

## India Russia Relations: From Cold War to Post-Cold War Era

Dr. Tawseef Ahmad Bhat\*

(\*Lecturer in Political Science, Government Degree College Pattan, Baramulla.

***Abstract:** Indo-Russia relations are rooted in a history of trust and common interests. Russia and India share a vision of multi polar world order. India's relations with Soviet Union were multi-faceted covering various spheres, as both countries have similar security, political, and economic interests. In cold war period, without joining any power bloc, India went on to maintain pretty cordial relations with Soviet Union. Although defence and nuclear energy are two core dimensions of the diplomatic ties between India and Russia, economic cooperation has the potential to unleash a new era in the bilateral relationship. Both the countries have enhanced their nuclear, strategic, political and cultural cooperation. Contemporarily, both the powers are pretty vital to each other for a variety of crucial reasons. The paper tries to highlight the multi-dimensional relationship between India and Russia ranging from cold war period to post-cold war era. The attempt has also highlighted current perspectives of the Indo-Russian relationship.*

**Key Words:** India, Soviet Union (Russia), Trade, Agreement, Defense.

### Introduction

Relations with Russia are a key pillar of India's foreign policy, and Russia has been a longstanding time-tested partner of India. India has maintained strong relations with Russia since its independence. Indo-Russia relations are rooted in a history of trust and common interests. Russia and India share a vision of multi polar world order. In cold war period, without joining any power bloc, India went on to maintain pretty cordial relations with Soviet Union. India signed friendship treaty with Soviet Union on 9th of August, 1971. This relationship got little diverged during disintegration for a brief period but joint initiatives were taken to restructure the relations to new heights. Multi-dimensional progress and developments took place in the relationship between the two which includes economic, political, cultural, oil, space, defence, nuclear and strategic cooperation. The relationship is also important in order to maintain a proper balance in the region, and also to counter the influences of rising China and United States of

America. Both the countries are individually trying to strengthen relation with many agreements in various sectors, and from other side, the two countries together being the members of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia, India, China dialogue and BRICS are also making influential efforts to boost their unity. The latest visits by the bilateral leadership, and recent nuclear deal and trade agreements between the two countries has further boosted & strengthened the relationship.

### **India and Russia during Cold War: a brief Review**

Cold war took place after 1945 till 1991. It was dominated by various factors. The two military groups who were involved here included Capitalist bloc supervised by United States of America and Communist bloc supervised by Soviet Union. Various nations from Western Europe and Eastern Europe joined either of the groups. However, most nations from Africa, Asia and Latin American continent didn't join either of the blocs, as they had recently achieved independence and hence, tried to maintain distance from the military blocs to maintain their liberation. For this purpose they formed Non Alignment movement (NAM), and India is one of the founding members of the NAM. Despite this, when Pakistan became member of the military group of the United States like SEATO and CENTO, this prompted India to rethink its stand during cold war. Hence, without joining the bloc politics, India maintained good relation to Soviet Union rather than United States. The Indo-Soviet connection began in the mid-1950s, developed intermittently through the late 1960s, pointed early during the decade of the 1970s, and subsided in the 1980s, becoming a sensible mutual acknowledgement of complementary as well as divergent interests. During these decades, despite occasional chafing, the groundwork was laid for a close economic and defense relationship between the world's largest democracy and the world's original communist state. India's relations with Soviet Union were multi-faceted covering various spheres, as both countries have similar security, political, and economic interests. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union started showing interest in India and voiced its optimism for friendly cooperation. This was driven by the Soviet desire to expand contacts in international arena. Soviet Union wanted to promote better relations with the non-aligned and newly emerged countries of Afro-Asian region. In June 1955, Nehru visited the Soviet Union, and this was the first visit of that country by the Indian Prime Minister. By the mid-1950, India and Soviet Union

appeared all poised to establish closer relations. This trend was considerably strengthened in 1956, when during visit to India, Soviet leaders Nikolai Bulganin and Alexie Hozygin referred to Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of India. In response, India voted with the Soviet Union in 1956 in the United Nations General Assembly, on the resolution of calling for democratic elections in Hungary which was then under the Soviet occupation.

India did not choose to join the Soviet camp, it only sought to use the Soviet supplied arms as a stepping stone to achieve strategic autonomy. The Indian non-alignment was, in fact, demonstrated a few years later, when Pakistan agreed to Soviet peace mediation at Tashkent after the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war. Meanwhile, before Indo-Pakistan would fight the third round of war in 1971, Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation was signed in August 1971. This treaty added a defining moment in India Russia relation. It marked a high point of bilateral cooperation. The treaty safeguarded India's security, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and made China to desist from getting involved in 1971 Indo-Pak war in favour of Pakistan. The treaty was so important for both countries, that in 1993, it was further extended after deleting security clauses. India met most of the defence needs from the Soviet Union. The relations between India & Russia were very cordial for about a decade. After the 1971 war, when India conducted the nuclear test in 1974, the Soviets did not condemn it and, in fact, went on to support India with the supply of heavy water for the nuclear programme which got halted when American and Canadians took back their supplies. India, on the other hand, also showed outright support to the Soviet Union. In 1979, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, India at that time in the UN General Assembly abstained from voting which had advocated that Soviets stop military intervention in Afghanistan. Various changes made by Gorbachev in their foreign policy brought it nearer to that of India. Both countries were already having space cooperation, and in this regard, on 19th April 1975, India's Aryabhata was launched on a Soviet Kosmos-3M rocket from Kapustin Yar range. In 1979, Bhaskara-I was launched from Kapustin Yar range once again. Indo-Soviet friendship reached its peak. But disastrous part of this story is that this period was very short lived. Gorbachev's experiment with Glasnost & Perestroika failed, bringing down the Soviet Union. After communism collapsed, democratic governments were installed one after the other in most of the east European countries.

## **India-Russia in Post-Cold War Era**

### **Economic Relation**

Although defence and nuclear energy are two core dimensions of the diplomatic ties between India and Russia, economic cooperation has the potential to unleash a new era in the bilateral relationship. The low level of bilateral trade between the two countries is constantly been noted, and pledges are duly made every year to have a joint commission to look into the challenges the private sectors of both countries are facing in setting up business. One of the most important steps in reformulating the relationship was also to manage India's rupee-ruble debt that had accumulated over the years of the Soviet Union's favourable trade policy. The current bilateral commercial diplomacy is to the tune of 10 billion dollars, with a target of reaching 20 billion dollars by 2020. One of the core features of Indo–Russia trade has been the presence of state enterprises mediating their interactions in each other's territories. This has had a positive effect because the Russians are more comfortable in dealing with Indian state officials due to such ties existing since the Cold War era. Furthermore, it has led to India and Russia explore relations in various dimensions ranging from national security to investment intensive technologies. In the post-Soviet decade, not only have Indian companies evolved business interests in Russia, but several Russian firms have also tied up with state governments in India to promote joint ventures. Also they have shown a willingness to invest in India in construction, major infrastructure projects such as dedicated freight corridors and industrial clusters, smart cities, and engineering services, sharing technologies and skills. Indian companies are exploring major investment options in Russia, especially in natural resources such as coal, fertilizers, hydrocarbons, minerals, and rare earth metals. Russia, being world's largest supplier of oil and natural gas, is well positioned to meet those needs. Indo-Russia cooperation in this area will ensure India's energy security. India-Russia annual summit was held in New Delhi on December 11, 2014, during which an agreement was signed by Russian oil company Rosneft Corporation, which will deliver 10 million tonnes of oil to India, annually for 10 years. According to the International Energy Agency, India is expected to have the highest rate of growth of crude demand globally through 2040. The sale of a 98% stake in Essar Oil to a consortium led by Russian state-owned oil giant Rosneft is significant step in the process of deleveraging the

balance sheets of Indian corporate. The Russia-India investments in the oil and gas sector and exports to third countries need to be energized. Russia is an important partner in peaceful uses of nuclear energy and it recognizes India as a country with advanced nuclear technology with an impeccable non-proliferation record.

A joint study group to establish a Free Trade Agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union held its first meet in Moscow on 31st July, 2015. The two sides decided to enhance multi-modal connectivity through the International North-South Transport Corridor. Defence, security, energy and technology are the core issues that dominate the discourse of India-Russia Strategic Partnership while issues related to connectivity and accessibility are yet to find mention. The International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is an attempt by Russia, Iran and India to boost transport connectivity amongst themselves and the Central Asian states. The INSTC links the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Caspian Sea to the Russian Federation. Studies by various transport experts have proven that the INSTC could provide multiple benefits to all players, especially to Russia and India. With the Sagarmala initiative of India and the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway, the corridor will connect Europe and Russia to the ASEAN states. From the Indian point of view, the INSTC and India-Myanmar-Thailand highway could transform India into a potential transit hub. India also gains from the corridor strategically as it helps India bypass Pakistan and reach Europe via Iran (also helps reach Afghanistan via Iran) and market goods easily.

### **Political Relation**

Politically, both the nations have been trying to restructure their relationship after the cold war era. The leaders of the two countries are making visits to each other, promoting diplomatic relations and consistently working to further boost their all round relationship. From political scenario, New Delhi needs Moscow's support in the former's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and the Russians have backed the Indian position on Kashmir. The annual Summit meeting is the highest institutionalized dialogue mechanism under the Strategic Partnership. It was not until Vladimir Putin became Russia's President in 2000 that the bilateral ties were put on a solid foundation. Counterterrorism is another area where both countries find a

convergence of interest. Both countries strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms, stressing the need for an effective global effort in dealing with the terrorist menace. The two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in combating terrorism in 2002, and a Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism was set up. India and Russia also share concerns about the aggravation of the security situation in Afghanistan, including along its borders. India openly shared Russia's concerns over developments in Syria. India's stance on Syria will certainly help cement its ties with Russia countering the earlier feeling that India was not coming forward to support Russia in difficult times.

### **Nuclear and Strategic Cooperation**

India–Russia nuclear cooperation goes back to cold war times of 1960s. In 1961, India had concluded research and development agreements with Russia in Hungary for the Rajasthan Atomic Power Station (RAPS). India concluded a contract with the USSR in 1976 for supplying of heavy waters. During the Cold War period, Russia also supported India by supplying fuel at Tarapur in 1982 and in 1988, agreed to help construct reactors and supply light water for reactors at Kundakulam after Pokhran–II. Despite certain concerns, India continues to have robust defence cooperation with Russia as the arms have proven their mettle and majority of our arms are of Soviet origins, which have come to be well accepted in the Indian military circles. Russia as a new country in the modern political map of the globe is a little more than ten years old. It is actually the principal successor state to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). Russia was given the permanent seat in United Nations Security Council which was held by USSR till 1991. The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by two years of relative uncertainty in relations between India and Russia. Thereafter, India and Russia decided to redefine their relations define based on the ground realities created by post-cold war situation. Moscow began exploring the possibilities of resuming the Indo-Russian ties. President Yeltsein replaced the old 1971 treaty with the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in January 1993 while visiting India.

The 2000-01 summit between Indo-Russia distinguished by the signing of the Declaration of Strategic Partnership that pledged cooperation in the spheres of politics, trade and economy, defence, science and technology, and culture. More than 80 bilateral agreements have been

signed between India and Russia as part of Indo-Russian strategic Agreement of 2001. To further promote defense ties, the two are working on developing a fifth-generation combat aircraft since 2007. The MIG-35 has had India embark upon a mega defence modernization programme. A historic moment in bilateral relation took place on 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2009, when India signed a nuclear deal with Russia apart from the deal. Both countries were having negotiations for construction of two or more nuclear power units at Kundakulam. Indian government recently announced the purchase of five S-400 supersonic air defense systems from Russia, costing around \$6 billion. Two sides agreed that the Kamov 226 helicopter would be manufactured in India. During 13<sup>th</sup> annual summit, a cooperative civilian nuclear energy roadmap was agreed between the two countries. Running till 2030, sixteen to eighteen new reactors will be constructed with installed capacity of 1000MW. India and Russia agreed to strengthen the defense partnership in line with the “Make in India” programme. In September, 2018, 19<sup>th</sup> Indo-Russia annual bilateral summit took place to further rejuvenate the relationship.

### **Cultural Relation**

Culture occupies a special place in our relations. Our cultural exchanges are centuries old and have been put on a strong new foundation in the last five decades. The Russian classics have been translated into all major Indian languages. Most of the works of Indian writers have been translated into Russian; Russian plays are regularly performed in India in translation; Russian music, dance and films attract great attention of the Indian public. Indian people are elated to know about the sustained curiosity of Russian people in various regions have in Yoga, Dance, Indian music, Literature, Ayurveda and Indian Philosophy. The Cultural Centre of Russia in Mumbai has always endeavoured to enrich the multifaceted cultural life of one of the most attractive cities of India by presenting Russian films, ballet, music, dances, literary and cultural heritage of friendly people of Russia. Today this Cultural Centre stands as a premier cultural centre not only in Mumbai but also in the western part of India, and it has a vital role in bringing the people of Russia and India closer and closer. The major boost to cultural relations took place when Vladimir Putin visited India on 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> January 2007, cultural agreements were signed between the two countries regarding cultural exchange programme between the two countries during 2007-2009. The year 2008 was celebrated as the “Year of Russia in India”, and the year

2009 was celebrated as the “Year of India in Russia”. Similarly, the “festival of Indian culture” was efficaciously held in Russia during 2011, and 2012 was acknowledged as the year of “festival of Russian culture” in India. During the official visit of Putin to India in 2012, the programme of cultural exchanges between Russia and India for 2013-2015 was signed. It was planned that the two countries will share technical performances, exhibitions of contemporary art, and visits of art groups, museum staff, writers and filmmakers. During 2015 May, Namaste Russia, a “festival of Indian culture in Moscow”, was inaugurated by India President Pranab Mukherjee. It was a six month long festival starting in May and ending in November 2015. It was organized jointly under the patronage of Russian Ministry of Culture and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). This festival seeks to “enhance and boost cultural bonds that build solid bridges of friendship and understanding between peoples of both countries”.

### **Current Perspective of the Relationship**

In October, 2016, nineteen documents related to cooperation in defence, space and technology were agreed while Russian President visited India for the 17<sup>th</sup> annual summit. In the very next year, the two countries adopted a joint statement, ‘Partnership for Global Peace and Stability’ and a ‘Roadmap of Events’ to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between them. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Indo-Russian Intergovernmental Commission meeting acted as a preparatory meeting held in Goa during October 2016. It aimed to strengthen cooperation in the spheres of trade and investment and expand cooperation in the oil and gas sector. The two sides reiterated implementation of the INSTC project and Green Corridor for custom facilitation. India is aggressively working with Russia and supporting it under the Pharmacy 2020 programme. Wockhardt and Pharmacy ECO are jointly producing insulin under the same programme. India held an international drill with Russia in 2017. India dispatched around 350 soldiers with anti-submarine warfare and aircrafts for Indira combat exercise in Vladivostok. In the Indira-2017, India deployed assets from army, navy and air force for the first time making it a tri-services operation in an integrated theatre. The exercise facilitated knowledge of each other’s doctrines, tactics and procedures. During 2018 visit of Russian President, various important agreements were signed which include Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian

Federation and NITI Aayog, MoU between Russian and Indian Railways, ISRO and Federal Space Agency of Russia 'ROSCOSMOS' on joint activities in the field of Human Spaceflight Programme and Action Plan for Prioritization and Implementation of Cooperation Areas in the Nuclear Field. India expressed hopes for cooperation in natural gas in fields at Gydan Peninsula and Gulf of Ob. To promote cooperation in science, both sides have agreed to work together under the framework set by the Arctic Council with the Russian Scientific Centre in the Spitsbergen Svalbard archipelago. A couple of MoUs on space cooperation and Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS) have been signed. Both the countries have agreed to strengthen cooperation amongst the anti-narcotics agencies while also deepening their interactions on counter terrorism and prevention of extremism. The two have agreed to closely cooperate with each other to maintain stability in Afghanistan.

### **Why India & Russia are important to each other?**

To maintain balance in the region and to counter the rise of China and lessen the United States influence, both are collaborating to each other. Both the countries are members of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, RIC and BRICS. Both the countries are good economies and are good partners to each other from the days of cold war. The rise of China in the post-Cold War era today is something that is adding that additional push to the contours of the Indo-Russian relations. The resurgence of Russia in the world to project itself as an independent pole in the international system suits India as it will prevent any form of Unipolar assertion by either the US or China. The second driver of Indo-Russian relation is the convergence of views about regional power play. Russia is comfortable with a strong India in South Asia while India would prefer an independent Russia at the global level as it would give India more space to manoeuvre its strategic policy. The third and most important driver of India's relationship with Russia is that in India, there is very little obligation to deepen ties with Russia in contrast to the US. It has been felt that Russia has served Indian national interests well and would continue to do so. India stands, to benefit from its relationship with Russia on issues like Kashmir, Energy supplies, access to Central Asia and technology outputs. Russia also stands to benefit from its relation because India is the second largest arms market for Russia.

## Conclusion

India has to rebuild on its strengths and common concerns with the Russians. 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. Needs focus is increasing trade and investment ties between India and Russia. It is clear that India-Russia relations remain vital for both countries amid a changing regional and global security environment. With more emphasis on defence deals as well as energy ties in recent times, India tried to ward off the impression that it is tilting towards the United States of America. The relationship between India and Russia needs to be nurtured in the changing global environment. Traditionally, both countries have favoured a rule based international order with both subscribing to the notion of a multi-polar world. Despite new sources for defence supplies, Russia remains a crucial partner for India. India will be a growing market for hydrocarbons as well nuclear energy and thus, energy offers considerable potential for mutually beneficial cooperation. India's globalizing service industries and corporates can help diversify the Russian economy and develop bilateral trade. India and Russia cannot afford to dilute their bilateral relations and they both require each other. Therefore, they need to synergize cooperation in the economic and security arenas. In the current context, the challenge is to re-examine the current state of the partnership.

## References

1. Arun Mohanty, "Saga of India-Russia Diplomatic Relations", *Russia-India Report, The Times of India*, April 27, 2011.
2. Santosh K. Mehrotra, "*India and the Soviet Union: Trade and Technology Transfer*", Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
3. Jyotsna Bakshi, "India-Russia Defense Cooperation", June 2006, IDSA, New Delhi.
4. Kanwal Sibal, "India's Relations with the US and Russia", *Force*, 13 June 2011.
5. India, Russia Sign Nuclear Deal, *The Times of India*, 7 December 2009.
6. Katherine Foshko, "*Re-Energising The India-Russia Relationship*", Gateway House Research Paper No. 3, September 2011.

7. P. Stobdan, “*India-Russia Strategic Partnership Common Perspectives*”, (ed.), IDSA, New Delhi, 2010.
8. Vidya Nadkarni, “India and Russia: The End of a Special Relationship?”, *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (AUTUMN 1995).
9. “JOINT STATEMENT OF INDIA AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ON STRATEGIC ISSUES”, PIB release, 6 November 2001 available at <http://pib.nic.in/archieve/lreng/1yr2001/rnov2001/06112001/r0611200110.html>.
10. Gulshan Sachdeva, “India-Russia Strategic Partnership Strengthened with Putin Visit”, *World Focus* (New Delhi) Vol. 25: No. 10-12, October-November, 2004.
11. Vidya Nadkarni, “*Strategic Partnership in Asia: Balancing without alliances*”, Routledge, London, 2010.
12. Nivedita Das Kundu, “*India Russia Strategic Partnership*”, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2010.
13. International events: The program of cultural exchanges between Russia and India in 2013-2015 is approved, 25 December 2012. (<http://www.prlib.ru/en-us/news/Pages/Item.aspx?itemid=6001>).
14. “President Pranab Mukherjee inaugurates Namaste Russia festival in Moscow”, 11 may 2015. (<http://currentaffairs.gktoday.in/president-pranab-mukherjee-inaugurates-namaste-russiafestival-moscow-05201522622.html>).
15. Sanjukta Maharana, “Indo-Russia Security Cooperation’, *World Focus*, Annual Issue, 408, December 2013.