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Issue Brief

India- Russia Tri-Service Military Drills 2017: Getting the Rear on Gear

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The Indian Defense Ministry stated on April 19, 2017 that India and Russia will hold Indra joint tri-service military exercises in November this year.¹The decision to hold joint military exercises came after comprehensive talks²between the Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar with his Russian counterpart Sergei Shoigu.

In March 2017, Air vice Marshal (retired) Manmohan Bahadur told Russia and India report (RIR) that India should also conduct regular air force exercises with Russia.³ India, for quite some time, have been holding bilateral joint ground and naval military



exercises with Russia, but this will be the first time when air force exercises will also be added in. This particular drill will include joint maneuvers by warships and anti- terror exercises between air and ground forces.

Although, Russia seems quite neutral about it, Indian officials are giving many statements. It is to be noted that in 2016, Russia-Pakistan tactical exercises “Druzhba 2016” triggered a lot of concerns for the Indian government. And India showed clear cut dislike and resentment over the mutual military involvement of Russia and Pakistan.

This first ever tri-lateral exercise between India and Russia is expected to be held from November 8 to 19, 2017.⁴ The two armies will look at refining their counter terrorism skills. It is anticipated that the exercise will be held in Russia.⁵

¹ <http://tass.com/defense/942180>

² <http://in.rbth.com/tag/shoigu>

³ http://in.rbth.com/defence/2017/04/20/india-russia-to-hold-tri-service-military-drills_746831

⁴ <http://www.news Bharati.com/Encyc/2017/4/20/India-russia-joint-exercise>

India, in the past few years, has conducted a series of exercises with US on an annual basis. This has ranged from naval Malabar⁶ war games to the counter terror Yudh Abhyas⁷ and Vajra Prahar.⁸ The US also bagged Indian arms contracts worth 15 billion dollars since 2007, overtaking Russian arms sales to India over the last 4 years.⁹ But now, India believes that both Russia and India through this tri-service Indra combat drill will further enhance the bilateral defense relations between both countries.

On April 26, the Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu in a meeting with India's Finance and Defense Minister Arun Jaitley on the sidelines of the 6th Moscow conference on international security said that Moscow is satisfied with the current level of military cooperation with New Delhi.¹⁰ According to Sergey, Russia and India has been increasing interaction in various fields at numerous levels.¹¹ Also, earlier on April 13, both the countries celebrated the 70th anniversary¹² of their diplomatic relations. Jaitley, on the other hand, said during this meeting with Sergey Shoigu, that plans to promote Russian designed weapons in India have been discussed. Also, further development of defense systems have been stressed upon. It also reflected that Jaitley was confident that this meeting will take bilateral relations to a new level.

Earlier in April, Russian President Putin had given approval for setting an Indo-Russian joint endeavor for the production of 200 Kamov military helicopters¹³ for India under a 1 billion dollar deal. Along with that, the construction of p 11356 frigates and the fifth generation fighter aircraft was also to be brought forward. Both these issues were further discussed in the meeting between Shoigu and Jaitley. Jaitley also

⁵ http://in.rbth.com/defence/2017/04/20/india-russia-to-hold-tri-service-military-drills_746831

⁶ <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/malabar-naval-exercise-by-india-us-japan-aimed-at-chinese-submarines-report-1642429>

⁷ <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/joint-indian-us-army-exercise-yudh-abhyas-2016-to-begin-in-uttarakhand-3026737/>

⁸ <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/joint-training-exercise-of-india-us-special-forces-to-be-held-after-four-years/>

⁹ <http://www.defense-aerospace.com/articles-view/release/3/167102/indian-government-clears-apache,-chinook-helicopter-buy.html>

¹⁰ https://defenceaviationpost.com/gab_gallery/defence-minister-shri-arun-jaitley-met-russian-defense-minister-mr-sergei-shoigu-moscow-along-respective-delegates-wednesday-26-april-2017-side-lines-6th-moscow-c/

¹¹ Ibid

¹² <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27483/Roadmap+of+Events+dedicated+to+the+70th+Anniversary+of+Establishment+of+Diplomatic+Relations+between+the+Russian+Federation+and+the+Republic+of+India+April+13+1947++April+13+2017>

¹³ www.bloombergquint.com/business/2017/04/26/arun-jaitley-russian-defence-minister-discuss-ways-to-boost-tie

said that the holding of these tri-service exercises will be a 'historic occasion'.¹⁴ Arun Jaitley also said that defense engagement between India and Russia will continue to grow. He also declared that Russia and India will also set up manufacturing units.¹⁵

Besides this, it has been indicated that the Integrated Defense Staff of the Russian Defense Ministry will lead the exercises.¹⁶ Indian sources have reported that this joint exercise will be an opportunity for India to synergize mutual collaboration between its services and see how other countries function jointly.¹⁷

India has been focusing on US and UK from quite sometimes, but now it seems that it is again shifting towards its old ally for the sake of arms and military maneuvers.

If one considers Russia-Pakistan tactical exercise "Druzhba 2016", India criticized this military cooperation more than anything and said Russia is steering military ventures with a nation which itself sponsors terrorism.¹⁸ New Delhi also criticized and conveyed its concerns to Moscow about the drills being held in Gilgit-Baltistan which India claims as part of disputed Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁹ Claiming Gilgit-Baltistan as its own territory shows the level of aggression of India towards Pakistan. Earlier, in an Indian-Russian annual bilateral summit in Goa in 2016, India conveyed its strong opposition to Russia for the joint exercises with Pakistan.²⁰ This repeated disapproval of India reflected that it was concerned about the growing relations between Russia and Pakistan after a decade of strained relations, and was also concerned about losing Russia as its ally. The tri-service exercise between Russia and India seems aimed as retaliation against the growing Pakistan-Russia defense cooperation.

Recently, an Indian newspaper indicated that the Russian government has decided not to hold bilateral military maneuvers with Pakistan anymore.²¹ It was also stated that this decision was taken by Moscow after seeing the strong reaction by India against the joint exercise with Pakistan, and that the Russian government has also accepted that Pakistan is a country which breeds terrorism. However, there is very

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=161325>

¹⁶ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-russia-to-upgrade-military-exercises/article18140791.ece>

¹⁷ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/post-russia-pak-war-games-delhi-ticks-off-moscow-for-wrong-approach/story-d7Sa8mvNSosFODMIOTgdPJ.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/deep-military-cooperation-between-russia-and-pakistan-threatens-delhi>

¹⁹ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/how-russia-changed-its-military-drill-kept-away-from-gilgit-baltistan/story-V4WPuEkSIJyrj2A1iKugKN.html>

²⁰ <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/india-conveys-to-moscow-its-opposition-to-russia-pakistan-military-exercise-3077204/>

²¹ www.dailypioneer.com/todays-newspaper/no-more-war-games-with-pak-russia.htm

little truth to this assertion. The commander in chief of the Russian forces, Oleg Salyukov has said that joint exercises with Pakistan, Mongolia and India will be held this year²² and no statement has been issued recently by Russian government which goes against it. Apart from defense cooperation, Pakistan and Russia will soon get involved in many joint ventures in the fields of energy and infrastructure. Moscow has also invited and is quite confident that Pakistan and India will join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization following the June 2017 summit in Kazakhstan.²³ This shows that the Indian government is giving a false notion about the current status of Russo-Pak relations on the basis of self-made assumptions and lies.

Another article from Indian newspaper suggested that whatever little military cooperation is going between Russia and Pakistan, Russians are far too engaged with India in defense cooperation to let anything come in the way.²⁴ What the Indian government and media are probably implying is that Russia may abandon Pakistan sometime soon and India-Russia alliance cannot be broken. Pakistan, however, is quite neutral on the declaration of the tri-service drill between India and Russia. Also, Russia has shown impartiality. Only Indian government has shown extreme excitement and probably this excitement led them to make statements which have no objectivity and very little truth. As far as Pakistan-Russia relations are concerned, this tri-service drill between India and Russia will have minimal or no effects at all on Pakistan. It is apparent that Pakistan and Russia are going to be long-term allies, and both the countries will have a symbiotic relationship. Currently, neither Russia nor Pakistan wants to back out from joint military and economic ventures. Cooperation with Pakistan is a plus point for Russia and they know it well. So it seems that the bilateral military knot between Russia and Pakistan cannot be untied easily. Both the countries are keen to have better ties and it seems that both the countries are ahead of the curve!

²² <https://breaking.com.ng/worldnews/russia-to-hold-drills-with-india-mongolia-pakistan-vietnam-in-2017/>

²³ <http://tass.com/world/941977>

²⁴ <http://www.dailypioneer.com/columnists/edit/robust-and-unparalleled.html>