India-Russia Relations at Engagement in Present Scenario: An Overview

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ABSTRACT
I would like my paper gives an overview of the India-Russia relations. This paper examines India–Russia relations after the year 2000. Political cooperation between India and Russia has emerged as the dominant framework in their bilateral relations. This is indications the mutual cooperation between countries in the sphere of politics, economic & trade, defence, terrorism and on cultural spheres. The Russian President Putin described India–Russia relationship as ‘Declaration on Strategic Partnership 2000’ during his New Delhi visit. The article argues that India–Russia relations remain steady in multilateral and bilateral context but some strains have come up in regional context of their relationship, mainly pertaining to Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, since India and Russia are keen to preserve their time-honoured relationship, these issues can be overcome through enhanced interaction in forums such as Brazil–Russia–India–China–South Africa (BRICS) and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This paper also remarks about both the states foreign policy structures which indicated the importance of their bilateral relations and their other common foreign policies. It also gives both the states view on international problems concerned with fighting terrorism as both the countries are the major sufferer from terrorism and thus supportive to each other and shares common views on the matter.

Key words: Strategic Partnership, terrorism, BRICS, SCO.

Introduction
The Russian Revolution of October 1917 had great impact on freedom struggle of India. The Indian youth specially appreciated the Revolution. They thought that if the Bolshevik party can overthrow the autocratic Czarist Empire through their consistent struggle then their united struggle can also overthrow the British Empire from India. After the visit of Soviet Union Jawaharlal Nehru became the staunch supporter of Communist Government. The new age of Indo- Soviet relation started after independence. The diplomatic relations with Soviet Union were established on 13th April 1947.

Indo- soviet political relations have been harmonious for several decades. It was India in the third world country that has enjoyed such broad and stable relations with the USSR. During the cold war, the major concern of Soviet Union foreign policy was the USA. It was USA who gave Marshal Plan and Trueman Doctrine against the Soviet Union to defend Communism in the East Europe. In the beginning of the cold war both USSR and USA searched their area of influence in India and Pakistan. After independence USSR gave financial and technical assistance to India. Many industrial unit and electric projects were started with the support of USSR in India. On the other hand USA supported Pakistan. In very simple words both countries were searching its area of influence in Asia. The shift in soviet policy towards Asia is seen in the mid 1960’s. This shift was an obstacle for Indo-Soviet policy. But soon, both the countries assured the importance of each other with increasing pressure in their security prospective, since US-China-Pakistan...
alliance passed a threat to them. On the issue of Kashmir USSR was in favour of India. When in the United Nation, Soviet Union supported the position of India, again the political relations started with new energy.

India and USSR signed an Indo-soviet treaty of friendship, peace and Co-operation in 1971 with the subsequent support by the Soviet Union to India over the Kashmir issues and help in consolidating the ties between the two countries (Jayapalan 2001). The beginning relations between the two countries would be better understood through the context of soviet’s third world policy. During freedom struggle in India, the Soviet Union delegate supported India's demand for independence and stood firmly on Indian side against the issues of racial discrimination towards the Indians in South Africa in April 1945; at San Francisco conference of the UN, the Indo-soviet relations could not develop along friendly lines on the account creation barriers between the peoples. After independence, the presence of capital in India and its continued membership in British Commonwealth of nations created suspicion in the Soviet Union leaders that India is still on Anglo- America colony (Adams 1989).

New Phases of Indo-Russia Relations:

The ups and downs have been seen in Indo-Russia relations, though relations remained smooth and continuous of distinct phases in their history and development. These phases relate to the national interests of these two countries as well as each of these phases has some relation to the global situation. According to the time period these relations developed in different ways during 1947-1956, 1956-1971, 1971-1985, 1985-1996 &1996 onwards. In each of these phases Indo-Russian relations have grown or declined depending on the perceptions and experiences that both the countries have had mainly with the Western powers. The rough period in Russian-Indian relations after 1985 clearly arose from the felt need of both to connect more seriously with the West. The restabilization of relations between the two after 1996 materialized again when both Russia and India experienced that the West, especially the United States, did not live up to their expectations to deliver its promises to both these countries.

Each of these phases has some distinct characteristics in terms of political and trade relations. For instance, in phase 1956-1971 and 1971-1985 trade between the two countries was state dominated but this ended after phase 1985-1996. During phase 1996 onwards trade has dominated by military hardware and joints military production between the two sides. There is a fundamental base line in the relation between these two countries that has built up over the years. This base involves India’s dependence on military hardware imports from Russia, political support on its position on Kashmir and other economic, cultural and political links. Currently both countries find themselves on similar platform on issues ranging from terrorism, impact of globalization, Iraq, etc. There is thus a common vision between the two countries that seems to be re-emerging as the test of bilateral ties lies in the commonality of approach to problems and conflicts.

Political relations:

Ties between Russia and India, both bilaterally and regional issues within the context of multilateral formats like the G-20, BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and RIC (Russia, India, China), formed the cornerstone of the foreign policies of both countries in 2016. The economics of the engagement is also significant, with Russia
still facing Western sanctions and India in a phase of uncertainty after demonetization of its high value currency.

Relations between Russia and India peaked for the year in October, when Russian President Vladimir Putin met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for their annual summit, in the verdant surroundings of Goa. Not only were the traditional pillars of defence, nuclear energy, space and energy security addressed, emphasis was placed on getting economic ties to reach their potential. In a ‘Partnership for Global Peace and Stability, they “pledged to pursue new opportunities to take the economic ties to unprecedented heights, achieve sustainable development, promote peace and security at home and around the world, strengthen inclusive and transparent global governance, and provide global leadership on issues of shared interest.” In its just unveiled ‘Foreign Policy Concept’ for 2016, Russia says it “is committed to further strengthening its special privileged partnership with the Republic of India based on the convergence of foreign policy priorities, historical friendship and deep mutual trust, as well as enhancing mutually beneficial bilateral ties in all areas, primarily in trade and economy, with a focus on implementing long-term cooperation programmes approved by the two countries.”

**Strategy Cooperation on Terrorism**

Both Russia and India have faced the problem of terrorism, India has seen it in the context of its military presence in Kashmir and Russia has seen it in Chechnya and both the countries are supportive of each other on the issue of terrorism. India and Russia are agreed that there is no justification for terrorism, and this must be fought against, without any compromise. Russia has supported the Indian draft in the United Nation on Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism [CCIT]. The two sides signed a MoU on cooperation in combating terrorism in December 2002. A Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism meets from time to time and its fourth meeting was held in Delhi on 24 October 2006. Indian and Russian militaries held joint antiterrorist exercises Indra-2012, from August 5 to 16 near Russia’s border with Mongolia and China. A combined group of Russian and Indian armies will carry out reconnaissance, blocking and destruction of terrorist groups (Nautiya 2008).

**Modi’s Moscow Visit**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Moscow on December 24 and 25 for the annual Summit Meeting with President Vladimir Putin. This will be his 23rd and probably last foreign trip during 2015 unless he also stops over in Kabul on his return from Moscow. This time around last year, Indo-Russian ties were a bit frosty. Russians were complaining about the Americans overtaking them as the number one arms supplier to India. They expressed disquiet and even sought retribution by ending the arms blockade to Pakistan to offset the loss. Indians on their part were frustrated by the Russian failure to meet delivery schedules, tendency to increase costs, and reluctance to transfer technology and supply spares. In fact, ties with Russia had started drifting during the Manmohan Singh era, with deals inked on defence and nuclear issues remaining only on paper.

Now it seems that both Modi and Putin are all set not only to straighten the loose ends of existing projects but also bring new big items on the table. This could well bring back Russia as India’s top military hardware supplier.

Modi is visiting Moscow after concluding a string of summit level meetings with the United States, France, Germany, Israel, United
Kingdom and most recently Japan, at each of which defence and security aspects received robust attention. This, along with Modi’s drumming up of foreign investments for his ‘Make in India’ initiative, would have made the Russians jittery about actually losing an established market.

The Modi visit comes against the backdrop of Western economic sanctions against Russia, fall in oil prices, Russia’s war against ISIS in Syria, and its recent standoff with Turkey. Much to India’s surprise, Moscow has shown remarkable resilience by weathering all the odds. It has stood up against the West and demonstrated its political strength and military prowess by taking on the ISIS in Syria. Clearly, Russia has rebounded on the world stage and, all said and done, it will be a factor in deciding the future course of the political settlement in Syria.

**Russia-India Strategic on Ukraine or Syria**

Although it is hard to find any firm Indian position on Russia’s combat mission in Syria or on its standoff with Turkey, Modi has so far eschewed from siding with the West over any crisis involving, be it Ukraine or Syria. This ambiguous stand underlines Russia’s significance in India’s geostrategic calculus, a position that no other power can replace and a circumstance that is not likely to be altered any time soon.

So far, India has escaped the political ramifications, but at the same time it has also failed to capitalize on Russia’s pivot to Asia. Only China seems to have benefited by intensifying economic and political ties with Russia. China has bailed Russia out through a series of big energy deals. This has also helped Russia significantly by offsetting its reliance on the European market. Russia’s cooperation with China has since intensified. Here, it is worth mentioning that India had missed a similar opportunity soon after the Soviet collapse. But it is not too late. Russia’s defence industry, except shipbuilding remains intact.

Squeezed by Western sanctions, Putin appears to be turning to the old-trusted friend India as a fast-growing outlet for exports and also benefit from Modi’s ‘Make in India’ drive to regain Russia’s market share. Russia seems already worried about the US pushing several big-ticket items for co-production and co-development in India. Clearly, Modi’s overt message last year that Russia is unable to satisfy the growing ‘Make in India’ demand appears to have been noticed in Moscow. On his part, Modi is unlikely to slide on ties with Moscow. Modi and Putin have met each other several times during the year including at forums like BRICS, SCO, G20, etc. Modi also seems mindful of the risk of relying totally on the US; since the latter could falter on thorny issues like trade barrier, nexus with Pakistan, and possible snapping of cooperation should India opt for nuclear weapons testing. India also needs to be careful about the United States attempting to transform India into another client state like Pakistan.

**India is Russia’s strategic partner: Russia**

A total of 16 agreements signed after Putin and Modi held discussions saw a range of pending deals come to fruition, in the fields of defence cooperation, like an inter-governmental agreement on the purchase of the S-400 ‘Triumf’ missile defence system, energy security, nuclear issues, cyber security and anti-terrorist cooperation. Another key issue that came up during the 17th India - Russia summit was the celebration of 2017 in a manner befitting the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations being established between the two countries. A series of events
have already been launched to foreground the anniversary.

Modi highlighted the significance of the issue, saying, "As we approach the 70th anniversary of the establishment of our diplomatic ties next year, India and Russia are celebrating and building on the achievements of our past. We are working to model a partnership that befits our common ambition and meets our shared goals for the twenty-first (21st) century."

Putin and Modi approved a range of events that depicted the "width and depth of multifaceted relations that the two countries have, spanning diverse fields including political, defence, energy, trade, economy, finance, investment, culture, education, think-tanks, science and technology, sports, youth, tourism, people-to-people exchanges," the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement. Relations with Russia are a key pillar of India's foreign policy. Under the special and privileged partnership the two countries share, several institutionalized dialogue mechanisms operate at both political and official levels to ensure regular interaction and follow up on cooperation activities.

However, the issue of Russia's increasing ties with Pakistan has the potential to strain bilateral relations. After the first ever joint military exercises, the first ever foreign office consultations were also held between them earlier this month.

Defence relations:

The defence deals reached at the summit included the purchase of five S-400 missile systems (known as the 'Growler' in NATO nomenclature), joint production of Ka-226T ('Kamov') helicopters, and the acquisition and joint production of four state of the art Admiral Grigorovich-class (Project 11356) guided-missile stealth frigates. The 'Kamov' helicopter deal is a key deal, being seen as a huge boost for the government's flagship 'Make in India' initiative. India will initially import and then manufacture Russian Kamov Ka-226 T light utility helicopters. The two countries also agreed to conduct an annual military conference. The Defence Minister-level India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission for Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC) met in New Delhi on October 26 to follow up on the significant decisions in defence cooperation announced at the Goa bilateral Summit. An important focus of discussions at IRIGC-MTC was on after-sales product support of Russian platforms and equipment. A combination of approaches is now being implemented to address it effectively, including long-term indents, life cycle contracts, collaboration in setting up workshops in India and creating manufacturing capacities in India for spares, components and sub-assemblies. India, a leading global importer of defence hardware, is currently undergoing a $100-billion upgrade of its mostly Soviet-era military equipment. The Indian media reported in early-November that the Defence Acquisitions Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Parrikar, has approved acquisition by the Indian Army of 464 Russian T-90MS tanks, the latest version of the T-90, which is already being manufactured in India under licence and with a progressive degree of indigenization. Valued at over US$ 2 billion and reported to be the world's largest tank contract in the last 15 years, it is to be implemented as a Make in India project.

India Russia New relationship

Prime Minister Modi will be visiting Russia from June 1-3 June 2016 as guest of honour at the St Petersburg Economic Forum at which India will be the guest country. Contrary to criticism in certain quarters, our relations
with Russia have not been neglected since he took over. Defence ties have been carefully nurtured. Our economic relations remain feeble, though lately a welcome upswing in energy ties has occurred. Modi’s visit to St Petersburg for an economic event indicates a shared desire to strengthen the trade and investment pillar of our strategic ties.

**Current Issues:**

Some major issues of dissonance have appeared between the two countries over the last few years. The first concerns the rapidly expanding ties between India and USA, which started with the India-US nuclear deal in 2008. The second concerns the growing defence relationship between India and USA. India has so far been heavily dependent on Russian armaments with more than 70 per cent of its weapons being sourced from Russia. Although in absolute terms Russia is still the largest supplier of defence equipment to India, its share in overall imports has progressively declined. Most recently, India’s reported decision to sign the three "foundational" defence Agreements with USA, viz., Logistics Support Agreement (LSA), Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for Geospatial Cooperation, has surfaced as a cause of serious concern for Russia. The latter feels that India is virtually entering into a military alliance with USA, which will severely restrict Russia’s ability to share sophisticated defence technology with it.

The frequency and comfort level in meetings between Modi and Obama are perceived to be higher than with Putin. Modi will travel to USA next month, his fourth visit in two years. Obama created history by visiting India twice in his term, as also to become the first US President to attend India’s Republic Day celebrations as Chief Guest in January 2015. In addition, Modi and Obama have interacted closely in several international fora like East Asia Summits, G-20 Summits, COP21, and others. As against this, meetings between Modi and Putin have been more formal and limited to two annual Summits and BRICS Summits.

**Opportunities**

Modi and Putin need to give much greater personal attention to building and strengthening the India-Russia partnership. This task cannot be delegated to Foreign Ministers or Foreign Offices. Prime Ministers from Nehru to Vajpayee have been the driving force behind the successful engagement with Russia. In the current scenario also, it would devolve upon Modi to take charge of bilateral ties with Russia, as he has done with several other significant partners.

**Is India Losing Russia?**

With the international system in a state of flux, we are witnessing significant political changes between nations. U.S.-China relations have come under great strain, as evidenced by their adversarial stand with regard to the South China Sea. Russia is ceding space to China with regard to East Asia. There seems to be a return to Cold War–like dynamics between Russia and the United States. It is being reported that Russia has placed nuclear-capable Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, which borders Poland and Lithuania. The missiles are capable of hitting targets as far away as Berlin. Their differing positions with regard to the crisis in Syria and ISIS underline the tension between the two.

To the surprise of many observers, India-Russia relations, who have stood the test of time, also appear to have been affected by
this trend, with Russia apparently upping its security ties with Pakistan, India’s traditional rival. For many in India, Russia’s decision to go ahead with its Druzhba (Friendship) 2016 military exercises with Pakistan immediately after the Uri terrorist incident, and its reticence in fully backing India on terrorism emanating from Pakistan at the recently concluded eighth BRICS Summit in Goa, are seen as worrying developments. From the perspective of a stakeholder in this bilateral relationship, the questions that come to one’s mind are: How worried should one be about these developments in India-Russia relations? Also, what should be done to ensure that there is no fundamental realignment in the relations between the two nations?

If one disregards the almost seventy-year history of relations between the two nations. The two countries have established substantial trust and understanding, a convergent worldview, and a stake in preserving a relationship that few countries can claim to have. On the security front, the Russians have been stepping up joint military exercises with Pakistan since 2014. The two naval exercises, Arabian Monsoon 2014 and Arabian Monsoon 2015, were followed up by Druzhba 2016, which was a two-week long military exercise conducted in Pakistan’s Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province involving seventy Russian service personnel.

While the naval exercises had combating crime groups and drug trafficking as their objective, Druzhba 2016 went a step further and had more conventional objectives, like training for combat in mountainous areas and taking on armed groups.

Conclusion:

Relations between Russia and India peaked for the year in October, when Russian President Vladimir Putin met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for their annual summit, in the verdant surroundings of Goa. Not only were the traditional pillars of defence, nuclear energy, space and energy security addressed, emphasis was placed on getting economic ties to reach their potential. In a ‘Partnership for Global Peace and Stability, they pledged to pursue new opportunities to take the economic ties to unprecedented heights, achieve sustainable development, promote peace and security at home and around the world, strengthen inclusive and transparent global governance, and provide global leadership on issues of shared interest. The North South International Transport Corridor is likely to soon become functional, raising the prospects for reduced transportation time and costs between the two countries, and providing a much required boost to bilateral economic ties.

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Learning acquired in youth is an inscription on stone.

~ Indian Proverb