



INDIA AND RUSSIA: TIES ARE FOREVER

H. K. Pandey¹, Ph. D. & Col Shantonu Roy²



Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com

Introduction

The India-Russia connection is the only bilateral relationship that is referred to as friendship. For more than five decades, people from both countries have had warm feelings towards each other, and although the fervour of the 1970s and 1980s has faded somewhat, there still remains the recognition of each other as reliable partners. It is for this reason that Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in December 2014, during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India: "Even a child in India, if asked to say who is India's best friend, will reply it is Russia because Russia has been with India in times of crisis."

There are, of course, other strong bilateral partnerships in the world. The most famous one is the US-UK Special Relationship, but it has now degraded to a master-poodle equation. Then there is the China-Pakistan All-Weather Friendship, but again it remains a patron-client association.

India and Russia started off with India being a poor country completely dependent on Russia for weapons, technology and industrial investment. New Delhi also required Moscow's diplomatic and military support during the 1965 and 1971 wars with Pakistan. Today India has a larger economy than Russia but they continue to work together as equal partners. The relationship has evolved over the past 50 years but the underlying nature of the friendship hasn't changed much.

Here are six reasons why India and Russia are BFF (best friends forever):

Indians and Russians are more alike than you think

Indians and Russians are lively and emotional people – mainly at the personal level. Amid strangers and colleagues they are reserved and hierarchical. Family life is a very important aspect of life in both countries.

On both the micro and macro levels, the affinity between Russia and India can be attributed to ancient connections. The similarity between Sanskrit and Russian are too uncanny to be

ignored. For instance, take the most famous Russian word – vodka. It has its origins in the Classical Sanskrit word for water – ‘udaka.’

Since Sanskrit is the oldest language in the world, it is likely Russian is the result of ancient Indians taking their language and culture from the banks of the Saraswati river to the Urals. The discovery of Shiva statues in Central Asia and Russia points to the spread of ancient Vedic culture far beyond the Indian heartland.

Indians – being part of the Indo-European genetic pool – are among the most European of Asians. Russians are the Easternmost Europeans and Leo Tolstoy refers to his country as the “great Asiatic nation”. Basically, the Indian and Russian DNAs overlap and that’s where the similarities and affinities spring from.

India and Russia can never be geopolitical rivals

India and Russia have a shared strategic interest in stability in the vast Eurasian landmass. Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine are some of the key areas where their interests converge. Not many Indians realise that Ukraine is a hub of defence industries that are vital to the servicing of Indian defence equipment, including AN-32 transport aircraft.

Because India and Russia do not share a border, they do not share the attendant problems such as boundary and water sharing issues. The chances of both countries coming into direct confrontation are next to zero.

Chanakya, the 3rd century BCE master of statecraft, assessed that at least one neighbour of a country will be a natural enemy. According to his ‘Rajamandala’ theory of foreign policy, immediate neighbours are considered enemies, but any state on the other side of a neighbouring state is regarded as an ally. Going by this theory, if China and Pakistan are hostile to India, then they can be counteracted through Russia and Afghanistan.

Synergy in Energy

Russia is the No.1 producer of energy and India is the world’s third largest consumer, after the US and China. Despite the global recession, there has been no let-up in India’s energy consumption, with the country having a limitless appetite for oil, gas and nuclear fuel. As Russia is the largest producer of these fuels, its strategy should neatly dovetail with India’s quest for energy security.

The reason it hasn’t so far is because of the tyranny of distance. While Europe and China – and lately Japan – have benefitted from Russian pipelines that ensure a steady and

reliable source of oil and gas, India continues to be a hostage to the volatile Middle Eastern energy producers.

During the 1980s, Russia was India's strategic supplier of petroleum plus Moscow accepted payment in rupees. Today India is rich and can afford to pay in dollars, therefore, it does not buy much energy from Russia. That could change with the mother of all pipelines being planned direct from Russia across the Himalayas.

Unlike an oil tanker, a pipeline cannot be rerouted so pipelines have a habit of locking countries into a long-term geopolitical embrace. The new energy linkages are going to increase the BFF factor further.

The most promising has been the area of nuclear energy. Russia is the only country practically collaborating with India in the nuclear energy sector. Two state-of-the-art nuclear power units with the world safest light water reactors have already been constructed at the Kudankulam site. Unit 1 is operational and unit 2 is being prepared for attaining criticality. Preparatory works for the construction of units 3 & 4 at the same site are underway.

I would like to reiterate that the Russian engineers have successfully implemented all post-Fukushima safety requirements outlined by the Indian Regulator AERB. A very important factor is the economic viability of the Russian projects. The Kudankulam units offer the most competitive price for electricity strictly corresponding to the figures stipulated by the Indian Government.

It is noteworthy that the Russian-Indian collaboration in the nuclear sphere is not limited to NPP construction. There are joint projects in nuclear science and on aspects of nuclear fuel cycle. Russian and Indian scientists effectively cooperate in research at the Russian Joint Institute of Nuclear Research in Dubna and within the framework of such international projects like ITER programme (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor).

The Strategic Vision for strengthening cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy signed during the bilateral summit in December 2014 provides for the construction of at least 12 units within the next two decades. This includes upto 6 more units at Kudankulam and units at other sites in India. We are expecting the Indian Government to soon announce and allocate a new site for these purposes. At Kudankulam Russian and Indian experts gained

practical experience of construction and commissioning of the Russian-designed reactors. This platform will allow us to effectively continue with the construction of new units.

Defence Technology: Welcome to Arms

Russia and India have transacted military sales for decades. While the West has slapped sanctions on India, Moscow continues to be a reliable supplier of high-end weapons and a source of cutting-edge missile technology. Russian technology and specialists have helped India leapfrog a couple of generations and produce best-in-class missiles such as BrahMos and Akash. The Prithvi is also based on Russian technology.

While most countries export stripped down versions of their latest weapons, Russia has made an exception for India, with the Sukhoi Su-30MKI jet fighter, which is more advanced than its own Su-27s. The S-400 missile defence system is the latest in a long line of potent weapons that Russia has offered India.

At the height of the Cold War, 85 per cent of Indian Navy, 75 per cent of Indian Air Force and over 50 per cent of Indian Army equipment was of Russian origin. While the overall percentage of Russian hardware has declined today, Moscow's presence in the Indian defence market is still dominant. It is the only country that can meet India's future needs – fifth generation stealth fighters (Sukhoi PAK-FA), nuclear submarines or aircraft carriers.

In terms of volume and investments this is by far the most advanced area of bilateral cooperation. The value of our business in military hardware with India is over USD 30 billion, more than India has with all other foreign partners put together. And this business continues to flourish.

Moreover, Russian-Indian military technical cooperation is based on transfer of technology and mutual development of hi-tech platforms, licensed production of modern Russian equipment in India and modernisation of Russian weapons, which are in service with the Indian Armed Forces. This kind of extremely versatile cooperation is hors concours too. By all means Russia and India has a unique partnership within the global military market serving as an enviable example of the combination of trust and benefit.

Currently we are exploring new vistas of cooperation in research and development not only on GtoG but also on BtoB basis. Russian companies are in talks with Reliance Defence

and Aerospace (RDA) for possible joint production of ships, submarines and aircraft under the transfer of technology. We have been deeply engaged with HAL for many years, which is India's major public sector company and Russia's time-tested and reliable partner. We are looking forward to expanding ties with Indian companies, which have been selected to participate in the "Make in India" programme. Russia is the only country, which has so far started working under this scheme. Again, while others talk, Russians do. Isn't it the proof of the true strategic character of partnership? I think it is.

A Fifth Generation Fighter aircraft cannot be made overnight. It involves a long process of research and development, which is going on smoothly. This project is identified as a priority one by both countries, and we are committed to complete it as soon as possible.

Standing up for each other

In 1979 when Russia invaded Afghanistan, India refused to criticise Moscow. There was a lot of heartburn in the West because of this. Indians were described as hypocritical for being a champion of freedom but looking away when the bear attacked a South Asian country.

But India was simply paying back Russia for its support during the 1971 War when the US, UK, France, Jordan, UAE, Turkey, Indonesia, China and several other western and Muslim countries backed Pakistan. It was a war which was forced upon India after the Pakistanis murdered 3 million of their own Bengali citizens. While the western democracies supported Islamabad, Russia vetoed US-sponsored resolutions that blamed India. Further, military intervention by Russia's Pacific Fleet prevented a joint US-British attack on Indian cities.

New Delhi has continued to back Moscow during the Ukrainian and Syrian crises, refusing to support US and EU sanctions. India's National Security Adviser unequivocally declared that Russia had "legitimate" interests in Ukraine. Asked on CNN how he viewed Russia's action in Crimea, Prime Minister Modi responded: "In the world right now, a lot of people want to give advice, but look within them, and they, too, have sinned in some way."

Exceptional behavior

Unlike the West, or more specifically the US, which suffers from a "God Complex", India and Russia do not believe they are exceptional nations that should impose their beliefs on the rest of the world. During the Soviet era, Moscow never imposed Orthodox Christianity or Russian values on any of the republics. Yes, Russification was official state policy but it

did not result in the eclipse of, say, Ukrainian or Kazakh identity. Similarly, India doesn't impose Hinduism on the world. Indians are inclusive by nature.

Again, Russian businesses are not a cover for the SVR, Russia's external intelligence agency. Edward Snowden has revealed how consultants working for American corporations are in reality NSA and CIA agents. Similarly, western churches have long been doing dirty work for the CIA and its allied spy agencies in the West. It seems nothing has changed since the colonial period when the clergy and traders provided advance intelligence and supplies for invading western fleets.

The cult of American Exceptionalism is based on the belief that all cultures are inferior to America's. Indians, who are still feeling the effects of two centuries of British colonialism, are especially sensitive to such notions of foreign powers.

India's experience with European powers is that Russia is the only country that does not believe in misguided notions of exceptionalism. It is precisely why the two countries can trust each other and work together.

Conclusion

The Russian-Indian relations during the days of the Soviet Union were omnipresent indeed but it is essentially wrong to argue that the two nations have cooled off each other since. In fact, having disengaged from ideological background our relationship has become more sincere and warmer than before. These are the sentiments that overwhelmingly prevail in Russia and we are very proud of the unprecedented level of trust and friendship with India. This is true of relationship between the leaders of the two countries irrespective of who is in power in Moscow or New Delhi. This is equally true of feelings of the general public. Trust is the very essence of our relations, something that does not come overnight but is nurtured for years and tested at the times of hardship. If some started to believe otherwise I wish to testify as a longstanding insider officially and personally that they are fundamentally wrong.

Russia and India pursue the same goals on international arena of which the recent BRICS and SCO summits in Ufa are indicative. Prime Minister Modi will visit Russia again by the end of the year for the bilateral summit expected to generate fresher ideas to deepen cooperation at both the global and bilateral levels. Russia is very extensively engaged with India in politics and economy although the latter has been less effective for objective reasons. I would say both the countries are rediscovering each other economically in terms of applying the capacity of private SMEs and start-ups while successfully maintaining traditional cooperation

in such areas as hydroelectric power, mechanical engineering, metallurgy, oil and gas industry, petrochemicals etc.

References

New Trends in Indo-Russian Relations by V. D. Chopra

Indo-Russian Relations: Prospects, Problems, and Russia Today by V. D. Chopra

Indo-Russian Military and Nuclear Cooperation: Lessons and Options for Future by Jerome M. Conley

A Journey Beyond the Three Seas by Afanasy Nikitin

Global Significance of Indo-Russian Strategic Partnership by V. D. Chopra

Significance of Indo-Russian Relations in 21st Century by V. D. Chopra