

# SIPRI Yearbook 2026, India's Nuclear Modernisation and Defence Trends

June 10, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released its Yearbook 2026 (June 2026), highlighting major global and regional security trends. For India, the report is significant due to findings on nuclear warhead increase, defence expenditure, arms imports, and India-Pakistan conflict (Operation Sindoor 2025).

## About India's Nuclear Arsenal

India's nuclear stockpile is estimated to have increased to **around 190 warheads by early 2026**, indicating a modest but steady expansion.

- The focus of India's nuclear modernisation is **shifting towards longer-range missiles**, particularly aimed at strengthening deterrence against China, while maintaining strategic balance with Pakistan.
- India continues to **develop and improve diverse nuclear delivery systems**, including **land-based, air-based, and sea-based platforms** to ensure a credible second-strike capability.
- The overall approach reflects India's continued policy of credible **minimum deterrence**, adapted to changing regional threats.

India is not a signatory to the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**, which it views as discriminatory. Instead, India has built its nuclear doctrine around three pillars:

1. **No First Use (NFU)**: India will not use nuclear weapons first in any conflict.
2. **Credible Minimum Deterrence**: India maintains only as many weapons as necessary to deter adversaries.
3. **Massive Retaliation**: Any nuclear attack on India will invite a devastating response.

However, some strategic analysts argue that India's quiet shift towards longer-range, more survivable systems (including the development of submarine-launched ballistic missiles) suggests an evolving doctrine, even if official policy remains unchanged.

## India-Pakistan Conflict: Operation Sindoor (2025)

SIPRI describes the May 2025 India-Pakistan confrontation (**Operation Sindoor**) as an “unusually severe military crisis” between two nuclear-armed states.

- During the conflict, India reportedly struck Pakistani air and missile bases, some of which may have had nuclear-related roles.
- Despite escalation, both sides reportedly took steps to prevent full-scale war, showing that nuclear deterrence continued to act as a stabilising factor.

The crisis highlights the fragile nature of peace in South Asia and the risk of escalation between nuclear neighbours.

## New Dimension of Warfare: Cyber Operations

The 2025 conflict marked the first known integration of cyber operations into active military conflict between India and Pakistan.

- This reflects the growing use of **hybrid warfare**, where cyber tools are combined with conventional military actions.
- It shows how modern conflicts are no longer limited to traditional battlefields but extend into digital and technological domains.

## India's Defence Expenditure

- **India's military expenditure is estimated at \$92.1 billion in 2025**, an **increase of 8.9%** over the previous year.
- **India remains the fifth-largest military spender in the world**, after the United States, China, Russia, and Germany.

Rising expenditure reflects continued focus on modernisation, procurement of advanced weapons, and strengthening defence capabilities.

## India in Global Arms Imports

- **India is the second-largest importer of major arms globally** during 2021-25.
  - It accounts for 8.2% of global arms imports, highlighting continued dependence on foreign defence technology.
- Major importers globally include **Ukraine, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Pakistan**.

## Global Nuclear Context

- The nine nuclear-armed countries collectively hold **about 12,187 nuclear warheads** as of early 2026.
- Around **9,745 warheads** are in military stockpiles, ready for **potential use**.
- While global stockpiles are slowly declining due to dismantlement by the US and Russia, the pace of reduction is slowing due to ongoing modernisation by all nuclear states.

## About SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute)

- **SIPRI** is an **independent international research** institute based in Stockholm, Sweden, established in **1966**.
- It conducts **research on global security, armaments, arms control, disarmament, and conflict trends**, with a focus on evidence-based policy analysis.
- SIPRI is widely regarded as one of the most credible global sources of data on military expenditure, nuclear arsenals, arms transfers, and global security trends.
- It publishes an annual SIPRI Yearbook, which provides a comprehensive assessment of global armaments, disarmament efforts, and international security developments.
- The institute also maintains key global databases on military spending, arms trade, and nuclear forces, which are frequently used by governments, researchers, and international organisations.
- SIPRI plays an important role in informing global disarmament debates and supporting transparency in international security affairs.

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Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/sipri-yearbook-2026/>

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