Chapter Three

THE MILITARY DIMENSION OF INDO-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP
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Nowhere has India's Soviet connection been more important than in the military sector.1 India is the largest non-bloc recipient of Soviet arms of which the value in 1974-1985 came to about 6.8 billions in current and 8.7 in constant US dollars.2 It was further recorded by SIPRI that two-thirds of Soviet deliveries to the Third World during 1982-1986 were to the three treaty partners, namely Syria, Iraq and India. India's share of 20.3 per cent in Soviet export ranked her second after Syria's 24 per cent share in total Soviet export.3

It is indeed remarkable that throughout the period under review the Soviet Union remained India's dominant arms supplier. The early years in the seventies represented a peak in high level Indo-Soviet military exchange with Soviet Union providing 70 per cent of India's

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1 It is difficult to ascertain precisely the magnitude of Soviet military aid programme to India since neither the Soviet nor the Indian side published any data in this regard. Therefore, the two most widely used western sources have been consulted namely, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) publications and the publication by International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). On India's side Annual Report published by the Ministry of Defence have been widely used. Other relevant materials of great help were several articles by the former directors of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), at New Delhi, K. Subrahmanyan, P.R. Chari and several other defence analysts like Raju Thomas and Ravi Rikye.


total arms import worth US $1,869 million. The following years witnessed a fall in Soviet share to 57 per cent but it was again followed by an increase with the result that India's share in Soviet export of major weapons to the Third World countries during 1977-81 was 20.3 percent. The Soviet supply to India had qualitative aspect, too; the quality of the weapons supplied to India improved dramatically from the late seventies with India receiving the top of the line Soviet equipments, sometimes even before the same were provided to the Warsaw Pact allies.

The quantitative and qualitative aspects of the Soviet arms transfers to India were surely indicative of the existence of a stable and enduring relationship in this sensitive area. But in case of India other factors were to be counted while assessing the nature of this relationship. Firstly, India's defence policy as outlined in the successive reports of the Ministry of Defence consistently veered around the principle of achieving self-reliance in defence production, which was thought to be the only conceivable way of decreasing India's dependence for arms on external powers. The report of 1980-81, for example, had an ambitious programme of elimination of imported technology within 10 to 15 years. Being a non-aligned country independence from both the Super Powers in the field of defence was regarded as a desirable strategy in India's national interest. Secondly, an important feature apparent in India's arms purchase was diversification of arms acquisition from the European countries like France.

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*SIPRI Yearbook*, n.3, p.187, Table 7.2.

Germany and of late USA (though not successfully), which were successfully competing with Moscow in the field of arms transfer. This gave an indication that India did not want total reliance on Moscow for arms, and wanted to keep the option open through efforts of diversification of its sources of supply wherever it was possible. In this backdrop the present chapter will assess the nature and content of Soviet-Indian collaboration in the field of arms transfer enquiring into the causes leading to India's dependence on Moscow as well as causes leading to her diversification effort.

There is another important issue which this chapter will address to while reviewing the evolution of Indo-Soviet military relationship i.e. to what extent arms transfer to India provided Moscow with an assured basis for influencing India's behaviour. Authoritative views from the West considered the political motive of establishing Soviet presence in a country through access to military bases and facilities being the dominant consideration behind Soviet arms transfers; although since the seventies economic incentive of earning hard currency through arms shipment became evident. It is difficult to ascertain what motivated Moscow in its liberal

\[7\]For example Roger F. Pajak, the National Security Adviser to Secretary of the Treasury in the US Government remarked that although through arms transfer the Soviet Union had acquired no "ideological converts", military assistance had proven to be one of Moscow's most "effective, flexible and durable instruments" for establishing "substantial degree of influence in the Third World". Soviet Military sales to India, he noted "have enhanced Moscow's stature in New Delhi and circumscribed that of the West", See his article "Soviet Arms transfers as an Instrument of Influence", Survival (London), Vol.23, n.4, July-August 1981, pp. 170-72; Roger E. Kanet, another prominent strategic analyst in the West in like manner viewed that Soviet military assistance had led to expansion of Soviet presence throughout much of Asia and Africa and had increased the potential of Moscow to influence future political and military developments; see his article, "Soviet Military Assistance to the Third World" in John F. Copper and Daniel S. Papps (eds.), Communist Nations Military Assistance (New York, 1983), pp.39.
arms transfer policy towards India. Soviet statements stressed its defensive aspect of helping the countries which were fighting for their liberation.¹

But this did not apply with regard to India. However, since the treaty's impact on India's non-aligned foreign policy was questioned it will be of value to probe whether Indo-Soviet collaboration in defence led to establishment of any such significant Soviet influence in the country. The analysis in this chapter will be period-wise relating to the Indira Gandhi regime (1971-76), the Janata Government (1977-79), and post-Janata period led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

**1971-76: ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE ON SOVIET ARMS?**

Unlike Pakistan's immediate drive for arms procurement for replenishing her losses in the 1971 war, in the case of India—with her preeminence in the subcontinent pretty established—there was no sense of urgency to follow a similar course, till such time as Pakistan's accelerated rearmament began to cause concern to India's defence planners. SIPRI noted a

¹Soviet military analyst Kozyrev asserted that Soviet military aid was rendered to countries which wanted defence against forces of aggression; in *The Arms Trade: A New Level of Danger* (Moscow, 1985), p.179. The Soviet military encyclopedia termed socialist countries" military aid as of "great importance to the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America in their fight for national liberation"; cited in Joachim Krause, "Soviet Arms Transfer Restraint" in Thomas Ohelson, ed., *Arms Transfer Limitation and the Third World Security* (SIPRI, 1988), p.95; Brezhnev's report at the 26th Soviet Party Congress in February 1981 emphasised the "defensive" aspect of Soviet arms transfer justifying military assistance to Angola, Ethiopia and Afghanistan on request in order to "frustrate attempts from the outside" to encourage "internal counter-revolution or aggression"; See his *Report of the CPSU Central Committee* in Foreign Broadcast Information Series (FBIS), *Daily Report: Soviet Union*, Vol. 1, Supplement 1, February 24, 1981, p.10; henceforth to be cited as FBIS.
sharp decline in Soviet supplies to India in 1972 and no order for Soviet equipment in the year 1972-73; although it remarked that this might have been caused not by a significant change of policy on either side but by the fact that deliveries of SU-7 fighters and other major items of equipment by the Soviet Union had been completed by that time.9

During the period under review India's Defence Ministry laid down some guiding principle of India's defence planning after a review of the existing strategic environment. The main strategic threat perceived by India were noted as: (1) increasing military presence of the Super Powers in the Indian Ocean due to the decision of the UK and the USA to further expand the communication facilities in Diego Garcia base in the Indian Ocean in 1974; (2) China increasing her logistics and intensifying patrolling activities in certain sectors of the Indo-Tibet border along with its support to hostile elements in the North Eastern region; (3) Pakistan's "qualitative and quantitative" addition to her arms strength through increasing collaboration with China, specially Pakistan's "tapping of the petro-dollars for arms" after the USA had lifted the embargo on arms supplies to Pakistan. Among these the third one appeared to become India's principal security concern since, as the Defence Ministry noted US arms aid "hardened the militaristic attitude" of Pakistani authorities who had taken the twin pledge of achieving qualitative superiority over India as well as building for Pakistan the finest fighting force in Asia. This proved to be an obstacle in India's policy of normalising its relations with Pakistan according to Simla Agreement.10 The defence plan for the period 1974-79 laid

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stress, accordingly, on three factors: India's adequate defence preparedness to meet an external threat of aggression in view of the sensitive security environment across the border, while simultaneously following a policy of good neighbourliness; (2) "modernisation" and selection of weapons system keeping in view the technological advances and highly sophisticated defence equipments in operation; (3) "Cost effectiveness" in acquisition of defence weapons considering India's financial strains due to huge hike in oil prices in the wake of the embargo put by the oil producing countries on oil supplies due to Arab-Israel war of 1973 and considering the enormous cost involved in both the acquisition and operation of the modern weapons system.  

It was India's Navy which had benefited in a big way by Soviet connection with considerable expansion through orders placed on the Soviet Union. The experience of 1971 war, the presence of the super powers in the Indian Ocean, the development in the Persian Gulf, and above all the necessity of guarding its long 2,000 miles coast-line all pointed to the need for expansion of Indian Navy that had so far been neglected. Soviet aid became fruitful because the kind of equipments that India was looking around for augmenting her under-water and surface vessels with better performance was readily available from the Soviet Union. The consideration of cost and replacement of ageing ships by modern sophisticated ones along with stress on "self-reliance in development of naval technology" which were laid down

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11Ibid., of 1975-76, pp.5-7.

12The case for naval expansion was forcefully brought out by Admiral Nanda (Indian Naval Chief during the 1971 war) in the course of his interview with Nisha Sahai Achuthan; see latter's Soviet Arms Transfers Policy in South Asia 1955-81 (New Delhi, 1988), p.170.
as one of India's defence objectives in the naval field\textsuperscript{13} led her to take a decision to move away from the predominantly British-oriented Indian Navy to one predominated by the Soviet weapons. According to an eminent Indian strategic analyst some bitterness existed on this score in 1972 due to Moscow's refusal to supply certain types of vessels to India; but the misunderstanding was removed when in a dramatic reversal of this position Indian Navy appeared to get everything they wanted and becoming almost planned with the supply of Soviet equipment.\textsuperscript{14} The SIPRI ATTW Yearbooks (1975-77) and the Military Balance, 1979-80 gave the details of orders and delivery of Soviet equipments which were primarily naval.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, most orders placed with the Soviet Union during this period were for sophisticated naval equipments which the Soviet Union had in her fleet. This went a long way in fulfilling India's long cherished dream of modernisation of her navy. For example, submarines, both the Fox Trot and Polynoncy type, formed a substantial part of the Soviet Union's North Pacific and Baltic Fleets. So also did the surface ship Kashin, Petya, Nanuchka and minesweeper Natya.\textsuperscript{16} Soviet weapons were also preferred on ground of efficiency and low cost compared to the high prices of similar sophisticated weapons in the international market. This was in line with the cost effectiveness laid down as one of the criteria to be considered in the arms acquisition programme. In terms of cost the Soviet Petya class patrol vessels and Osa class missile boats were considerably cheaper than the Lender class frigates being manufactured with

\textsuperscript{13}India, Defence, \textit{Annual Report 1973-74}, p.30.

\textsuperscript{14}Ravi Rikhye, "Soviet Arms to India", \textit{Motherland} (Delhi), 26 May 1975.

\textsuperscript{15}For details see Achuthan, n.12, pp.84-85.

British collaboration in Bombay. Similar considerations of cost determined the decision to acquire Soviet maritime reconnaissance aircraft against the British offers. The western press quoting Indian newspapers reported that the plans to acquire the British Harrier had been dropped due to cost in favour of Soviet-made missiles.

Viewed against this it would appear surprising that Soviet Union had not granted any co-production facility to India to produce Soviet naval equipments under license from the Soviet Union. The Defence Ministry in keeping with the goals of autarky in defence production was interested in a collaboration with the Soviet Union that would genuinely transfer the know-how in this field. But India's Defence Secretary, Mr. Govind Narain's visit to Moscow in July 1973 did not result in any Soviet assurance that India could embark on a programme of submarine production under Soviet license. This created a sense of disappointment in some circles in India who contrasted it with the Soviet attitude towards licensed production of MiG interceptors in India. As one noted Indian journalist observed it would not be difficult for India to reach the next stage of the manufacture of the entire missiles for the army, navy and airforce if the necessary technical cooperation was forthcoming from the Soviet Union.

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19 *Indian Express* (Delhi), 7 July 1973; all references to the *Indian Express* in this chapter are to the Delhi edition.
In the field of avionics the Indo-Soviet collaboration proceeded in keeping with the goals of autarky in defence production along with stress on induction of new equipments and replacement of aged weapon systems, including operational aircraft, to give adequate versatility, flexibility and adaptability to the Indian air force.\textsuperscript{21} It was in this field that the Soviet Union unlike the western partners emerged as the only major supplier which offered licensed production facilities in India. The first MiG-21 aircraft built by the Hindustan Aeronautics under licensed production was ready on 15 February 1973, a few months after which the Nasik division of Hindustan Aeronautics switched over to the progressive manufacture of MiG 21-M aircraft after having nearly completed the production programme of MiG-212-FL series. In April 1974 the Minister of Defence Production stated that the MiG-21-M aircraft would be manufactured in India from the current financial year, the import content of the raw materials being about forty per cent.\textsuperscript{22} The production of MiG-21-M was in keeping with the Subramaniam Aeronautics Committee Report of May 1969 which had recommended an improved version of MiG-21 to be developed with an integral weapon system for interception and ground attack -- a feature which had been incorporated in the MiG-21-M.\textsuperscript{23} Soon after the delivery of MiG-21s to India the Soviets themselves embarked on the process of replacing it by MiG-23s. This was later used as a criticism of Indo-Soviet military

\textsuperscript{21}India's Defence Ministry's \textit{Report}, n.13, p.11.

\textsuperscript{22}Cited in \textit{Tribune} (Chandigarh), 19 April 1974.

\textsuperscript{23}Cited from Achuthan, n.12, p.83.
collaboration i.e., the Soviets had only agreed to part with the technology of weapon system of the preceding generation, as an Indian analyst observed.  

Although the Soviet MiG-21 interceptor aircraft continued to remain the mainstay of IAF, controversies arose about the relevance to India's air defence of its improved version—the MiG-25, when India's Defence Secretary returned from Moscow with an indication of Moscow’s willingness to supply these aircrafts to India. MiG-25 was a high performance interceptor aircraft combining both interception and interdiction in close ground support operation, a weapon system to which most of the major powers in the world were switching over and a system which was known as "Foxbat" in NATO's parlance. Indian Air Force had long been looking for such deep penetration aircraft but no decision had been taken till that time, since the defence planners in India were in two minds about the relevance of this highly sophisticated offensive interceptor weapon system to India's air defence. Some alluded to IAF's demand as "a common squadron leader's mania for the latest", and others dealing specially with IAF's concern for Pakistan's low flying Phantom penetrating Indian air defence maintained that solution to such a threat lay in widening India's anti-aircraft defence system around the country's sensitive areas. There were still others who questioned the advisability of spending large sums on the new version after having heavily invested on the MiG-21-M which was a versatile system in India's conditions, whereas the MiG-25s were basically only interceptors helped in their task by an air-borne radar with their range being no more than half

24 See Thomas, n.17, p.235.

25 Indian Express, n.19.
of the improved MiG-21 series. So the IAF found itself in a peculiar position of not having
the necessary foreign exchange to pay for an advanced deep penetration aircraft and finding
the advanced Soviet series not versatile enough to suit India's requirements. Indian Defence
analyst Ravi Rikye's remark is worth quoting in this context. He wrote,

It is the Air Force that is most concerned with the Indo-Soviet equation on arms. The
transport fleet is in chaos because of obsolete equipment. There are series of
deficiencies in the SAM and helicopter force. And only one-third of the combat
squadron flying the MiG-21s are satisfactorily equipped. The Air Force is watching
with understandable alarm the continuing modernisation of Pakistan Air Force... Both
for political and financial reasons the Government could prefer purchasing Soviet
equipment for modernising the air force, but there is very little the Soviets have which
is of use to India. 27

Despite much criticism of Soviet weapons by mid-seventies the Soviet Union had emerged as
India's principal supplier of weapons dominating all the three branches of India's defence
forces, army, navy and airforce. 28 In monetary terms, too, during the period 1967-76 the
Soviet Union remained the dominant supplier, having transferred equipments worth almost
$1,365 million, overtaking India's traditional supplier UK whose transfers were only of $75
million. 29

26 Ibid; also see comment by G.K. Reddy in *The Hindu*, 24 February 1975.
27 Rikhye, n.14.
28 From the chart of India's sources of military equipment (1964-76) based on figures from the
29 See Appendix-6 in Achuthan, n.12, p.142, derived from US Arms Control and Disarmament
Agency, *World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfer* (Washington, D.C.: USGPO), Table-
VIII, p.158.
The years under review also witnessed the exchange of military visits from both the sides—signifying the closeness of Indo-Soviet military relationship. The most significant among these was the visit of Marshal Grechko, the Soviet Defence Minister to India during February 24-28, 1975, accompanied by Naval Chief Gershkov and Air Chief Kutakhov. This second important Soviet mission to India, after Soviet President Brezhnev’s visit in November 1973 was significant not only from the point of view of some expected arms negotiation (of which however, little information was available) resulting from the visit, but from the more important consideration of Soviet Union sharing India’s perception of threat posed by the US pronouncement at the time of lifting embargo on arms supplies to Pakistan. It was not a coincidence that India leaders just on the occasion of the visit expressed India’s deep concern at Pakistan’s assured inflow of arms through collaboration with Iran, China’s supply of arms to Pakistan and through declaration of the US Government’s decision to lift arms embargo on Pakistan.30 Grechko’s eloquent statement that nothing could ever "undermine the stability of the deep rooted friendship between India and the Soviet Union", his expression of grave concern at the action taken by "certain quarter", to step up the arms race necessitating "joint efforts of the states of the region to maintain peace and stability in the region", his recalling of Brezhnev’s remark (during his tour to India in 1973) on the Treaty’s significance in raising the Indo-Soviet relationship to a "new higher level",31 conveyed the message that the Treaty would solidify

30 See Foreign Minister’s statement in Lok Sabha on US arms supplies to Pakistan on February 25, 1975 in Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Foreign Affairs Record (New Delhi), Vol. 21, no.2, February 1975, pp.74-76; henceforth to be cited as Foreign Affairs Record.

31 From Indo-Soviet Joint statement released on February 27, 1975 in ibid., pp.73-74.
Indo-Soviet military relationship which would be an effective counter to the US decision. The reference to the Treaty in the Joint Communiqué as "corresponding to the basic interests" of the India and the Soviet Union for opening up a new prospect of further growth of mutually beneficial cooperation among the two countries was significant in this context.

India's official response to Grechko's visit was positive. The Ministry of External Affairs report observed,

The visit of Marshal Grechko highlighted the steadfast friendship and growing cooperation between India and the Soviet Union and the importance attached by them to the preservation of peace and stability in Asia. It opened up new prospects of further growth of the two countries in various fields.

This served to underline a mutuality of strategic perceptions regarding the security environment in the subcontinent. It was the Soviet Union which stressed Treaty's implication for the "peace and stability" in the region. This was interpreted in some circles, as for instance in China, as a Soviet attempt to extend influence in the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean through arms transfer. But in India's perception it was the threat from Pakistan's armament programme that made her to move to Moscow for arms, both on financial and political grounds.

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32 *Indian Express*, 28 February 1975.

33 *India, Ministry of External Affairs, Annual Report 1974-75*, (New Delhi, 1975), pp.4-5; henceforth to be cited as MEA, *Report*.

34 "Delhi-Moscow on Defence Collaboration", *Hindustan Times*, 26 February, 1975; Western press and Chinese press speculated that purpose of Grechko's visit was to bring advanced weaponry to Indian defence arsenal; cited from *The Guardian*, 28 February 1975, and Peking's Hsinhua News Agency in *Hindustan Times*, 4 March 1975.
But this did not make India dependent on Moscow in the sense that India did not lose her independence in foreign or defence policy decisions as was apprehended by some strategic analysts in India. As one analyst observed, while the Soviet outstanding help in certain military areas notably MiG-21 project, surface-to-air missile system and missile boats deserved recognition India needed to be aware of the political motivations involved in Soviet arms transfer to India—which were related to Soviet Union's own interest in influencing the behaviour of the recipient country (Soviet interest in having base facilities in the Indian Ocean was a probable Soviet political motivation). As a result India would be seriously hampered in taking independent decision if she were involved in a war. Indian military planners should seek to diversify her sources of supply of military weapons in the interest of "a legitimate independent military policy" he added.35 Another Indian strategic analyst was highly critical of Soviet Union's political aspect of arms sales which was in his view inseparable from the military aspect. Noting the "the Soviet tendency to ring up Delhi on political level when military teams balked at terms", he pointed out that the focal point of Moscow's pressure on Delhi was inevitably supply of spares where Soviet manipulation by delay and harsh payment terms became common having "serious ramification for India's defence preparedness". He also critically viewed Soviet Union's denial of information about some advanced items making India rely on published western data for assessing the capabilities of the Soviet weapons. He pointed to two political motivations of the Soviet Union being served by arms transfer to India namely,

obtaining India's consent to Soviet Union's Asian collective security proposal and the desire to have greater access to Indian bases.\textsuperscript{36} But these apprehensions did not provide substantial evidence to prove the contention that Moscow, through arms transfer, was able to exert any influence on India's defence policy. India always took pride in its independent defence policy and was not known to accept Moscow's intervention in defence affairs. There is also no documentary evidence that due to her enormous help to build up India's Navy, Moscow ever asked for base facilities from Indian authorities. Prior to the visit by Marshall Grechko the Indian Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh categorically stated, "Let me put it clearly that India would never provide the Soviet Union or any country a naval base on the Nicobar Island".\textsuperscript{37} An analyst while finding many "irritants" in Indo-Soviet military cooperation discounted the possibility of Soviet Union influencing India through arms transfer since there was a firm control exercised by the political leadership in the two countries over their respective military personnel.\textsuperscript{38} Apart from the fact that India accepted "aid without strings" and paid for every nut and bolt imported from the Soviets, the Soviet Union also laid an emphasis on assistance that could enable India to progressively manufacture the weapons supplied. Soviet manipulation of spare parts was also overemphasised since after India had started producing MiG-21 she had no difficulty in getting blue prints for

\textsuperscript{36}Rikhye, n.14. 
\textsuperscript{37}Reported in \textit{Indian Express}, 9 August 1974.
\textsuperscript{38}Chari, n.28, p.240.
the advanced version of the MiG-21, like MiG-21M. It would, therefore, be wrong to suggest that India's dependence on Moscow had reached a "dangerous" level.39

Janata Government’s (1977-79) Major Arms Diversification through Britain: A Test of Indo-Soviet Military Relationship

Janata Government's decision in October 1978 to purchase the Anglo-French Jaguar, deep penetration strike aircraft (DPSA) following prolonged international negotiations, which included offers by Sweden (Viggen), France (Mirage) and the Soviet MiG-23 (Flogger), led to a serious discussion in India regarding the role Soviet weapons in Indian's arms acquisition programme -- especially in the area of deep penetration striker aircraft system. It is important to refer to the Indo-Soviet negotiations preceding the decision. The Janata Government by late 1977 had already eliminated the MiG-23 claiming that it "did not meet the needs of the Indian Air Force".40 The Soviets, however, continued to sell their case with greater vigour and persuasion. The Soviet Deputy Defence Minister and Air Chief Kautakhov arrived in March 1978 with a fresh offer, including easier credit and manufacturing terms with a projected cost of Rs.2.5 crores. The Indian Government, however, kept to its earlier decision on the ground that the MiG-23 did not meet the technical and combat needs of the Indian Air Force.41

39See in this context review by G.K. Reddy in The Hindu 24 February 1975; also Hindustan Times, 23 February 1975.

40Thomas, n.17.

41Cited in Achuthan, n.12, p.90.
In India’s on-going negotiations with the USSR and the West for the purchase of a DPSA India went for an "outright purchase" of one quarter of her total requirements of aircrafts from the British, the remaining to be manufactured in India under license production according to Defence Ministry’s report. At a press interview on 1 October 1978 the Indian Defence Minister was reported to have refuted the suggestion that a Soviet MiG-23 had been under consideration.

Why did the Janata leadership prefer the Jaguar over the Soviet MiG-23 which the Soviets were zealously pursuing for India’s acceptance? The decision could not be interpreted as purely politically motivated in keeping with Prime Minister Desai’s pronouncement of pursuing a "correct non-alignment" for reducing India’s dependence on the Soviet Union. Indeed, diversifying the sources of supply of combat aircraft had been advocated in official circles much before the Janata Government was formed in 1977. From the Defence Ministry’s statement it appears that the need for modernisation of Indian combat aircraft in keeping with the country’s needs appeared to be a focal point behind the Government’s decision in the favour of British Jaguar. The Defence Ministry justified the decision on three grounds. Firstly, it was a decision by the "experts" who after detailed examination of various options gave their opinion in favour of Jaguar. Secondly, Jaguar programme was merely a

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43 Cited in P.R. Chari, "The DPSA Decision", *Strategic Analysis* (New Delhi, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses), vol.11, no.7, October 1978, p.234.

"replacement programme" intended to replenish the IAF fleet of ageing Hunters and Canberra with a suitable modern aircraft which was imperative in the context of "swift change and sophistication in technology and equipment". Thirdly, India had also to take into account the "level of sophistication of such equipment" in other countries including its "neighbour". This necessitated adequate "defense preparedness at all times", through continuous modernisation of equipments of the IAF while simultaneously continuing the efforts to maintain friendly and cordial relations. But this aim itself could be said to be politically motivated since it aimed to act as an adequate deterrent to external aggression from across India's border, meaning Pakistan whose impressive additions to its pre-1971 level of strength of her armed forces had been stated to cause concern to India. The need for DPSA, particularly in view of Pakistan's possible acquisition of USA's 7-Corsair fighter bomber (although actually denied to her by USA which offered her instead F5 interceptors), was evident as assessed by the Political Affairs Committee on 6 October 1978 in the Defence Minister's proposal for acquisition of a limited number of DPSA for the time being, pending India's conclusion of the deal.

However, what is relevant to our discussion is the consideration of factors leading to the Government's rejection of the Soviet offer of the MiG-23. Although the Government did not come out with any statement in this regard, yet on the basis of study of Government's

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47 Reported in Hindustan Times, 7 October 1978.
statements some presumptions can be made. In the first place Jagjivan Ram’s statement in Rajya Sabha during discussion on the purchase of Jaguar aircraft revealed that the Government preferred Jaguar over the Russian MiG-23 on ground of technological component of the former which was perceived to meet India’s requirement. In reply to Bepin Pal Das’s view that Mirage from France would have been better than the Jaguar, he pointed out that Mirage had functioned mainly as interceptor or fighter not as a strike plane which India required at that point of time. Jaguar had the technical component of being a "low flying strike aircraft", having a speed which would be adequate to go to the target, hit it and come back. India had the "best interceptors" in the Soviet MiG-21 Bis but this was not suitable for strike purposes for meeting the demand of IAF. He also pointed out that the aircraft ensured better survivability to the pilot for being two-engined. Indicating that the Soviet planes were not rejected on political ground he noted, "Our relations with the Soviet Union continue to the very friendly ...we have always valued the friendship with the USSR".

Secondly, the Government appeared to have considered the Jaguar’s adaptability to indigenous production about which they had doubt in case of Soviet MiGs. It may be noted that after 15 years of its initiation in India the Defence Ministry was talking about a special five year programme of indigenisation of the MiG aircraft in 1977-78. It is also to be noted that during the visit of

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48 For details, See Bipin Das Pal’s statement in Government of India, Rajya Sabha, Debates (New Delhi, Rajya Sabha Secretariat), vol.CVII, no.13, 6 December 1978, cols.231-39.

49 Jagjivan Ram’s statement in ibid., Col.244, 249; also see his statement in "Meet the People" Broadcast over All India Radio reproduced in Times of India (Delhi), 18 October 1978; all references to this newspaper in this Chapter are of Delhi edition.

a high level defense team from the Soviet Union in India in October 1978 coinciding with the arrival of the British company for negotiating the Jaguar deal, Jagjivan Ram was reported to have urged the Soviet Government for assistance in accelerating the pace of indigenisation of MiG aircraft in India. In reply the Soviet team was reported to have suggested a plan for special scheme of indigenisation of MiG-21 Bis, whose production had then started in India. The offer perhaps was made to dissuade India from the Jaguar deal. This evidently had no effect on India's defence planners. Thirdly, "Cost effectiveness" appeared to be another factor in Government's preference for the Jaguar. Denying the idea floated at that time that Jaguars were costly the Defence Minister stated in Parliament that it was on the "Overall economies of the total proposal for the Jaguar" that India based its decision. Jaguar was considered more economical than Mirage F-1. The cost factor of MiG-23 was not mentioned in this context, but considering the views of some eminent Indian strategic analysts who questioned the veracity of the advantages of the Soviet arms publicised in India as being "cheap", it may be suggested that the Government preferred the Jaguars on ground of being more economical than Soviet one. One analyst, for example, comparing the cost of MiG-21 with Mirage maintained that coming to the "system cost" MiG-21 might be one-third as expensive as compared to Mirage but considering the Soviet planes" restricted range and the aircraft payload and electronic equipment shortcomings necessitating supplementary

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51Reported in National Herald (Delhi), 13 October 1978; also see Air Vice Marshall, G.K. John's comment on better adaptability of the Jaguars for indigenous production in Hindustan Times, 29 September 1979.

52India, Rajya Sabha, Debates, n.48, col.246.
arrangement the MiG-21 could be as expensive as the Mirage. Another analyst maintained that while the unit prices of Soviet weapons were low, prices of spares and ancillaries were high.

On the whole the interpretation of the factors leading to the Jaguar decision and the rejection of the Soviet MiG-23 focused more on technical points than on political consideration. An analyst summed up the factors leading to Jaguar decision as follows:

1. the need for DPSA, particularly in view of Pakistan's acquisition of French Mirage and her efforts to obtain USA-7 Corsair fighter bomber;
2. technical requirements met by the Jaguar were not fulfilled by the other offers available;
3. Jaguar deal was in keeping with the policies and requirements of the Indian aeronautics industry.

As for the reasons for rejection of the Soviet MiG-23 he maintained, (i) the Soviet Union exercising technological control over key sections of the MiG-21, the export clause of Indo-Soviet agreement on it prohibited the sale of Indian made MiG parts to other countries, such as Egypt; (ii) the possibility of the Soviet Union conducting its "spare parts diplomacy" in the event of possible deterioration of Indo-Soviet relations; (iii) the argument of a smooth generational transition from MiG-21 to MiG-23 could not hold good equally for the transition from the British Canberra to the Jaguar; (iv) there was an overall impression about the Soviets transferring technology for only those weapons that were obsolete for them -- as was evidenced

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in their switching over to MiG-23 while offering MiG-21 to India, and in the unsatisfactory performance of SU-7B during the 1971 war. 55

Another analyst, however, maintained that the Government's decision was not a purely technical one but had political overtones of representing a policy shift of moving from Eastern to Western sources for military supplies. In his opinion acquisition of the DPSA and its associated aeronautical technology had the likelihood of adversely affecting the indigenous design and manufacturing capabilities and would pose difficult problems for India in manufacturing it indigenously for countering the FSE deployed by Pakistan which had great manoeuvrability as a frontline aircraft in the U.S. The advantage in obtaining a Soviet aircraft would have been that it could have been more cheaply produced and over shorted time-frame due to existing MiG-21 production facilities in India, with the added facility of later conversion into the SU Fencer type advanced aircraft. This along with the factor that Soviet Union had since 1962 been the supplier of India's major defence equipment -- made it appear that the decision in favour of a western company could not but be politically motivated. 56 It can be, however, said that both these factors, political and military, would have played a role in shaping the decision of the Janata Government.


56 Chari, n.43, pp.234-5.
Same could be said of the Janata Government's decision to acquire from Britain the Sea Harrier VS Tol aircraft to replace the aged INS Vikrant, although this did not raise much debate as was witnessed in the wake of Jaguar versus MiG-23 controversy. In the background of almost virtual domination of Soviet equipments in Indian naval field during the first half of seventies, the decision to move again to India's traditional supplier in the West appeared to be a paradox. But here again India's strategic environment demanded a new weapons system which could be used both for the fighter reconnaissance and strike roles. India's navy was stated to be seeking to combine its coastal defence with the offensive capability of keeping sea lanes open and carrying the fight to the enemy water. It was in this context that the Government's decision to have the newly designed Sea Harrier was welcomed. These naval aircrafts, fitted with a new generation of air-to-surface sea skimming anti-shipping missiles, were said to have provided air defence to the Indian fleet at sea. The decision was also welcomed as a healthy departure from the prevalent dependence on Moscow.

It is not clear as to what extent the Janata Government was guided by the irritants in Indo-Soviet military relationship -- like Soviet manoeuvre with regard to delivery of parts, its unwillingness to part with the design of the parts of advanced weapons system and the like. It was, however, clear that an important factor was the Janata Government's policy of diversifying its sources of arms import through the West. In the event it is not surprising to

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58 *The Tribune*, 1 November 1979.
note that the USSR's share of India's defence imports in the early 1970s dropped from 70 per cent to 50 per cent by 1977.\textsuperscript{59}

Notwithstanding this diversification the Janata leadership continued to show willingness to maintain close links with Moscow in this crucial sector. During Jagjivan Ram's visit to Moscow in May 1978 he was reported to have clinched an important deal from the Soviets which was related to the production in India, with Soviet know-how of a more powerful version of the MiG-21 fighter, namely the MiG Bis.\textsuperscript{60} Though it remained a basically defensive aircraft with the same weapon load as the MiG-21M, the new MiG Bis, equipped with air-to-air missiles and most advanced radar and firing devices fitted in powerful Soviet engines, were to have much faster acceleration and a far greater ground attack than the jet fighters which the West could provide.\textsuperscript{61} Reportedly the Soviets had also allowed India to improve the fire power of the new MiG Bis fighter interceptor with the French Matra Magic air-to-air missiles which were to be made in India under license.\textsuperscript{62} Jagjivan Ram's visit to Moscow was followed by the visit of a high level Soviet military team to New Delhi in October 1978 led by Mr. Silaviev, the first Deputy Minister of Aviation of the Soviet Union. India's rejection of the MiG-23 notwithstanding, the two sides negotiated agreements to accelerate the indigenisation process of the MiG-21 and to work out a new protocol for it and for transfer of

\textsuperscript{59}Cited in Chari, n.28, p.238.

\textsuperscript{60}\textit{The Hindu}, 25 May 1978.

\textsuperscript{61}\textit{National Herald} (Delhi), 13 October 1978.

\textsuperscript{62}\textit{The Hindu}, n.60.
technology, all of which would be subject to periodical reviews. The Soviet delegation also agreed to explore the possibilities of export of spares, accessories and avionics manufactured in India for use of MiG production in the Soviet Union. The protocol was also expected to accelerate the production in India of the improved version of MiG-21, called MiG-21 Bis which India had just embarked on the process of indigenisation in the light of the use of new engine. The Soviet gesture could remove whatever reservation India had on the indigenisation of the MiG aircraft which was reflected in Jagjivan Ram's remark appreciating the "continued Soviet assistance" in developing India's defence industry, especially in the achievement of indigenous manufacture of both the aircraft and the engine of MiG-M.

The trend continued in 1979-80. A delegation led by the Secretary of Defence, J.A. Dave left for Moscow with a shopping list containing proposals for purchase and progressive manufacture under license of some latest weapons covering all the three services of Indian defence ranging from armoured personnel carrier (APC) for its infantry besides T-72 tanks, MiG-23 planes for use in a versatile middle combat role -- supplementing the interceptor task of MiG-21, and the deep penetrating capacity of the Jaguar, to the latest modern version of missile boats for the Navy. This was followed by a delegation led by the Secretary of India's defence production to Moscow in November 1979 to discuss proposals for building a

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63 Reported in *Times of India*, 18 October 1978.

64 Reported in *Hindustan Times*, 18 October 1978.

prototype of Soviet transport aircraft AN-32 at the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.\textsuperscript{66} Thus, the Soviet Union realising India's defence planners' need for a "new weapon system" which had led them to move towards the West, came forward with a proposal not only for stepping up the normal purchase of defence equipments but also with an idea of a quick change to new weapon system -- an idea which was said to have been mooted by Premier Kosygin during his visit to India earlier in Moscow 1979.\textsuperscript{67}

On balance it can be said that despite the change of government in India and despite the Janata Government's efforts to diversify the sources of arms supply from the West nothing notable was done to alter the existing close Indo-Soviet military relationship. As the Foreign Minister stated in a major foreign policy speech on 29 June 1977, the Janata Government did not view that the Treaty was against India's policy of non-alignment and there was no reason to suppose that the quality of relationship would suffer due to the change of Government. The Government, on the contrary, was committed to "deepen and expand" the relationship between India and Soviet Union on the basis of "equality and mutual benefit" as was stipulated in the Treaty.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{66}The announcement in this regard by Mr. Subramaniam, Senior Commander of IAF cited in \textit{The Statesman} (Delhi), 24 October 1979.

\textsuperscript{67}\textit{The Hindu}, n.65.

\textsuperscript{68}\textit{Foreign Affairs Record}, vol.23, no.6, April 1977, p.93.
Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan: A New Dimension to Indo-Soviet Military Relationship

The Afghanistan crisis made an impact both on the Super Power military policies and on the arms acquisition propensity of the regional powers, namely Pakistan and India. The Afghanistan crisis more than anything else brought into sharper focus the US-China-Pakistan alignment which was reflected in US military aid policies towards Pakistan. The Carter administration had sought China's cooperation for a joint US-Chinese efforts to bolster Pakistan's defence against the perceived Soviet threat following its military intervention in Afghanistan. On 14 January 1980 the US administration announced the offer to Pakistan of a tentative two-year economic and military package worth about $400 million. This was rejected by Pakistan as "peanuts". The US administration kept up its efforts to enter into a long-term relationship with Pakistan. Both the reports of India's Ministries of External Affairs and Defence underlined that Pakistan's effort to expand its military capability could have an adverse effect on regional stability.

It is against this background that one has to consider India's announcement on 28 May of her arms deal with the Soviet Union to buy $1.6 billion worth of military equipments and weapons to be paid back over a period of 17 years at 2.5 per cent annual interest. The

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69This matter was discussed with the Chinese leaders in the course of US Defence Secretary Brown's visit to Peking in early January 1980; see New York Times, 28 January 1980, p.A10.


significance of this arms deal was substantial for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the financial terms were highly favourable. According to western sources the Soviet Union made available to India excellent pay back terms.\(^7^2\) An important aspect was the provision for repayment in local currency which saved India's scarce foreign exchange reserve. This was significant because from mid-seventies the USSR demanded hard currency for arms export generally to the oil rich countries in the Middle East, in order to cover up the acute trade deficit which it was experiencing while trading with the West for obtaining technology. According to an Western estimate 80 per cent of all Soviet military deliveries to the Third World during 1978-81 were paid for in hard currency.\(^7^3\) Viewed from this perspective Soviet readiness to allow India to repay in local currency for Soviet arms signified the important position India occupied in Soviet arms transfer policy. Secondly, the 1980 deal was important for India also because the items the Soviets agreed to sell included advanced weaponry covering all the three services of India's defence forces which fulfilled India's long cherished dream of modernisation.\(^7^4\) In American press the deal was stated to be a "reactive" one to the American aid offer to Pakistan.\(^7^5\) There was also a suggestion which came from a noted western specialist on Indo-Soviet relations that the 1980 arms deal represented Soviet effort to gain India's wider support


\(^7^5\)*New York Times*, 29 May and 30 May 1980.
for its Afghan intervention, arguing that military relations had always been perceived as a sensitive indicator of friendship. This did not represent Moscow’s influence over India, but it did provide her with an important tool seeking influence in her relations with India.\textsuperscript{76} Indeed, the common sentiment in India was that the arms deal was another instance of Soviet Union’s friendship which had been tested by time. To cite from an editorial from an Indian newspaper,

\begin{quote}
While accepting aid from outside until there can be greater degree of self reliance, the guiding factor will be whether the supplier will remain a friend in need...Moscow has time and again proved it can be depended upon, while the contrary has been this country’s experience with some other suppliers of essential equipments. The aid at least illustrated Moscow’s obligation to help India when the later faced an emergency.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Mrs. Gandhi was, however, cautious regarding India’s non-alignment. She showed willingness to diversify the sources of supply of arms while continuing the link with the USSR in this sensitive area. Thus the 1980 deal was followed by the visit of India’s Defence Secretary to Washington in October 1980 to wrap up negotiation for $330 million worth of arms deal, first ever signed between two countries as was described in West.\textsuperscript{78} This was followed by a "fact-finding mission" to Canada for a possible co-production arrangement for a turbo-prop commuter aircraft to which Canada appeared to be receptive.\textsuperscript{79} Simultaneous acquisition from Moscow was also carried forward. Brezhnev was reported to have agreed to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Hindustan Times}, 12 June 1980.
\item \textit{Hindustan Times}, 24 October 1980.
\end{itemize}
supply MiG-25 high altitude reconnaissance which the SIPRI corroborated by recording order for eight such aircrafts by India in 1980. The Defence Ministry report recorded the decision by Indian Air Force to go in for acquisition and licensed production of Soviet AN-32 transport aircraft to replace the ageing Dakota and an agreement in naval hardware for supply of more frigates and minesweepers during that current plan under easy credit arrangement. This was described as a "major achievement of the year".

Indo-Soviet military relationship faced another review after the US announcement in September 1981 of a 6-year economic and military package to Pakistan worth about $1.6 billion which included purchase of several F-16 planes—the most advanced in US Air Force. The announcement was the result of Pakistan assuming enormous importance in US strategic perception as a frontline state in US contingency planning to contain Soviet expansion from Afghanistan to Gulf. India's concern at the US arms aid was at two levels. Firstly, the massive arming of Pakistan beyond the legitimate defence needs "resulted in a significant quantitative and qualitative" enhancement in Pakistan's overall military capability "tilting the delicately poised balance in the region". Secondly, while USA justified the sophisticated arms (like F-16s) transfer to Pakistan for enabling the latter to defend air intrusion on the Pak-

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80 SIPRI Yearbook, n.74, p.223.


82 For authoritative US pronouncement on Pakistan's role, see Dilip Mukherjee, "India's Relation with the United States: A New Search for Accommodation", in Satish Kumar, ed., Yearbook on India's Foreign Policy 1985-86, (New Delhi, 1988), p.212, fn.2.
Afghan border, India questioned their suitability for such use and maintained that these would result in their being used against India as had happened in the past.²³

In an interview to the western press Prime Minister Indira Gandhi pointed out that the inclusion of F-16s in Pakistan’s armoury introduced into the region a class of armaments at least a generation ahead of anything operating in the Indian inventory. Pakistan was acquiring these weapons mainly to build up its arsenal against India and not for the purpose of meeting the "Soviet threat". The Russians were told by Pakistan that they did not intend to use these weapons against Russia.²⁴ India’s view was supported by eminent Congressmen in the USA. As a noted US analyst put it, F-16 equipped with the latest computerised avionics developed specially for the US Air Force had more manoeuvrability and greater precision in reaching target, capable of carrying much bigger payloads and was superior than the MiG-23 or the Jaguar which the IAF had in its possession. Instead of F-16 Pakistan should be given F-5G which could counter the Soviet MiG-23 and would also "be politically digestible in India".²⁵

The US delivery of F-16 aircraft to Pakistan emerged as an important Indian concern with regard to the 1981 arms deal. As happened with India’s acquisition of Jaguar fighter bombers, Indira Gandhi’s Government was considering the search for these weapons from the western sources first-the Mirage 2000 from France in this case. However, India’s ongoing

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²⁴Prime Minister’s interview cited in Achuthan, n.12, p.109.
negotiation with France could not come to any conclusion due to snags that developed on the question of technology transfer to India. It was not coincidental that the Soviet Defence Minister Marshall Ustinov visited India in March 1982. The high power delegation he led to India comprising of Air Marshal Pavel Kantakhov and Navy's Chief Admiral Gorshkov (the highest ranking military delegation ever sent to a country outside the eastern bloc) may be said to have been motivated by the Soviet objective to dissuade India from buying Mirage 2000 from France. He offered India MiG-27 Flogger tactical strike fighter on favourable terms as an alternative to Mirage 2000 trying to convince the Indian side about the superiority of MiG-27 over the Mirage 2000 as a counterbalance to F-16s. No details on negotiation on MiG-27 came out for public consumption and no reference to India's negotiation with the Soviets on MiG-27 was made in the Defence Ministry's report. The Indian Government meanwhile sought to play down the significance of the visit by characterising the General's visit as part of a regular exchange of high level visits between the two countries; although it was added that the two sides reviewed cooperation in the "development of defence production industry in India".

Marshall Ustinov's visit to India was followed by the visit of the Defence Minister of France in October 1982 which resulted in the finalisation of Mirage 2000 deal providing an outright purchase of a limited number of the striker aircrafts on a fly-away condition with the

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86*The Hindu*, 16 March 1982.


88*The Hindu*, 16 March 1982.
provision for subsequent manufacture of the aircraft in India under license. SIPRI commented that this was a deal to match F-16 that USA was supplying to Pakistan.\(^8^9\) The opinion had some credibility. India rushing into the purchase of 40 Mirage 2000 at a time when the aircraft had not been fully developed or tested by France itself proved that it wanted to achieve a rough technological equivalence with the F-16 which were at that times decided to be delivered to Pakistan.\(^9^0\) The reason for India's preference for the French aircraft over the Soviet proposal of MiG-27 was not made public. But it was clear that the Mirage deal had some similarities with the Jaguar deal. The top brass in Indian defence sector believed that the Mirage 2000 gave India a clear air superiority which the MiG-27 could not provide. But this was interpreted in some critics as defense personnel's craze for the latest as the best even if that happened to be the most expensive one.\(^9^1\)

Following the Mirage deal there were several other arms deals with the western countries, indicating Mrs. Gandhi's willingness to forge ties with them. An agreement with the Federal Republic of West Germany in 1981 for acquisition and licensed production of 2 Type 209 submarine in each case was described by the Defence Ministry as a "landmark" for Indian navy which was committed to a "balanced growth with adequate coastal defence, ocean-going and under-water capabilities" and transfer of technology for modern submarines which could

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\(^9^0\) See in this context Mukherjee, n.82, p.200.

\(^9^1\) Mohan Guruswamy, "Chasing for Mirage won't reduce expenditure", Times of India, 7 April 1988.
lead to progressive indigenisation in this important field.\textsuperscript{92} She also tried an opening in the USA which had so far supplied India advanced technology but no combat equipments. She visited USA in July 1982 amidst speculation that USA would be prepared to consider the sale of F-16s to India if Mrs. Gandhi expressed her interest in that aircraft during her talks with President Ronald Reagan. The officials in the External Affairs Ministry, however, denied the reported speculation on Indo-US arms agreement maintaining that the reports were "baseless".\textsuperscript{93} Meanwhile the Government quickly denied that the wrapping up of a deal with the USA for purchase of C-130 transport aircraft (a bigger one than the Soviet AN-32 that India was looking for) was not a purchase of "item of defence or military nature".\textsuperscript{94} But these definitely indicated Indira Gandhi's willingness not to depend on Moscow solely for arms. In the West it was described as Indian Government's eagerness to "guard its proclaimed non-alignment and to forge ties with the West".\textsuperscript{95}

But Mrs. Gandhi was aware of Moscow's susceptibilities. Since 1962 Moscow had remained India's major supplier of military hardware. It was perhaps due to this that despite her failure to dissuade India from concluding the Mirage deal Moscow continued in its efforts

\textsuperscript{92}\textit{SIPRI Yearbook}, n.74, p.222 and India's Defence Ministry's Report 1981-82, pp.14-15, corroborated the figure.

\textsuperscript{93}\textit{The Tribune}, ibid., quoting PTI; for further details see J.N. Parimoo, "US Ready to sell F-16 aircraft to India", \textit{Times of India}, 24 July 1982; see also Warren Unna, "USA ready to sell arms to India", \textit{The Statesman} (Delhi), ibid, 24 July 1982.

\textsuperscript{94}\textit{Indian Express}, 25 July 1982.

to convince India of her dependability in this sensitive area. During Indian Defence Minister’s
visit to Moscow in 1983, India was reportedly shown the blueprint of MiG-29 and MiG-31
which at that time had not even reached Moscow’s East European allies. These were said to
be better in sophistication than the US F-15 and F-16 supplied to Pakistan. This offer in
combat aircraft was followed by offer of supply and co-production of more advanced armoured
vehicles like T-72 and T-80 battle tanks. 96 The following visit to India by Soviet Defence
Minister Marshall Ustinov in March 1984 resulted in Soviet Union agreeing to supply India
on an urgent basis a wide range of advanced weaponry covering all the three services --
ranging from MiG-27 aircraft, missiles and latest weapons for the Indian navy to T-80 battle
tanks to strengthen Indian armoured vehicle. 97 The Defence Ministry focused on
modernisation and replacement as the criteria of India’s arms acquisition from the Soviet
Union, but the latter also served the strategic and political interests in development of India’s
defense capability. A noted Indian specialist on Soviet affairs had remarked in the wake of
Ustinov’s earlier visit in 1982 that an expanding Indo-Soviet collaboration enabled India to
build a defense production base necessitated by the US transfer of sophisticated arms to

96 Times of India, 21 April 1983.

97 Annual Report of the Ministry of Defence during 1983-84 and 1984-85 recorded the following
acquisition of weaponry from the Soviet Union with its comments as the following: (i)
induction into service of Soviet MiG-27M aircraft replacing older aircrafts like Hunter,
Canberra and Sukhoi; (ii) AN-32 replacing older medium transport aircraft from the IAF; (iii)
Il-76 augmenting IAF’s capabilities on the heavy transport area; (iv) the T-72 M tanks as
Indian Army’s Main Battle Tank all of which modernised the existing fleet of tank improving
the gunnery and increasing the power to weight ratio; pp.8, 20 and 22.
Pakistan, the Chinese military modernisation drive and unilateral American military build-up in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.98

Gorbachev-Rajiv Gandhi Era: Continuation of Close Indo-Soviet Military Relationship Despite Diversification in the West

Rajiv Gandhi was a man with modern and scientific outlook. He appeared more inclined towards the West including the USA realising that these countries had more to offer than the Soviet Union in the field of modern technology and new combat weaponry. He was helped in this by the changing US perception of India which was motivated to move India away from the Soviet Union through gestures of friendliness and assistance in crucial areas.99 Authoritative pronouncement from the USA recognised India as a regional super power having the potential for developing formidable military capability which could either help or hinder US strategic interests in the region.100 This changing perception, as Dr. Fred Ikle, the US Under Secretary of Defence put it, opened the possibility of a new chapter in Indo-US relations.101 Based on this changed perception about India a National Security Directive (NSD) 147 was issued on October 1984 by the White House which underlined to all concerned agencies the importance of building a better relationship with India in all possible ways, particularly accommodating

98 Bhabani Sengupta’s remarks cited in Kaufman, n.95.


100 The statement from National Security Council cited in Mukherjee, n.82, p.205.

101 Cited in ibid.
requests for military as well as dual purpose technology. It was believed that availability of non-Soviet sources which would decrease India's dependence on Moscow could also lead to sympathetic understanding of US objectives in the region.102

On the Soviet side the new political thinking of Mikhail S. Gorbachev led to a Soviet reassessment of Soviet Third World policy having important implication for Soviet Union's arms transfer policy to these countries. Unlike Brezhnev who had spoken with enthusiasm about the prospects of national liberation movement in the Third World countries and the Soviet role in them, Gorbachev in his 27th CPSU Congress was cautious in committing the Soviet Union in the liberation movement of these countries by merely expressing Soviet support to the struggle waged in these countries against imperialism, with the additional remark that the "task of building a new society was primarily their own responsibility".103 Change was also noted in Soviet concept of regional security from Brezhnev to Gorbachev period when greater scope of Super Power cooperation on the issue of regional security was envisaged.104 All these ideas led to a diminishing Soviet involvement in the Third World. After Brezhnev's death in 1982 the CPSU leadership had already begun to question the optimism of the previous decade concerning Soviet commitment in the Third World countries, since success of national liberation movement in many countries had not been matched by a viable politico-economic system. In some instances it also undermined the anti-imperialist

102 Ibid.

103 From translation in New Times (Moscow), no.12, 31 March 1986, p.43.

image of the Soviet Union, which the Soviets had so assiduously attempted to cultivate, as had happened in Afghanistan. Gorbachev, therefore, appeared less eager to commit the Soviet Union in the Third World conflict, which was demonstrated in his announcement to withdraw from Afghanistan. All these led to Moscow's rethinking on arms transfer policies towards the Third World. This added with Rajiv Gandhi's proclivities towards the West brought uncertainties in New Delhi's dealing with Moscow in the military sphere. But like the exception which proverbially proves the rule, Moscow-New Delhi military link was not altered basically; although Rajiv Gandhi's Government maintained the trend of diversification already started by pursuing more expansive relations with the West, including the US where a breakthrough was achieved short of a meaningful military relationship.

A qualitative breakthrough was achieved by Rajiv Gandhi in making an opening into the US market. As a part of NSD 147 a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was finalised by the US Government with India in May 1985 which contained the US offer of sale of high performance computers to be used in Indian military research establishments. Apart from being a path-breaking instance of technology transfer its commercial connotation assumed great significance in the context of India's efforts to modernise its industry and economy, a goal particularly emphasised by Rajiv Gandhi. Another important technological collaboration with the USA was its offer of sale GE 404 Engines for use in prototype of the Light Combat


106 Economic Times (New Delhi), 9 October 1986.
Aircraft (LCA). Since this was an area of military technology handed by the State Department's office of Munition Control in USA, a political significance was attached to the US offer. A similar US collaboration with India having security implication was the release to India of classification of night vision technology for operating tanks in poor visibility. Previously India's negotiation with the US for anti-tank Tow missile fell through in 1980 because of US refusal to supply night vision technology that India wanted. The US Secretary of Defence, Casper Weinberger during his visit to India in 1985 expressed his Government's willingness transfer of defence technology to India.

But there were both technical and political reasons which prevented the build-up of a successful Indo-US military relationship comparable to that of Indo-USSR relations. To what extent USA would be prepared to transfer any sophisticated technology without having assured itself that this technology would not fall into the hands of any third party least of all the Soviet Union was the first question faced by New Delhi. Differences over such questions had already surfaced between the two countries in early eighties when India was asked to sign a general security military information agreement required under the US regulation while negotiating for Tow missiles. Rajiv Gandhi's unhappiness on this score was expressed in his interview.

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107 Mukherjee, n.82, p.207.
108 Ibid., p.208.
109 Press briefing by Weinberger in ibid., p.214, fn.32.
110 Kapur, n.99, p.471.
with American correspondents during his visit to USA in 1985.\textsuperscript{111} India had also appeared to have doubts regarding US reliability as a spare parts supplier. Talking to American correspondents the Indian Prime Minister commented that India did not have sufficient confidence in the United States as an arms supplier because it could change terms retrospectively and there was no certainty that the supplies of spare parts would be maintained.\textsuperscript{112} Washington in response was reported to have offered India legal protection so that obligation under existing controls would be honoured even if political relations deteriorated. But this could not relieve India.\textsuperscript{113} Legalities apart the fact remained that the US arms delivery to India was a byproduct of its political objectives. After the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan the Carter Doctrine clearly gave Pakistan a place in US contingency planning and India would have to live with the risk of interruption if the situation so required. USA, moreover, never recognised India's anxiety that US arms deliveries to Pakistan were tilting the military balance in favour of Pakistan. In view of this gap in threat perceptions Indo-US military relationship continued to be at low key. In fact no important arms deal was recorded in either the SIPRI Yearbook during this period or in India's Defence Report suggesting that USA never wanted to compete with the USSR in this field.

India's expansive policy towards other West European countries in its arms supply relationship was perceived as being "more in line with India's non-alignment" since most of

\textsuperscript{111}\textit{Financial Times} (London), 5 May 1985.


\textsuperscript{113}Mukherjee, n.82, p.210.
these countries despite their alignment with the USA were showing signs of developing their respective armament policies. ¹¹⁴ Both Western and Indian sources recorded various arms deals negotiated between India and these countries, like the $3.3 billion Indian accord to buy Mirage 2000 from France in 1982 being extended by India’s decision in 1986 to buy nine more,¹¹⁵ $1.4 billion deal with Swedish arms manufacturer Bofors for the delivery and production of guns in India,¹¹⁶ extension of agreement to buy British Sea Harrier Jump jets¹¹⁷ and negotiation with West German Dornier for light transport aircraft along with manufacturing license.¹¹⁸ All of these negotiations in the West offered India manufacturing facilities; but as happened with USA these arms deliveries by the West remained at commercial level and, therefore, could not make inroads into Moscow’s overwhelming predominance in India’s arms market, which apart from financial reason was determined by coincidence of interests at the political level.

Ultimately it was the USSR which emerged as India’s dominant arms suppliers in crucial areas especially from mid-1985 when several new agreements between India and the Soviet Union were signed covering all the three branches of Indian defence forces with


¹¹⁶ International Herald Tribune (Hong Kong), 2 April 1986.


¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.17; see in this context on comment on India’s acquisition of German HDW’s SS Tupe 1500 modern submarines for Indian Navy in The Indian Defence Review (New Delhi), vol.11, 2 July 1987, pp.7-8.
Gorbachev’s initiative. Gorbachev’s willingness to come up to India’s requirement for counter-matching weapons provided to Pakistan by USA proved that India’s importance had not diminished in Moscow’s eyes even due to his policy of restricting Soviet commitment to Third World security. India’s concern at that time revolved around Pakistan’s possible acquisition of AWACs represented by Airborne Early Warning System (AEW). In Defence Ministry’s assessment AEW was by no means a defensive system, although it could be used for countering air intrusion. It was not just another military system either. It was a command post in the sky and imported a definite technological edge to Pakistan’s military apparatus. Its "force multiplier" effect would keep under surveillance a large volume of air and ground space along the Indo-Pak border. Defence Ministry’s reference to India’s decision to add two squadrons of MiG-29 aircraft to the inventory of combat aircrafts during 1986-87 financial year indicated that the contract for the MiG-29 was signed in the middle of 1986. The MiG-29 christened as BAAL by the IAF and code-named Fulcrum by the NATO was described in Indian press as the latest in avionics and considered to be one of the most advanced, commensurate with the latest in service in US fighters. Defence Ministry described MiG-29 as "highly sophisticated and advanced technological combat aircraft" that was in keeping with the "process of modernisation of the IAF" and was expected to "further strengthen the air defence capability


120 India, Defence Report, ibid., p.17.

of the IAF". Supply of the MiG-29s was originally scheduled to begin in April 1987 but the delivery dates were advanced by about five months and the first batch of MiG-29 arrived in India in January 1987 in a record time of six months after negotiation. It should be noted in this context that India happened to be the first country outside the Soviet bloc to receive these aircrafts from USSR.

However, MiG-29 although was said to be more than a match for the F-16s, was thought less than a match for the AWACs. India, it was reported, suggested to the Soviets to supply their IL-76 Mainstay AWACs aircraft in order to meet the perceived threat from the anticipated US delivery of hi-tech AWACS to Pakistan. But the Soviets reportedly offered the less sophisticated TU-124. Later, the Soviets were reported to unveiled have their its Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACs) to India by offering the giant military tactical transport aircraft IL-76 in the AWACs role to counter the US AWACs given to Pakistan; but the IAF then did not favour that, pointing out that the IL-76 fitted with a proto dam was not able to pick up low flying targets with great precision and these aircrafts still needed to incorporate the features of the sophisticated American AWACs aircraft and the diverse varieties of aircrafts like the Jaguar, the Mirage 2000 which the IAF had. During Gorbachev's visit to India in November 19867, there was speculation that Soviet Union might offer India the

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125 Indian Express and Hindustan Times, both 15 January 1987.
most advanced interceptor with MiG variety, namely MiG-31. Having more sophistication in
technology than the MiG-29s these aircrafts were stated to have been developed in the USSR
as response to US AWACs. Naturally there was an expectation (as was expressed by some
members of Parliament) that Soviet Union who had agreed to sell to India MiG-29 even before
it had reached the East European allies of Soviet Union, would come forward to meet the
challenges posed to India's security by the AWACs by providing India with matching
weapons. But as was known from Prime Minister's statement, India had no intention of
setting up MiG-31 production base at that stage since it was believed that the combat role of
MiG-31 did not suit such roles defined by the IAF and in that case MiG-31 was not considered
to be a counter to AWACs as was presumed. What all these indicated was that the Soviet
Union always came forward with matching advanced aircrafts to counter Pakistan's, but it
happened to be short of what IAF demanded at that point of time, no matter how sophisticated
and advanced these might have been. India's negotiation with the Soviet Union to counter F-16
and latter AWACs illustrated this.

Gorbachev's period also saw Soviet assistance to Indian Navy which already had an
assortment of Soviet supplied missiles, corvettes, submarines and frigates. Amidst report
circulating during Narasimha Rao's visit to Moscow in 1985 about the probable Soviet offer
of a nuclear-powered submarine to India to counter Pakistan's Agosta class submarine.

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2 December 1986, col.211.

127 Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's statement in Rajya Sabha on 2nd December 1986 in ibid.,
col.224.
Gorbachev during his visit to India offered the USSR Kilo Class (8x21 inches) torpedoes, including the Tango-class submarines classified by the Pentagon as the only diesel powered "attack submarine" of that genre in Soviet fleet. Defence commentators in India viewed that after the addition of USSR Kilo Class to Indian Navy already equipped with USSR Foxtrot class submarines since 1969 and recently acquired West German HDW's SS Type 1500 submarine -- Indian submarine fleet "would be capable of deterrent power projection at sea". India's helicopter fleet was also strengthened by Gorbachev's offer of Soviet M-126 helicopters which in India's Defence Ministry's assessment "augmented airlift capability at high attitude air base".

Conclusion

The telling point which emerges from the foregoing is that Indo-Soviet close relationship in the military field was fostered more on ground of political expediency than on ground of purely military reasons. From the point of view of purely military consideration of advanced weapons India at times found those from the West better suited to her requirements as the Mirage deal had shown. But due to Moscow's sharing of India's anxiety on US arms supply to Pakistan it became politically imperative for India to maintain the closeness of Indo-Soviet military relationship. Close on the heels of Gorbachev's visit to India commentaries from

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129 *Indian Defence Review*, vol.11, 2 July 1987, pp.7-8.

USSR were published showing Moscow's sharing of perception with India.\textsuperscript{131} Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in a statement in Rajya Sabha expressed satisfaction over Gorbachev's description of India as a "major power".\textsuperscript{132} Lack of similar mutuality of security perceptions with USA obstructed the development of a viable military supply relationship between the two countries.

The fifteen years of working of the Treaty in the military sphere demonstrated that the exclusiveness that characterised the Indo-Soviet relationship in the early part of the seventies was maintained till the period ending with Rajiv-Gorbachev era. It was, of course, true that it was not a relationship at the cost of others. Pursuing Indian defence planner's objective of self-reliance in defence production and simultaneous drive towards modernisation, the leadership in India continued to stick to the policy to diversify the sources of supply. This was more evident during the Janata period but the trend continued through the Indira Gandhi and the Rajiv Gandhi periods. Irritants developed often on Soviet Union's erratic handling of the issue of spare parts supply, on her unwillingness to divulge design of some parts of the weapons and even on manipulating settlement of cost. These won Moscow no few critics in India. A question also surfaced about the quality of some arms -- not sufficiently advanced to match those of the adversaries or to meet the requirement of India. Instances of these were seen during India's acquisition of Jaguar and Mirage fighter planes. Co-production arrangement

\textsuperscript{131}A Tass commentary published in \textit{Times of India}, 30 October 1986 highlighted the inherent danger posed by Pakistan's acquisition of AWACs planes; in an interview to an influential Pakistani newspaper on 12 October 1985 Mikhail Kapitsa (the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister) was reported to have expressed the view that Moscow would side with India if the countries of South Asia could not sort out their problems with India, cited in \textit{Hindustan Times}, 13 October 1985.

\textsuperscript{132}India, Rajya Sabha, \textit{Debates}, n.126, cols.225, 227.
was an important part of Indo-Soviet military cooperation since it led to progressive indigenisation which was important in achieving India's aim of a self-reliant defence industry. But there was some dissatisfaction regarding indigenisation of MiG-21 aircraft. One SIPRI publication remarked that India's progress towards self-sufficiency was not satisfactory due to her dependence on technical support, services, personnel and maintenance and training.

Nevertheless, the reason why despite several such shortcomings Soviet Union remained almost irreplaceable as a source of combat defence equipments in India was both pragmatic and political. For purely practical point of view the Indian defense experts preferred Soviet weapons because they were cheap, easy to handle being robust and simple unlike the sophistication of western equipments, and capable of integration into advanced ones easily due to the existing production facilities of the earlier form, as had happened in the case of MiG-21 which was turned into the successive advanced ones of MiG-21, MiG-23, MiG-25 Recce, MiG-27 and MiG-29. While the financial terms stipulated by the Soviet Union was regarded even in the West as extremely favourable, the problem of spare parts supply was

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135 Chari, n.28.
regarded to be less applicable in case of India.\textsuperscript{136} While these were important factors in consideration for a close Indo-Soviet military relationship, the security reasons came to become a predominant consideration in India's defense policy planning. It is indeed curious to note that it was the US starfighter F-104 which stimulated a close Indo-Soviet military cooperation in the sixties through an agreement on MiG aircraft. Even today it is the same US supply of combat aircraft (this time F-16 and AWACs) to Pakistan which has led to India's important negotiations with the Soviet Union on MiG-25, MiG-27, the latest MiG-29, and unconfirmed report of MiG-31. China had occasionally been referred to in India's Defence Ministry's report as India's security concern; but by and large it was Pakistan being massively armed by USA, especially after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan who became India's "Principal security concern". This compounded by military cooperation with Pakistan made India more towards a closer military cooperation relationship with Moscow. As an Western analyst remarked unlike other Third World countries with whom the Soviet relationship was based on ideological affinity towards communism, in India's case Moscow's political interest in limiting US and Chinese expansion in Asia cemented her relationship with India.\textsuperscript{137}

However, through arms transfer Moscow could not exert influence on India. It might be said to be an influence exerting tool, though in a very limited sense, in terms of obtaining India's diplomatic support on some important Soviet decisions related to this region. But the minimum political price that India had to pay for Moscow's arms transfer by muting her

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\textsuperscript{136}Copper and Papps, n.7, p.7.
\textsuperscript{137}View by Kanet, n.105, p.12.
criticism of Soviet policy could not in any case be termed as Moscow's influence on India. In terms of acquisition of base, facilities for prepositioning of equipment, overflight, landing and port facilities India was a major exception to Soviet diplomacy whose record in the Indian Ocean area, the Middle East and the various parts of Africa bore evidence both of success and failures. There was no authentic evidence of Indian Government granting naval bases to the Russians. Official denial on India's side was released in December 1980 when a report was published that Indira Gandhi had agreed to give base facilities for military purpose to the Russian Navy in the Indian ports.\footnote{Foreign Affairs Record, vol.27, no.12, December 1980, p.272.}

Eminent strategic analysts from the West generally subscribed to the contention that India's pride in its independent strategic thinking had disallowed the subordination of her military policy to Soviet strategic interest. It was with Soviet support that India built her large naval force in the Indian Ocean to enhance India's prestige not of the Soviets. India, therefore, granted only facilities to the Russian navy, as were granted to others but demonstrated "no interest to accommodate Russian interest in the Ocean".\footnote{Stephen P. Cohen, "The Soviet Union and South Asia" in Edward A. Koloridge and Roger E. Kanet, eds., The Limits of Soviet Power in the Developing World (London, 1989), p.213.} In the view of an eminent Indian analyst although through arms transfer Moscow was able to have a "visible presence" in Indian, even if to a limited degree, it did not provide Moscow sufficient leverage for altering
India's policy when her "major interests were involved". Another analyst stated in this context,

the Soviets do not enjoy any military base in India; there are no Soviet advisers in the Indian defence services. Despite the substantial military cooperation the Soviet Union has not acquired any great influence in India's domestic or foreign policy. It is, therefore, unlikely that the Soviet Union could use arms supplies as an instrument of coercion diplomacy in dealing with New Delhi.

This was also the view shared by prominent military personnel in India.

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141 Chari, n.28, p.243.

142 See in this context Surjit Mansingh's interview with Indian defence experts in India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy 1966-82 (New Delhi, 1980).