

India and the EU

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India and the EU: Building a Future-Ready Defence Partnership

Context:

Amid the ongoing **Russia-Ukraine conflict**, changing **trans-Atlantic security dynamics**, and evolving global power equations, the **European Commission's Joint White Paper (WP) on European Defence Readiness 2030** outlines a strategic plan to boost the EU's collective defence.

While reaffirming ties with **NATO** and the **United States**, the EU is simultaneously seeking greater **strategic autonomy** and **technological self-reliance**.

This shift opens new pathways for **India-EU defence cooperation**, especially in light of India's growing defence capabilities and strategic neutrality in global conflicts.

Recent high-level visits—such as the Indian Prime Minister's trip to **Cyprus and Croatia** and the External Affairs Minister's visits to **France, Belgium, and Germany**—highlight the strengthening of **India-EU strategic relations**.

Key Features of the White Paper on European Defence Readiness 2030

Strategic Goals and Defence Spending

- The EU aims to attain **full defence readiness by 2030**.
- Proposes an additional **1.5% of GDP** as defence spending.
- Total projected defence investment: **€800 billion over four years**.
- Continues close engagement with **NATO and the US**.
- Reaffirms the UK as a **key strategic ally**.

Seven Priority Areas for Investment

1. **Air and missile defence**
 2. **Artillery systems**
 3. **Ammunition and missile stockpiles**
 4. **Drones and counter-drone systems**
 5. **Military mobility**
 6. Advanced technologies like **AI, quantum, cyber, and electronic warfare**
 7. **Strategic enablers and critical infrastructure protection**
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Global Outreach and Indo-Pacific Partnerships

- The WP proposes strengthening defence ties with **Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand**.
 - Suggests a **Security and Defence Partnership (SDP)** with **India**, marking a significant diplomatic and strategic shift.
 - Reflects the EU's growing interest in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
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Key Challenges Identified in the WP

- Rising threats from **terrorism, hybrid warfare, cybercrime, and organised crime**.
- Vulnerability in **critical raw material supply chains**.
- Broader transnational issues:

- **Migration**
 - **Technological disruptions**
 - **Climate change**
 - Identifies **China** as an **authoritarian actor** influencing the European economy and public sphere.
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Opportunities for India

1. Defence Exports

- India's defence exports reached **₹23,622 crore (~\$2.76 billion)** in FY 2024-25.
 - EU's immediate focus on **ammunition and weapons replenishment** creates export potential for:
 - **ATAGs (Advanced Towed Artillery Guns)**
 - **Pinaka rocket launchers**
 - **Air defence systems and radars compliant with NATO standards**
 - Note: India, maintaining **neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict**, does not supply arms to Ukraine.
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2. R&D and Defence Innovation

- The WP identifies **AI, quantum tech, hypersonics, and biotech** as critical **dual-use technologies**.
- India can engage in **joint research and development** and promote integration of its **startups and SMEs** in EU's defence ecosystem.
- Potential to join **EU Defence Innovation Scheme (EUDIS)**, building on India's experience

with **INDUS-X** (India-US defence tech initiative).

3. Regulatory and Strategic Integration

- India must align with **EU's evolving defence procurement frameworks** to access long-term opportunities.
 - Harmonisation of defence regulations in the EU may affect India's **export standards and supply chains**.
 - India should pursue **cross-certification of defence equipment** to access the **future EU Common Defence Market**.
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Broader Areas of India-EU Engagement

1. Space and Cybersecurity

- The EU's increasing focus on **military applications of space and cyber technologies** offers room for Indian industries to collaborate.

2. Infrastructure and Mobility

- Indian **EPC (Engineering, Procurement, and Construction) firms** can secure contracts in EU-led **military infrastructure projects**, including **ports and mobility corridors**.

3. Migration, Mobility, and Skilling

- There is potential to create **job opportunities** for Indian professionals.
 - India should engage in discussions on **migration and mobility frameworks**, particularly as part of the **India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.
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Strategic Significance for India

The emergence of an **EU Defence Union** and greater **European strategic autonomy** presents a historic opportunity for India to:

- **Strengthen defence exports**
- Build deeper **strategic partnerships**
- Promote **atmanirbharta (self-reliance)** in defence
- Align with **global technological and innovation standards**

India must position itself as a **credible, neutral, and strategic partner** in the evolving **Euro-Atlantic security architecture**.

Conclusion

The **European Defence Readiness 2030** is a significant step towards redefining Europe's security and defence priorities.

For India, it is a timely and strategic opportunity to:

- Deepen its **engagement with Europe**
- Enhance **technological and defence cooperation**
- Expand its **strategic influence**
- Achieve **greater self-reliance and integration** in the global defence landscape

