

India Advances Arms Talks With Russia, Days Before Obama Visit

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) speaks with Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu (L) during their meeting in New Delhi on Jan. 21, 2015.

NEW DELHI — India and Russia have agreed to speed work on a fifth-generation military aircraft, Indian officials said Thursday, in a vote of confidence in an old defense partner days before U.S. President Barack Obama arrives to advance ties.

India and Russia signed a deal in 2010 to jointly develop and produce a stealth jet for both their militaries, as well as third countries, in what India said at the time would become the biggest defense program in its history.

But five years on, progress has been slowed by arguments over how much each partner should contribute to design and development and whether the aircraft should be a single-seater or a twin-seater, as insisted on by the Indian Air Force.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu held talks with his Indian counterpart Manohar Parrikar on Wednesday to review the project as well as another ambitious plan to build 400 advanced helicopters in India annually, announced when President Vladimir Putin visited last month.

"We have decided to fast-track many of the issues [relating to the fighter jet]," a Defense Ministry official quoted Parrikar as telling reporters late Wednesday. The ministers agreed to review progress every three months.

New Delhi's push to get the Russian projects off the ground comes amid preparations to host Obama as the guest of honor at its Republic Day parade on Jan. 26.

India and the U.S. are ramping up ties, including on defense hardware, where Washington has emerged as one of the country's top three suppliers.

But New Delhi has been careful to maintain old ties including those with countries, such as Russia and Iran, that have often put it at odds with the West.

Russia had stood by India when the U.S. and its allies had imposed sanctions for its nuclear and missile programs, said former Indian Army brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal.

"India's acquisition of weapons and defense equipment from Russia has been the most enduring part of the India-Russia strategic partnership," Kanwal said.

Relations between Russia and the U.S have sunk to their lowest level since the end of the Cold War, mainly because of Moscow's confrontation with the West over the crisis in Ukraine, during which the West has imposed sanctions on Russia.

Russia is isolated and its economy in tatters, Obama said in his State of the Union address this week.

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