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Here's Why Russia Has Sent \$13 Billion Worth Of Weaponry To India In Recent Years

By Allan Smith and Armin Rosen
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This vehicle is used to launch Russian Iskander missiles

Russia has sent an extraordinary amount of weaponry to India, which was the world's largest arms importer in 2013. Vladimir Putin's government has been aggressive in its stance towards

Europe and the west — while cultivating one of the developing world's emerging powers as the leading recipient of Russian arms.

Between 2012-2013, Russia sent more than \$13.6 billion in weapons to India, nearly half of the overall \$29.7 billion worth of arms exported by Russia during this time, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI tracks weapons imports and exports in production cost as opposed to transaction cost, and does not account for the exchange of some small arms).

In comparison, the U.S. sent just under \$2 billion to India over the same timeframe, according to SIPRI.

"It's not surprising that India is its biggest customer and that U.S. sales to India are not comparable," Matt Schroeder, an arms sales expert with Small Arms Survey, told Business Insider. He explained that the U.S. became suspicious of India after the country developed and then tested nuclear weapons in the late 1990s. American sales to the world's second-most populous nation did not increase until after the September 11th terrorist attacks.

During the lull in relations, India looked to other suppliers — Russia included.

"It takes years, sometimes decades, to transition away from one supplier to another," Schroeder said. "I think India is pretty leery about putting all of its eggs in the U.S. basket to begin with. The U.S. tends to sanction countries when they kind of fall foul of U.S. arms exports criteria, and the Russians don't generally do that. They don't tend to sanction regimes for their behavior."

Schroeder said that for that reason, he would be surprised if India ever decided to import as much weaponry from the U.S. as it does from Russia.

Overall, India imports far more in weaponry than China, another rising power with a population of over 1 billion.

Schroeder said this is because China has a much more robust domestic defense industry than India, and no longer needs to purchase as many weapons. The Chinese imported technology from Russia during the 1980's and 1990's before the country developed its own ability to produce advanced weaponry on a large scale.

India is further behind in that regard — which means it will have to depend on powerful external suppliers, including ones whose interests and policies might be diametrically opposed to those of the United States. So India is an ideal place for Russia to build favor and influence. It's a large, ambitious country with an independent-minded foreign policy, and active security threats on its borders — and a domestic arms industry that can't keep up with its policies or perceived security needs.

Its complicated history with the United States presents Putin with an opportunity as well, and a chance to undercut U.S. in one of Asia's most strategically vital countries.

Weapons sales are one way that Russia can build influence with rising powers — turning key states like India into another potential battleground between Putin and the U.S.