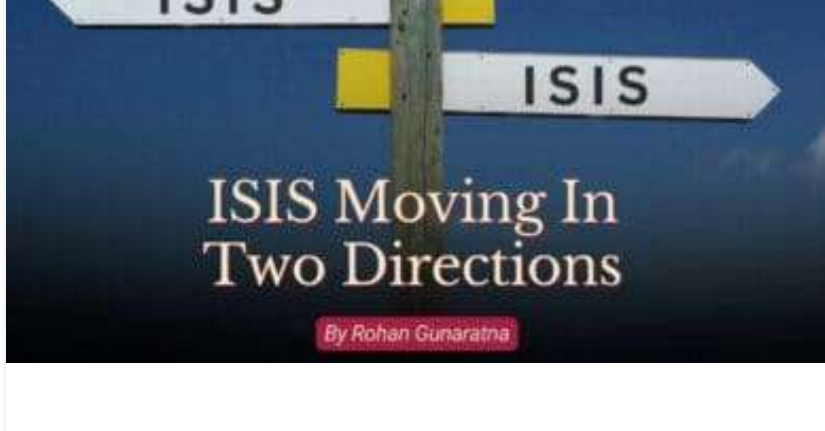
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