

War in Ukraine: The Future of India-Russia Relations

Jagdish Bhagwat Phad

(Ph.D. Scholar, JRF)

Dr. Rafiq Zakaria College for Women, Chha. Sambhaji Nagar, 431001.

E-Mail: Jagdishphad71@gmail.com

Abstract

On February 24, 2022, Russian forces initiated an extensive invasion of Ukraine. In contrast to, the position of the US and the strategic allies of the US, India's stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine was different. Indian government chose to maintain a "calculated public neutrality" towards Russia despite its uneasiness at Moscow's conflict. Thus, the Modi government has so far refrained from publicly naming Russia as the 'initiator of the conflict.'

In the past few years, India has minimized its arms purchases from Russia and is now relying more on the US, Israel, and France. The relationship between India and Russia is under threat due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the decline of the Russian economy. Unlike the Cold War era, Russia is not a major global player. For both strategic and economic reasons, Russia will probably need to link itself even more closely with China. Thus, Russia's relationship with China will strengthen. Due to its scepticism of Russia, India has to look for alternative allies and offshore balancers, especially the US.

Keywords: *India, Russia, Ukraine, the USSR, China, Trade, Energy, G20, SCO, Defence.*

Introduction

Indo-Russian strategic and cordial relations date back decades. India and Russia are Cold War-era allies. In August 1971, India and the then Soviet Union signed 'the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation,' which established a mutual strategic partnership. This treaty was the zenith of bilateral friendship.

Russia and India have a history of credible partnership. The expanding ties between India and Russia have an influence on Indian foreign policy. The collaboration has taken on a qualitatively new character with increased levels of cooperation in effectively all fields since the "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership" was signed in October 2000. The two nations have been working together in a variety of fields, including security, and defence as well as trade, politics, the economy, science and technology, culture and tourism, and various international groupings.

After the Ukraine conflict, Indo-Russian relations have become more uncertain. Widespread concerns have been raised about the endurance of the

bilateral relationship between India and Russia. This research paper analyses the history of bilateral relations, the current situation, and prospects.

INDO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

India-Russia Relations: A Brief Historical Overview

India was seen by the Soviet Union (The USSR) as a stable, populated postcolonial nation that was emerging as a leader among both non-aligned and anti-colonial states and who could also work with them to thwart American interests in the Asian region. India's claim to Jammu and Kashmir state was supported by the Soviet Union. India supported the USSR at the United Nations. Thus, they became a significant economic and security ally.

In August 1971, India and the USSR signed 'the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation. Until the Soviet Union's demise, the treaty was in force. The Treaty of Indo-Russian Friendship and Cooperation, which took its place in 1993, did not have the security provisions of the Indo-Soviet treaty. 1971 Treaty was replaced in 1993 by the Treaty of Indo-Russian Friendship and Cooperation, which did not have the security provisions of the previous India-USSR treaty.

With the signing of the Indo-Russian Strategic Partnership in 2000, India and Russia formalized their strong strategic relationship. This agreement has received substantial backing in India by most of the political parties. Following the imposition of sanctions by the US government in reaction to Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014, Russia once again focused on deep relations with India and China. After the conclusion of the Cold War, Russia's capability to act as a safeguard against the threat posed by China and Pakistan has decreased as a result of its efforts to forge stronger connections with both countries while sustaining its security ties with India. Throughout the Russia-Ukraine war, India quietly supported Russia and didn't quit buying Russian oil despite Western pressure.

Trade Relations

According to the India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), for the fiscal years 2020-21, India and Russia had bilateral trade worth \$8.1 billion. Russian imports stood at \$5.5 billion, compared to India's exports of \$2.6 billion. The main exports from India to Russia in FY 2021-2022 comprised iron and steel, sound and TV recorders and reproducers, and electrical machinery, equipment, and parts.

In 2021-2022, India's imports from Russia reached \$9.86 billion. India's imports from Russia include "mineral fuels, mineral oils, and products; bituminous substances; mineral waxes; followed by pearls, precious or semi-precious stones or metals and articles; imitation jewellery and coins in FY 2021-22." During April-June period, India's imports from Russia soared by 132% to \$16 billion, primarily as a result of oil purchases by India from Russia.

Following the setting up of the framework, India and Russia agreed to use rupees to settle their commerce. The framework, however, did not work as planned since Russia quickly accumulated a surplus worth billions of rupees, while India's trade deficit increased as a result of an increase in crude oil imports. According to Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, India will give Russia alternatives for the investment of the billions of rupees it acquired for exports.

Energy Security

India-Russia vital energy linkages have become a key factor in their bilateral relations during

the past few decades. Russia is crucial for India's energy security because of its vast energy reserves. Additionally, the International North-South Transport Corridor, a multimodal infrastructure network that links Iran with Russia, holds great potential for strengthening connectivity and trade.

After the Russia-Ukraine conflict, India extended commercial and investment ties with the Russian energy business. Russian oil cannot be substituted the entire ban would have caused severe global shocks. As a result of Western sanctions and the West's exclusion of Russian oil and gas, India has benefited to a great extent. Global oil prices have risen dramatically. India's energy choices are influenced by both economic benefits and financial limitations. So despite Western pressure, India didn't quit the Russian oil imports.

Defence Cooperation

India presently imports the majority of its weapons from Russia. Russia is the source of about 70% of the combat aircraft employed by India's air force and navy, 44% of the warships and submarines, and more than 90% of the army's armoured vehicles. Nearly 65% of Indian arms imports between 2000 and 2021 came from Russia, as per data from the Stockholm Institute of Peace Research (SIPRI 2022). SIPRI reveals that for every single year, Russia was India's most valuable weaponry supplier from 2000 to 2020. In 2021, less than one-third of India's imported armaments came from Russia, compared to more than two-thirds annually between 2007 and 2013. Russian government has been exporting state-of-the-art weapons and technology to India. High-end S-400 surface-to-air missile systems and MIG-29 fighters are some of such valuable weapons.

Russian investment in India's nuclear sector is small. More substantial Russian involvement has been seen in India's nuclear energy field. Due to India's strict nuclear liability norms, Western investment has been constrained in the country's relatively small but developing civilian nuclear industry, which has helped Russia, whose government consented to bear liability in the event of a nuclear accident. This helped Russia to emerge as India's principal nuclear energy partner. President Putin and PM Modi announced that the nuclear energy sector in India will see increased Russian investment in 2015.

India-Russia and G20

Since the war in Ukraine began, India has been the third-largest purchaser of Russian crude oil since the war began, after the EU and China, in violation of Western efforts to restrict Russia's sales in order to reduce Putin's war spend. Contrary, India has minimized its arms purchases from Russia in the past few years and is now relying more on the US, France, and Israel.

Russian President Putin and Chinese President Xi skipped the G20 summit while all Western leaders participated. US President Biden took the spotlight in India to woo leaders away from China's influence while two of the major actors in the international arena have been struggling with complications at home.

India-Russia and SCO

India was recognized as a permanent member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) at the Astana Summit in Kazakhstan in 2017. India and Pakistan were granted full membership in this summit. Since its creation in 2001, SCO has gone through several notable developments. The SCO has been dominated by China. The perception that the SCO is an anti-Western organization concerns the Central Asian members.

Under India's presidency, Iran became a full-time member in July 2023. A pair of countries that seem to be gaining from the SCO's expansion are Russia and India. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) connectivity project, of which India and Russia are also major stakeholders, will reap the rewards from Iran's entry. The 22nd SCO summit, which was hosted and presided over by India, took place virtually in July 2023. It was attended by all the SCO leaders including Indian PM Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and Russian counterpart Putin.

Influence of US and China on India-Russia Relations

The relationship between India and Russia is under threat due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The invasion will probably worsen three trends: declining Indian reliance on Russian weapons; fading Russian trustworthiness as a balancer against China and China; and strengthening relations between India and the US. For both strategic and economic reasons, Russia will probably need to link itself even more

closely with China. Thus, Russia's relationship with China will strengthen. And then due to its scepticism of Russia, India has to look for alternative allies and offshore balancers, especially the US. Lastly, there is a chance for Russia and India to strengthen their energy relations, notably their hydrocarbon relations. Future relations between India and Russia may be shaped by strategic and energy security concerns in India.

Conclusion:

Widespread concerns have been raised about the endurance of the bilateral relationship between India and Russia ever since the Ukraine crisis reached its second year. Russia has been drawn to China as a result of Western isolation, and Moscow is slowly depending on the Asian giant both economically and strategically. Since the conflict, Chinese exports to Russia, of many items have risen dramatically, on average by 18% in many industries.

However, Indo-Russian relations have also strengthened during this period. In April 2023, Dr. S. Jaishankar, the minister of external affairs for India, referred to the bilateral relationship as "the steadiest in the world." According to a March 2023 document clarifying the country's foreign policy, Moscow will 'continue developing up a particularly privileged strategic cooperation' with India. Russia and India have a history of credible partnership.

The two countries recently marked the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic ties. Their partnership is still determined by the same strategic goal. In addition to their bilateral ties, India and Russia are stakeholders in several multilateral organizations, such as the BRICS, RIC, G20, East Asia Summit, and SCO, where they can work together on shared interests. Bilateral ties will strengthen despite current developments and uncertainty. The United States' strategic engagement with India and the dynamics of foreign policy might harm relations between India and Russia. In the future, India-Russian ties will be driven by India's priorities about its energy security and strategic issues.

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