

**INDIA – UZBEKISTAN DEFENCE COOPERATION: FROM BILATERAL
DIALOGUE TO STRATEGIC ALLIANCE**

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Abstract: *Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, India and Uzbekistan have steadily enhanced their defence cooperation from basic dialogue mechanisms to a multifaceted strategic partnership. This paper explores the evolution, dynamics, and strategic significance of bilateral defence relations, highlighting areas such as military training, counterterrorism, defence industry collaboration, and regional security engagement through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The study argues that the transformation from political goodwill to strategic depth reflects a convergence of security interests in countering extremism, ensuring regional stability, and strengthening Central Asian connectivity.*

Keywords: *Defence Cooperation, Strategic Partnership, Central Asia, Security, SCO*

Introduction. The end of the Cold War opened new geopolitical horizons in Central Asia, where India sought to redefine its engagement with post-Soviet republics. Among them, Uzbekistan emerged as a pivotal partner due to its geographic location, political stability, and shared security concerns. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992, India and Uzbekistan have continuously expanded their bilateral cooperation – from cultural exchanges to defence and counterterrorism collaboration. The transformation from bilateral dialogue to a strategic alliance demonstrates a maturing relationship aimed at addressing common security threats and fostering peace in the region.

Main discussion. India and Uzbekistan initiated defence cooperation in the late 1990s, primarily through high-level visits and security consultations. The landmark moment came in 2003, when both countries signed the Agreement on Defence Cooperation, marking the institutionalization of security dialogue. Over the next decade, regular Joint Working Groups (JWGs) on Defence and Defence Industry Cooperation facilitated deeper engagement.

A crucial component of India – Uzbekistan defence ties is military education and training. Uzbek officers have participated in training programs at India's prestigious institutions such as the National Defence College and the Indian Military Academy. This exchange not only strengthens professional interoperability but also fosters long-term mutual trust.

Both nations share common threats emanating from extremism, terrorism, and radicalization – particularly from Afghanistan's unstable security landscape. The first joint military exercise, Dustlik-2019, was a milestone in counterterrorism cooperation.

Subsequent exercises (Dustlik–II in 2021 and Dustlik–III in 2023) demonstrated an evolving tactical understanding and interoperability between the two armed forces.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has become an essential platform for enhancing multilateral security cooperation. India's full membership in 2017 further aligned its regional security goals with Uzbekistan's, especially in counterterrorism, information security, and intelligence sharing through the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent.

Recent years have witnessed growing interest in defence industrial cooperation including discussions on joint production, maintenance of military hardware, and technology sharing. India's Make in India initiative aligns with Uzbekistan's modernization efforts, opening opportunities for industrial partnerships.

Despite significant progress, challenges remain – including logistical barriers, limited trade connectivity, and the absence of direct land routes. Nevertheless, initiatives such as the International North – South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and Chabahar Port could enhance future military logistics and defence collaboration.

Conclusion. India–Uzbekistan defence cooperation has progressively transformed from a symbolic diplomatic dialogue into a comprehensive and dynamic strategic partnership rooted in mutual confidence and shared regional objectives. Over the past two decades, both countries have moved beyond ceremonial exchanges to institutionalized mechanisms of security collaboration, including regular joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and defence education programs. This transformation reflects a shift from rhetorical partnership to pragmatic strategic engagement.

The growing partnership serves not only bilateral defence interests but also contributes significantly to regional stability and security in Central Asia, a region marked by evolving threats such as terrorism, extremism, and transnational crime. As Uzbekistan occupies a pivotal geographical position in Eurasia, cooperation with India provides both nations a platform to address common security challenges and to strengthen multilateral ties under frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

In the context of intensifying geopolitical competition among major powers, India and Uzbekistan's enhanced defence cooperation represents a balanced approach toward strategic autonomy and regional resilience. Future collaboration is expected to expand into defence technology transfer, cyber security, counterterrorism operations, and capacity-building initiatives aimed at modernizing Uzbekistan's armed forces with India's growing defence-industrial capabilities.

Moreover, strengthening this partnership holds the potential to reshape the emerging Eurasian security architecture by promoting a multipolar order rooted in mutual respect, sovereignty, and regional connectivity. Through sustained engagement, policy coordination, and technological cooperation, India and Uzbekistan are poised to become key contributors to peace and development across Central and South Asia.

Ultimately, the India–Uzbekistan defence relationship exemplifies a strategic model of South–Central Asian cooperation—anchored in trust, shared vision, and collective security—that will continue to evolve as both nations navigate the complex dynamics of twenty-first-century geopolitics.

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