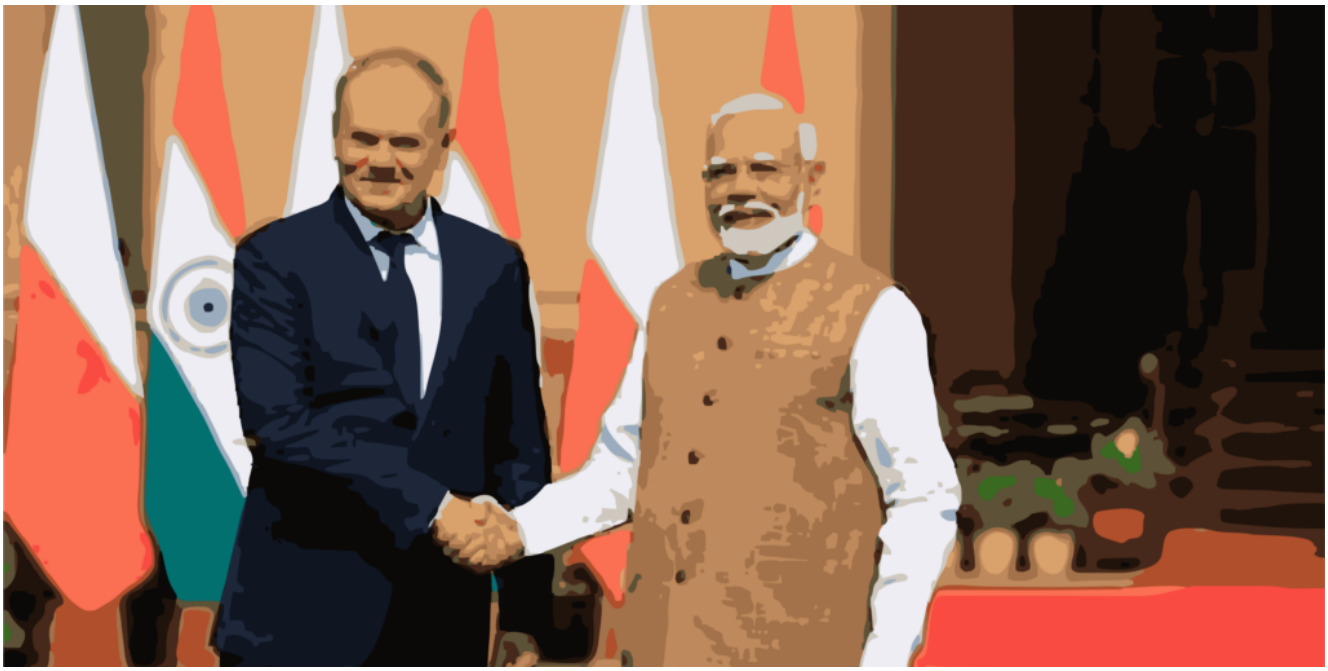
From Strategic Convergence to Defense Cooperation: The India-Poland Opportunity

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As part of his *gospodarczą ofensywą* (economic offensive) to India and Vietnam, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk visited India from October 21 to 23 on an official visit. Accompanied by Andrzej Domanski, Minister of Finance & Economy, he led a high-level delegation of around 100 leading CEOs and industry representatives. During the visit, he discussed the entire spectrum of bilateral relations with PM Modi. PM Tusk also addressed the India-Poland Business Forum, encouraging companies to invest in supply chains and joint ventures. This visit follows up on PM Modi's visit to Poland in August 2024, during which bilateral ties were elevated to a strategic partnership, and an Action Plan (2024-2028) was adopted.

This visit also comes as Poland revises its stance since the Russia-Ukraine war, shifting from partnership-based to skepticism-based, as indicated by its de-risking of supply chains. The India-Poland rapprochement also comes under the

larger pretext of the Security & Defense Partnership as well as the India-EU FTA which is expected to into force by December 2026. A significant part of defense and economic cooperation is in the defense industrial sector, as both nations are undergoing foundational transformations. Interestingly, the challenge that arrests this potential is for stakeholders in both countries to overcome skepticism and establish a meaningful partnership.

For India, the transformation is about *Atmanirbharta* (self-reliance). To that end, India looks for indigenization and localization of capabilities under a resilient arrangement. This transformation is also underpinned by an increasingly diversified portfolio, as Russia's share in India's defense industry has steadily declined from 70% during 2011-2015, to 51% during 2016-2020, and to 40% during 2021-2025. In 2023, it was reported that despite being in NATO for 24 years, Poland still maintained Soviet military equipment in its arsenals. Polish Deputy Minister Mariusz Błaszczak considered this Poland's Achilles Heel of national defense. In this context, for Poland, transformation means expanding and modernizing its capabilities to build Europe's strongest and largest army by 2030, and a modernized force by 2035, with the aim of deterring the Russian threat. Thus, both sides have cause for cooperation.

The Trust Deficit

There has been a political line of skepticism, characterized by Poland's wariness of India's ties with Russia, as some reports allege that European-origin sensitive and dual-use goods are exported from India to Russia. Similarly, Indian anxieties stemming from Indian-origin ammunition reaching Ukraine add to the deficit. In October 2025, Deputy PM Sikorski visited Pakistan, which added to India's anxiety, as illustrated by EAM Jaishankar, who told DPM Sikorski that India expects its partners not to help "fuel" terrorism in the neighborhood.

Another contributor to the deficit was the infamous Bumar-BEML episode. Poland's Bumar (Now Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa, or PGZ) and India's Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML) had signed contracts in 1999, 2002, and 2005 for the WZT-3 armored recovery vehicles (ARVs), and were on track to do so in 2012 as well. However, the then outgoing army chief, Gen. VK Singh (retd), claimed the 275 million USD deal was a "scam," as the previous deals had disregarded the contractual stipulation to indigenize the ARV.

In follow-up, the then member of parliament Pinaki Mishra that the case ended up as a subject matter of a CBI inquiry due to issues of exorbitantly priced spares, slow pace of indigenization, and lack of transparency in the bidding process. On October 2012 it was reported that Polish authorities conveyed that the contract would notbe implemented citing lack of profitability and differing priorities. In 2017, it was reported that India was pursuing a case against Bumar regarding the contract, however no follow up was reported.

Bridging the Gap

As Rao and Kugeil argue, any credible proposal or framework must work towards answering two fundamental questions:

1. Which Indian requirement can a Polish partner meet?
2. Which Polish production or supply constraint can an Indian partner ease?

A good example is WB Electronics India Pvt Ltd, often mistaken for a subsidiary of WB Group; it is an Indian company established as a joint venture with the WB Group in 2023. The company became well known after reports of Polish Warmate systems being deployed by Indian forces in Pakistan during Operation Sindoor. It has established a production line in the Uttar Pradesh Defense Industrial Corridor

(UPDIC). While not comparable in scale to the WZT-3 deal, it is significant because it offers a tried-and-tested template for co-development to potential entrants.

In October 2026, the WB Group announced plans to invest $100 million over five years via WB Electronics India to produce drones and unmanned systems. The Polish government is also invested in WB Group via the Polish Development Fund, with a 24% equity stake.

In the backdrop of PM Tusk's visit in October, when asked about staying competitive in the Indian market, the WB Vice President noted, "We first start by designing the perfect aircraft. Only then do we think about how to reduce the price. Our products, in fact, have no direct comparisons with existing ones. That is why they are more expensive: developing that level of sophistication does not come cheap. It involves extensive engineering, very high-quality components, and, above all, extensive experience gained from war zones."

In the defense context, India needs systems that operate in the lower airspace, as articulated by former CDS Gen Anil Chauhan (retd.) when sharing his reflections on Operation Sindoor at VIF. More recently, the former ITBP Director General noted that they spent 70% of their Rs 400 crore modernization funds on drones. On a larger note, it contributes to India's Make in India initiative and the Make for the World initiative. On the other hand, developing systems for lower airspace combat is also an important requirement for Poland. Maj. Gen. Ireneusz Nowak stated in October 2026, "We need to develop massive, responsive weapons systems capable of counteracting UAV operations." He also acknowledged that using fighter jets to shoot down cheap drones was a bad cost ratio, but they were used because there were no other options at the time. From a businessperspective, in 2024, the President-CEO of the WB Group noted that Poland has a problem finding good talent, while India has no shortage of resources, educated people, and a big market.

Overcoming the trust deficit requires political confidence, which PM Tusk's trip to India, under the broader emerging India-EU partnership, has helped illustrate. Moreover, India-Poland ventures would likely be driven by the private sector, which does not deal with Russia, so as not to lose Western market interest. Lastly, the ventures could look to established precedent via India's partnership with America. Thus, a positive outcome out of India-Poland's collaboration appears likely.

If successful, as Rao and Kugiel note, the India-Poland project could be expanded into the Visegrád 4+India format. Recently, EAM Jaishankar had his first-ever foreign ministers' meeting with the V4 ministers in September. Out of the many topics discussed, defense, security, and supply chains were included. As ET Defense noted, "The test now is whether the two sides can move from positive rhetoric to a pipeline of joint projects that are commercially viable, technologically meaningful and politically resilient".