

# MP-IDSA *Commentary*

## India-France Defence Cooperation: BEL-Safran JV for HAMMER Smart Munitions

*S. Samuel C. Rajiv*

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### **S***ummary*

The BEL-Safran JV for the production of HAMMER Smart Precision Guided Air-to-Ground munitions will strengthen the operational readiness of the Indian armed forces.

India and France, during the visit of the French President Emmanuel Macron from 17 to 19 February 2026, elevated their relationship into a ‘Special Global and Strategic Partnership’. Both countries decided to further ‘intensify joint research, co-design, co-development and co-production of advanced defence platforms, including in the field of air, naval and land systems, and emerging dual-use technologies’.<sup>1</sup>

A significant development in India–France defence cooperation during this visit was the inauguration of the Joint Venture between Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Safran for the production of Highly Agile Modular Muniton Extended Range (HAMMER) Smart Precision Guided Air-to-Ground weapon system. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Macron also jointly inaugurated the Final Assembly Line (FAL) of H125 helicopters for civilian use. The military version could also be produced in the future.

The joint venture cooperation agreement (JVCA) between BEL and Safran was earlier signed on 24 November 2025 to manufacture the HAMMER precision-guided weapon. Both companies initially decided to enter into the JV in February 2025, when they signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at Aero India. The Chairman and Managing Director of BEL had then noted that the MoU.

will localise HAMMER production, enable development of future variants and support the Government of India’s Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative by reducing import dependence. The collaboration will facilitate technology transfer, create opportunities for Indian industries, especially SMEs and position India as a global hub for smart ammunition production.<sup>2</sup>

As part of the JV, a Centre of Excellence is being established for ‘joint industrial activities’ including ‘manufacturing, engineering and associated services’. Safran will implement a ‘knowledge transfer programme’, and transfer of production will take place in a ‘phased manner with BEL leading final assembly, testing and quality assurance’.<sup>3</sup>

The HAMMER air-to-ground weapon equips the Indian Air Force’s (IAF) Rafale fleet, 36 of which were acquired as part of a September 2016 inter-governmental agreement (IGA). The first Rafale aircraft was received in October 2019, and all 36 were inducted by 2022. The IAF ordered the HAMMER precision-guided muniton in

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<sup>1</sup> [“India – France Joint Statement \(February 17, 2026\)”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 17 February 2026.

<sup>2</sup> [“Safran and Bharat Electronics Limited Forge a Partnership in the Defense Sector”](#), Safran, 11 February 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

July 2020 in the wake of border tensions with China and ahead of the arrival of the first batch of the Rafales.<sup>4</sup> The 2016 IGA for the aircraft and its associated weapons systems, however, did not include the HAMMER but did include the Beyond Visual Range (BVR) Air-to-Air METEOR Missiles, short- and medium-range MICA Air-to-Air Missiles, and precision-guided Air-to-Ground SCALP Missiles.<sup>5</sup>

The HAMMER air-to-ground smart munitions (range of 70 kms) as well as SCALP air-launched cruise missiles (range of 250 kms) were used effectively in Operation Sindoor for destroying Pakistani terror infrastructure at stand-off ranges. Reports note that India will soon finalise a €300 million (Rs 3,200 crore) deal for SCALP (also known as Storm Shadow) cruise missiles, along with Meteor BVR missiles.<sup>6</sup>

The HAMMER munition, meanwhile, has become an important part of Safran's portfolio. The group noted that in 2025, sales of the HAMMER, along with missile seekers, navigation and timing systems, played an essential role in the growth of its 'Equipment and Defense' business vertical by over 11 per cent. While SEAD's 'Propulsion' business vertical saw a 17.6 per cent growth, 'Aircraft Interiors' business vertical saw a 14.2 per cent growth.<sup>7</sup>

The sales of the HAMMER to Ukraine have been significant in recent years. The French Defence Minister was cited in January 2024 as stating that France will supply 50 HAMMERS per month to Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> Reports noted that while the company produced 830 units of the munition in 2024 (as against the originally planned 600 precision-guided bomb kits), it further ramped up production to 1,200 units in 2025.<sup>9</sup> Analysts note that the munition has emerged as 'one of NATO's most versatile and survivable answers to Russia's high-volume, low-accuracy bombardment doctrine'.<sup>10</sup> In a recent development, Norway is also funding the purchase of the smart air-to-ground weapon from France for Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [“IAF Orders HAMMER Missiles to Make Rafale a More Lethal Jet”](#), *Business Today*, 24 July 2020.

<sup>5</sup> [“Inking of Rafale Deal with French Government”](#), Rajya Sabha—Council of States, India, 22 November 2016.

<sup>6</sup> [“India France Eye Major Rs 3,200 crore SCALP Missile Deal”](#), *The Times of India*, 9 February 2026.

<sup>7</sup> [“Safran Reports Excellent Financial Performance in 2025 and Raises Its 2028 Ambitions”](#), Safran, 13 February 2026.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Kayali, [“France Gives Ukraine 12 More Howitzers Amid Flak for Not Pulling Its Weight”](#), *Politico*, 18 January 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Dmytro Shumlianskyi, [“France Exceeds Hammer Bomb Production Target for Ukraine by Nearly 40%”](#), MILITARNYI, 4 May 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Chomsky, [“Safran Reaches Record Output of AASM Hammer Guided Bomb Kits Amid Rising Demand from Ukraine and France”](#), Defence Industry Europe, 21 February 2026; also see [“France's Strategic Enhancement of AASM Hammer Precision-Guided Munitions”](#), *Debug Lies News*, 11 July 2025.

<sup>11</sup> [“Norway and France Agree on Military Support to Ukraine”](#), Government of Norway, 12 February 2026.

As for the IAF, the precision-guided bomb kit has been integrated onto the Tejas Mk1A fighter, in addition to the Rafale fighter aircraft.<sup>12</sup> The inauguration of the JV is expected to ‘localise the manufacturing, supply and maintenance’ of the smart bomb kit to ‘meet the operational needs of the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy’. It is expected that the indigenisation level will progressively increase to 60 per cent, with key sub-assemblies, electronics and mechanical parts manufactured locally.<sup>13</sup>

The BEL-Safran JV builds on significant developments in India–France defence industrial cooperation since the January 2024 defence industrial roadmap agreed to between the two countries. These include the inauguration of the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility for Rafale M-88 engines in Hyderabad in November 2025. This is the first such facility for M88 engines outside of France. While the facility, established with an investment of over Euros 40 million by Safran, will prioritise the MRO for India’s Rafale fleet, it will also help in the maintenance of M88 engines for Safran Electronics and Defense’s (SEAD) other export customers of the Rafale fighter jet. India currently operates 36 Rafale fighters and has ordered 26 Rafale Marine naval variants in April 2025. The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) on 12 February 2026 accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the procurement of Multi Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) (Rafale).<sup>14</sup> India is set to procure 114 Rafales.

Three Indo-French JVs have been formed in the aftermath of the 2016 Rafale deal as part of the offset obligations—Dassault Reliance Aerospace Limited (DRAL), Thales Reliance Defence Systems Limited (TRDSL) and L&T MBDA Missile Systems Limited, which manufacture fuselages, assemble and integrate advanced radars, and missiles such as SCALP cruise missiles and Meteor BVR missile, respectively. TRDSL, for instance, has successfully indigenised critical radar components of AESA radars in collaboration with BEL.<sup>15</sup> These JVs have also successfully integrated some Indian companies into their global supply chains.

The BEL-Safran JV will therefore not only strengthen the operational readiness of the Indian armed forces but also aid in enhancing domestic defence industrial capabilities. It remains to be seen whether the HAMMER precision munitions manufactured in India will also meet the requirements of international customers of this cutting-edge weapon, in addition to those of the Indian armed forces.

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<sup>12</sup> [“French AASM HAMMER Integration Enhances Indian Tejas Mak1A Fleet, Nears Combat Readiness”](#), Indian Defence Research Wing, 22 May 2025.

<sup>13</sup> [“Atmanirbhar Bharat: BEL and Safran Electronics & Defence Ink Joint Venture Cooperation Agreement for Production of HAMMER Smart Precision Guided Air-to-Ground Weapon in India”](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 24 November 2025.

<sup>14</sup> [“DAC Clears Rs 3.60 Lakh Crore Worth of Capital Acquisition Proposals to Enhance the Combat Readiness Of Defence Forces”](#), Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 12 February 2026.

<sup>15</sup> [“Annual Report 2024-25”](#), Reliance Infrastructure Limited, p. 10.

## About the Author



**Dr. S. Samuel C. Rajiv** is Research Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

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