

Indigenisation of the Indian Defence Industry and Military Assistance

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The Indian military system was developed under the control of the British Empire. The Indian Navy, Army and Air Force were dependent on the arms transfer from Britain until the 1950s. Post-independence India was also in no position to be 'self-sufficient' in defence equipment. India acquired a substantial number of defence weapons and equipment from European countries, mainly from the Soviet Union. Since its independence, the country has faced a hostile security environment externally. It has been involved in several military confrontations with Pakistan and China. To address these challenges and strengthen its military capabilities within a short time, India had to depend on the Soviet Union for licensed production, which was a key component in the development of its indigenous defence capabilities.

By focusing on the relationships between the military assistance India received during the Cold War, arms transfer to post-independence India and the indigenisation of the Indian defence industry, this paper examines the three following related subjects in sequence :

(1) After the Second World War, mainly since the 1960s, the US and the Soviet Union started economic and military assistance to third-world countries on a large scale. First, we examine the aim and scale of such assistance to India. A close relationship existed between military assistance and arms transfer during the 1960s and 1970s.

(2) The worsening Sino-Indian relations from 1961 onward provided a strong impetus to the military modernisation of India. The natural priority of the new government after independence was to build its industrial capacity and defence industry. We examine how military assistance contributed to the establishment of India's indigenous defence industry.

(3) The industrial and military development of Bangalore in the 1960s and 1970s was based on a diverse military-industrial-research complex. From this point of view, it is important to elucidate the relationship between Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and research institutes of aeronautical engineering, including the Indian Institute of Science and the Indian Institutes of Technology.