



Is Pakistan Acquiring Russian Tanks?

OE Watch Commentary: As the security cooperation between the governments of Pakistan and Russia continues to take shape there have been questions about how close the relationship could be alongside Russia's interest in maintaining good relations with India. The accompanying excerpted articles report on the Pakistani government's interest in acquiring T-90 tanks from Russia and they help gauge the reaction to it in India and what Pakistan looks to get out of it.

The article from *Live Mint*, an English-language newspaper in India, mentions the possible acquisition of "close to 600 battle tanks including T-90 tanks from Russia," but also notes how the overall plan is to "procure at least 360 battle tanks globally besides producing 220 tanks indigenously with help from China." Additionally, the article states that the Pakistani government is "in the process of inducting Chinese VT-4 tanks as well as Oplod-P tanks from Ukraine" and reports on how much of the armed forces' inventory of tanks are Chinese and Ukrainian. The article also mentions how Indian forces have been conducting "counter-terror operations" in Jammu and Kashmir, while the "Pakistan Army was fast reducing its gap with Indian forces in fighting a conventional war." While the article does not cite a specific source for this report, the article from *Quwa*, a news website focusing on defense issues in Pakistan, provides some background on the possible acquisition of T-90s.

The *Quwa* article, published in April 2018, mentions that Pakistan's Ministry of Defense "was clear in stating that talks are in play and that announcements will be made once they are completed," in reference to when a deal would be made. A new minister of defense, Pervez Khattack, assumed duties in August 2018, but the issue of funding does not appear to have changed, which the article notes "has been one of the major constraining factors" of acquiring the T-90s. The article also mentions that the Pakistani government has been looking for "an off-the-shelf MBT" and that this plan "has the T-90 in the running" for possible acquisition. There has been no official announcement from the government of Pakistan on acquiring Russian T-90s, just the unnamed source noted in the recent *Live Mint* article. It is unknown if, or when, Pakistan's acquisition of tanks will take place, but the timeline between the announcement in April and the December article is worth noting. In October, the Indian government signed a deal to purchase Russian S-400 missile systems, worth an estimated \$5 billion. The Indian government is likely concerned over Pakistan acquiring T-90 tanks from Russia, but it does not appear to have had a major impact on Indian-Russian security cooperation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

Source: Manash Pratim Bhuyan, "Pakistan procuring 600 battle tanks from Russia to strengthen capability along border with India," *Live Mint*, 30 December 2018. <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/11fDdo391n5H63VR4b3j4N/Pakistan-procuring-600-battle-tanks-from-Russia-to-strengthe.html>

...Pakistan has drawn up an ambitious plan to procure close to 600 battle tanks including T-90 tanks from Russia, primarily to bolster its combat prowess along the border with India, military and intelligence sources said Sunday.

...Apart from battle tanks, Pakistan Army is also procuring 245 150mm SP Mike-10 guns from Italy out of which it has already received 120 guns.

The sources said Pakistan was eyeing to buy from Russia a batch of T-90 battle tanks- the mainstays of the armoured regiments of the Indian Army, and that the move reflects Islamabad's intent to forge a deeper defence engagement with Moscow...The sources said as part of the mega plan to significantly revamp its armoured fleet by 2025, Pakistan has decided to procure at least 360 battle tanks globally besides producing 220 tanks indigenously with help from China.

Pakistan Army's move to enhance its armoured corps comes at a time when the Line of Actual Control in Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed growing hostilities in the last one year...But, when the Indian Army is focused on counter-terror operations, the Pakistan Army was fast reducing its gap with Indian forces in fighting a conventional war, the intelligence sources said.

Besides eyeing to procure T-90 tanks, Pakistan Army is also in the process of inducting Chinese VT-4 tanks as well as Oplod-P tanks from Ukraine, the sources said. Trials for both Oplod and VT-4 tanks have already been conducted by the Pakistan Army.

At present, Pakistan is learnt to have around 17 units of Chinese origin T-59 and T69 tanks, which comprise 30% of its total tank strength, the sources said. It also has 12 regiments of Al-Zarar tanks, which makes 20% of the tank fleet while Ukrain origin T-80-UD and T-85-UD as well as upgraded version of T-59 tanks comprise the rest 50% tank fleet...

Source: Bilal Khan, "Pakistani Defence Minister: talking to Russia for Su-35, T-90 tanks and air defence systems," *Quwa*, 8 April 2018. <https://quwa.org/2018/04/08/pakistani-defence-minister-talking-to-russia-for-su-35-t-90-tanks-and-air-defence-systems/>

On 05 April, Pakistan's Minister of Defence (MoD) Khurram Dastgir Khan told the Russian News Agency RIA Novosti that talks were underway with Russia for the procurement of air defence systems, the Sukhoi Su-35 Flanker-E and potentially the T-90 main battle tanks (MBT).

Khan did not provide a timeline as to when these negotiations are expected to reach fruition, but the MoD was clear in stating that talks are in play and that announcements will be made once they are completed...

Regarding the T-90 MBT, Khan outlined that Pakistan was "interested in T-90 tanks" and that it would "not be a one-time purchase, but a long-term commitment."...Pakistan and Russia had formally begun building bilateral defence relations following a memorandum-of-understanding (MoU) in November 2014...

However, the Pakistani MoD's statements underline the objective to recapitalize its conventional warfare capabilities...Unfortunately, a continual lack of funding has been one of the major constraining factors to such procurement. Thus, the supplier's willingness to extend a line-of-credit or loan to kick-start programs is of importance to Pakistan...Khan was also aware to highlight that an off-the-shelf MBT – which now apparently has the T-90 in the running – would be a long-term and multi-batch purchase.

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