

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

The India-Armenia Defence Partnership: Strategic Drivers

Bhawna

January 13, 2025

S*ummary*

Armenia has emerged as one of India's leading markets for defence exports.

Historically, Armenia relied heavily on Russia for arms procurement. According to SIPRI, from 2011 to 2020, Russia was the main supplier of arms to Armenia accounting for 93.7 per cent of its imports.¹ However, Russia's inability to meet supply commitments due to the Ukraine war has exposed the risks of overdependence on a single ally.² As a result, Armenia had to look for other sources for defence procurement.

Armenia's efforts to meet its defence requirements, moreover, have been driven by the need to ensure security amidst persistent tensions with Azerbaijan. In September 2023, Azerbaijani forces seized the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, with Armenians fleeing the territory.³ Azerbaijan compelled Nagorno-Karabakh's de facto authorities to disarm and dissolve institutions of the Republic of Artsakh by 1 January 2024.⁴ Such geopolitical challenges have exacerbated Armenia's need for affordable, reliable defence equipment.

According to Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, being part of Russian-led multilateral organisations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) has also not benefitted Armenia, as it has not provided the necessary support during times of conflict and security challenges.⁵ Armenia hosts the Russian 102nd Military Base in Gyumri and the 3624th Airbase at Erebuni Airport near Yerevan. Additionally, Russian border guards have been stationed along Armenia's borders with Turkey and Iran. Alen Simonyan, the speaker of the Armenian parliament, expressed disappointment with the CSTO, stating that the alliance was like a “gun that does not shoot”.⁶ Armenia announced on 8 May 2024 that it had ceased its financial contributions to the CSTO and effectively suspended its membership in the Russian-led military alliance.⁷

Armenia has explored partnerships with other countries to address these shortcomings, enhance its military capabilities and ensure national security. In the

¹ [“Only in 2019, Armenia Received 62.3% of its Arms Supplies for the Last 10 years: SIPRI”](#), *First Channel News*, 4 June 2021.

² [“Russia's Failure to Comply with Arms Supply Agreement is One of the Main Problems in Bilateral Relations – Armenian Security Council Secretary”](#), *Arka News Agency*, 12 July 2023; Shoghik Galstian, [“Armenian Official Sheds Light On Weapons Not Supplied By Russia”](#), *Liberty Radio Station*, 4 December 2023.

³ Michael Ertl, [“Nagorno-Karabakh: Conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenians Explained”](#), *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 28 September 2023.

⁴ [“Azerbaijan: As Azerbaijani Forces Assume Full Control Over Nagorno-Karabakh, It Must Respect and Protect the Rights of Local Ethnic Armenians”](#), *Amnesty International*, 29 September 2023.

⁵ [“Armenia Says Truce Agreed with Azerbaijan After New Clashes”](#), *The National News*, 15 September 2022.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ [“Armenia Stops Financial Contributions to Russian-Led Military Alliance”](#), *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 8 May 2024.

above milieu, India has emerged as a significant source of defence equipment.⁸ Armenia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Mnatsakan Safaryan in October 2023 stated that Armenia was diversifying its defence cooperation and this was “a good opportunity to enhance Armenian-Indian ties in this field further”.⁹

Yerevan has also moved closer to New Delhi in the context of the expanding Azerbaijani–Pakistani–Turkiye trilateral cooperation.¹⁰ During the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Turkey provided unmanned aerial vehicles which significantly influenced Azerbaijan's victory in the conflict.¹¹ Azerbaijan also acquired the multi-role JF-17 Block III fighter jets from Pakistan in a deal valued at approximately US\$ 1.6 billion.¹²

Armenia, on its part, has formed trilateral partnerships with India along with like-minded countries such as Iran, France and Greece.¹³ On 12 December 2024, the second India–Iran–Armenia Trilateral Consultations took place in New Delhi, where the three nations focused on connectivity initiatives, multilateral engagement and regional developments, aiming to enhance trade, tourism and cultural exchanges.¹⁴ Furthermore, on 19 December 2024, Armenia, Greece and Cyprus held trilateral defence consultations in Athens.¹⁵

Armenia has emerged as India's leading market for defence exports, highlighting a significant shift in India's defence trade relationships.¹⁶ Armenia appointed a defence attaché at its Embassy in New Delhi on 18 May 2023. Citing deepening military ties between the two countries, India has also appointed a military attache to Armenia for the first time in April 2024.

⁸ [“Foreign Nations Keen to Acquire Reliable & Cost-Effective Indian Missiles”](#), *Sputnik*, 28 September 2024.

⁹ Shashank Mattoo, [“Armenia Keen to Expand Defence Links with India as Conflict Festers”](#), *Mint*, 25 October 2023.

¹⁰ John C. K. Daly, [“Azerbaijan Concerned by India’s Weapons Sales to Armenia”](#), The Jamestown Foundation, 14 August 2023.

¹¹ Hulya Kinik, [“The Role of Turkish Drones in Azerbaijan’s Increasing Military Effectiveness: An Assessment of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War”](#), *Insight Turkey*, 14 December 2021.

¹² [“Azerbaijan Buys Fighter Jets from Pakistan under \\$1.6 billion Deal”](#), *The Hindu*, 27 September 2024.

¹³ [“Why 2024 Should be the Year of Armenia-India Strategic Partnership”](#), *Armenpress*, 30 December 2023.

¹⁴ [“2nd India-Iran-Armenia Trilateral Consultations”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 12 December 2024.

¹⁵ [“Armenia-Greece-Cyprus trilateral Defence Consultations Held in Athens”](#), *Armenpress*, 20 December 2024.

¹⁶ [“Why Armenia has Emerged as India's Leading Defence Export Destination”](#), *Firstpost*, 28 October 2024.

India's growing defence cooperation with Armenia is exemplified by the US\$ 40 million deal for the supply of four Swathi weapon-locating radar systems.¹⁷ Operational in conflict zones and considered superior to systems provided by Russia and Poland, this collaboration aligns with India's 'Make in India' initiative, which aims to establish a robust US\$ 26 billion defence industry by 2025.¹⁸

This partnership with Armenia not only highlights India's technological advancements in defence capabilities but also enhances its strategic ties in the region, contributing to India's objectives for self-reliance and international partnerships in defence. Since 2022, contracts have been signed for the supply of various weaponry. This includes the 214mm Pinaka MLRS,¹⁹ Konkurs anti-tank missiles, mortars and various ammunition such as small arms cartridges and 30-40 mm grenades.²⁰ The list also includes Multi-terrain Artillery Guns (MArG), 155mm/39 caliber self-propelled howitzers, Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS), towed 155mm/52 caliber howitzers, ZEN anti-drone systems and Akash and Akash-NG air defence systems.²¹

Additionally, reports note that Armenia is acquiring Indian anti-missile defence systems, specifically the Ashwin Ballistic Missile Interceptor.²² There are proposals from Armenia to acquire a wider range of weapons and military equipment.²³ This includes Pralay ballistic missiles, supersonic missiles like BrahMos and BrahMos NG, third-generation anti-tank guided missiles and more. Moreover, India may propose a plan to upgrade Armenia's four Su-30SMs and equip them with modern avionics, radars and missiles, such as the Astra BVRM and the Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW).²⁴ The estimated value of current and forthcoming contracts with India varies, with estimates ranging from US\$ 1 billion to US\$ 2 billion.²⁵

¹⁷ Prakash Panneerselvam, [“Winning a Defence Deal with Armenia: India Walloped Turkey”](#), *Diplomatist*, 31 March 2020.

¹⁸ [“India Wins US\\$40mn Defence Deal from Armenia”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1 March 2020.

¹⁹ Yeghia Tashjian, [“The Geopolitical Implications of India's Arms Sale to Armenia”](#), *The Armenian Weekly*, 9 August 2023.

²⁰ [“Assessing Armenia's Military Diversification Efforts: Partnerships with India and France”](#), Regional Center for Democracy and Security, 27 March 2024.

²¹ [“The Annual Assessment of Global Military Capabilities and Defence Economics”](#), *The Military Balance*, 2024, p. 161.

²² [“Armenia Has Quietly Acquired 15 Ashwin Ballistic Missile Defence Interceptors from India”](#), *Indian Defence News*, 23 December 2023.

²³ [“Military Supplies to Armenia Escalate Tensions in South Caucasus”](#), *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 6 August 2024.

²⁴ Bhaswar Kumar, [“Armenia May Ask India to Upgrade its Su-30s, Buy Astra Missiles”](#), *Business Standard*, 16 September 2024.

²⁵ [“The Annual Assessment of Global Military Capabilities and Defence Economics”](#), no. 21.

Armenia has diversified its defence partnerships not only with India but also with countries such as France, to prepare for future military challenges. On 24 October 2023, Armenia and France finalised an arms agreement. This deal enables Armenia to acquire radar systems and additional equipment from French defence companies Thales and Safran while also allowing Paris to assist Yerevan in training military personnel and modernising its armed forces.²⁶ In October 2023, French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu and Armenia's Defence Minister Suren Papikyan signed a deal for the sale of three GM 200 radars manufactured by Thales²⁷ and also signed a MoU on Mistral short-range air defence system.²⁸ In June 2024, France agreed to supply 36 CAESAR self-propelled howitzers to Armenia.²⁹ In December 2024, Armenia and France signed a defence cooperation program for 2025.³⁰

The future of the India–Armenia relationship appears promising, with the potential for increased collaboration in various areas, especially defence and trade. India's rise as a key defence exporter to the US, France and Armenia enhances its economic and strategic status.³¹ By showcasing its capacity to produce and deliver advanced defence equipment, India has established itself as a dependable partner in the global defence arena. India now supplies defence products to over 90 countries. In the first quarter of 2024–2025, the country's defence exports witnessed a remarkable 78 per cent growth, rising to Rs 6,915 crore from Rs 3,885 crore in the same period the previous year.³²

India is increasing its domestic defence-industrial base as part of its 'Atmanirbharta' (self-reliance) initiative and 'Make in India' programme while promoting arms exports. Additionally, India–Armenia economic cooperation could expand through increased trade and investment, particularly in sectors like technology, agriculture and infrastructure. As both countries navigate complex regional dynamics, they can benefit from a strategic alliance that supports mutual interests in stability and security.

²⁶ Mark Dovich, [“Armenia and France Sign First Weapons Deal”](#), *Civilnet*, 24 October 2023.

²⁷ [“France Announces Sale of Weapons to Armenia”](#), *Le Monde*, 23 October 2023.

²⁸ [“France to Boost Armenia's Air Defences with Radars, Missiles”](#), *Reuters*, 23 October 2023.

²⁹ Ruzanna Stepanian, [“Armenian Official Details New Arms Deal with France”](#), Liberty Radio Station, 25 June 2024.

³⁰ [“Armenia and France Sign Defence Cooperation Programme for 2025”](#), *Arka News Agency*, 11 December 2024.

³¹ Siranush Ghazanchyan, [“US, France, Armenia Emerge as India's Top Three Defense Export Customers”](#), Public Radio of Armenai, 28 October 2024.

³² [“From Importer to Exporter, India's Defence Exports Jump 30-fold: Guess Who's Buying”](#), *The Economic Times*, 22 August 2024.

About the Author

Ms. Bhawna is Research Intern at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses is a non-partisan, autonomous body dedicated to objective research and policy relevant studies on all aspects of defence and security. Its mission is to promote national and international security through the generation and dissemination of knowledge on defence and security-related issues.

Disclaimer: Views expressed in Manohar Parrikar IDSA's publications and on its website are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Manohar Parrikar IDSA or the Government of India.

© Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) 2025