Military and Technical Cooperation between Russia and India Developing Steadily

India is widely known as the largest importer of Russian defence industry products, and Russia is India’s main supplier of weapons. India has been cooperating in the military and technical sphere with many other countries, including such technologically advanced powerhouses as the USA, France, South Korea and Japan. Therefore, Russia’s leadership in the Indian market can be considered a testament to the high quality of Russian products. In addition, this shows the reliability of Russia-India relations and the great trust that exists between the two countries.

However, in recent years, India has seriously begun developing its own defence industry. In September 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the “Make in India” initiative, which is aimed at bringing Indian industry to a new level, creating many jobs and ensuring the flow of foreign investment. In accordance with the program, India is planning to develop various kinds of high-tech production on its territory in all spheres. In addition to the economic effect, thanks to “Make in India”, India expects to make a leap in the scientific and technical sphere.

The program covers a wide range of areas, including military technology. In the face of growing competition from Indian manufacturers, some foreign exporters may be forced to reduce supplies, or even withdraw from India altogether. However, this is unlikely going to affect Russia. Russia-India military and technical cooperation (MTC) is gaining momentum. One of the reasons for Russia’s confidence that it will retain the Indian market is that Russia not only sells its machines and equipment to India, but also provides it with technology.

Many types of weapons developed by Russian defence industry are now produced under license in India. This is quite consistent with the “Make in India” program and contributes to Indian scientific and technological progress. Indicative in this respect is the history of Russian-Indian cooperation in armored vehicles. From 1980 and through 1990s, the Soviet tank T-72M1 was produced in India. The assembly of the T-90S tank on Indian territory began in 2003. In September 2015, the news broke that India was negotiating with the Russian Federation the purchase of its upgraded version, the T-90MS tank. And in March 2016, the Russian state-owned company Rosoboronexport already announced the beginning of negotiations concerning the production of T-90MS in India. In November 2016, Indian media reported on the purchase from Russia of a large amount of weapons, including 464 T-90MS tanks. In February 2017, Russia extended India’s license for the production of T-90S.

Armored vehicles are just one of many directions of the Russian-Indian military and technical cooperation. In March 2017, the media reported that this year, Russia and India would conclude contracts for the sale of 48 Mi-17V-5 military transport helicopters and 4 frigates. Russian helicopters and ships of this type are already at the disposal of the Indian armed forces. India’s desire to acquire a new batch indicates that it was satisfied with past acquisitions.

Especially worth noting is the Russian-Indian cooperation on the BrahMos project, in which the Russian rocket and space company NPO Mashinostroenia and the Indian Defense Research Organization have developed a supersonic anti-ship missile that surpasses foreign counterparts both in speed and range of fire. Work began back in 1998, the first launch took place in 2001, and now, the BrahMos missile has been in service with the Indian army for several years.

Russian-Indian development also interested other countries; a number of states in Africa and Latin America decided to purchase rockets of a total value exceeding USD 10 billion. In 2011, India itself ordered 200 missiles worth USD 4
billion for its armed forces. The BrahMos project has been continued ever since. All these years, Russian and Indian experts have been working together to improve their pet projects, adapting them to solve all new problems. Ground-based versions of the missile and versions for installation on ships were developed. In 2011, there were confirmed reports that plans were underway to equip FGFA combat aircraft with the BrahMos missiles. This aircraft, together with the Russian Su-30MKI aircraft (now licensed in India) also constituted a joint Russian-Indian development. This was a very bold decision, as, until now, no one has yet dared installing such heavy weapons on fighters.

By 2017, the goal was achieved. To do this, there was need to create a light version of the rocket weighing 2.5 thousand kg, which is 500 kg less than the weight of its prototype. Thus, BrahMos became the first rocket in history with such speed and range that could be installed on fighters.

In March 2017, the upgraded BrahMos ER missile was tested for the first time in India. The new missile is capable of hitting targets at a distance of 450 km. The Russian-Indian company BrahMos Aerospace is currently working on a new missile capable of speeds up to 5,000 km per hour. Presumably, it will be ready in 2-3 years.

In June 2017, the Russian Ministry of Defense hosted a meeting of the Russian-Indian Commission for Military and Technical Cooperation, which was attended by Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and his Indian counterpart Arun Jaitley. As a result, the parties adopted a plan for further cooperation. According to Sergei Shoigu, Russia and India intend to strengthen cooperation in order to jointly increase the combat readiness of their armed forces.

He reminded that a privileged strategic partnership has existed for many years between the two countries. The minister also said that an important part of these relations is regular joint military exercises, and the annual Russian-Indian maneuvers "Indra-2017" will be held on Russian territory, as planned, in the fall of 2017.

Thus, it can be concluded that cooperation with Russia helps India to not only acquire modern military equipment, but also develop its own scientific and technical potential, and for the Make in India program, it is only beneficial. But this is not the only reason why the Russian-Indian military-technical cooperation is likely to keep growing.

As is known, military and technical cooperation is not just in the sphere of international trade. When the two countries give each other access to areas related to their own security, this is a demonstration of great trust and common strategic interests. Speaking at the 18th Russian-Indian summit held in early June 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin especially noted the military-technical cooperation between Russia and India as a factor that gives special significance to Russian-Indian relations. According to him, Russia has not maintained such close cooperation with other countries in delicate defence spheres.

India needs Russian support to maintain its position in its competition with Pakistan and China, as well as to combat the terrorist threat emanating from the Middle East. Russia also needs a powerful India to ensure stability in Central Asia, especially in the former Soviet republics near the Russian border. Thus, Russian-Indian strategic cooperation is very important for both countries.

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