



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## POLICY BRIEF

### Developments in the Indian Military - 2024

#### *Author*

Deependra Singh Hooda

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

### Cover Photographs:

*Indian Army tank operating in Ladakh, Source: ADGPI*

*INS Tushil, multi-role stealth-guided missile frigate, was commissioned into the Indian Navy at the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad, Russia on December 09, 2024. Source: PIB*

*Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of Spain Pedro Sanchez inaugurated the TATA Aircraft Complex of manufacturing of C295 Aircraft in Vadodara, Gujarat on October 28, 2024. Source: Flickr/MEA*

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by

Deependra Singh Hooda

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## Developments in the Indian Military - 2024

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### India-China Line of Actual Control (LAC)

#### Breakthrough at the LAC

In 2024, India and China held one Corps Commander-level meeting and three meetings of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China Border Affairs. The 31st WMCC meeting was held in Beijing on August 29, less than a month after the previous WMCC meeting, indicating that both sides were close to an agreement.

On October 21, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri announced that talks at diplomatic and military levels have resulted in an agreement on "patrolling arrangements along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China border areas leading to disengagement and a resolution of the issues that had risen in these areas in 2020."<sup>1</sup> In a statement in Lok Sabha, External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar stated, "Disengagement has now been achieved in full in Eastern Ladakh through a step-by-step process, culminating in Depsang and Demchok... The conclusion of the disengagement phase now allows us to consider other aspects of our bilateral engagement in a calibrated manner, keeping our national security interests first and foremost."<sup>2</sup>

The agreement at the LAC laid the foundation for the first bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in five years. The two leaders met on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 23. They agreed that the Special Representatives on the India-China boundary question would meet at an early date to oversee the management of peace & tranquillity in border areas and to explore a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> India Today. "Army to Resume Patrolling along LAC in Eastern Ladakh after Disengagement Talks," October 22, 2024. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/army-resume-patrolling-along-lac-eastern-ladakh-disengagement-talks-india-china-border-dispute-2620952-2024-10-22>.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Statement by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar in Lok Sabha." Accessed December 25, 2024. <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/38665/Statement+by+External+Affairs+Minister+Dr+S+Jaishankar+in+Lok+Sabha>.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. "Meeting of Prime Minister with Mr. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China on the Margins of the 16th BRICS Summit." Accessed October 26, 2024. <https://mea.gov.in/press->

The meeting of the Special Representatives of India and China, Ajit Doval, National Security Advisor of India, and Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was held in Beijing on December 18. Both sides agreed on the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, data sharing on trans-border rivers, and border trade.<sup>4</sup>

## Future Outlook

The breakthrough at the LAC and the high-level meetings could pave the way for both countries to move towards normalisation of relations. However, there is unlikely to be any immediate change in the military posture at the LAC. Commenting on the agreement over the restoration of patrolling rights, Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi has underscored the need to restore trust and go back to the status quo of April 2020. Thereafter, issues of de-escalation and normal management of the LAC can be addressed.<sup>5</sup>

Both sides have been actively enhancing their military infrastructure along the border, which will likely continue. China has been constructing 628 Xiaokang, or “well-off villages”, along India’s borders with the Tibet Autonomous Region for the past five years. Reports indicate that these are being expanded and occupied by Chinese nationals.<sup>6</sup>

In July, satellite imagery revealed that China has completed the construction of a 400-meter bridge across the Pangong Tso lake. The bridge significantly reduces travel time for Chinese military forces by 50-100 kilometres, or several hours.<sup>7</sup> Even as airfields in Tibet and Xinjiang are being upgraded, China is moving in modern air defence equipment and aircraft. In May, six Chinese Air Force J-20 stealth fighters were seen deployed at the Shigatse airport in Tibet.

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[releases.htm?dtl/38457/Meeting\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_with\\_Mr\\_Xi\\_Jinping\\_President\\_of\\_the\\_Peoples\\_Republic\\_of\\_China\\_on\\_the\\_margins\\_of\\_the\\_16th\\_BRICS\\_Summit.](#)

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. “23rd Meeting of the Special Representatives of India and China.” Accessed December 25, 2024. <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38805>.

<sup>5</sup> The Indian Express. “Army Chief: Need to First Restore Trust, Assure Each Other on Buffer Zones,” October 22, 2024. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/indiachina-agreement-army-chief-general-upendra-dwivedi-restore-trust-9633001/>.

<sup>6</sup> The Indian Express. “Explained: China’s ‘Xiaokang’ Border Defence Villages along the LAC, Now Being Occupied,” February 15, 2024. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/china-xiaokang-border-defence-villages-lac-9163202/>.

<sup>7</sup> PTC News. “China Completes 400-Metre Bridge over Pangong Lake near LAC in Ladakh | See Satellite Images,” July 30, 2024. <https://www.ptcnews.tv/world-news/china-completes-400-metre-bridge-over-pangong-lake-near-lac-in-ladakh--see-satellite-images-4394955>.

The J-20 stealth fighter is China's most advanced operational fighter aircraft, and these aircraft are predominantly based in the eastern provinces of China.<sup>8</sup>

There is similar activity on the Indian side. In the 2024-25 defence budget, the Border Roads Organisation was provided Rs 6,500 crore, 30% higher than the allocation for 2023-24. Projects such as the development of Nyoma Airfield in Ladakh at an altitude of 13,700 feet, the Shinku La tunnel in Himachal Pradesh, and the Nechiphu tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh, will be funded out of this allocation.<sup>9</sup>

In March, the 12.04 km long Sela Tunnel, built at an altitude of 13,000 ft, was completed. The tunnel provides all-weather connectivity to the strategically important Tawang Sector in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>10</sup> In November, the Centre sanctioned Rs 28,229 crore for constructing the 1,637 km Arunachal Frontier Highway connecting 12 districts of the state along the LAC.<sup>11</sup>

The Chinese military actions in Eastern Ladakh in 2020 had resulted in a breakdown of confidence-building measures and considerably heated up the LAC. While the disengagement may have removed the immediate flashpoints, suspicions about future intentions remain. There is unlikely to be any dilution on the Indian side of force levels or of building a strengthened deterrent posture.

## Pakistan

### Ceasefire and the Situation in Jammu and Kashmir

The February 2021 ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan along the Line of Control (LoC) has largely held, bringing much-needed relief to border communities. However, while the agreement has helped the local population, it has failed to induce the Pakistan Army to curb infiltration into Indian territory.

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<sup>8</sup> NDTV.com. "China's Most Advanced Stealth Fighters Deployed 150 Km From Sikkim." <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/china-deploys-six-j-20-stealth-fighters-just-150-km-from-sikkim-border-5778944>.

<sup>9</sup> "Rs 6.22 Lakh Crore Allocated to MoD, Highest among Ministries, in Regular Union Budget 2024-25.

<sup>10</sup> Arunachal Observer. "World's Longest Channel Ready for Inauguration by PM: BRO," February 8, 2024. <https://arunachalobserver.org/2024/02/09/worlds-longest-channel-ready-for-inauguration-by-pm-bro/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Centre Approves Rs 28,229 Crore For 1,637 Km Arunachal Frontier Highway Along LAC." Accessed December 25, 2024. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/centre-approves-rs-28-229-crore-for-1-637-km-arunachal-highway-along-lac-7121910>.

The Jammu region has seen a surge in terrorist attacks since 2022. The trend continued in 2024, with terrorist attacks spreading to areas like Reasi, Kathua, and Doda, long considered militancy-free. The months of June and July saw a series of ambushes on army patrols and convoys in the Jammu region. The attacks were carried out by terrorists who had infiltrated from Pakistan and who were described by the Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police as “well-trained for jungle warfare, well-equipped and battle-hardened combatants.”<sup>12</sup>

After the Jammu and Kashmir elections in October, terrorist focus shifted to the Kashmir region. On October 21, terrorists attacked a tunnel construction site near Sonamarg, killing six migrant workers and a doctor.<sup>13</sup> On November 13, at least a dozen people were injured after terrorists threw a grenade at a Sunday market in the summer capital Srinagar.<sup>14</sup>

With local recruitment dwindling, the ongoing violence is primarily being driven by terrorists infiltrating from Pakistan. A national news magazine quoting intelligence inputs revealed that out of 119 active terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, 95 are from Pakistan, while only 24 are locals.<sup>15</sup>

Drone intrusions are another cause of tension. The Border Security Force reported the neutralisation of 250 Pakistani drones in the Punjab region along the India-Pakistan border in 2024.<sup>16</sup> This is a sharp increase over the 100 drones neutralised in Punjab in 2023.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hindustan Times. “HT Interview: No Local Recruits, Pak Pushing Foreign Terrorists into J&K, Says DGP Swain,” August 8, 2024.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/htinterview-no-local-recruits-pak-pushing-foreign-terrorists-into-j-k-says-dgp-swain-101723133408516.html>.

<sup>13</sup> “Militants Kill Seven, Including Six Migrant Workers, in India’s Kashmir | Reuters.” Accessed December 25, 2024. [https://www.reuters.com/world/india/militants-kill-seven-including-six-migrant-workers-indias-kashmir-2024-10-21/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/india/militants-kill-seven-including-six-migrant-workers-indias-kashmir-2024-10-21/?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>14</sup> www.ndtv.com. “Omar Abdullah’s Appeal To Forces After 12 Injured In Srinagar Market Blast.” Accessed December 25, 2024. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/grenade-attack-at-sunday-market-in-j-ks-srinagar-at-least-6-injured-6933958>.

<sup>15</sup> Deccan Herald. “As Local Recruitment Dips, Foreign Terrorists Take Center Stage in J&K.” Accessed December 25, 2024. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/jammu-and-kashmir/as-local-recruitment-dips-foreign-terrorists-take-center-stage-in-jk-3274425>.

<sup>16</sup> ANI News. “Punjab: On Its 60th Raising Day, BSF Seizes 250th Pakistani Drone in 2024.” Accessed December 25, 2024. <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/punjab-on-its-60th-raising-day-bsf-seizes-250th-pakistani-drone-in-202420241201174033/>.

<sup>17</sup> Staff, Scroll. “Punjab: 100 Pakistani Drones Shot down in 2023, Says Border Security Force.” Text. Scroll.in. <https://scroll.in/latest/1061186/punjab-100-pakistani-drones-shot-down-in-2023-says-border-security-force>.

## Future Outlook

2024 was a year of serious economic, political, and internal security challenges for Pakistan. After facing a potential economic crisis at the beginning of the year, Pakistan's situation has somewhat improved. A \$7 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund and financial assistance from China and Saudi Arabia has been crucial in preventing a balance of payments crisis and stabilising foreign exchange reserves. The World Bank reports that Pakistan's GDP has grown to 2.5% in 2024 after a contraction of 0.2% in 2023.<sup>18</sup> However, structural impediments continue to challenge Pakistan's macroeconomic stability.

The February 8 general elections led to the formation of a coalition government comprising the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), even as independent candidates, many backed by the former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), secured the maximum number of seats. Since then, the political environment has remained tense, with ongoing protests by supporters of Imran Khan, who remains incarcerated and facing multiple legal cases.

The internal security situation has deteriorated in 2024, with both the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch militants stepping up their attacks. Despite the government launching Operation Azm-e-Istehkam in June, aiming to eradicate extremism and terrorism comprehensively, violence has escalated. Deaths in terrorist-related incidents have touched nearly 2200, an increase of 43% over 2023.<sup>19</sup> The escalating violence has prompted China to demand that Pakistan enhance security measures following attacks on Chinese workers involved in projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

The political instability in Pakistan and its continuing support of terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir suggest that there is unlikely to be any thaw in the India-Pakistan ties.

## India-Myanmar Border

In 2024, Myanmar's civil war has led to significant territorial shifts, with various resistance forces and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) controlling substantial portions of the country. The Arakan Army has seized most of central and northern Rakhine State and taken control over the entire 270 km border

<sup>18</sup> World Bank. "Overview." Text/HTML. Accessed December 25, 2024.  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview>.

<sup>19</sup> "Terrorism in Pakistan - Yearly Fatalities | SATP." Accessed December 26, 2024.  
<https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>.



with Bangladesh.<sup>20</sup> It has also moved into the Chin state, capturing the strategic town of Paletwa. In January, nearly 600 Myanmar Army soldiers crossed into Mizoram's Lawngtlai after the Arakan Army captured their camps.<sup>21</sup>

The war in Myanmar is also having an impact on the ongoing ethnic conflict between the Kukis and Meiteis in Manipur. Since May 2023, approximately 260 people have been killed and over 60,000 displaced due to the violence. An estimated 37,000 refugees from Myanmar are currently present in Mizoram and Manipur, the latter hosting approximately 5,000 refugees.<sup>22</sup> The state government has blamed the refugee influx as one cause of violence in Manipur. There are also reports that Kuki and Meitei insurgent groups that took refuge in Myanmar and fought in its civil war have been streaming back across the border to Manipur, bringing in sophisticated arms.<sup>23</sup>

The 1643 km long India-Myanmar border is poorly manned due to a lack of infrastructure and roads to set up a chain of border outposts. In September, it was reported that the Cabinet Committee on Security has, in principle, approved the construction of border fencing and roads along the international border between India and Myanmar at an approximate cost of Rs 31,000 crore.<sup>24</sup>

The Centre's decision to fence the border is facing opposition from some state governments. Nagaland and Mizoram assemblies have adopted resolutions opposing the Centre's move.<sup>25</sup> The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah), a Naga insurgent group currently under ceasefire with the Indian

<sup>20</sup> bdnews24.com. "Arakan Army Takes Full Control of Myanmar's Western Border with Bangladesh after Seizing Key Town." Arakan Army takes full control of Myanmar's border with Banglades. Accessed December 26, 2024. <https://bdnews24.com/world/feda1a0940bc>.

<sup>21</sup> www.ndtv.com. "As More Myanmar Soldiers Enter India, Mizoram Reaches Out To Centre." Accessed December 26, 2024. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/as-more-myanmar-soldiers-enter-india-mizoram-reaches-out-to-centre-4897065>.

<sup>22</sup> Lakshman, Vijaita Singh & Abhinay. "Over 5,000 Myanmar Refugees Take Shelter in Manipur's Naga District." The Hindu, June 20, 2024, sec. India. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/over-5000-refugees-sheltering-in-manipurs-naga-district-fearing-aerial-bombardment-attacks-in-myanmar-assam-rifles-dg/article68313232.ece>.

<sup>23</sup> www.ndtv.com. "Insurgents From Myanmar Civil War Worsen Manipur Ethnic Conflict: Report." Accessed December 26, 2024. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/insurgents-from-myanmar-civil-war-worsen-manipur-ethnic-conflict-report-7291556>.

<sup>24</sup> www.ndtv.com. "1,643 Km India-Myanmar Border To Be Fenced At A Cost Of Rs 31,000 Crore." Accessed December 26, 2024. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/1-643-km-india-myanmar-border-to-be-fenced-at-a-cost-of-rs-31-000-crore-6592867>.

<sup>25</sup> The Times of India. "After Mizoram, Nagaland Adopts Resolution against Suspension of FMR (Free Movement Regime)." March 2, 2024. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/nagaland-joins-mizoram-in-opposing-suspension-of-fmr/articleshow/108153023.cms>.

government, issued a statement that they would "not allow the proposed boundary fencing that further divides the Naga family as a nation."<sup>26</sup>

The border fencing is a long-term project. Meanwhile, the government must take measures to improve the management of the India-Myanmar border and build the necessary infrastructure for deploying additional forces.

## Organisational Restructuring

### Integrated Theatre Commands

In June 2024, it was reported that the Army, Navy and Indian Air Force are "99 per cent" on board with the broad contours of the theatre commands being given shape by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). The remaining issues are more administrative than operational.<sup>27</sup> This had fuelled expectations that 2024 could see the operationalisation of the Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs). However, the year has passed without a clear decision or implementation.

In July, senior defence officials were quoted in the media as saying that the locations for the headquarters of the three ITCs had been identified. The Western Theatre Command, responsible for the Pakistan front, will be based in Jaipur, while the Northern Theatre Command, responsible for the China front, will be situated in Lucknow. The Maritime Theatre Command at Thiruvananthapuram will be responsible for the seaboard and the island territories.<sup>28</sup>

A finalised blueprint for the ITCs was reportedly discussed during the first Joint Commanders' Conference held at Lucknow in September. The military has proposed that the three theatre commanders be given the rank of four-star generals, bringing them equivalent to the Service Chiefs. While theatre commanders will handle operations, the role of the Service Chiefs will be limited to raise-train-sustain and administrative functions.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The Times of India. "NSCN-IM Rejects Move to Fence Myanmar Border." January 25, 2024. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/nscn-im-rejects-move-to-fence-myanmar-border/articleshow/107130005.cms>.

<sup>27</sup> Philip, Snehes Alex. "Army, Navy, IAF Finally '99%' in Agreement over Structure of Proposed Theatre Commands." ThePrint, June 28, 2023. <https://theprint.in/defence/army-navy-iaf-finally-99-in-agreement-over-structure-of-proposed-theatre-commands/1646390/>.

<sup>28</sup> India Today. "Defence Ministry Identifies Three Locations to Set up Theatre Commands," July 4, 2024. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/theatre-commands-defence-ministry-chief-of-defence-staff-lucknow-jaipur-thiruvananthapuram-2562057-2024-07-04>.

<sup>29</sup> India Today. "India Set for Its Biggest Military Reform as Integrated Theatre Commands Await Final Govt Nod," September 10, 2024. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today->

In October, speaking at the annual Colonel Pyara Lal Memorial Lecture at the United Services Institution in New Delhi, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi mentioned that there is significant consensus among the three Service Chiefs and the CDS on the plan for ITCs. He stated, "We have been able to devise a complete structure and plan nearly everything. I think now it's at a mature stage to be presented to our decision-makers."<sup>30</sup>

In parallel with the ITCs, the military is attempting to move towards greater jointness. Around 200 issues related to jointness between the forces have been identified, and approximately 30% of them have already been addressed. A common operational planning process is being prepared, incorporating war-games, communication technology, common digital maps, geo-referencing systems and the aggregation of unmanned aerial vehicles. Intelligence-gathering resources are also being harmonised to support integrated operations.<sup>31</sup>

## Capability Development

### Indian Army

The Indian Army has declared 2024 and 2025 as "Years of Technology Absorption." The Army is adopting a multifaceted and concurrent approach, with the foremost priority being to align and synergise the available technologies within the existing system.<sup>32</sup>

The Defence Procurement Board (DPB) approved the Annual Acquisition Plan (AAP) 2024-26 in May 2024. Based on the prioritisation of schemes in the AAP, 25 schemes costing approximately Rs 40,695 crore have been identified and targeted to be concluded in the Financial Year (FY) 2024-25.

In September, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) granted the Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the Army's project to build the Future Ready Combat Vehicles (FRCVs). The FRCV will replace the T-72 tanks, which are nearing

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[insight/story/india-set-for-its-biggest-military-reform-as-integrated-theatre-commands-await-final-govt-nod-2597327-2024-09-10](https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/theatre-command-plan-to-be-sent-to-govt-soon-army-chief/).

<sup>30</sup> The Tribune. "Theatre Command Plan to Be Sent to Govt Soon: Army Chief." Accessed December 27, 2024. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/theatre-command-plan-to-be-sent-to-govt-soon-army-chief/>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> "Theme of the Year 2024 - The Official Home Page of the Indian Army." Accessed January 1, 2025. [https://indianarmy.nic.in/about/about-us-site-main/theme-of-the-year-2024-about-us-site-main?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://indianarmy.nic.in/about/about-us-site-main/theme-of-the-year-2024-about-us-site-main?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

retirement. The Army expects the first prototype in the next 3-4 years, with inductions commencing by 2030.<sup>33</sup>

Artillery modernisation received a boost in 2024. In December, the MoD signed a contract with Larsen & Toubro Limited for the procurement of 100 additional K9 Vajra self-propelled artillery guns.<sup>34</sup> Bharat Forge and Tata Advanced Systems are in the contract negotiation stage with the MoD to supply 307 Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS) howitzers.<sup>35</sup> In August, the Indian Army issued a Rs 6,500 crore tender for the acquisition of 400 towed artillery gun systems.<sup>36</sup>

The Indian Army's urgent requirement of replacing the ageing INSAS rifles with modern AK-203 rifles has been plagued with pricing issues and delays. The Indo-Russia Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL) facility in Amethi has only been able to supply 35,000 rifles so far, forcing the Army to procure 73,000 SIG Sauer rifles under emergency procurement.<sup>37</sup>

## Indian Navy

The following ships were commissioned by the Indian Navy in 2024:<sup>38</sup>

- INS Sandhayak, the first of four Survey Vessel Large (SVL), was commissioned in February 2024.
- The second ship of the SVL project, Nirdeshak, was commissioned in December 2024.

<sup>33</sup> Deshpande, Smruti. "Defence Ministry Approves Future Ready Combat Vehicles Procurement. Here's the Roadmap for the Project." ThePrint, September 4, 2024. <https://theprint.in/defence/defence-ministry-approves-future-ready-combat-vehicles-procurement-heres-the-roadmap-for-the-project/2251918/>.

<sup>34</sup> Standard, Business. "MoD Signs Rs 7,629-Cr Deal with L&T for 100 More K9 Vajra Artillery Guns," December 20, 2024. [https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/mod-signs-rs-7-629-cr-deal-with-lt-for-additional-k9-vajra-artillery-guns-124122001200\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/mod-signs-rs-7-629-cr-deal-with-lt-for-additional-k9-vajra-artillery-guns-124122001200_1.html).

<sup>35</sup> "Boost for Indian Army Firepower! Bharat Forge, Tata Likely to Bag Rs 7,000 Crore Deal for DRDO-Made Advanced Towed Artillery Gun Systems - Times of India." Accessed January 1, 2025. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/boost-for-indian-army-firepower-bharat-forge-tata-likely-to-bag-rs-7000-crore-deal-for-drdo-made-advanced-towed-artillery-gun-systems/articleshow/114969178.cms>.

<sup>36</sup> Negi, Kuldeep. "Indian Army Floats Rs 6,500 Crore Tender For Procurement Of 400 Howitzers Under 'Make In India.'" Swarajya by Kovai Media Private Limited. Accessed January 1, 2025. <https://swarajyamag.com/news-brief/indian-army-floats-rs-6500-crore-tender-for-procurement-of-400-howitzers-under-make-in-india>.

<sup>37</sup> Panag (ret), Lt Gen H. S. "SIG Sauer 716 Rifles Are a Stopgap. AK-203 Is the Future Rifle of Indian Armed Forces." ThePrint, September 12, 2024. <https://theprint.in/opinion/sig-sauer-716-rifles-are-a-stopgap-ak-203-is-the-future-rifle-of-indian-armed-forces/2263620/>.

<sup>38</sup> "YEAR END REVIEW 2024." Accessed January 1, 2025. <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2088180>.

- INS Tushil, a Russian-built frigate, was commissioned at the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad, Russia in December 2024.
- Nilgiri, the lead ship of the Project 17A stealth frigate class; Surat, the fourth and final ship of the Project 15B stealth destroyer class; and Vagsheer, the sixth and final submarine of the Scorpene-class, will be commissioned on January 15, 2025.

The government has approved the construction of two nuclear powered attack submarines that are to be designed and constructed indigenously. The first submarine is expected to be ready by 2036-37. In August, the Navy commissioned its second nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, strengthening India's nuclear deterrence.<sup>39</sup>

In October, India signed a deal with the United States to acquire 31 MQ-9B Predator drones. The Indian Navy will get 15 drones, which will be the 'SeaGuardian' variant, while the Army and the Air Force will be allotted eight 'SkyGuardian' Predator drones each.<sup>40</sup> Nine of the 24 MH 60Rs helicopters being procured by the Indian Navy have been operationalised onboard Fleet ships. These multi-role helicopters have bolstered the Navy's Anti-Submarine Warfare capabilities.

Project 75 (India) aims to produce six stealth submarines with Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) technology. The project has faced numerous delays over stringent tender requirements and the Navy's insistence on a proven AIP system. Delays in the project exacerbate existing shortfalls in the Indian Navy's underwater warfare capabilities, especially in the context of an expanding Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

### Indian Air Force (IAF)

The IAF is down to 31 fighter squadrons against a sanctioned strength of 42, the lowest level since 1965. Two more squadrons of the ageing MIG-21 will be phased out in 2025. In his annual conference in October, the IAF Chief, Air Chief Marshall Amar Preet Singh, said that the IAF will fight with "whatever we have."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Hindustan Times. "Navy to Bolster Posture in Indian Ocean with New Warships, Submarine," January 2, 2025. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/navy-to-bolster-posture-in-indian-ocean-with-new-warships-submarine-101735756340606.html>.

<sup>40</sup> "India Signs Mega Deal For 31 Predator Drones From US." Accessed January 2, 2025. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/india-signs-deal-for-31-predator-drones-from-us-6792986>.

<sup>41</sup> Firstpost. "Indian Air Force Faces Historic Shortage, Has Only 31 Squadrons Available against 42: Report," October 7, 2024. <https://www.firstpost.com/india/indian-air-force->

To augment a dwindling fleet, the IAF has signed two contracts for delivery of 83 and 97 Tejas Mk1A fighter jets. However, the delivery of these aircraft has been delayed as GE Aerospace has been unable to supply the engines for the aircraft. The first batch of engines is now anticipated to arrive by April 2025, after a delay of more than two years.<sup>42</sup>

Three of the five S-400 air defence squadrons contracted from Russia were delivered by 2023. The supply of the balance two squadrons has been pushed back by two years and is now expected to be completed by August 2026.<sup>43</sup>

The IAF is looking to induct additional fighter aircraft, flight-refuelling aircraft, and a range of UAVs. In February, the government accorded its acceptance of necessity (AoN) for the procurement of six mid-air refuellers. The IAF currently operates a fleet of six Russian-origin Ilyushin-78 tankers that are plagued by maintenance problems.<sup>44</sup>

## Indigenisation

2024 saw a continued focus on indigenisation. The need for this is evident as India was the largest importer of arms from 2019 to 2023, accounting for almost 10% of global arms imports. In July, the Department of Defence Production (DDP) notified the fifth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) consisting of 346 items. Earlier, four PILs comprising 4,666 items were notified by the DDP for DPSUs, of which 2,972 have already been indigenised. These five lists are in addition to the five PILs of 509 items notified by the Department of Military Affairs.<sup>45</sup>

MoD achieved the highest-ever growth in indigenous defence production in value terms during the FY 2023-24. The defence production went up to a record-high figure of Rs 1,26,887 crore, reflecting a growth of 16.7% over the

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[faces-historic-shortage-has-only-31-squadrons-available-against-42-report-13822797.html](https://www.pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2033571).

<sup>42</sup> Standard, Business. "Govt Imposes Fine on US Firm over Delays in Delivery of Tejas Mk1 Engines," November 4, 2024. [https://www.business-standard.com/industry/news/govt-imposes-fine-on-us-firm-over-delays-in-delivery-of-tejas-mk1-engines-124110400621\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/industry/news/govt-imposes-fine-on-us-firm-over-delays-in-delivery-of-tejas-mk1-engines-124110400621_1.html).

<sup>43</sup> Bisht, Inder Singh. "Russia Delays S-400 Air Defense System Delivery to India by 2 Years." The Defense Post (blog), March 21, 2024. <https://thedefensepost.com/2024/03/21/russia-s-400-system-india/>.

<sup>44</sup> Hindustan Times. "Mid-Air Refuellers, Maritime Planes in India's ₹84,560 Cr Defence Push," February 16, 2024. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/midair-refuellers-maritime-planes-in-india-s-84-560-cr-defence-push-101708093690365.html>.

<sup>45</sup> "Aatmanirbharta in Defence: MoD Notifies Fifth Positive Indigenisation List of 346 Items for DPSUs." Accessed January 2, 2025. <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2033571>.

previous year. Defence exports touched Rs 21,083 crore, an increase of 32.5% over the last fiscal when the figure was Rs 15,920 crore.<sup>46</sup>

Currently, of the 65 ships under construction, 63 are being built in India. The Indian Navy has achieved approximately 90% indigenisation in the Float segment, 60% in the Move segment, and 50% in the Fight segment.<sup>47</sup>

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez jointly inaugurated the TATA Aircraft Complex for manufacturing of C-295 transport aircraft at TATA Advanced Systems Limited Campus in Vadodara, Gujarat, in October. In September 2021, MoD had signed a contract with Airbus Defence and Space SA, Spain, for the supply of 56 aircraft - 16 to be brought in fly-away condition from Spain and 40 to be built in India by TASL. The first Made-in-India C-295 is expected to be rolled out by September 2026 and the remaining by August 2031.

## Looking at 2025

The situation at the LAC will continue to occupy the attention of the Indian Army in 2025. Even though the disengagement at the LAC has been completed, the focus on infrastructure building along the Northern borders will be sustained. The Indian military will continue to strengthen deterrence against any future Chinese attempts at military coercion and unilateral actions to change the status quo at the LAC.

Speaking at a press conference on December 27, Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations Director General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said that India had carried out 25 ceasefire violations in 2024, along with some false flag operations. He also accused India of carrying out massive atrocities in Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>48</sup> Such statements are an indication that the ceasefire agreement remains fragile.

With ethnic violence continuing in Manipur, and the unfolding situation in Myanmar, the government will have to undertake a comprehensive review of the India-Myanmar border. The Centre will also have to step in more proactively to find a solution to the conflict in Manipur.

<sup>46</sup> "YEAR END REVIEW 2024"....

<sup>47</sup> Singh, Mayank. "Indian Navy's 262 Indigenous Projects under Advance Stage." The New Indian Express, October 27, 2024.  
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Oct/27/indian-navys-262-indigenous-projects-under-advance-stage>.

<sup>48</sup> Dawn.com. "Banned Outfits Provided with Sanctuaries, Support on Afghan Territory: ISPR." DAWN.COM, 14:36:14+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1881429>.

In view of the Israel-Hamas conflict, the Indian Navy commenced Maritime Security Operations in 2024. The high tempo of operational deployments of Navy assets would have to be maintained through 2025.

The dwindling Air Force fleet demands a serious look by the government. China has unveiled its sixth-generation stealth fighter, and Pakistan is purchasing 40 J-35 stealth fighters from China, which will be delivered in the next two years.<sup>49</sup> An early decision must be taken on the Air Force's pending requirement of purchasing 114 medium-role fighter aircraft.

The MoD has declared 2025 as the "Year of Reforms." One of the focus areas of reforms is to "further bolster jointness and integration initiatives" among the armed forces and "facilitate establishment of the Integrated Theatre Commands."<sup>50</sup> It is hoped that 2025 will finally see a rollout of the ITCs.

The induction of cutting-edge technology is a priority area for the three services. However, this will require a significant increase in the investment in defence research and development (R&D). This year's budgetary allocation to the Defence Research and Development Organisation was Rs 23,855 crore. Out of this allocation, a share of Rs 13,208 crore is earmarked for capital expenditure. Of this capital expenditure, more than 50% goes into strategic systems, leaving very little for R&D in other areas.<sup>51</sup>

The Central Government Expenditure (CGE) pattern shows that defence spending has steadily declined from 17.43% of CGE in FY 2018-19 to 12.9% in FY2024-25.<sup>52</sup> In terms of percentage of GDP, the allocation has dropped from 2.3% to 1.9% in the same period. Capital expenditure constitutes about 28% of the total budget. With little scope for cutting pay and allowances or revenue expenditure, modernisation can be speeded up only if budgetary allocation to defence is enhanced.

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<sup>49</sup> Livemint. "Pakistan to Acquire 40 Chinese Stealth Fighters. All about China's J-35 Fighter, a Stealth Rival to US F-35 | Today News." mint, December 24, 2024. <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/pakistan-to-acquire-40-chinese-stealth-fighters-all-about-china-j-35-fighter-a-stealth-rival-to-us-lockheed-martin-f35-11735000787818.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Standard, Business. "MoD Seeks to Modernise Armed Forces, Will Observe 2025 as 'Year of Reforms,'" January 1, 2025. [https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/mod-wants-to-modernise-armed-forces-will-observe-2025-as-year-of-reforms-125010100837\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/mod-wants-to-modernise-armed-forces-will-observe-2025-as-year-of-reforms-125010100837_1.html).

<sup>51</sup> "STANDING COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE (2023-24) A REVIEW OF THE WORKING OF THE DEFENCE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION" [https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2963532/1/17\\_Defence\\_42.pdf](https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2963532/1/17_Defence_42.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> "Defence Budget Can't Beat Inflation! - Rediff.Com India News." Accessed July 25, 2024. <https://www.rediff.com/news/special/defence-budget-cant-beat-inflation/20240226.htm>.





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