



## CHANGING NATURE OF INDIA-RUSSIA DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP

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### **Abstract**

*This article provides an overview of the India-Russia defence partnership in the wake of India's diversified defence cooperation with West and European countries. India shared a trusted partnership with Russia from Nehru to the present regime. The presence of the Indian diaspora also strengthened Cultural, Energy and Economic cooperation with Russian Federation. Both countries are cooperative in various dimensions and extend support in international forums. Defence cooperation is an essential feature of bilateral cooperation between India and Russia. The central portion of the Indian arms includes submarines (Vikramaditya); fighting aircraft (MIG-21, 23, 27, 29, Sukhoi-30, Mirage-2000, and Jaguar); and battle tanks (T-72 and T-90) are of Russian origin. However, India's defence agreements with France, the US, Canada, and Israel widened the trusted relations between India and Russia. The main objective of this paper is to analyse India's diversified defence policy and its implications for India-Russia friendship and cooperation.*

**Keywords:** *India, Soviet Union, Cold War, Russia and Defence Policy.*

### **Historical Background: India-Soviet Union Relations**

The India-Russia relationship has evolved into a collaboration on an equal footing. This relationship dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when India was ruled by the British and Russia was dominated by the Czars. Indian freedom warriors were motivated by the Russian Revolution of 1905. The parallelism between the current conditions in Russia and India struck Mahatma Gandhi as well. He formed a strong bond with Russia and corresponded with Leo Tolstoy. The embryonic Indian liberation fight was observed with interest and compassion by Russia's communist leader V.I. Lenin. Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Soviet authorities saw that their revolution had a higher chance of succeeding, and they wanted India to become independent and free. Many Indian freedom fighters, influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution, developed personal relationships with Soviet officials.

Pandit Nehru's ideas formed the Indian National Congress's stance toward the Soviet Union. Jawaharlal Nehru was highly impressed by the Soviet experience after visiting the Soviet Union in 1927 on the 10th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. He was convinced that a poor developing country like India should follow a development model that prioritised social justice, equality, and human dignity rather than the capitalist way. Nehru was confident that India and the Soviet Union must have a close and friendly relationship. It's worth noting that, even before India gained independence, an official notification on establishing diplomatic ties between India and the Soviet Union was made on April 13, 1947. Nehru had a great deal of faith in the Soviet Union. On Kashmir and other critical issues affecting India's national interests, the Soviet Union regularly provided India with crucial political, diplomatic, and strategic support bilaterally and in international forums. India was able to carry out the operations that led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 because of Soviet political and material support and the confidence afforded by the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation. A strong economic and strategic partnership supported this political understanding.



On August 9, 1971, the 'Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation between the Governments of India and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were signed. Like the Soviet Union, which imploded in 1991, it is now history. The treaty is also virtually completely forgotten in Indian public memory, despite being one of India's most important diplomatic and strategic instruments signed after independence. A global situation and the evolution of Indo-Soviet relations influenced the treaty. It also enhanced the relationship, notably in the security domain, by instilling favourable feelings toward the Soviet Union among Indian decision-makers. Did the nature of Indo-Soviet ties in the 1970s and the following decade limit India's options as its geopolitical environment shifted negatively following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979? India privately expressed its dissatisfaction with Moscow's Afghan policy, but the nature of bilateral ties prohibited it from adopting a public stance against it. During the 1980s, India attempted to open up to the United States, but its strong Soviet ties and general perspective on Afghanistan hampered the effort. Pakistan went nuclear throughout this decade, with the United States turning a blind eye. India was practically powerless to intervene (Katju, 2022).

The Cold War was defined by the interaction between the Soviet Union and India. Over nearly four decades, Soviet-Indian relations went through three unique phases, each marked by the ascension of three outstanding leaders: Jawaharlal Nehru and Nikita Khrushchev, Indira Gandhi and Leonid Brezhnev, and Rajiv Gandhi and Mikhail Gorbachev. The rise and fall of a political dynasty in India followed a similar pattern to the Soviet Union. The first period ended in disasters with China, the second with Indira Gandhi's assassination, and the third with the Soviet Union's demise (Mastny, 2010). When many wealthy countries are experiencing economic stagnation, both India and Russia have gained a new sense of self-confidence as a result of their tremendous economic growth. Both India and Russia assume a more significant role on the global stage as major financial giants. The goal of both countries is to create a multipolar world. India appreciates Russia's continued political and diplomatic support on critical problems. India is likewise pleased to see Russia's economic and military recovery and its reassertion in the international arena. Trade and commercial connections remain the weakest link in Indo-Russian collaboration today. There is very little trade between the two countries. Both sides have, of course, indicated their intention to raise the aim (Kundu, 2016).

### **India-Russia Relations in a Post-Cold War Period**

The bilateral relations between the Republic of India and the Russian Federation are known as India–Russia relations. India and the Soviet Union (USSR) had a strong strategic, military, economic, and diplomatic cooperation during the Cold War. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited its strong relationship with India, resulting in a special friendship between the two countries. This relationship is described as a "special and privileged strategic cooperation" by both Russia and India. Politics, defence, civil nuclear energy, anti-terrorism cooperation, and space have traditionally been the foundations of the Indo-Russian strategic alliance.

### **Act Far East Policy**

In the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Prime Minister also introduced the "Act Far East" initiative in the year 2019, which aims to increase India's involvement with Russia's Far East area. "Let us expand the tie between India and Russia even more; India is proud of the achievements of the Indian diaspora, and I am confident that the Indian diaspora here in the Russian Far East will contribute actively to the region's prosperity as well," Modi suggested.



Modi praised President Vladimir Putin's vision for the welfare of Russia's Far East in his speech, stating that the President had opened up economic prospects for India in the region. "By designating the development of the Russian Far East as a 'national priority for the twenty-first century,' President Putin has taken a comprehensive approach to improving everything from the economy, education, and health to sports, culture, and communication," the PM said in the presence of the Prime Ministers of Japan and Malaysia (Chaudhary :2019).

### India-Russia Defence Partnership

New Delhi and Moscow have formed strategic cooperation in numerous sectors throughout the last 70 years of bilateral relations between the two countries. Russia has made a significant contribution to India's technological and industrial growth. Russia produces 75–80 per cent of the defence equipment used by India's armed forces. India and Russia have collaborated on various projects, ranging from space exploration to applied medicine. Russians have long used Indian coffee, spices, and tea products. The strategic partnership between India and Russia in the twenty-first century is built on defence cooperation. India has been obliged to diversify its defence procurement due to the global arms market. Russia has been supplying India with high-quality military equipment. Russia and India have collaborated on new product development and research, such as the BrahMos Cruise Missile, 5th Generation Aircraft, and Multi Transport Aircraft (MTA). Russia continues to be India's dependable, private, and trusted friend and strategic partner (Bakshi, 2006).

**Table: India-Russia Defence Trade**

Ordered	No Designation	Weapon description	Years weapon of order	Year delivery	Delivered
140	Su-30MK	FGA aircraft	2001	2005-2019	132
123	BMP-2	IFV	2006	2007-2008	123
300	T-90S	Tank	2006	2009-2018	300
20	S-400/SA-21	SAM system	2018	2020	S-400/SA-21
250	V-46	Diesel engine	2002	2004-2008	250
8	AK-630 30mm	Naval Gun	2003	2014-2017	6
80	Mi-8MT/Mi-17	Transport helicopter	2008	2011-2013	80

In terms of collaboration in the areas of defence, nuclear, space, science and technology, and oil and gas, Russia and India have complementary interests. Russia has increased its participation in multinational organisations and the United Nations (Pandey, 2020). Russia's market share assures India to remain an important supplier of new guns and spare components. The military-technical cooperation, which involves knowledge transfer and collaborative production, is a one-of-a-kind connection that India values greatly (Kapoor, 2019).

### India's Defence Partnership with other Countries

South-East Asia, the Middle East, and East Asia have all built bilateral links with India. Since China has become a strategic competitor, India has formed strategic alliances with Russia, the United States, Israel, and France. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought about significant reforms in India's foreign policy. In comparison to his predecessors, Narendra Modi has travelled abroad more frequently.



By spreading an Indian nationalist mindset, he has marketed India as a "global guru." India has promoted yoga, harmony, peace, and happiness (Pandey, 2020).

Since the early 1920s, India has been unable to develop relations with Israel due to Arab–Israeli conflict and conflicts over Jewish national ambitions. India and Israel have had solid cooperation on various defence, security, and global topics since 1992. India has maintained strong relations with Israel without compromising its position on Palestinians. Recent years have seen an increase in Indo-Israeli defence cooperation. The major stakeholders in both countries have backed India's viewpoint. Sustainability, progress, and long-term stability are all dependent on the countries' capacity to discover a common cause for cooperation (Bramhayya, 2020).

Since 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has built robust and strategic cooperation with the United States, which has resulted in a high level of FDI and technology. It had eventually resulted in economic development. The military and strategic collaboration have been bolstered. In 2008, India and the United States inked the historic Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal (123 accords). According to this agreement, India and the United States have opened their nuclear reactors and agreed to share information and cooperate on atomic energy. Atomic energy will only be used for civilian purposes. In the Indo-US defence collaboration, there have been several exciting advancements. In 2019, commerce between India and the United States climbed to US\$18 billion. During Narendra Modi's first term, India imported more weaponry from America, making it its second-largest arms supplier. The Indian Prime Minister has created strong defence connections with the United States, which has resulted in India's military being strengthened and modernised. In 2016, India and the United States inked a one-of-a-kind Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA). In addition, in 2018, India signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), which has resulted in the development of Indo-US defence cooperation (Bramhayya, 2020).

The two countries recently pledged to strengthen defence cooperation across all areas during bilateral meetings between India's defence minister Rajnath Singh and his French counterpart Florence Parly in New Delhi. Defence industrial cooperation was a significant issue with discussions on the Make in India initiative and future cooperative ventures in the aerospace and maritime domain. The ministers recognised some strategic problems and discussed China and Afghanistan-related topics. Parly stated that France was prepared to deliver additional Rafale fighter jets to India. The strategic allies' deployment of the same aircraft underlined their relations' "true asset and strength" (Pabby and Chaudhury, 2021).

## **Multilateral Cooperation**

### **Russia- India- China (RIC)**

On June 23, 2020, A few eyebrows were raised when India decided to attend a (virtual) meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, India and China (RIC). Amid the tensions on the Line of Actual Control, the dominant calls were for a more decisive westward shift in India's foreign policy. A RIC meeting seemed incongruous in this setting. The statements made by the leaders at the conference highlighted their disparate concerns. The irony in the Chinese Minister's demand to oppose bullying, reject power politics, and uphold the rule of law in international relations was lost on him. Sergey Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, has criticised unilateral coercive tactics aimed at settling scores with geopolitical adversaries and overthrowing regimes. S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, stated



emphatically that big nations must follow international law and recognise the legitimate interests of partners in order to maintain a stable world order (Raghavan :2020).

### ***Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)***

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a multilateral arrangement between major powers like Russia-China-India. India joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a permanent member in June 2017. India's involvement in the regional grouping, along with Pakistan's, has raised expectations for regional cooperation between India and China. The Indian establishment accepted the Chinese leadership's invitation and joined the regional group. With the onset of complex interdependence, India adopted a strategy of partnership with all major states to maintain stable relationships with all nations in the area, especially China, in order to exploit the benefits of advanced nations' economic progress in the multi-polar world. However, it was a pivotal period in mid-2017 when India got involved in a military confrontation with the PLA at the Doklam trijunction region (Teckchandani :2021)..

### ***Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS)***

BRICS is also one of the multilateral arrangements between Russia and India, which strengthened their relations. Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC) are developing countries that are expected to be the future dominating suppliers of manufactured goods, services, and raw materials by 2050. China and India will overtake the United States as the world's leading providers of manufactured goods and services, respectively, while Brazil and Russia will overtake the United States as the world's leading suppliers of raw materials. South Africa joined the group, which is now known as BRICS, in 2010 (Majaski :2020).

### **Objectives of BRICS**

- To promote and achieve economic development.
- To achieve regional development.
- To remove trade barriers.
- Optimum use of resources.
- Building harmony and relationships among nations.
- To become a dominant supplier of manufactured goods, services and raw material by 2050.

### **India on Ukraine Crisis**

As the US seeks to mobilise worldwide support to isolate Russia in the aftermath of its invasion of Ukraine, India, a close Indo-Pacific friend and fellow democracy, has declined to join the diplomatic alliance against Russia. New Delhi made it plain that it has no intention of harming Russia's relations by neither condemning Russian actions nor joining UN resolutions against Russia. India has managed to maintain strong ties with Russia while significantly strengthening strategic ties with the US. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has made it difficult to maintain this position. India's disengagement is very noticeable because it holds a rotational seat on the UN Security Council. India has legitimate worries about taking a tougher stance towards Russia—no "snap" should be expected. However, it should prompt Delhi to expand its supplies of critical defence equipment. India, on the other hand, has more immediate worries. Russia continues to be the world's leading supplier of essential arms. Without a regular supply of parts, India's military capabilities, particularly air power and underwater warfare, would gradually deteriorate—at a time when India is engaged in a strategic standoff with China. In addition, India is afraid that Moscow may send advanced military technology to Pakistan. In the



coming days, India's stance on the invasion may harden. India, on the other hand, has compelling reasons to retain ties with Russia. This invasion, on the other hand, should speed India's diversification of defence supply to countries that are more aligned with India's long-term security objectives (Rossow, 2022).

## Conclusion

In their decades-long bilateral relationship, India and Russia have had ups and downs. For the first time in two decades, the India-Russia annual summit was cancelled. According to an Indian news report, the postponement was due to "serious misgivings" about New Delhi joining the Indo-Pacific initiative and Quad. "The India-Russia Annual Summit did not take place in 2020 due to the COVID outbreak," a spokesperson for India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) responded. This agreement was reached between the two governments (Rajagopalan, 2020).

The partnership between India and Russia cannot be sustained solely based on defence and historical ties. To develop a robust economic and strategic partnership, new modalities of cooperation must be found in light of fundamental changes in international relations. Both India and Russia will have to learn to navigate their relationship in the face of challenges posed not only by bilateral variables but also by regional and global ones. Both countries attempt to reinforce their positions in an international order in flux (Kapoor, 2019).

Without a doubt, India and Russia are at the forefront of the global economic scene, with a strong focus on financial inclusion as a means of achieving long-term progress. As a result, it is only natural for the two "old friends and allies" to expand and deepen their partnership to usher in the next era of progress. India and Russia are intended to serve as examples of peaceful, mutually beneficial cooperation and great friendship between two nations. The intimate connections between New Delhi and Moscow, built on a shared vision of bilateral relations development, bring to life the adage: 'An old and trusted friend is better than two new ones' (Russia Plus, 2019).

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