ISSUE BRIEF

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EU-INDIA SECURITY AND DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP 2026: STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES AND PAKISTAN'S SECURITY CONCERNS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

Image Source: *ANI, India.*

On 27 January 2026, India and the European Union (EU) entered a new era of cooperation by signing the "Mother of all deals", a comprehensive trade agreement. Alongside this trade agreement, a significant Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) was concluded by the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Dr S. Jaishankar, and the European High Representative, Kaja Kallas. The partnership is a comprehensive security framework for institutionalised cooperation across traditional and non-traditional security arenas, including maritime security, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, and defence industrial collaborations. This development is grounded in the shifting nature of bilateral interaction from 'episodic cooperation to strategic convergences',[1] amidst the rising geopolitical uncertainties. The SDP emerges as a quintessential expression of strategic multi-alignment in an increasingly multipolar world, building on calculated convergences rather than formal alliances. These convergences include shared security concerns in Indo-Pacific, the pursuit of strategically diversified global partnerships, and a shared commitment to uphold a rule-based order. It also illustrates New Delhi's realisation of supply chain vulnerabilities and its urge to reconfigure its strategic dependencies amid heightened geostrategic turbulence. For India, the strategic imperatives include integration into

1 Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, "EU-India Partnership: Maritime Security and Multipolar Collaboration in the Indo-Pacific", Stratheia, Feburary 14, 2026 https://stratheia.com/eu-india-partnership-maritime-security-and-multipolar-collaboration-in-the-indo-pacific/

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Europe's supply chains, access to advanced technology, information exchanges, and co-development opportunities.

What's the Partnership About

India becomes the third Asian country, after Japan and South Korea, to forge such an agreement with the European Union. The EU forges Security and Defence Partnerships with like-minded non-European countries to establish a framework for cooperation across multiple domains, including traditional and non-traditional areas. These partnerships are mostly anchored around participation in European civilian and military initiatives, inclusion in Permanent Structured Cooperation Projects, and agreements for the exchange of classified information.[2] India's interest in this partnership primarily lies in the last two domains.[3] Tailored according to each partner's specific requirements, the EU-India Security and Defence Partnership focuses on the following domains

- **Maritime Security**

  Enhancing cooperation in maritime security to promote a 'rule-based' maritime system, including coordinated joint exercises, information exchanges, and mutual efforts to counter threats to undersea infrastructure, such as submarines. Also, supporting the development of a regional maritime security architecture and strengthening coordination between the Indian Navy and the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) through joint naval exercises to secure critical sea lanes.[4]

- **Cyber issues**

  Deepening the cyber security dialogue, including enhanced information exchanges on the cyber security threat landscape, policy frameworks, building a multi-level resilient framework and cyber capacity building.[5]

- **Counter-terrorism**

  Strengthening existing frameworks such as the "Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism (JWG-CT)", increasing intelligence exchanges on threat assessment, and joint efforts to combat terrorism in all forms, including radicalisation, financing, and capacity building.[6]

2 "Security and defence partnerships", European Council, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/security-defence-partnerships/

3 Shashank Tiwari, "The India-EU Defense Agreement: Industrial Logic and Strategic Context", South Asian Voices, Feburary 13, 2026 https://southasianvoices.org/sav_channels/defense-security/

4 Harsha Kakar, "India-EU Security and Defence Partnership", India-EU Trade Council, February 05, 2026 https://eu-india.org/2026/02/05/india-eu-security-and-defense-partnership/

5 Kakar, "India-EU Security and Defence Partnership".

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- **Non-Proliferation and Disarmament**

  Reinforcing existing international frameworks to prevent Proliferation, promoting dialogue on Non-proliferation and Disarmament, and engaging in Joint initiatives.[7]

- **Space Security and Defence**

  Enhancing information exchange and cooperation in space security at multilateral fora, and fostering dialogue on the protection of space assets.[8]

- **Defence Industry and Technology**

  Exploring strategic convergences and alignments, Joint research and development, Co-production, and the establishment of an industry-led EU-India Defence Industry Forum to explore mutual opportunities and industrial partnerships.[9]

Strategic Diversification

To navigate the uncertain and "the most turbulent" geopolitical landscape, India seeks strategic diversification and the reconfiguration of its supply chains. India's concerted efforts to reduce its traditional defence reliance on Russia, from 72 percent in 2010-14 to 36 percent in 2019-23,[10] reflect New Delhi's realisation of supply chain vulnerabilities, particularly amid disruptions stemming from Russia's involvement in the Ukraine war and diverging domestic priorities. These endeavours for strategic diversification align with Europe's quest for "new global partners" in a period when the "European defence industrial base struggles to fulfil the increased defence supply demands".[11] The shared interests led to the consolidation of the India-EU Security and Defence Partnership (SDP), which offers a "reciprocal bargain". For New Delhi, it facilitates integration into Europe's defence

6 "Towards 2030: A Joint India-European Union Comprehensive Strategic Agenda", Ministry of External Affairs, India, January 27, 2026 https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/40616/Towards+2030+A+Joint+IndiaEuropean+Union+Comprehensive+Strategic+Agenda

7 "Security and Defence Partnership between the European Union and the Republic of India" European Union External Actions, January 21, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-security-and-defence-partnerships_en

8 "Security and Defence Partnership between the European Union and the Republic of India".

9 Karine de Vergeron, "EU-India Renewed Strategic Partnership and Its Significance in the Shifting Global Landscape", Fondation Robert Schuman, April 07, 2026 https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/829-eu-india-renewed-strategic-partnership-and-its-significance-in-the-shifting-global-landscape

10 "Trends in International Arms Transfer 2023", SIPRI, March 2024, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/fs_2403_at_2023.pdf

11 Hannah Aries, Bastian Giegerich, Tim Lawrenson, "The Guns of Europe: Defence-industrial Challenges in a Time of War", International Institute of Strategic Studies IISS, January 19, 2023 https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/survival-online/2023/06/the-guns-of-europe-defence-industrial-challenges-in-a-time-of-war/

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supply chains, access to advanced technology, and avenues for co-production (a core objective of India's "Self-reliance" agenda). For Europe, it provides access to a cost-efficient, speedy, and reliable defence market, the objective central to its 'ReArm' initiative.[12]

For India, the partnership does not formalise any bilateral defence deals; however, under the broader umbrella, it does accentuate defence dealings with the European states. France has become India's second-largest defence partner after Russia, accounting for 33 percent of India's total defence requirements. From the 40 billion dollars valued procurement of 114 Multipurpose fighter jet (Rafale) from Dassault Aviation to co-development of Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), the deepening defence ties reflect India's growing confidence in French defence technology, its eagerness to curb Russian dependence as well as its strategic necessity, as it faces an airpower gap with its neighbours.[13] Similarly, in the naval domain, India has negotiated a US$9 billion deal with Germany to acquire 6 advanced conventional diesel-electric submarines,[14] pivoting away from its traditional reliance on Russian fleets. India has also signed a 'Joint Declaration of Intent' with Greece to strengthen defence industrial cooperation and Joint production of weapons.[15]

Along with defence imports, the European defence market offers a viable option for India's defence exports, as New Delhi aims to increase its defence exports to 5 billion Euros by 2029. Another catch for India is co-development and co-production opportunities, which directly align with India's "Defence Atmnirbharta". The willingness of European countries to engage in technology and data exchanges and joint production underpins India's increasing pivot towards Europe. India-France defence partnership, 'Joint venture between Airbus and TATA for assembly of H125 Helicopter, coproduction of HAMMER Missiles, and joint production of up to 90 Rafale'[16] could serve India's long-standing objective of strengthening its domestic defence industry. However, the potential risks of diversification include differences in procurement standards, intellectual property protections, and political friction within the EU and with India's other international partners. New Delhi needs to recognise these risks to ensure that strategic diversification does not inadvertently translate into new dependencies or tensions.

12 Tiwari, "The India-EU Defense Agreement".

13 Dr. M Rajesh, "India's Fighter Jet Conundrum in the Context of a hostile Neighborhood", International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research, March 19, 2025 https://zenodo.org/records/15050960

14 Snehesh Alex Philip, "Navy, Germany's TKMS wraps up cost negotiations for new submarines, P-75I deal likely early next fiscal", The Print, February 26, 2026 https://share.google/ezCB75CbrsALrBuz0

15 Saurabh Trivedi, "India, Greece to strengthen defence partnership, expand capacity of military industries", The Hindu, February 09, 2026 https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-greece-to-strengthen-defence-partnership-expand-capacity-of-military-industries/article70611898.ece

16 "India to make Rafale jets with France in boost to defence ties, Macron says", Reuters, February 19, 2026 https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-make-rafale-jets-with-france-boost-defence-ties-macron-says-2026-02-19/

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Indo-Pacific Security

India's substantial dependence on the Indian Ocean for trade (95% by volume and 68 percent by transit value)[17] and energy supplies positions the Indo-Pacific security at the centre of New Delhi's security calculus. China's expanding influence in the Indian Ocean littoral states, coupled with its naval modernisation, including the acquisition of new aircraft carriers, submarine fleets, deployment of large Uncrewed Undersea Vehicles (UUVs), and assertiveness to seek maritime dominance, have altered the security landscape of the Indo-Pacific region and raised security concerns in India.[18] The security environment is further jeopardised by the persistent threat from non-state actors, such as pirates operating in the western Indian Ocean and Houthis militants disrupting the critical sea lanes.

India's Indo-Pacific Security strategy is ostensibly aimed at creating a 'free and open' region to foster economic integration and maritime security.[19] This approach rhetorically converges with Europe's Indo-Pacific strategy. The enhanced maritime cooperation under the Security and Defence Partnership is intended to strengthen maritime security through joint initiatives, capacity-building and information sharing. Yet this endeavour must be seen in the context of India's multi-alignment rhetoric, forging issue-based, selective partnerships as an instrument of 'strategic hedging', with implications beyond New Delhi's perimeter.

Institutionalized Collaboration

In the era of increasing multipolarity, India seeks to forge institutionalised cooperation and collaborations, moving beyond the 'buyer-seller' relationship. Traditionally, India's strategic engagement with Europe has been largely declaratory, based on joint statements and pacts. The Security and Defence Partnership institutionalises cooperation by establishing structured frameworks, such as the Annual EU-India Security and Defence Dialogue, the Joint EU-India Comprehensive Strategic Agenda-2030, and the EU-India Defence Industry Forum. It also initiates negotiation on the "Security of Information Agreement", a crucial agreement for the exchange of classified security and defence information.[20] It further mentions "building on and continuing

17 Suyesha Dutta, "What's Behind India's Shift from Non-Alignment to 'Strategic Alignment' in the Indian Ocean?", Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, January 29, 2025 https://share.google/E1taLNecDwdO5jRR3

18 Dhruva Jaishankar, Ammar Nainar, David Vallance, "Sharing The Burden: Preparing For Maritime Security Competition in the Indo-Pacific", ORF, February 2026 https://orfamerica.org/newresearch/sharing-the-burden-preparing-for-maritime-security-competition-in-the-indo-pacific

19 Mihir Shekhar Bhonsale, Dhruv Bansal, "India's Indo-Pacific Straetgy: Strengthening Partnerships and Navigating Challenges", Indo-Pacific Civil Society Forum, October 2024 https://cuts-global.org/pdf/briefing-paper-5-Indias-indo-pacific-strategy-strengthening-partnerships-and-navigating-challenges.pdf

20 "India-EU Joint Statement on the State Visit of President of the European Council, and President of the European Commission to India, and the 16th India-EU Summit", Ministry of External Affairs India, January 27, 2026 https://share.google/eRG63mlqGHTJyd8gv

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existing thematic dialogues" and consultations in maritime security, space, counter-terrorism, and cybersecurity domains.[21]

The agreement also signals the possibility of New Delhi's participation in European defence initiatives, such as the ReArm and SAFE (Security Action for Europe) projects. These initiatives reflect Europe's effort to mobilise billions of Euros (800 billion Euros for ReArm and 150 billion Euros for SAFE) to expand defence production, de-risk dependencies, and diversify supply acquisition. The Indian defence market seems lucrative for the procurement of "ammunition, loitering munitions, and small unmanned aerial systems" for their "substantially lower costs".[22] Additionally, as the world's second-largest importer of defence equipment, India's large defence market is an attractive destination for European manufacturers. These developments could translate into a diversified, technologically advanced, and reliable partnership for India's Defence industry.

During a meeting with the European dignitaries, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh seemingly coaxed European diplomats regarding the Indian defence industry playing a "meaningful role" in European security initiatives.[23] Despite growing enthusiasm for the partnership, India's role as a reciprocal defence partner remains constrained by a substantial defence trade flow deficit. In 2024-25, India's defence-related exports to the European Union were 135 million dollars,[24] reflecting incremental yet limited market penetration. France alone accounts for 33 percent of India's total defence imports. The trade imbalance could be addressed through prioritising targeted Joint ventures to boost domestic production, streamlining export licensing and compliance processes, and strategically analysing Europe's defence procurements to expand market penetration.

Concerns in Pakistan

The South Asian security landscape positions Pakistan and India in an intricate "Balance of Power Paradox", where security gains or alignments of one state raise the other's vulnerabilities. The extra-regional security alignments can disrupt the fragile regional security equilibrium by accelerating the already intense arms race. India and Europe's burgeoning security alignment consolidates New

21 "Security and Defense Partnership between the European Union and the Republic of India", European Union External Action, January 27, 2026 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/security-and-defence-eu-and-india-sign-security-defence-partnership_en

22 John Hill, "Top 3 conditions informing the EU-India Defense deal", Airforce Technology, January 30, 2026 https://www.airforce-technology.com/news/top-3-conditions-informing-the-eu-india-defence-deal/

23 Rajnath Singh, "Raksha Mantri meets High Representative/Vice President of European Commission in New Delhi", Press Release, Ministry of Defense, January 27, 2026 https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2219030&reg=3&lang=1

24 "EU-India security and defense partnership aims to expand market access for India equipment: report", India-EU Trade Council, January 25, 2026. https://eu-india.org/2026/01/25/eu-india-security-and-defense-partnership-aims-to-expand-market-access-for-indian-military-equipment-report/

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Delhi's strategic ambitions into concrete arms deals, triggering the 'action-reaction spiral', which "constrains Pakistan to maintain strategic and conventional balance vis-à-vis India".[25]

The quantitative asymmetry in conventional strength between Pakistan and India has long been a concern for Pakistan's defence and security. India's recent US$40 billion deal with France to acquire 114 Rafale jets, "to compensate for the dwindling squadron numbers,"[26] further widens the existing asymmetry. However, the Pakistan-India military standoff in 2025 exposed the limits of India's rhetoric of the quantitative edge. Despite Rafale's advanced capabilities, India lost three of them to "Pakistan's J-10CE, armed with long-range PL-15 missiles"[27].

To neutralise India's Rafale acquisition and sustain credible deterrence, Pakistan must accelerate the expansion of J-10 CE fleets and the procurement of the fifth-generation J-35 stealth fighter. India's integration into Europe's advanced technology and defence modernisation exerts strategic pressure on Pakistan, compelling accelerated acquisition of technologically advanced defence equipment. Nevertheless, Pakistan's persistent financial constraints remain a major challenge to sustained defence modernisation.

Another concerning aspect of the SDP could be the counter-terrorism domain. India has consistently sought to frame bilateral tensions with Pakistan within the counter-terrorism paradigm, including during the May 2025 crisis. This could complicate bilateral dynamics, granting India diplomatic leverage and undermining Pakistan's credibility at European Union platforms. Pakistan should focus on fostering conducive diplomatic engagements at the multilateral forums and countering India's quantitative edge with qualitative strength.

Conclusion

India seeks to navigate rising geostrategic uncertainties through strategic diversification, supply chain reconfiguration, and strengthening its domestic defence capabilities. Meanwhile, Europe is striving to ramp up its defence production, diversify its global partnerships, and seek resilient and cheaper supply chains. Mutual security convergences regarding strategic diversification, Indo-Pacific security concerns, and the pursuit of retaining strategic autonomy have led to the consolidation of the EU-India Security and Defence Partnership. This partnership reflects a reciprocal bargain,

25 Saddaf Sultaana, "India-Israel Defense Cooperation: Security Implications for Pakistan", Journal of Security and Strategic Analysis, July 2021 https://thesvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/dr-sadaf-sultana.pdf

26 "India's Massive Rafale Expansion Sparks Pakistan's J-10CE Surge and J-35 Stealth Fighter Fast-Track", Defense Security Asia, January 18, 2026 https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/india-rafale-expansion-pakistan-j10ce-j35-airpower-race/

27 "Pakistan's J-10C Downs Five Indian Jets Including Three Rafales in First Salvo of War, Claims Foreign Minister" Defence Security Asia, May 08, 2025 https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/author/dsa-a/

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granting India access to European defence supply chains and advanced technology, while offering the European defence industry access to the world's 2nd-largest arms importer and a cost-effective ammunition supplier. Pakistan's security concerns regarding this partnership lie in the widening conventional asymmetry, excessive maritime surveillance, and counter-terrorism narrative framing. While the SDP offers a comprehensive security framework, the evolving security landscape of South Asia and Indo-Pacific, the EU's internal political dynamics and the interests of individual European states will determine its ultimate effectiveness.

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