

19th India-Russia Summit:

Assessing the Strategic Partnership

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India-Russia: Political and Diplomatic Relations

Tanaji Pol
Rutuja Raut

"A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out."

By Walter Winchell

The quote represents the relationship between India and Russia. India is the 2nd largest market for the Russian defense industry. Both nations have embassies in Moscow and New Delhi. Also they have Consulates General in important cities. Not only the governments but also the people of countries have very positive and friendly attitudes towards each other.

When we analyzed the role of these two rising economic powers on a global map and world affairs they have an immense importance, as both of them play active role on global platform. These two nations are growing rapidly with high economic growth rate. Also in various sectors they are cooperating with each other smoothly. With the changing period and circumstances they have wisely diversified their foreign policy options towards other nations by keeping in mind their strategic interests. However, even in complicated geopolitical situation both countries are very keen and careful about the trust and mutual beneficial partnership which had built up over the decades.

Historical developments

“Relations between India and Russia are rooted in history, mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation. This is a strategic partnership that has withstood the test of time, and which enjoys the support of the people of both countries.”¹ Diplomatic relations between Russia and India had begun even before getting independence and after independence also India inherits many features of Soviet Union for fulfilling its own need of development. In 1468, a Russian traveler Afanasy Nikitin travelled in India and he stored his memories in the document form called as ‘The Journey beyond Three Seas’.

Relations of USSR and India

After getting independence it was Prime Minister Pundit Nehru who visited USSR in 1955 and 1st Secretary of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev’s return trip to India. As this period witnessed the area of cold war politics, initially relations between two countries did not geared immediately as India decided to remain non-aligned. Slowly and gradually especially during Nikita Khrushchev’s period relations between two nations took new turning points. After Nehru’s visit they adopted identical positions over many issues like Suez Canal Crisis, Anglo-French-Israel aggression against Egypt, question of Hungary, India-China war, and India-Pakistan wars etc. the bridge of friendship became more strong and closer with the

signing of Treaty of Peace, friendship and cooperation on 9th August, 1971. So India-Russia relations during Cold War began to blossom only in the 1960s and 1970s. However it was particularly during this phase some differences took place. Certain issues like Soviet intervention of Afghanistan in 1970s or differences of opinions over the signing of treaty of NPT are some areas. But these issues were kept away from public domain and discussions happened at the highest political levels. So whatever the differences that these two nations faced they were not discussed openly. Rather they were well managed bilaterally, often not even with their respective audiences. Relationship during this period proved advantageous to India. Finally undoubtedly this period built the strong foundation for the present day Indo-Russian relationship.

India Russia relations in post cold war

“When the Soviet Union disintegrated, India was faced with the difficult task of reorienting its external affairs and forging relations with the fifteen Soviet successor states, of which Russia was the most important.”² The process of disintegration of USSR had opened up the new chapter and new wave in international politics and it had wide implications on the many foreign policies of countries out of which India is one such a nation. Russia as a succeeded the USSR after its collapse and it continued to engage with earlier countries in multiple aspects. The relationship during post cold war period highlights the factors of growth of appreciation for each other’s strategic

interests as both countries are multilingual, multinational and multi-ethnic.

In the new millennium India-Russia relations continued to be strengthened by the political leaders. Visits of the official authorities printed a new footprint where two countries chalked out steps for reworking on past agreements for stretching good bilateral relations. "Both the countries committed the two countries to non participation in any military, political or other alliances or associations or armed conflicts directed against the other side, or in any treaties, agreements or understandings infringing upon the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity or national security interests of the other side."³ So directly indirectly both nations have smartly preserved their interest with developing good bonds with other nations also at the same time.

India Russia political relations

Many scholars mentioned that Russia has been a time-tested partner for India during the needful and struggling times. This friendship is not only limited for political aspects but also it has crossed the multiple areas of diplomatic, economic, cultural, defense, technological and strategic relations widely. Among all these types the political relations plays very crucial role as it automatically impacts the other relations too. In October 2000, with the signing of 'Declaration on the India-Russia strategic partnership' the ties between two countries had got a qualitative

turn in the above mentioned areas. With this declaration the bilateral cooperation areas were enhanced between two countries. Again in December 2010 this friendship has reached to the level of a "special and privileged strategic partnership." The usage of terminology itself reflects the importance of relations towards each other. Political relations can be traced through further elements.

A) Intergovernmental Commission

This is the powerful body which conducts various affairs at governmental levels regularly. There are two intergovernmental commissions. One is IRIGC-TEC and another one is IRIGC-MTC. Earlier one stands for the Inter Governmental Commission on trade, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation. IRIGC-MTC stands for Inter Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation. This commission is co-chaired by External Affairs Ministry and Russian Dy. Prime Minister. And IRIGC-MTC co-chaired by two defense ministers.

B) Annual Summits

"The Annual Summit meeting between the Prime Minister of India and the President of the Russian Federation is the highest institutionalized dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between India and Russia."⁴ So far 19 Annual Summits meetings have taken place between India and Russia

alternatively. For 17th Annual Summit Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Goa from 15-16 October, 2016 in which 19 documents were signed for bilateral cooperation in various areas defense, space, foreign policy, trade and investment, shipbuilding, railway, science and technology. The visit in the year 2017 also became crucial for celebrating 70th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between India and Russia. Later for 18th Annual Summit Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Russia in June 2017 which took place in Saint. Petersburg. This summit resulted into the adoption of 12 documents with the 'adoption of Saint Petersburg Declaration' that highlights a comprehensive matrix for future cooperation. Recently 19th Annual Summit took place in New Delhi with the arrival of President Putin on 4th and 5th October, 2018. The focus of this summit was on various vital issues like energy, nuclear commerce, defense cooperation, multilateral engagements, banking and financial sectors, counter terrorism etc. out of these spheres the nuclear energy won the key focus of summit as it has assisted Russia in achieving the monopoly on India's nuclear market. Kundankulam Nuclear Power Plant is the best example of success story. "Both sides agreed that their relationship is matured and confident, covering all areas and is marked by deep trust, mutual respect and close understandings of each other's position."⁵

(C) Consultations

Bilateral consultations have taken place during visits on

important issues. Such as mainly securing areas, common threat, about role in regional organization etc. the recent summit welcomed the commencement of consultations on Free Trade Agreements between Eurasian Economic Union and its member states and New Delhi.

D) Bilateral Interactions and Visits

Besides the formal meetings India and Russia meet on other various platforms of which they are the members to play a significant role. Also the exchanges of political authorities for extending cooperation areas took place for several times. With the top ranking authorities visits many areas have been explored. Accordingly programs are arranged, bilateral interactions take place between them.

Strategic relations between India and Russia in multiple areas

With political relations both nations have strategic interests behind it. These can be identified through multiple areas like defense and security cooperation, nuclear security, space cooperation, developments in science and technology, cultural relations so on and so forth. Ties between these two countries go well as Russia is a natural resource rich and India is resource hungry nation. Though, from 1991 Indian foreign policy excavates many options to develop good bonds with many powerful nations and especially with US still in 2016 Annual Summit it was referred to Russia by India that 'An old friend is better than the new ones.' This demarcates India's national

interests that though India is utilizing the channels with US still it will not affect the India Russia relationship. Strategic partnership of both nations can be seen through various areas.

Defense and security area is an important one where cordial relations are developed since the cold war phase. A kind of mutual buyer and seller type relationship has evolved over a period of time. Brahmos missile, SU-30 aircrafts, T-90 tanks are best examples of it. They conduct training exercises and exchanges between the armed forces annually. With that bilateral naval exercises also held as and time comes. For these developments IRIGC-MTC plans the schedules. Besides these activities, visits of heads of defense forces also participate in various conferences where usual discussions took place. However one thing is notable that the defense relations were very close to the cold war period during the USSR era. In new world order India changed its priorities not only to invest only in defense and military but rather to create its own identity with economic growth and reduced its dependency on Russia for defense equipments.

Economic partnership is the strong pillar of any partnership in modern democratic world order where commercial factors influence other elements. In case of India its imports from Russia is always higher than its export. These commercial exchange activities are facilitated through IRIGC-TEC. Another mechanism to boost this relationship is the Indo- Russia Forum on trade and investment. This platform promotes bilateral

business to business contacts between both countries. Economic relationship flourished especially during the Putin phase where it began to change towards the fresh and vibrant era of friendship.

Another significant area of bilateral cooperation is nuclear energy. India believes in the peaceful use of nuclear energy for the developmental purpose. Department of Atomic Energy and Russia's Rosatom signed the strategic vision for utilizing nuclear energy in peaceful ways during 2014.

Like nuclear energy space cooperation also did not keep apart from creating good ties. Related to space developments framework agreements were signed on outer space, satellite launches, GLONASS navigation system, remote sensing and other applications. The space centre of India and Russia specifically ISRO and Roscomos have signed a Memorandum of Understanding MoU to establish ground measurement gathering stations for GLONASS and NAVIC in Russia and India.

One cannot imagine being in modern world without exploring the area of science and technology and research and development. Recently India and Russia have institutionalized their bilateral relations through various programs like Inter-Academy Exchange Programme, Indo-Russian Science and Technology Centre, Inter-Ministerial Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation. With these there is a Working Group

established in 1993 with the aim of collaborating research projects. Certainly such activities have led to increase in mutual learning and promoting economic growth with high levels of competitiveness. Both India and Russia considered that changing world has changing demands so one cannot afford to ignore this vital area. Also developments in such areas facilitated the good bonds in other areas too.

Cultural relations rather are the 1st element through which beginning of other relations are concerned. The Indian cinema and literature of India of 1940s decade highly reflect the socialist ideology. Afterwards through various social policies like education, language exchanges started happening and these details constitutes the soft power.

These are just highlights of some areas where India and Russia had explored their strategic relations. However one thing is noted here that these relations were not only one sided gain for a single party state. Rather they resulted into mutual cooperation and parallel developments from both sides.

Milestones in the relations

There are some milestones due to which these relations have flourished and blossomed over a period of time. They are mentioned as follows. Some treaties and agreements have proved essentially helpful to extending their relations.

1. Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation

between the Government of India and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on August 09, 1971, New Delhi.

This treaty facilitates the cooperation between two countries by keeping in mind their national interest for extending their mutual bilateral cooperation. It also promotes the universal peace and security. It believes in development of friendship and cooperation that will meet the national interests of both countries.

2. Delhi Statement by the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues: Nuclear Arms Race, UN Role in Peacekeeping, and Regional Security on January 19, 1986.

This particular treaty was formulated by focusing on the nuclear arms race and the role of United Nations in keeping peace and stability within the regions especially in the third world nations. This commission tries to handle the challenge of nuclear issue. Also it takes into account the issues of arms control. Considering the importance and role of other member states of UN it enhanced the peace keeping function with regional security.

3. Declaration of Strategic Partnership between the Republic of India and the Russian Federation on October 3, 2000.

This particular treaty strengthened the bonds which have been traditionally shared by these two nations. It

emphasized on all earlier significant developments of earlier creations of agreements like Treaty of Peace, Friendship and cooperation of 1971, declaration of 1994 and Moscow Declaration of 1994. It confirms their adherence towards cherishing common ideals. This declaration review and reenergizes its strategic relationship.

4. Joint Statement Druzhba-Dosti: A vision for Strengthening the Indian-Russian Partnership over the next decade on December 11, 2014.

This statement was signed between India and Russia for strengthening their partnership over the next decade. It is very famous as it decided to cooperate in areas like energy, technology and innovation, expanded economic engagement, global order and world peace and people to people ties.

Significance of India-Russia Friendship

Working in multiple areas reflects the high objectives of these two countries towards the showcasing the powers of regional players. This relationship has multi-dimensional implications. The world order which was a bipolar during cold war period has changed drastically after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The earlier bipolar system transformed in to unipolar system where the hegemony of USA was established. India was

affected by these structural changes and challenges that happened at international level since the late 1980s. Cooperating in multiple areas denotes that India and Russia both have common interest areas accordingly they put and pool the resources. The above milestones and declarations set aside action plans of through which these two countries are going to change the world.

Remarkably this Indo-Russian partnership has transformed into competitive and free direction with lots of updates according to changing time and circumstances. Its just not only limited to the state actors but also informal players and non-state actors, marker forces have left footprints. "The success of Indo-Russian-strategic partnership will also depend upon India's willingness and courage to acquire the role, and therefore, responsibility of a great power in the changing geo-political environment."⁶

Thus both India and Russia are playing a vital role on the global platform undoubtedly with their time trusted relationship. With the changing power equations at the international level both countries need to cooperate more in terms of developing their economic relations as some where it will enable them to come closer. Thus the relations between India and Russia don't have a full stop.

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India-Russia Relations in context of Geopolitics

Kalpesh Medhe

The geopolitics of India must be considered in the geographical context of the Indian subcontinent- a self-contained region that includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and, depending how one defines it, Nepal and Bhutan. We call the subcontinent "self-contained" because it is a region that is isolated on all sides by difficult terrain or by ocean.

The independence of India resulted in the unification of the country under an authentically Indian government. It also led to the political subdivision of the subcontinent. The Muslim-majority areas the Indus Valley region west and northwest of the Thar Desert, and the Ganges River basin both seceded from India, forming a separate country that itself later split into modern-day Pakistan and Bangladesh. It was this separatism that came to frame Indian geopolitics.

In the absence of direct external threats, modern India's strategic outlook has been shaped by the dynamics of the Cold War and its aftermath. The most important strategic relationship that India had after gaining independence from Britain in 1947 was with the Soviet Union. There was some limited ideological affinity between them. India's fundamental national interest was not in Marxism, however, but in creating a state that was secure