

**INDIA- RUSSIA RELATION IN THE CHANGING PARADIGM OF INDIAN POLITICS
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS FROM 2014-2020**

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Abstract

India and Russia share's a historically deep and resilient partnership that has evolved over decades rooted in mutual trust and strategic support. A defining moment in this relationship was the Indo- War of 1971 during which the then Soviet Union extended crucial diplomatic and military backing to India at a time when the entire global community was aligned against it. This support laid the foundation for a "special and privileged strategic partnership" that has continued into the 21st century with Russia as its successor. Despite changing geopolitical dynamics such as India's growing ties with the West and Russia's increasing proximity to China the bilateral relationship has remained steady marked by cooperation in defence, energy and multilateral forums. During the COVID-19 pandemic India and Russia demonstrated solidarity through medical assistance and vaccine collaboration reinforcing their enduring partnership. Furthermore amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict India has maintained a position of neutrality advocating dialogue and diplomacy while balancing its national interests. This stance reflects not only India's pragmatic foreign policy but also its long-standing recognition of Russia's support in critical moments of history. In a nutshell the India-Russia relationship exemplifies continuity amid change adapting to new global realities while preserving the core of mutual respect and cooperation between them.

Key words: diplomacy, conflict, neutrality

Research Problem

The statement of problem is in a changing scenario of the geo political condition will India and Russia's longstanding relationship remain sustainable in terms of economic pressures or ongoing conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war. Or it will shake the strong foundation of trust between the two or will it remain cordial to preserve the "special and privileged strategic partnership" in the 21st century.

Objectives:

1. To analyse the key areas of cooperation between India and Russia particularly in defence, energy and multilateral platforms.
2. To evaluate India's policy of strategic neutrality in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its implications for bilateral relations.
3. To explore the role of crises (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) in reinforcing India-Russia cooperation and solidarity.

Research methodology

The methodology is been used is qualitative data and secondary data various newspaper links , magazines, articles are also been considered it.

In 2014 India got a new government when Narendra Modi from the BJP became the Prime Minister with thumping majority of votes in the same year Russia was busy in dealing with its own problems following the Ukraine crisis and the takeover of Crimea¹. Because of this Russia's relationship with Western countries became very tense. These situations pushed forward both India and Russia to rethink their foreign policies but in different directions.

For Russia the tension with the West forced it to depend more on China for trade, security and political support. Meanwhile India was already becoming cautious about China's growing power in Asia to balance this India started moving closer to the United States which was also focusing more on Asia through its "pivot to Asia" strategy. As a result India's economic and defence partnerships with the US increased along with this India also improved its relations with Japan, countries in West Asia and its

neighbouring nation . Overall India expanded its global partnerships while Russia became more dependent on China due to Western pressure. Despite of growing closeness to the west India -Russia remain cooperated in various sectors.

New Dimensions of India–Russia Cooperation under PM Modi

Even though some doubts existed on both sides about the future of India–Russia relations Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin worked consistently to strengthen this long-standing partnership. Their efforts created a sense of optimism with many observers noting that the diplomatic and political ties between New Delhi and Moscow remain as strong as they were during the Soviet era. To support this partnership both countries maintained regular high-level engagement. Besides the annual India–Russia summits the defence ministers of both nations meet frequently as co-chairs of the Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC) where they review ongoing defence projects and explore new areas of cooperation. Similarly India’s External Affairs Minister co-chairs the Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC) with Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister. These meetings along with other ministerial-level interactions held every year ensure steady communication and coordination across multiple sectors of government.

The Scenario in Various Sectors:

Energy Sector

After 2015 the energy partnership between India and Russia made notable progress. Both countries signed an MoU to work together on the exploration and production of hydrocarbons in Russia. Significant agreements were also reached in the nuclear energy sector during 2014–2015. These included plans to build at least 12 nuclear power plants in India over the next 20 years promote “local manufacturing” of nuclear plant components and expand cooperation in crude oil supply and helicopter engineering².

In 2016, several major hydrocarbon deals were also concluded. Oil India Limited secured a 23.9%³ stake in Vankorneft while ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) acquired an additional 11% in the Vankor oilfield. Russia’s Rosneft also bought a 49% stake in Essar Oil. This \$12.9-billion acquisition became the largest foreign direct investment (FDI) in India’s energy sector and Russia’s biggest overseas investment⁴. With a cumulative investment of about \$15 billion Russia has become India’s largest overseas destination for oil and gas investments. In 2016 alone Indian companies invested \$5.4 billion in Russian energy assets. Another major development was Russia becoming a new long-term supplier of LNG to India. The first shipment of Russian LNG arrived at Dahej, Gujarat in June 2018 marking a new milestone in India–Russia energy cooperation⁵.

Economic Corridor

Russia primarily exports energy products such as oil, gas and nuclear materials as well as defence equipment. Although India and Russia have expanded cooperation in the energy sector through mutual investments, direct energy supply via pipelines continues to face logistical and geopolitical challenges. Despite these hurdles bilateral investment has grown significantly. The earlier goal of achieving \$30 billion in two-way investment by 2025 was achieved much earlier in 2017 itself as a result the new target was raised to \$50 billion by 2025 along with a goal of reaching \$30 billion in bilateral trade⁶. In terms of trade performance the total India–Russia bilateral trade between January and September 2019 reached USD 7.55 billion. Although trade between the two countries fell sharply from 2013 to 2016 it recovered in 2017 and continued to rise throughout 2018 and 2019.

Major Indian imports from Russia include:

- Mineral fuels, mineral oils, and related products
- Mineral waxes
- Precious and semi-precious stones, natural or cultured pearls

- Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, and mechanical appliances
- Electrical machinery and equipment
- Fertilizers

Major Indian exports to Russia include:

- Pharmaceutical products
- Electrical machinery and equipment
- Machinery, boilers, and mechanical appliances
- Organic chemicals
- Vehicles (excluding railway or tramway equipment)

Defence Paradigm

By 2014 the United States briefly overtook Russia to become India's largest arms supplier and India became the biggest foreign buyer of American weapons. Although Russia continued to be India's main defence supplier during 2014–18 its total arms exports to India dropped by 42 percent compared to 2009–13. Russia still holds a significant 58 percent share of India's total defence imports followed by Israel at 15 percent and the US at 12 percent. However this is lower than the 70 percent share Russia enjoyed during 2010–14⁷.

Even with this decline Russia remains an essential defence partner for India especially because of its supply of spare parts, joint production programmes and transfer of technology benefits not easily available from other countries. The dip in 2014 was gradually corrected. In 2016 major inter-governmental agreements were signed including the purchase of the S-400 Triumph air defence system and four Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates⁸. These deals were finalised in 2018 alongside agreements for the production of Ka-226T helicopters in India⁹.

Russia continues to be India's primary source of defence equipment, providing over 60 percent of the weapons used by the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy. Key platforms such as the S-400 Triumph system, BrahMos cruise missile, Sukhoi Su-30MKI aircraft, T-90 tanks and Talwar/Krivak-class frigates highlight the depth of cooperation¹⁰.

Over time India–Russia defence cooperation has evolved from a simple buyer-seller arrangement to a deeper partnership involving joint research, development and production of advanced technologies this collaboration is visible in joint military exercises as well. The first-ever Tri-Services Exercise, INDRA-2017 was held in Vladivostok. The naval exercise Indra Navy-2018 took place in the Bay of Bengal and the Tri-Services INDRA-2019¹¹ exercise was conducted in Babina, Pune and Goa.

Major joint programmes between India and Russia include:

- BrahMos cruise missile development
- Fifth-generation fighter aircraft programme
- Sukhoi Su-30MKI project
- Ilyushin/HAL transport aircraft
- Ka-226T utility helicopter production
- Joint development of select frigates

Important defence equipment purchased or leased from Russia:

- S-400 Triumph system
- Ka-226 helicopters (200 to be built in India under Make in India)
- T-90S Bhishma tanks
- INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier
- Other S-400 air defence components

Russia also plays a crucial role in supporting the Indian Navy's submarine capabilities:

- India's first submarine (Foxtrot-class) was supplied by Russia
- India relies heavily on Russia for its nuclear submarine programme
- INS Vikramaditya—India's only aircraft carrier—is of Russian origin
- 9 out of 14 conventional submarines in the Indian Navy fleet are Russian-made

Bilateral Trade

In recent years India–Russia relations have faced some challenges due to India’s growing engagement with Western countries and Russia’s increasing closeness with China. However despite these shifts the partnership between India and Russia continues to remain strong this was clearly demonstrated when Prime Minister Modi visited Vladivostok to attend the 20th annual India–Russia summit and the 5th Eastern Economic Forum¹². He became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit the Russian Far East and the visit aimed to give “new direction new energy and new momentum” to bilateral cooperation. India and Russia engage in trade across a wide range of sectors, including defence, energy, pharmaceuticals, IT, metallurgy, fertilizers, agro-industries and infrastructure. In 2019–20 the value of their trade stood at USD 10.11 billion¹³ although both countries recognize that the actual potential is much higher.

The India–Russia strategic partnership is built on six major pillars: political cooperation, defence collaboration, trade and economic ties, civil nuclear energy, counter-terrorism efforts and space cooperation. During the Cold War India enjoyed a close and multidimensional relationship with the Soviet Union. After the USSR dissolved Russia inherited these strong ties and both countries continued to share a “Special Strategic Partnership.”

The Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission (IRIGC) serves as the main mechanism for managing and coordinating government-level cooperation in various areas. Both countries also work closely together in several major international organisations and connectivity initiatives such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

India remains the second-largest market for the Russian defence industry. In 2017 around 68% of India’s military equipment imports came from Russia reaffirming Russia’s position as India’s principal defence supplier. In 2020 India’s Defence Minister also visited Russia to participate in the World War II Victory Day¹⁴ celebrations further highlighting the depth of historical and strategic ties between the two nations.

Civil Nuclear Energy Relations

India and Russia have built a strong partnership in the field of civil nuclear energy highlighted by their joint development of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP).

Both countries signed major agreements to construct 12 additional nuclear power plants in India over the coming decades. These agreements also include plans for the “localised manufacturing” of components for Russian-designed nuclear reactors within India. Alongside this, important deals were finalised in 2014 and 2015 for the supply of crude oil from Rosneft to Essar underscoring the deepening strategic energy partnership between the two nations¹⁵.

Space Relations

The space partnership between India and Russia is equally significant. The year 2015 marked the 40th anniversary of the launch of India’s first satellite Aryabhata which was sent into space aboard a Russian Soyuz launch vehicle strengthening this long-standing cooperation Russia also agreed to train Indian astronauts for India’s first manned space mission—Gaganyaan¹⁶.

President Vladimir Putin expressed similar sentiments on the eve of India’s 68th Republic Day praising India’s achievements and reaffirming that the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership with India is a permanent priority in Russia’s foreign policy. Concerns about Russia’s increasing engagement with Pakistan or its strengthening ties with China should not be overstated. Russia’s partnership with China must be understood in the context of U.S. attempts to isolate Moscow while India continues to be a central part of Russia’s strategic outreach towards Asia Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept of 2016 clearly states its commitment to enhancing its partnership with India grounded in shared foreign policy goals, historical friendship and strong mutual trust. This includes long-term cooperation in trade, economy and strategic sectors.

A major symbol of the strength of this relationship came in April 2019 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the Order of St. Andrew the Apostle, Russia's highest civilian honour. This award recognised his significant contributions to advancing the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership and giving new direction to India–Russia relations.

Further Strengthening More Ties of India–Russia Relations

In 2017 which marked 70 years of India–Russia diplomatic relations Prime Minister Modi was invited as the Guest of Honour at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF). Although both countries had already issued a ten-year vision document in 2014 they again released a new joint declaration titled “*Vision for the 21st Century*”¹⁷. Many of the priority areas listed in 2014 reappeared in the 2017 document but once again the joint statement lacked concrete, practical steps to make bilateral cooperation more effective.

A major innovation in India–Russia diplomacy came with the introduction of informal summits. The first such meeting took place in Sochi on May 21, 2018 signalling a new style of engagement built on deep trust and confidence between Prime Minister Modi and President Putin. As highlighted in the 2018 joint statement during President Putin's visit to India these informal summits reflect the desire of both countries to maintain close and frequent consultations on important bilateral and global issues. Both sides agreed to continue this practice reaffirming their commitment to the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. The Sochi Summit demonstrated the intention of both leaders to keep communication channels open and work together as major powers responsible for global peace and stability¹⁸.

Another important development was the increasing cooperation between Indian States and Russian Regions aimed at building “sister city” partnerships. Efforts were made to link Assam with Sakhalin, Haryana with Bashkortostan, Goa with Kaliningrad, Odisha with Irkutsk and Visakhapatnam with Vladivostok. These sub-national partnerships are expected to deepen economic and cultural engagement¹⁹.

India and Russia have both increased their cooperation in science and technology focusing on new-age fields like the Fourth Industrial Revolution advanced technologies and cybersecurity. In 2017 they created a High-Level Committee on Cooperation in High Technologies which selected several joint research and development projects²⁰. Many fresh steps have been taken since then to strengthen this partnership.

Connectivity has also become a key part of Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy. One major project in this area is the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) which India has been actively promoting. After India became a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) cooperation with Russia²¹ under this platform also expanded significantly.

India and Russia have shown strong and active collaboration in the energy sector. Agreements such as the *Programme of Cooperation in Oil and Gas (2017–18)* and an MoU between Gazprom and Engineers India Limited for studying a gas pipeline to India marked important progress.

The Annual Summit between the Prime Minister of India and the President of Russia is the most important institutional mechanism in their strategic partnership. By 2020 the two countries had held 20 Annual Summits alternating between India and Russia. During Prime Minister Modi's 2019 visit 14 MoUs were signed in areas such as trade, investment, defence cooperation, road transport and oil and gas.

India–Russia Relations During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic did not significantly affect India–Russia relations. Even before the pandemic the partnership was experiencing some strain because both countries were gravitating toward opposite geopolitical camps in the growing rivalry between the United States and China. India worried about China's aggressive behaviour began moving closer to the U.S. and the Indo-Pacific grouping. At the same time Russia facing increasing hostility from the West strengthened its partnership with China. Although neither India nor Russia is fully comfortable with these shifts both countries have consciously tried to protect their bilateral relationship from being weakened by global politics. Their

bond continues to survive on long-standing diplomatic goodwill and defence cooperation remains the strongest

foundation of the partnership.

The most prominent example of this defence cooperation is India's purchase of the S-400 long-range air defence system. Although there were fears of possible delays due to the pandemic India's Ambassador to Russia, Bala Venkatesh Varma clarified that the delivery schedule would not be affected. India is purchasing five S-400 units in a deal worth over \$5 billion even though this risks U.S. sanctions. India's decision to continue with the deal despite pressure clearly shows how important its defence partnership with Russia remains²².

Humanitarian Support Between India and Russia During the Pandemic

Both India and Russia extended significant humanitarian assistance to each other during the Covid-19 crisis. Russia publicly thanked India for supplying essential medicines such as hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and paracetamol during the early stages of the pandemic. Additionally, Russia's primary defence export agency, Rosoboronexport, contributed \$2 million to the PM CARES Fund²³ to support India's Covid-19 response. Vaccine cooperation also became an important pillar of support. Russia's sovereign wealth fund agreed to supply 100 million doses of its Sputnik V vaccine to Dr. Reddy's Laboratories in India. This agreement followed broader arrangements between the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and Indian manufacturers to produce 300 million doses of the vaccine within India. Deliveries began in late 2020, with Sputnik V being promoted by Russia as the world's first Covid-19 vaccine²⁴.

During India's devastating second wave, Russia sent 22 tonnes of medical relief. Two aircraft operated by Russia's emergency services (EMERCOM) arrived in India carrying 20 oxygen-generating units, 75 ventilators, and 2,00,000 packets of essential medicines. The Russian Ambassador, Nikolay R. Kudashev, stated that this aid was provided in the true spirit of the "special and privileged strategic partnership" between the two countries and as part of their close cooperation in combating Covid-19²⁵.

Indo–Russia Relations in the Post–Covid Era

After the pandemic, India and Russia continued to strengthen their relationship as reflected in the 21st Annual Summit held in December 2022. The joint statement titled "*India–Russia: Partnership for Peace, Progress and Prosperity*" celebrated two major milestones 50 years of the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation and 20 years of the Strategic Partnership²⁶ highlighting the deep, long-standing bond between the two nations. The summit also included the first 2+2 Dialogue between the Foreign and Defence Ministers, along with a meeting of the Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military-Technical Cooperation during the summit both leaders stressed the importance of expanding economic cooperation and identifying new long-term sectors for sustainable growth. They also emphasized improving connectivity through major projects such as the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the proposed Chennai–Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor, both of which are expected to boost trade and strategic linkages.

On Afghanistan the two sides discussed regional security issues, post-pandemic economic recovery and the evolving situation in the country. They acknowledged that India and Russia share similar views and concerns on Afghanistan and welcomed the progress made through NSA-level consultations.

In terms of global diplomacy India and Russia reaffirmed their alignment on many international issues and agreed to deepen cooperation in multilateral forums especially at the UN Security Council. Defence cooperation remained a key pillar with both sides agreeing to expand joint manufacturing in India of spare parts and components for Russian-origin weapons under the Make in India initiative. They also supported establishing joint ventures to meet Indian defence needs and to export to friendly nations.

Despite the challenges of the Covid-19 period both Prime Minister Modi and President Putin expressed satisfaction with the consistent progress in the 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership' the

summit resulted in the signing of 28 agreements, including government-to-government agreements, covering a wide range of areas such as defence, space, finance, power, education, culture, health and scientific research.

Some of the most significant developments in the India–Russia partnership include the renewal of the military-technical cooperation agreement for another 10 years, extending it until 2031²⁷. The two countries also signed a deal for the joint manufacture of nearly 6 lakh AK-203 assault rifles in Amethi, Uttar Pradesh, under which Russia agreed to waive royalty charges²⁸. In the energy sector, agreements on fossil fuel imports, including coking coal for India’s steel industry, as well as investments by Vostok Oil, were renewed and expanded. Additionally, Russia has begun the deliveries of the S-400 long-range air defence systems to India. Despite various challenges, including the global pandemic, India–Russia relations have remained strong. Russia’s timely assistance during India’s second wave of Covid-19 further reinforced its position as a trusted and reliable partner reflecting the country’s shared commitment to peace, cooperation and mutual support.

Conclusion

Even with global tensions, geopolitical shifts and the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, India and Russia successfully maintained stable and cooperative relations. Russia’s major humanitarian support during India’s second Covid wave strengthened the image of Russia as a trusted and time-tested friend. Going forward both countries continue to work toward peace, stability and deeper strategic partnership.

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