



INDIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS IN EMERGING WORLD ORDER

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Abstract

India and Russia have acquired a new self-confidence arising out of their rapid economic growth. As rising economic powers, both India and Russia are playing an increasingly larger role on the world stage. This article mentions about their traditional friendly relations before disintegration of the Soviet Union and continuing close relations during the transition period and their interest in further deepening and diversifying close and multifaceted ties with each other in the coming years. The article mentions briefly about the historical background, it depicted how since the very early times both these countries are linked and dependent on each other. Article indicates about both the countries interest in creation of the more democratic, multipolar world and wants peace and stability and thus shares similar views on many aspects. The USSR was instrumental in helping independent India industrialise, develop its scientific potential, and defend its territorial integrity. The Indo-Russian relationship developed a level of trust between two independent countries that was unprecedented in international affairs. The collapse of the USSR negatively affected the bilateral relations, though the political leadership in both countries succeeded in containing the impact. Today the two countries need to find new ways to reignite their ties in a rapidly changing international system. Continuity, mutual trust and confidence are the major pillars of India-Russia relations or the basis of solid background of Indo-Soviet ties. The bilateral relationship has developed into a strong "strategic partnership" in recent years. One important point of the old Indo-Soviet friendship was a special bilateral trade and economic relationship. Although this arrangement had the usual weaknesses of corruption, patronage, transactions in low quality products, it helped many small and medium size private companies to become exporters. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, this relationship has been badly damaged. Economic transformation in Russia from a centrally planned economy to a market economy in 1992 – coined as the policy of economic liberalization in India. These developments changed the nature and character of foreign economic relations in both the countries. Therefore, despite having solid economic and trade relations in the past, a large part of the 1990s was a period of difficult adjustments for both Indian as well as Russian business.

Key Words: Defence & Strategic, Energy, Economic, Problematic



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Introduction:

A cordial relationship with India that began in the 1950s represented the most successful of the Soviet attempts to foster closer relations with Third World countries. The relationship began with a visit by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to the Soviet Union in June 1955 and Khrushchev's return trip to India in the fall of 1955.¹ While in India, Khrushchev announced that the Soviet Union supported Indian sovereignty over the

disputed territory of the Kashmir region and over Portuguese coastal enclaves such as Goa.²The Soviet Union's strong relations with India had a negative impact upon both Soviet relations with the People's Republic of China, including Indian relations with the PRC, during the Khrushchev period. The Soviet Union declared its neutrality during the 1959 border dispute and the Sino-Indian war of October 1962, although the Chinese strongly objected.³The Soviet Union gave India substantial economic and military assistance during the Khrushchev period, and by 1960 India had received more Soviet assistance than China had. This disparity became another point of contention in Sino-Soviet relations. In 1962 the Soviet Union agreed to transfer technology to co-produce the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21 jet fighter in India, which the Soviet Union had earlier denied to China. In 1965 the Soviet Union served successfully as peace broker between India and Pakistan after an Indian-Pakistani border war. The Soviet Chairman of the Council of Ministers, literally Premier of the Soviet Union, Alexei Kosygin, met with representatives of India and Pakistan and helped them negotiate an end to the military conflict over Kashmir.⁴In 1971 the former East Pakistan region initiated an effort to secede from its political union with West Pakistan. India supported the secession and, as a guarantee against possible Chinese entrance into the conflict on the side of West Pakistan, it signed with the Soviet Union the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971.⁵ In December, India entered the conflict and ensured the victory of the secessionists and the establishment of the new state of Bangladesh. Relations between the Soviet Union and India did not suffer much during the rightist Janata Party's coalition government in the late 1970s, although India did move to establish better economic and military relations with Western countries. To counter these efforts by India to diversify its relations, the Soviet Union proffered additional weaponry and economic assistance. During the 1980s, despite the 1984 assassination by Sikh separatists of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the mainstay of cordial Indian-Soviet relations, India maintained a close relationship with the Soviet Union. Indicating the high priority of relations with the Soviet Union in Indian foreign policy, the new Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, visited the Soviet Union on his first state visit abroad in May 1985 and signed two long-term economic agreements with the Soviet Union. In turn, Gorbachev's first visit to a Third World state was his meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in New Delhi in late 1986.⁶

Indo-Soviet relations were further consolidated during the period that the two nations were led by Rajiv Gandhi & Gorbachev. The two nations had more or less identical views on most

of the international questions. Therefore, the Indo-Soviet friendship would be maintained at high level. During 1990-91, India generally supported the position taken by the Soviet Union in the Gulf Crisis.⁷ Soon after, during the period of crisis in the USSR, the Soviet was seen unhappy when India was commenting that overthrowing of Gorbachev government by the hardliners was the internal matter of that country. When the coup failed & Gorbachev came to power, India faced a very embarrassing situation. After that Soviet Union suddenly collapsed in Dec 1991 and as a result 15 new states emerged in world map.⁸ But India has maintained friendly & cooperation relations not only with Russian Federation but also the other newly emerged states.

Today, both India and Russia have acquired a new self-confidence arising out of their rapid economic growth, at the time when many developed countries are suffering from economic recession. As rising economic powers, both India and Russia are playing an increasingly larger role on the world stage. The two countries share the goal of creating a multipolar world. India values the political and diplomatic support it continues to get from Russia on vital issues. India is also happy to note that Russia is recovering economically and militarily and is reasserting itself on the international sphere. In the nuclear-power sector Russia has already constructed two nuclear power plants at Kudankulam in south of India under Indo-Russian Nuclear Cooperation program. Negotiations for two additional units on the same site are also going on. In the space sector too, India-Russia cooperation on Glonass is going on well. India is also trying to get Russian Technology in tracking satellites and to have a collaborative Chandrayaan II, project involving space probes to the moon. In today's complicated and fast changing geopolitical situation, both countries have wisely diversified their foreign policy options, yet have been careful not to abandon a mutually beneficial partnership of trust built up over decades.

India-Russia Defence and Strategic Cooperation:-

Indo-Russian cooperation in the defence sector is still the strongest link. Even today around 50% of the defence equipment used by the Indian defence forces is of Russian origin. India is cooperating with Russia on major defence projects such as on indigenously developed nuclear submarine Arihant, the Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA). Off late, Russia also participated in the formation of the first group of Indian satellites for distant probing of the earth. The first launch of IRS series satellites was conducted by "Vostok" rocket.⁹ Russia has also advanced a proposal for selling the advanced MiG-35 fighter jet to the IAF. A \$3.77

billion deal for the supply of 40 SU-30MKI Russian fighter aircraft to India was also signed.¹⁰ The agreements included proposal for procuring around 10,000 'Invar' missiles, T-90 tanks and over 200 air-launched versions of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles.¹¹ Russia still remains India's largest supplier of military equipment despite the entry of US and Israel, which has apparently, also become major suppliers of military hardware to India.

Indo-Russian Energy Cooperation:-

Indo-Russian energy cooperation is also expected to get a boost in the coming years. India imports oil, mostly from the volatile region of Middle East. However, to sustain current high rate of growth, India need to secure and diversify sources of energy import. According to the International Energy Agency, India would be the third largest energy consumer in the world by 2025 after US and China.¹² Russia, India's trusted strategic partner is destined to play a vital role in ensuring India's energy security in the coming decades. The former Soviet Union played a major role in building India's energy sector by building tens of hydropower stations, developing India's coal industry, finding oil in Indian soil and helping in setting up India's energy major ONGC. Indo-Russian energy cooperation acquired new dimensions in the post-Soviet period, particularly in the hydrocarbon and nuclear sector. India has invested \$2.8 billion in the Sakhalin energy project, controlling 20% stakes in the venture and has purchased Imperial Energy, (London-listed oil major in Tomks region).¹³ These are India's largest investments abroad in energy sector.

India is energy deficient country and Russia is energy surplus and therefore, a mutual interest lies in this sector. Indian side feels that there is a clear compatibility between India's needs and Russia's resources. Indian side is adopting a policy to implement the experience of Sakhalin-1 to other oilfields in Russia.¹⁴ India's policy is to promote the idea of India's willingness to offer Russian companies to participate in Indian oil and gas projects, both upstream and downstream, as well as to undertake joint exploration in other countries too. India has geared-up its energy diplomacy and is moving quickly to penetrate in the Russian energy market. India-Russia Civil Nuclear Cooperation Reaffirmed that cooperation on peaceful use of nuclear energy and cooperation in nuclear sector is significant for Russia-India strategic partnership. India-Russia civil nuclear cooperation while long-standing has not been without its ups and downs, however, both the Nations decided to accelerate bilateral civil nuclear energy cooperation. The cooperation in this sector depends much on the manner in which both the Nations conduct their bilateral diplomacy. The two sides welcomed

progress in identifying the sites in India for additional nuclear reactor units to be set up in cooperation with Russia. Both the sides agreed to actively work towards localisation of manufacturing in India under the “Make in India”, mission and in continuation with the series of construction of nuclear power plants.¹⁵It appears that potential sites have been offered in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. It is learnt that President Putin has plans to sell as many as 25 nuclear reactors to India through Russia's state-owned energy giant, Rosatom.¹⁶The pace of both the countries cooperation in nuclear energy is increasing. At present, both the countries are progressing on fulfilling the plans for 12 Russian nuclear reactors at two sites. The recent agreement will increase Indian manufacturing content in these reactors. Unit-II of the Kudankulam plant in Tamil Nadu, will be commissioned soon and the negotiations are at an advanced stage for units III and IV.¹⁷ Both the sides welcomed the action for localization between RosAtom of Russia and the Department of Atomic Energy of India. Both India and Russia reaffirmed their intention to expand the scope of such collaboration and avail the opportunities for expanding mutual capabilities.

Economic Relations:-

India and Russia have also been trying to engage each other to boost-up the economic partnership through Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Today Russia is a WTO member and it also has formed Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan to a “Common Economic Space”. Therefore, it is expected that CEPA with the broader Eurasian region might come-up soon. It is expected that Russia will also invest in the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) project. This project covers an area of about 400,000 sq.km and six states with a population of 178 million. This project incorporates nine mega industrial zones.¹⁸

Bilateral trade between both countries is concentrated in key value chain sectors : machinery, electronics, aerospace, automobile, commercial shipping, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fertilisers, apparels, precious stones, industrial metals, petroleum products, coal, high-end tea and coffee products. Bilateral bodies that conduct economic relations between the two countries include IRIGC, the Indo-Russian Forum on Trade and Investment, the India-Russia Business Council, the India-Russia Trade, Investment and Technology Promotion Council, the India-Russia CEOs' Council and the India-Russia Chamber of Commerce.¹⁹Both Governments have jointly developed an economic strategy that involves using a number of economic components to increase future bilateral trade. These include development of an FTA

between India & the EEU, a bilateral treaty on the promotion and protection of investments, a new economic planning mechanism built into IRIGC, simplification of customs procedures, new long term agreements in the expansion of energy trade including nuclear, oil and gas. Finally, long term supplier contracts in key sectors such as oil, gas and rough diamonds. Companies such as Rosneft, Gazprom, Essar&Alrosa will act as long term suppliers respectively. Russia has stated it will co-operate with India on its "Make in India" initiative by engagement in the development of "Smart Cities", the DMIC, the aerospace sector, the commercial nuclear sector and enhancement in manufacturing of Russian military products through co-development and co-production.²⁰ Russia agreed to participate in the vast, over \$100 billion, DMIC infrastructure project which will eventually connect Delhi and Mumbai with railways, highways, ports, interconnecting smart cities and industrial parks. Both countries have also agreed to work together in the aerospace sector to co-development and co-produce aircraft, examples include the Sukhoi Superjet 100, MS-21, FGFA, MTA and Kamov Ka-226.²¹ Both countries have agreed to streamline their bilateral trade in diamonds through reductions in regulations and tariffs. Due to India simplifying recent visa rule changes for Russians travelling to India, the number of tourists increased by over 22%. In 2011 the Indian consulates in Moscow, Vladivostok and St. Petersburg issued 160,000 visas, an increase of over 50% compared to 2010.²² Both governments have set up a joint study group (JSG) to negotiate the specifications of an agreement, a final agreement would be signed between India and Eurasian Economic Union of which Russia is a part of (also including Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan & Belarus). Thereby, the Indo-Russian FTA would result in a much bigger free trade agreement including India, Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan & Belarus.²³

However, there are still certain issues related to inadequate banking and financial services, lack of brand promotion, removal of discrimination in insurance coverage and quality control concerns are coming-up as a stumbling block in Indo-Russian economic cooperation. The Russian side appreciated that the simplified visa regime for Russian citizens being implemented by the Indian side and this move had contributed to a 24% increase in Russian tourists travelling to India in the year 2011-12 as compared to the earlier years.²⁴ India and Russia are also trying to collaborate on new areas which need to be explored further, like in the area of democratisation process, social policy diffusion, in religious dialogues, in promoting secularism, tolerance, multi-ethnicity, for developments of internal economic

management and planning etc. which are all significant areas for both India and Russia and could be addressed together.

Russia's preference for multipolarity and encouragement for the promotion of groupings like RIC (Russia-India-China), BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa), as well as SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) is intended to create a forum outside the Western block where India and Russia along with other countries can discuss issues without western pressure. Amidst all these positive developments as well as certain concerns, there is a hope that India-Russia friendship and the strategic partnership will scale new heights and it will grow, thrive and blossom in the coming years.

Nonetheless, there is a need to create wider public interest and understanding for developing the relationship, particularly among the increasingly influential younger generations. Without strong public support, it will be difficult to provide greater depth, a sound foundation and long-term stability to this mutually beneficial strategic partnership. There is no substitute for spontaneous and natural people-to people exchanges. India and Russia will need to build direct contacts with the entire spectrum of stakeholders and interest groups in the political, economic, military and other spheres. Today, India-Russia relationship has many positive dimensions and can move on steadily. India's connections with other former Soviet States specially with the two distinct parts of Central Eurasia i.e. five states of Central Asia and three States of South Caucasus is also significant and the relationship is developing significantly over the past two decades since these countries got their independence.

Strains In Indo-Russian Relationship:-

The first concerns the rapidly expanding ties between India and USA, which started with the India US nuclear deal in 2008.²⁵ The second concerns the growing defence relationship between India and USA. Russia's decision to supply Pakistan with the Mi-35 Hind attack helicopters has alarmed the Indian defence establishment. The Russia-Pakistan joint exercises raise many questions. India having its own military exercises with the U.S. and has signed logistics agreements which can eventually give the U.S. access to Indian naval bases. Russia had proposed a Russia-India-China (RIC) forum. India is hesitant about this because of the unresolved issues with China.

Also, Tri-lateral relation between Russia-China-Pakistan left deep impact on India. Russia's growing affinity with Pakistan is bound to give rise to some ruffles between India and Russia. The rivalry between Pakistan and India only gets worse as the latter accuses the former of

breaching international border norms. Pakistan's relationship with Moscow deteriorated during 1980s, when the former allied with the West to fight the Soviet in Afghanistan.²⁶The reason of their rivalry has yet again brought the two countries together, binding them with defence agreements. The reason of their rivalry (Afghanistan) has yet again brought the two countries together, binding them with defence agreements. In June 2014, Russia announced the lifting of its long-standing embargo on arms sales to Pakistan.²⁷In November 2014, Russia and Pakistan signed their first ever military cooperation agreement. The Russians argue that if India can buy defence equipment from the U.S., why they (Russia) couldn't sell to Pakistan.²⁸The problem for India, of course, is the strategic import of such moves by Russia. Then again, India must realise that it's growing proximity to the U.S. reduces it's leverage over Russia. As does Russia's increasing tilt towards China. As always, a bit of history can be useful. Russia leaning towards China to combat the pressure of the West might bring about certain changes in the power pattern in the South Asian region. The common apprehension that India and Russia shared with regards to the long borders they shared with China seems to have lost its significance for Russia, as Russia expands its economic, political, and security ties with China. It would be overrated to call Russia's shift towards Pakistan a move taken by the country to bring India on track. The combination of secure Pakistan and China backed by Russia would mean a huge challenge to India's position in the South Asian region. The allegation however, cannot be ignored either. Russian Defence Minister Gen Sergey Shoigu visited Islamabad to sign an unprecedented Russia Pakistan defence cooperation agreement.²⁹ In a joint statement issued at the conclusion of the third meeting of Pak-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation in Moscow, both, Pakistan and Russia, hoped to collaborate in trade, economy, science, technology, agriculture, education, and culture.³⁰ The growing closeness between Russia and Pakistan is seen as a threat to India's strategic defence moves.

Russia downgrading its military-technical relationship with India from that of an exclusive partner to a preferred partner. Such pragmatism should come as no surprise given that India has diversified its own military import portfolio and no longer considers Russia as its exclusive trading partner. Russian military export overtures towards Pakistan are now perceptible. In a noteworthy development, Russia decided to supply Mi-35 Hind attack helicopters to Pakistan.³¹ Prior to this, Moscow had refrained from supplying lethal military equipment to Pakistan on account of New Delhi's strained relationship with Islamabad-the

legacy of this Indo-Russian military exclusivity can be traced all the way back to the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace of 1971. Consequently, the Pakistan deal caught many geo-political commentators by surprise; some, like Pavel Felgenhauer, have even gone so far as to call it an “important, key change in Russian policy in the region.”³² Conscious of Indian sensitivities, Russian diplomats have been quick—perhaps too quick—to point out that the negotiations are part of an “ongoing cooperation with Pakistan in the field of defence and counterterrorism.”³³ But the 123 Agreement that India signed with the U.S and Russia’s share of military sales to India is now in steady decline. In consonance with India’s enhanced geopolitical status and strategic rapprochement with the U.S., New Delhi has found new partners in the West. Russia’s increasing bond with China also to some extent brings strain in Indo-Russia relations.

India conducts more military exercises with U.S than any other country. The Chinese arms industry is known for reverse engineering foreign-origin military hardware and has already burned Russia in the past when it acquired a small number of Russian Su-27 Flanker jets and then reverse-engineered the J-11B aircraft. In comparison, Indo-Russian military transfers do not have such a checkered past. If China’s questionable reverse engineering practices and its already developed industrial base were factored into Russia’s decision-making calculus, India would emerge as a far superior long-term partner for the Russian arms trade. Going forward, a period of dissonance is to be expected, before India and Russia can adjust to the real-politik of the present.

Concluding Observation:-

India has to rebuild on its strengths and common concerns with the Russians. Both have to revitalize their earlier agreement on sharing intelligence for a joint strategy on terrorism. Indian and Russian anxieties on terrorism need to converge and bring about some positive outcome. India needs to deepen its scientific and technological relations with Russia since a base for this already exists. India can use some creative means to build a Russia-India-China (RIC) alliance. Needs focus is increasing trade and investment ties between India and Russia. After the Ukraine crisis in 2014, the Russia-China relationship has become stronger, with important implications for India & other rising powers. Both Russia & China are being challenged by the United States, politically, economically, & strategically. That also caused for some worries for India. Also, the policy to move towards USA was started way before Modi came into picture is brought some difficulties in the relation between the nations.

Things are not going totally downhill. Latest visit by PM Modi made sure that the ties are renewed and new defence contracts are signed. The leadership in both countries seem to have realised the value of maintaining their partnership and seem to be taking steps towards strengthening the relationship. This is evident from the spurt in the number of senior level bilateral visits as well as interactions at multilateral forums like RIC, BRICS and SCO. In fact, there have been around 40 bilateral visits by senior Russian and Indian officials in 2017 alone. Added to this is an astonishing 22 per cent leap in bilateral trade in 2016-17.

Restoring the lost momentum in ties has been relatively easy because of one reason: there are no fundamental disagreements between Moscow and New Delhi, unlike their relations with the other major powers. The relationship provides both countries with crucial strategic space vis-à-vis other great powers. Both countries aspire for a multipolar world, in which they are significant players. On issues of mutual and paramount importance both countries have consistently supported each other. Some recent instances include India's refusal to join the US-led sanctions on Russia and Russia's unwavering support for India's membership into the NSG. Moscow and New Delhi both voted against the US on the Jerusalem resolution at the UN. More importantly, India voted against a UN General Assembly resolution which condemned the human rights situation in Crimea and Sevastopol, thus declaring its solidarity with Russia. In fact, both the recent UN votes appear to signal some differences with the US on issues that the Trump administration considers its core interests: Israel and Ukraine. Russia-India trade has not grown to great heights despite the encouragement of both states. India has been supportive of Russian positions & has a careful & calibrated response to all Russian actions — in Chechnya, Syria, Ukraine & elsewhere, India has supported Russia. To fight against terrorism is another area where Modi & Putin found a convergence of interest. Thus, the warmth in Indo-Russian relations has been maintained & sustained. Trade between two countries continued to grow. Russia stands firmly with India in its fights against terrorism. Both sides also emphasized the need for comprehensive reform in UN system. They are also good allies in BRICS nations submit. Somehow, at present time in the age of ease of doing business India's changing narrative towards US makes some hazards but India-Russia relations have its roots, on the one hand in the struggle against western Imperialism & colonialism & other hand in India's national interest. Where, India's relation with Russia is highly symbiotic.

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