

OPINION: WHAT INDIA'S S-400 MISSILE DEAL WITH RUSSIA SIGNIFIES

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The conclusion of the multi-billion dollar deal for S-400 air defence systems – albeit done in a low key manner, with the contract finding no mention in the remarks by Prime Minister Narendra Modi or President Vladimir Putin after their annual summit – underscores why Russia will remain the main supplier of hi-tech military gear for the foreseeable future. That India decided to go ahead with the deal despite the US threat of action was a clear signal that New Delhi intends to stick with its independent foreign policy, and retain the autonomy of acquiring advanced defence hardware from the best possible source. Such contracts have to be finalised keeping in mind India's national security interests, not those of others, and if the US truly considers India an ally in the Indo-Pacific region and a counterbalance to China, it will understand and provide the necessary presidential waiver.

During Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit, India and Russia also made incremental progress in a host of key areas, including the construction of second nuclear power project with up to six Russian-designed reactors, work on nuclear projects in third countries and the development of the International North-South Transport Corridor, which will see New Delhi and Moscow working along with Tehran for the transportation of Indian goods to Russia through Iranian territory. This too was a clear demonstration that India intends to retain its strategic options while it works to strengthen its relations with the US in a host of fields. In other words, India has signalled that it will not be drawn into an "either us or them" game.

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