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India-Russia relations

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Bilateral ties with Russia are a key pillar of India's foreign policy.

India sees Russia as a longstanding and time-tested friend that has played a significant role in its economic development and security.

This longstanding and time-tested partnership is chiefly driven by shared interests of multilateralism, and global peace and prosperity.

It follows the principles of:

Mutual trust;

Respect for each other's territorial integrity and core national interests, and

Alignment of interests on the most critical international and regional issues of war and peace.

Evolution of Ties:

The roots of India-Russia relationship can be **traced back to the early 20th century**, when India was **under British rule and the Tsars ruled Russia**.

The **Russian Revolution of 1905** inspired Indian freedom fighters, and figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were greatly influenced by the ideas emanating from Russia at that time.

The **official establishment of diplomatic relations** between India and the Soviet Union was announced even before India gained independence, **on April 13, 1947**.

The relationship between the two nations took on a truly strategic dimension during the Cold War era, with strong political, strategic, military, economic, and diplomatic ties.

However, India-Russia relations have faced challenges, particularly in the post-Covid scenario.

Issues related to Russia's close ties with China and Pakistan have contributed to a strain in the relationship, leading to geopolitical complexities for India.

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Defence and Security Cooperation:

Defence cooperation is a cornerstone of the India-Russia relationship.

Russia has been a **key supplier of defence equipment to India**, including aircraft, tanks, submarines, and missiles.

The two countries engage in joint military exercises and share intelligence and counterterrorism cooperation.

According to the **latest SIPRI's International Arms Transfers 2022 report**, Russia continues to be India's largest arms supplier.

In October 2018, India had signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the **S-400 air defence missile** systems.

Both countries regularly conduct the **Tri-Services exercise 'INDRA'**.

During the **17th Annual Summit**, agreements were reached for S-400 air defence systems, frigates (Project 1135), and the formation of a joint venture to manufacture Kamov-226T helicopters **under 'Make in India' initiative**.

Russia plays a **vital role in assisting India with its submarine programs**, providing several conventional submarines, including India's first submarine '**Foxtrot Class**' and support for the nuclear submarine program.

Economic Collaboration:

Economic cooperation between India and Russia covers various sectors, including energy, pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, and information technology.

Bilateral trade between India and Russia **touched \$25 billion (2022)** on account of increased purchase of discounted oil from Russia.

Investment opportunities and joint ventures are actively pursued to enhance economic ties.

Bilateral investments between the two countries reached US\$30 billion in 2018.

Indian investments in Russia total around US\$13 billion, including energy and telecom sectors. Russian investments in India amount to about US\$16 billion, involving sectors like banking and telecom.

Bilateral trade has been growing steadily, with both countries **aiming to reach a target of \$30 billion by 2025**.

India **exports** pharmaceuticals, iron & steel, apparels, and more to Russia. Russia exports defence equipment, nuclear power equipment, fertilizers, and more to India.

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Space and Nuclear Cooperation:

India and Russia have a history of collaboration in the space sector.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has **launched several satellites** using Russian launch vehicles.

The Soviet Union launched India's **first unmanned satellite Aryabhata** in 1975.

Today, Russia is supporting India's **1st manned space mission 'Gaganyaan'**.

Russia has also been a reliable partner in **India's nuclear energy program**, including the construction of nuclear power plants.

Russia **recognizes India as a country with advanced nuclear technology** with an impeccable non-proliferation record.

Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) is being built in India.

Both India and Russia are implementing **Ropur Nuclear Power Project** in Bangladesh.

Cultural Exchanges and People-to-People Contacts:

Cultural exchanges play an important role in strengthening India-Russia ties.

Both countries have cultural centers that promote language, arts, and cultural activities.

Tourism between India and Russia has been increasing, allowing people-to-people contacts and fostering greater understanding.

Science and Technology:

In 2007, India and Russia signed a **framework agreement on cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space**, covering satellite launches, GLONASS navigation, remote sensing, and societal applications of outer space.

Institutional Mechanisms for Science and Technology Cooperation: The Working Group on Science and Technology under IRIGC-TEC, the Integrated Long Term Programme (ILTP), and the Basic Science Cooperation Programme are key institutional mechanisms for bilateral Science and Technology cooperation.

New Initiatives: India-Russia Bridge to Innovation, cooperation in telemedicine, creation of a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), and the Russia India Network (RIN) of universities are some of the new initiatives aimed at advancing Science and Technology cooperation. Top of Form Bottom of Form.

International Cooperation:

India and Russia cooperate closely on various global forums, including the **United Nations, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization**.

Both countries share similar views on major international issues, such as multilateralism, counterterrorism, and the need for a multipolar world order.

Energy and Infrastructure:

India is expected to **become the world's third-largest energy consumer by 2025**, and Russia plays a crucial role as a partner in the energy sector. Hydrocarbons, along with nuclear energy, are active areas for exploring cooperation between India and Russia.

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In 2016 witnessed the creation of a bilateral investment fund by the **National Infrastructure Investment Fund (NIIF)** of India and the **Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF)**. This fund aims to facilitate high-technology investments in both Russia and India, strengthening economic ties and fostering collaboration in various sectors.

North South International Transport Corridor (INSTC) is designed to improve transportation links and reduce transportation time and costs between India and Russia.

Cyber Security:

India and Russia have an “**Agreement on cooperation in International Information Security**,” which signifies their commitment to work together in the realm of cyber security.

Both countries have been **actively working on closer coordination to combat radicalization and cyber terrorism** facilitated through social media platforms by groups like the Islamic State (IS), as well as Pakistan-based outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Hizbul Mujahideen, and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Russian Quantum Center (RQC) plans to provide ‘**quantum cryptography**,’ a cutting-edge technology that can significantly bolster information security in sectors like banking, national security, and homeland security.

Quantum cryptography relies on the principles of quantum mechanics and the intrinsic properties of individual particles or waves of light (photons) to develop an unbreakable cryptosystem, making it highly secure against hacking attempts.

Terrorism:

“**The Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism and Organised Crime**” signed in 2017 is a step towards consolidating the benefits accrued in field of security and seeks to jointly fight the new and evolving risks and threats.

The Agreement would reinforce relationship between India and Russia through exchange and sharing of information, expertise and best practices, and would help in curbing terrorism and enhancing security in the region.

Russia supports India in combating terrorism and backs India’s proposal of **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)**.

Challenges in India-Russia relations:

The lack of involvement of the private sector; absence of logistics; poor connectivity; and more recently, the stalling of the International North-South Economic Corridor, have resulted in higher costs

There has been a **gradual decline in the defence orders of India** from Russia because of:

India’s **desire to diversify its defence imports** and therefore a heightened competition for Russia with other suppliers

Dissatisfaction in India with post-sales services and maintenance being offered by Russia

Moreover, India has also had concerns in the past regarding supply and servicing of defence supplies.

Russian officials have repeatedly **criticized the idea of the Indo-Pacific and the Quad**, arguing that it is meant to contain China

Russia believes that, India is currently an object of the Western countries

The USA factor:

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The source of divergence between Indian and Russian interests lies in the continuing problems that Russia faces in its relations with the US

The consequence of this confrontation is that Moscow has increasingly leaned on China both for support as well as a way to undermine American power

At a time of greater prospects with India-USA engagements, it might get difficult to maintain the balance in India-Russia ties as well

Way ahead:

India and Russia **continue to share a common strategic rationale for their relationship**: apart from bilateral synergies, the two are members of various multilateral organisations including BRICS, RIC, G20, East Asia Summit and SCO, where avenues for cooperation on issues of mutual importance exist.

The fact that Russia holds a **permanent seat at the UN Security Council** and has **been a supporter of India** on various issues including Kashmir at the international forum is of critical importance for India

India would do well to take steps to shore up its relations with Russia to prevent it from becoming more dependent than it is already on China.

India and Russia's relationship cannot flourish on defence and historical linkages alone.

Both India and Russia will have to learn to navigate their relationship amidst challenges emerging not just from bilateral factors but also regional and global ones, as both countries seek to strengthen their position at a time of flux in the international order.