

RAKSHA Framework: India's Ten-Year Roadmap for Defence Diplomacy

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Introduction

Military diplomacy as an instrument of statecraft utilises military capabilities, personnel, expertise, and institutional relationships to support national foreign policy and strategic objectives.¹ The release of India's 10-year strategic roadmap for defence diplomacy on 03 Sep 2026 marks a significant development in the country's approach to national security and foreign policy. Titled 'RAKSHA' and unveiled by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, the framework provides a long-term focus to India's international defence engagement and seeks to integrate military cooperation more closely with India's broader diplomatic, technological, and industrial objectives.² India cogitates defence diplomacy as more than military-to-military engagement. Training foreign armed forces, conducting exercises, supplying defence equipment, strengthening maritime partnerships, and expanding defence exports lead to durable diplomatic relationships that can enhance India's international influence.

Relevance of Military Diplomacy

India has long practiced military diplomacy as an essential constituent of its foreign policy, although without treating it as a separately articulated framework. It uses exercises, training, exchanges, agreements, maritime cooperation, United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping engagements and humanitarian assistance to build trust, interoperability, and long-term defence

partnerships, relying on collaboration rather than force.³ Military engagements with partners like the United States, France, Japan, and Australia have strengthened interoperability and understanding, while defence cooperation with neighbouring countries has supported capacity building and regional confidence. India's growing military capabilities have also unswervingly sustained foreign-policy objectives through several initiatives. These include Operation Cactus in the Maldives in 1988, the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka, decades of UN peacekeeping, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations, and maritime efforts against piracy and for the protection of seafarers and shipping.

Contemporary military diplomacy often intersects with public diplomacy as defence exercises, deployments, and humanitarian operations are witnessed not only by governments but by international media and wider public audiences. Indian experience validates how its military diplomacy has traditionally combined deterrence and security cooperation with capacity building and regional stabilisation. Effective defence communication is, however, essential to ensure that military engagement conveys partnership and reassurance rather than coercion or threat.⁴

Strategic Context

India's evolving security environment—marked by global tensions and uncertainties, heightened Indo-Pacific competition, China's growing presence, and regional instability—demands resilient partnerships and stronger indigenous capabilities. India's emergent heft demands greater regional security responsibility, especially in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). RAKSHA seeks to shift defence engagement from transactional ties to long-term affiliations that deliver military, economic, and

diplomatic benefits, and are backed by technology, industry, and secure supply chains.

RAKSHA provides a broader national-power dimension as defence diplomacy can create markets and partnerships for Indian industry. A stronger defence–industrial base can improve technological and military strength, further reinforcing India’s diplomatic leverage. The vision framework links diplomatic influence and defence cooperation to build partner capabilities, expand defence exports, and maritime cooperation. It also uses these long-term relationships to enhance India’s strategic influence. The national objective is to create long-term security relations rather than one-time defence transactions.

Four Pillars of RAKSHA

The framework of RAKSHA rests on four pillars, which are strategic partnerships, capacity building, indigenous defence exports, and maritime security.⁵

- **Strategic Partnerships.** This pillar seeks to expand India’s bilateral and multilateral defence partnerships. New Delhi already maintains extensive security affiliations with major powers, neighbouring countries, and states across the Indo-Pacific. RAKSHA provides a charter for making these relationships more systematic and advantageously purposeful. This approach is consistent with India’s preference for strategic autonomy. Rather than becoming dependent on a single bloc or alliance system, India can develop multiple partnerships according to its specific interests. Cooperation with different countries can focus on maritime security, training, technology, logistics, defence production, or other areas where interests converge. The

advantage of flexibility does have limitations as India's partners may themselves have competing geopolitical interests. Managing multiple strategic relationships, therefore, requires diplomatic balance and careful prioritisation.

- **Capacity Building.** The capacity-building pillar lays emphasis on training, joint exercises, exchanges, and sharing of military expertise. Capacity building is valued diplomatically as it progresses relationships beyond transfer of equipment. Training foreign personnel also creates professional familiarity, while joint exercises build interoperability and confidence. For developing countries and India's immediate neighbourhood, such support can improve their ability to respond to security challenges independently.⁶ India can, thus, position itself as a security partner that helps countries build their capabilities rather than simply seeking influence through military presence. Such engagements are diplomatically important as these endure for decades.

- **Defence Exports and Industrial Power.** The third pillar of indigenous defence exports connects defence diplomacy directly with India's industrial growth and technological aspirations. The growing emphasis on indigenous production and exports, and India's desire to be a defence exporter needs long-term relationships with partner countries. Once a foreign military operates Indian platforms, cooperation will continue through training, maintenance, spare parts, upgrades, and modernisation. Defence exports can become an enduring form of strategic engagement. An effective defence export ecosystem can

strengthen India's domestic industry by creating economies of scale, attracting private investment, supporting research and development, and refining technology.⁷ However, global competition requires quality, competitive pricing, timely delivery, financing, and strong after-sales support.

- **Maritime Pillar.** This pillar has geopolitical significance because of India's geography and its predominant position in the IOR. RAKSHA's emphasis on India as a 'Net Security Provider' and 'First Responder' underpins an important element of the country's regional strategic outlook.⁸ The maritime dimension extends beyond conventional naval power. It can involve maritime-domain awareness, coordinated patrols, joint exercises, HADR, anti-piracy cooperation, and assistance to partner countries. Through maritime cooperation, India can build regional partnerships, goodwill, and influence in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific.

Geopolitical Implications

China's expanding strategic presence inevitably forms part of RAKSHA's geopolitical context. However, its objective lucidly focusses on development of greater national and regional capability without forsaking strategic autonomy. Rather than relying on a formal alliance structure, India can reinforce multiple partnerships while retaining freedom of strategic choice through RAKSHA.

For the Indian Ocean neighbourhood, the implications could be even more direct. Training, capacity building, maritime cooperation, and humanitarian assistance can deepen India's

relationships with smaller regional states and provide alternatives to excessive dependence on any single external power. This can enhance India's regional influence while contributing to a more distributed and cooperative security architecture.

Strategic Autonomy and National Power

One of the deeper consequences of RAKSHA is its potential contribution to India's strategic autonomy, which is not just avoiding international partnerships. It denotes sufficient national capability and diplomatic flexibility to conjoin with different countries while retaining independent decision-making. Indigenous defence production is directly connected to foreign policy. The more India can design, manufacture and sustain its own military systems, the greater is its freedom of action. Diversified defence partnerships reduce the risks associated with dependence on a single external supplier. RAKSHA is, as an attempt to build networked strategic autonomy, based on multiple international partnerships supported by stronger domestic capabilities.

The broader implication of RAKSHA is the elevation of defence diplomacy into an instrument of national power. India is seeking to create a self-reinforcing cycle in which diplomatic engagement produces defence partnerships, defence partnerships create opportunities for Indian industry, stronger industrial capability improves military and technological strength, and greater capability enhances New Delhi's diplomatic influence.

Whole-of-Government Approach

Another key aspect of RAKSHA is the appreciation that defence diplomacy cannot be conducted by the armed forces or the defence establishment alone. Modern defence cooperation increasingly involves foreign policy, industrial policy, technology, trade, finance, and logistics. A defence partnership may involve not only military drills but also manufacturing agreements, technology cooperation, training, financing, and long-term maintenance.

The participation of defence, foreign policy, and national security institutions, therefore, points towards a more integrated approach. The effectiveness of this model will depend on coordination across institutions so that individual defence engagements contribute simultaneously to India's military preparedness, industrial development, and diplomatic objectives. This whole-of-government approach could itself become an important institutional implication of RAKSHA. Defence diplomacy would increasingly function at the junction of foreign policy, economic policy, technology policy, and national security rather than as a narrowly military activity.

Opportunities and Challenges

RAKSHA provides India with substantial opportunities. It can increase diplomatic influence, strengthen New Delhi's role in the Indian Ocean, support the growth of the domestic defence industry, and create new avenues for technology cooperation. It can also enable the nation to contribute more effectively to regional security and humanitarian assistance. The blueprint's success will ultimately depend on implementation.⁹ Strategic ambition must be matched by credible military capability, technological innovation, and industrial competitiveness. Defence exports will require reliable platforms, competitive pricing, financing mechanisms, and dependable after-sales

support. Capacity-building initiatives will similarly require sustained resources and long-term engagement.

India will also need to manage the political expectations of multiple partners. Strategic autonomy becomes meaningful only when the country possesses sufficient capability to make independent choices and sufficient diplomatic skill to manage divergent interests. There is also a risk of overextension, if international commitments expand faster than India's military, financial, and institutional capacity.

Conclusion

RAKSHA's import lies in connecting India's diplomatic influence, defence cooperation and defence-industrial power into a mutually reinforcing strategy. The framework seeks to transform defence relationships from transactional arrangements into enduring partnerships. Training and capacity building can create institutional trust; military exercises can generate interoperability; defence exports can create long-term industrial relationships; and maritime cooperation can strengthen India's role as a regional security provider.

The maritime emphasis, particularly the aspiration to act as a net security provider and first responder is especially relevant to India's geography and strategic interests in the IOR. At the same time, the emphasis on indigenous defence production connects national security with technological and economic capability. RAKSHA could help India evolve from a major defence market into a defence producer, capacity builder and regional security provider, strengthening its strategic autonomy and enabling it to play a more consequential role in shaping the regional and international security order.

Endnotes

¹ Kamal Davar, “Military diplomacy: A critical element of statecraft”, *ORF Expert Speak*, 27 Aug 2024, accessed 10 Sep 2026, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/military-diplomacy-a-critical-element-of-statecraft>

² Saurabh Trivedi, “RAKSHA: India’s 10-year blueprint for defence diplomacy and global strategic partnerships”, *The Hindu*, 04 Sep 2026, accessed 10 Sep 2026, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/raksha-indias-10-year-blueprint-for-defence-diplomacy-and-global-strategic-partnerships/article71427493.ece>

³ Dhruva Jaishankar, “India’s military diplomacy: taking the leap”, *Brookings*, 12 Jan 2017, accessed 10 Sep 2026, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/indias-military-diplomacy-taking-the-leap/>

⁴ “Raksha Mantri unveils ‘RAKSHA’ defence diplomacy document”, *Ministry of Defence, Government of India*, accessed 10 Sep 2026, <https://mod.gov.in/en/gallery-188>

⁵ Ministry of Defence, Government of India, “Twitter Post”, X, 03 Sep 2026, accessed 10 Sep 2026, <https://x.com/SpokespersonMoD/status/2095415309666803740>

⁶ Jaishankar, “India’s military diplomacy”.

⁷ Anoop Verma, “RAKSHA and defence diplomacy: Can India turn strategic ties into exports and technology partnerships?”, *ET Government*, 05 Sep 2026, accessed 10 Sep 2026, <https://government.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/raksha-and-defence-diplomacy-can-india-turn-strategic-ties-into-exports-and-technology-partnerships/133783822>

⁸ “Raksha Mantri unveils ‘RAKSHA’”, *Ministry of Defence*.

⁹ PIB Delhi, “Raksha Mantri unveils ‘RAKSHA’ defence diplomacy document outlining India’s strategic roadmap & vision for global partnerships over next 10 years”, *Ministry of Defence, Government of India*, 03 Sep 2026, accessed 10 Sep 2026, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2306256®=48&lang=2>