Evolution of Defence Acquisition Procedures in India

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Abstract: Defence acquisition determines how military requirements become usable capabilities and how public expenditure influences national technological development. In India, its evolution reflects a continuing effort to reconcile operational urgency, financial accountability and the aspiration for strategic autonomy. This article examines the progression from the 1992 procurement framework and post-Kargil institutional reforms to successive Defence Procurement Procedures, the Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 and the draft reforms announced in 2025. It uses qualitative documentary analysis of government publications, parliamentary material and selected international frameworks. The discussion shows that acquisition policy has gradually expanded beyond purchasing equipment to support indigenous design, domestic manufacturing and participation by private enterprises. Nevertheless, additional rules do not automatically produce faster decisions or reliable deliveries. Requirements formulation, evaluation, contracting and lifecycle support remain closely connected challenges. Drawing on international perspectives, the article recommends differentiated acquisition pathways, professional project management, proportionate oversight and stronger evaluation of outcomes. Effective reform should be judged by timely military capability, sustainable industrial learning and responsible use of public resources.

Keywords: Defence Acquisition, Defence Procurement Procedure, DAP 2020, Indigenous Design, Strategic Autonomy, Public Procurement, Defence Modernization, Lifecycle Support

INTRODUCTION

For a soldier awaiting essential equipment, an acquisition delay is an operational problem. For a manufacturer investing in a prototype, it may threaten the survival of a business. For the public, the same transaction raises questions about cost, integrity and national priorities. Defence acquisition brings these different concerns together, often through decisions involving sophisticated technology and commitments extending over decades.

India's procedures have consequently undergone repeated revision. The central question has broadened from how equipment should be purchased to how acquisition can strengthen the

country's capacity to design, manufacture, maintain and upgrade it. This development explains the growing importance of indigenous content, innovation and industrial partnerships.

The article traces that evolution through documentary analysis and considers its implications for contemporary reform. It distinguishes capital acquisition under the Defence Acquisition Procedure from revenue procurement under the Defence Procurement Manual. It also treats DAP 2025 as a draft in the verified official record, rather than presenting proposed changes as completed legal developments (Ministry of Defence, 2025b; Press Information Bureau, 2025). Its argument is that successful acquisition requires coherent institutions and informed judgement alongside well-written procedures.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Independent India inherited limited industrial capabilities and substantial dependence on foreign military technology. Early acquisition arrangements therefore developed alongside public manufacturing, licensed production and government-to-government cooperation. Equipment purchases were linked with diplomatic relationships and the need to establish domestic production capacity. However, manufacturing under licence did not always provide control over design, modification or critical components. These limitations gradually made acquisition an industrial policy concern as well as an administrative function. The historical question was not simply whether India could buy adequate equipment, but whether purchasing decisions could improve its ability to sustain military capability independently.

A formal procurement framework existed in 1992, although the more comprehensive system associated with successive Defence Procurement Procedures emerged later. The distinction matters because accounts beginning in 2002 can overlook the earlier administrative foundation. After the Kargil conflict, the review of national security management encouraged changes in defence planning and acquisition institutions. New procurement management structures were established in 2001. These arrangements sought to connect military requirements with decision-making responsibilities and financial scrutiny more systematically. The preamble to DPP 2013 records the relationship between the 1992 procedure, the institutional changes and subsequent revisions (Ministry of Defence, 2013).

DPP 2002 became effective on 30 December 2002 and initially covered acquisitions arising from the Defence Acquisition Council's purchase decisions. Its scope expanded in June 2003

to include purchases followed by manufacture through imported technology transfer. This development recognised that acquiring a platform and establishing production capabilities could form parts of the same programme. The emerging framework also made acquisition a more identifiable administrative sequence rather than an isolated purchasing decision. Nevertheless, specifying stages could not resolve every difficulty, particularly where user requirements, technical feasibility and available budgets did not align (Ministry of Defence, 2008).

DPP 2005 strengthened the framework through measures intended to promote transparency and competition. A parliamentary reply identified broader qualitative requirements, open tendering for commercially available items, and provisions concerning direct offsets and integrity pacts for specified purchases. The significance extended beyond additional paperwork. Broader requirements could reduce the risk of a procurement specification effectively identifying one supplier in advance. Integrity arrangements sought to protect the legitimacy of high-value transactions. Offsets introduced a mechanism through which selected acquisitions could generate obligations benefiting Indian industry, although contractual obligations and meaningful technological learning remained distinct questions (Ministry of Defence, 2005).

DPP 2006 widened the system further by incorporating the Make procedure, alongside arrangements for purchasing, purchasing followed by manufacture, shipbuilding and faster acquisition in specified circumstances. The Make approach gave greater recognition to equipment developed through indigenous research and design. It represented an important change in the relationship between the government and industry: firms could contribute to developing future capability rather than only offer completed products. The accompanying official explanation acknowledged the complexity of defence acquisition and the need for evaluation, trials and commercial assessment. Developmental ambition therefore had to coexist with safeguards for public expenditure (Ministry of Defence, 2006).

DPP 2008 emphasised transparency, a wider vendor base, reliability and delegation. Advance information, clearer trial methods and written communication of evaluation outcomes sought to make the process more predictable. These measures mattered because suppliers commit resources before knowing whether they will receive contracts. Unclear testing expectations can increase costs and discourage participation. The continuing revision process, including

changes in 2009, demonstrated that procurement rules were being adjusted through implementation experience. Yet repeated amendments also created a learning burden for officials and enterprises. Stability and accessibility became important considerations alongside the responsiveness of the framework.

DPP 2011 pursued simplification and a more level competitive environment for public and private participants. Its changes included revised financial safeguards and a more developed approach to competitive shipbuilding. These measures recognised that procedural costs can affect market participation. An enterprise may have appropriate technical competence yet struggle with burdensome guarantees or uncertain contractual exposure. The official presentation linked reform with expanding the industrial base and reducing import dependence. By this stage, procurement policy was increasingly expected to influence the structure of the domestic defence economy, rather than merely regulate individual transactions (Ministry of Defence, 2011).

DPP 2013 consolidated the expanding framework and expressed the combined objectives of timely acquisition, optimal use of resources, accountability, competition and self-reliance. Its historical importance lies partly in making the tension between these objectives explicit. Accelerating a purchase, encouraging domestic development and obtaining competitive prices may require different approaches in different circumstances. The evolution of offset policy similarly connected major acquisitions with enterprise development, research and related industrial capabilities (Ministry of Defence, 2014). These ambitions required more than contractual percentages. Their practical value depended on the relevance of the capabilities developed and their continued use after contractual obligations ended.

DPP 2016 strengthened the emphasis on indigenous design through the Indian Designed, Developed and Manufactured category. The reform signalled that domestic intellectual effort deserved particular recognition, rather than treating all production within India as equivalent. The Strategic Partnership Model, notified in 2017, sought longer-term relationships between Indian entities and overseas manufacturers for selected major platforms. Its intended benefits included technology transfer and domestic supply chains (Ministry of Defence, 2016, 2017). These developments broadened acquisition into an instrument of industrial capability building, while also raising demanding questions about partner selection, competition and the depth of transferred knowledge.

The simplified Make II procedure announced in 2018 encouraged industry proposals and supported indigenous development, while the Strategic Partnership framework continued to evolve (Ministry of Defence, 2018a, 2018b). DAP 2020 then replaced the earlier terminology with an acquisition framework effective from 1 October 2020. It incorporated domestic manufacturing priorities, leasing and broader arrangements for innovation and support (Ministry of Defence, 2020). Subsequent amendments and the draft DAP 2025 continued this reform trajectory. Across these changes, the enduring challenge has been implementation: connecting institutional authority, technical understanding and realistic schedules so that procedural compliance produces timely and dependable military capability. This continuity explains why every revision must be assessed against implementation experience, including the resources available to procurement organisations and the incentives shaping decisions at each stage of the acquisition cycle.

From Procurement to the Acquisition of Capability

The change in terminology from procurement to acquisition carries an important policy meaning. Purchasing equipment is one stage within a longer relationship involving training, infrastructure, ammunition, maintenance and upgrades. A platform delivered without adequate support may remain expensive while contributing little operational value.

Acquisition should therefore begin with the capability required and consider how that capability will be sustained. This approach encourages attention to operating costs, access to technical information and the ability to modify systems when threats change. It also makes comparisons between competing offers more demanding: the cheapest initial price may not produce the most economical or reliable capability over time.

The implication is that acquisition officials need multidisciplinary support. Military, engineering, commercial and financial perspectives should inform decisions early enough to identify unrealistic assumptions before they become contractual commitments.

Understanding the Acquisition Process

The acquisition cycle can be understood as a connected series of decisions. It begins with identifying a military need and translating that need into appropriate requirements. Market engagement helps establish whether a suitable solution exists or whether development is necessary. Categorisation and approval then determine the route through which the

requirement will proceed. These choices influence the potential supplier base and the allocation of technological risk.

A request for proposals communicates the terms on which offers will be assessed. Technical evaluation and applicable trials examine compliance, while commercial assessment addresses price and contractual conditions. Negotiation, approval and contract signature establish obligations, but delivery and acceptance still require active management. The precise sequence varies with the applicable procedure and acquisition category; it should not be assumed that every case follows an identical route (Ministry of Defence, 2013).

Understanding these connections helps explain why delays accumulate. An unclear requirement may produce difficulties during trials, which then affect commercial decisions. Improving one approval stage will have limited benefit if unresolved problems move forward through the rest of the process. Reform should therefore examine the entire programme rather than optimise isolated administrative steps.

The Significance of DAP 2020

DAP 2020 consolidated the emphasis on domestic design and manufacturing while recognising a wider range of acquisition needs. Its official introduction described arrangements for greater indigenous participation, the Buy Global Manufacture in India category, leasing, support for innovation and improved contract management (Ministry of Defence, 2020).

Its industrial logic is significant. Acquisition demand can provide firms with reasons to invest in production, specialised workers and supply chains. Nevertheless, domestic purchasing preferences should be accompanied by realistic assessments of technical readiness and production capacity. A manufacturing location alone does not establish independent access to critical technology.

Leasing also widens the available choices where ownership may not provide the most suitable response to a requirement. Such decisions need careful consideration of availability, contractual restrictions and long-term costs. The broader lesson is that flexibility should involve reasoned selection between options, supported by documented analysis, rather than discretion without clear justification.

Amendments and the Revenue Procurement Track

The April 2022 amendments sought to strengthen indigenous sourcing and reduce procedural burdens. Measures included revised financial safeguards, simplified innovation procurement and changes intended to shorten Make II processing. The announcement also recognised exceptions for imports requiring specified approvals (Ministry of Defence, 2022). It should therefore not be interpreted as an unconditional legal prohibition on every foreign acquisition.

Revenue procurement follows a related but separate route. DPM 2025 addresses the goods and services required for operations and sustenance, including support needs that continue after platforms enter service. Its approval announcement emphasised simpler processes, innovation and participation by smaller enterprises (Ministry of Defence, 2025).

The relationship between the two frameworks matters operationally. Capital acquisition may deliver a system, but revenue purchases help keep it usable. Administrative coordination should prevent support requirements from becoming an afterthought. Equally, scholars should avoid describing the revenue manual as a replacement for the capital acquisition procedure.

The Draft DAP 2025 and Contemporary Reform

The February 2025 consultation proposed changes addressing readiness, acquisition speed, indigenous design and industrial participation. The official invitation stated that the draft would replace DAP 2020 once approved (Ministry of Defence, 2025b). An August 2025 official backgrounder also described DAP 2025 as a draft (Press Information Bureau, 2025).

Specific proposals included fewer procurement categories, greater recognition of design, technology readiness-based approaches, revised trials and procedures for rapidly changing technologies. The February explanation proposed raising indigenous content in the Indian IDDM category from 50% to 60%, alongside other changes (Ministry of Defence, 2025a). These figures describe the proposal; they should not be cited as an enacted universal requirement.

The policy direction recognises that a long development programme and a frequently updated digital product may need different acquisition methods. The practical challenge is to define those methods clearly enough to support speed without creating uncertainty about eligibility, evaluation or accountability.

International Perspectives

International experience suggests that acquisition reform involves institutional behaviour as much as formal rules. The United States' 2024 National Defense Industrial Strategy emphasised resilient supply chains, workforce readiness, flexible acquisition and economic deterrence (Clark, 2024). The relevant lesson for India is that procurement reform cannot succeed independently of the industrial capacity needed to fulfil contracts. Shorter approvals will achieve little if suppliers cannot obtain skilled workers or dependable components.

The United Kingdom's Integrated Procurement Model, published in February 2024, emphasised integration, earlier engagement with industry and faster delivery of capability (UK Ministry of Defence, 2024). Its relevance lies in examining requirements and commercial feasibility together before plans become difficult to change. India can draw from this approach through structured consultation that improves technical understanding while protecting equal treatment and confidential information.

In Europe, Directive 2009/81/EC established procurement rules adapted to defence and sensitive security requirements (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2009). The European Defence Industrial Strategy subsequently highlighted readiness and cooperation across the industrial base (European Commission, 2024). These instruments serve different functions, but together show how procurement rules and industrial strategy can interact. India's institutional setting is different; the transferable principle is coordinated demand supported by transparent procedures and credible industrial planning.

Persistent Challenges in Implementation

Requirements formulation remains a central difficulty. Specifications that demand excessive performance or change repeatedly can undermine competition and delay evaluation. Operational ambition should therefore be tested against technical feasibility, available resources and the consequences of waiting for an ideal solution.

Trials present a related challenge. Equipment must demonstrate safety and military suitability, yet evaluation should be proportionate to the risks involved. Repeating comparable tests without a clear reason can consume time and supplier resources. Documented test plans, agreed criteria and accountable decisions help reconcile scrutiny with efficiency.

Contract management also deserves greater attention. Approvals and signatures do not establish that equipment has been delivered, accepted and made operational. Programme performance should include support availability and the resolution of technical defects. Finally, a preference for domestic supply should encourage learning and competition. It should not conceal persistent underperformance or make public support independent of measurable capability development.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER REFORM

India should strengthen professional acquisition teams that remain involved across major project stages. Continuity can preserve institutional knowledge and clarify responsibility when requirements or schedules change. Training should combine technical understanding with commercial negotiation, financial assessment and contract administration.

Different types of acquisition should follow proportionate pathways. Mature equipment, developmental programmes and rapidly changing software require different approaches to testing and risk. Any accelerated route should retain a clear audit trail, defined authority and safeguards against inappropriate classification.

The government should also improve non-sensitive demand visibility and the clarity of evaluation requirements. Smaller enterprises need realistic information about development stages, potential orders and financing risks. Public reporting should distinguish preliminary approvals, signed contracts, deliveries and operational outcomes. Oversight should also distinguish a reasoned decision taken under genuine uncertainty from negligence or misconduct. Officials need confidence to document proportionate choices without treating delay as the safest response. At the same time, flexibility must remain subject to scrutiny: departures from normal practice should record the operational need, alternatives considered and reasons for selecting the final course. Independent reviews should examine whether reforms reduce delays and improve capability, rather than treating the publication of a revised procedure as evidence of success. Evaluation should include the experience of end users who operate the equipment and maintainers responsible for its readiness. Their feedback can reveal whether promised improvements survive delivery and whether contractual support works in practice. Bringing this evidence into subsequent reviews would make revision a process of learning grounded in operational experience.

CONCLUSION

India's defence acquisition procedures have evolved from a narrower purchasing framework into a wider mechanism for military modernisation and industrial development. Successive revisions have strengthened the attention given to transparency, competition, indigenous design and participation by domestic firms. The progression also reveals a persistent tension between careful scrutiny and timely action.

The next stage should concentrate on implementation quality. Procedures need officials with appropriate expertise, feasible requirements and reliable mechanisms for managing contracts. Strategic autonomy will depend on the ability to sustain and improve equipment as well as acquire it. Reform succeeds when public expenditure produces dependable military capability and durable technological learning.

FUTURE SCOPE

Future research should compare acquisition timelines across procurement categories and examine the period between initial approval and operational availability. Interviews with users, officials and suppliers could identify obstacles hidden by aggregate statistics. Further studies should investigate software acquisition, autonomous systems, intellectual property arrangements and lifecycle costs, while evaluating whether simplified procedures improve outcomes for both the armed forces and domestic enterprises. Comparative studies could also assess how acquisition organisations retain specialist staff and institutional knowledge. Such evidence would help identify reforms that improve everyday decision making, beyond changes visible in the wording of policy documents.

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