



## A STUDY ON THE RECENT RELATIONS OF INDIA WITH RUSSIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The relationship between India and Russia has deep historical roots, evolving from the close ties during the Soviet era to the "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" that defines their current engagement. Despite a changing global landscape and emerging complexities, the relationship remains significant for both nations. Diplomatic relations were established even before India's independence, on April 13, 1947. The Soviet Union played a crucial role in India's industrialization, investing in key sectors like heavy machinery, mining, energy, and steel. The 1971 Treaty of Peace and Friendship solidified their bond, reflecting shared geopolitical goals. The Soviet Union became a major supplier of arms to India, a crucial factor during the Cold War. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, both countries navigated a period of adjustment. The 1993 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and the 1994 Military-Technical Cooperation agreement laid the groundwork for a renewed partnership. In 2000, the "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership" marked a new phase, institutionalizing annual summits and enhancing cooperation across various sectors. This was further elevated to a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" in 2010. The India-Russia relationship in recent times is characterized by multifaceted cooperation, but also by emerging challenges and a need for careful balancing. Regular high-level exchanges, including annual summits between the leaders, underscore the strong political trust. Both countries coordinate on various multilateral platforms like the UN, BRICS, SCO, and G20, advocating for a multipolar world order. Russia has consistently supported India's bid for permanent membership in the UN Security Council and its position on issues like Kashmir.*



**Keywords:**

Security, Relationship, Import

## **INTRODUCTION**

Russia remains a major defense partner for India, although India is gradually diversifying its arms sources. The cooperation has moved beyond a buyer-seller dynamic to include joint research, development, and production of advanced systems like the BrahMos missile and AK-203 rifles. Despite delays in some deliveries, such as the S-400 missile system, due to the Ukraine conflict, defense ties remain significant, with Russia accounting for a substantial portion of India's military equipment. (Skalamera, 2022)

Bilateral trade has seen a significant increase, reaching a record high of \$65.7 billion in FY 2023-24. This growth is largely driven by India's increased imports of discounted Russian crude oil, which now constitute over 40% of India's total oil imports. While this has benefited India by keeping inflation in check, it has also led to a significant trade imbalance in Russia's favor. Both countries aim to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030 and are exploring mechanisms for trade in national currencies. Cooperation extends to energy, including nuclear power (Kudankulam plant), and connectivity projects like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor.

Russia has become a crucial energy supplier for India, especially in the context of Western sanctions. Besides oil, cooperation in nuclear energy is significant, with Russia committed to building more nuclear power units in India. Collaboration exists in areas like space exploration (including cooperation on GLONASS and NavIC), nuclear technology, and other advanced fields. The Gaganyaan mission has seen collaboration in human spaceflight. Both nations actively cooperate within BRICS, advocating for greater representation of emerging economies in global institutions. They also share a vision for a multipolar world order, challenging the dominance of a single power. (Shah, 2020)

India's neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict has been a point of divergence with some of its Western partners. While India has called for a peaceful resolution through



dialogue, it has refrained from explicitly condemning Russia's actions. This stance is driven by its strategic interests, including dependence on Russian arms and energy.

Russia's increasing alignment with China, India's regional rival, is a source of concern for India. Balancing its relationship with Russia while managing its complex relationship with China is a key foreign policy challenge for India. India's growing strategic partnership with the United States, particularly in defense and technology, adds another layer of complexity to its ties with Russia. Russia views the Indo-Pacific initiatives and the Quad with suspicion, seeing them as attempts to contain China.

The significant trade deficit in favor of Russia is a growing concern for India. Efforts are being made to diversify the trade basket beyond oil and fertilizers and to increase Indian exports to Russia. While Russia remains a key defense supplier, India is actively pursuing diversification of its arms procurement to other countries and focusing on indigenous production under the "Make in India" initiative. This could gradually reduce India's reliance on Russian arms in the long term.

Western sanctions on Russia have created challenges in bilateral payment mechanisms, necessitating the exploration of alternative systems, including the use of national currencies. The recent escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan following attacks in Kashmir has added a new dimension. Russia has urged restraint from both sides and offered to mediate, reflecting its historical role in the region, even as its ties with Pakistan have also seen some improvement in recent years.

**The political and strategic relationship between India and Russia stands as a remarkable testament to enduring friendship and pragmatic cooperation in a rapidly evolving global landscape. Rooted in the historical amity of the Soviet era, this partnership has not only weathered the dramatic geopolitical shifts of the post-Cold War world but has also adapted and deepened in response to contemporary challenges and opportunities. Despite increasing global complexities and India's growing engagement with other powers, the bond with Russia remains a significant pillar of India's foreign policy, characterized by a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership." (Rodkiewicz, 2023)**



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Dmitrieva et al. (2020): Historically, the Soviet Union was a reliable ally for India, particularly during periods of Western skepticism. This foundation of trust and mutual support laid the groundwork for the robust relationship that persists today. The signing of the "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership" formalized this deep-seated connection, paving the way for enhanced cooperation across a spectrum of sectors, including political, security, defense, trade, science, and technology.

Arkhipova et al. (2022): The political dimension of this relationship is marked by regular high-level engagements, including annual summits between the leaders, frequent ministerial visits, and robust institutional mechanisms for dialogue. These interactions facilitate a continuous exchange of perspectives on bilateral, regional, and global issues of mutual concern.

Alexandre et al. (2023): Both India and Russia share a vision for a multipolar world order, advocating for greater representation of developing countries in international institutions like the United Nations, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Their coordinated efforts in these multilateral forums reflect a shared commitment to a more balanced and equitable global architecture. Russia has also consistently supported India's candidacy for permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council.

Kadian et al. (2023): Strategically, defense cooperation has been a cornerstone of the India-Russia partnership. For decades, Russia has been India's primary supplier of military hardware, and this relationship has evolved beyond a simple buyer-seller dynamic to encompass joint research, development, and production of advanced defense technologies.

### **Recent relations of India with Russia**

The political and strategic relations between India and Russia are characterized by a deep-rooted friendship, extensive cooperation across multiple domains, and a shared vision for a multipolar world. While evolving geopolitical dynamics present certain challenges, the



enduring strength and adaptability of this partnership suggest that it will continue to be a significant factor in international relations in the years to come. The ability of both nations to navigate complexities while focusing on mutual benefits will be crucial in shaping the future trajectory of this steadfast embrace.

Economic ties between India and Russia have also witnessed significant growth, particularly in recent times. Bilateral trade reached a record high of \$65.7 billion in the fiscal year 2023-24, a substantial increase from pre-pandemic levels. This surge is largely driven by India's increased imports of discounted Russian crude oil, which now constitute a significant portion of India's energy basket. While this has created a trade imbalance, both countries are actively exploring ways to diversify their economic engagement, with a goal of reaching \$100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030. Cooperation in sectors such as energy (including nuclear), pharmaceuticals, fertilizers, and precious metals remains vital. Connectivity projects like the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor and the International North-South Transport Corridor hold the potential to further boost economic interaction.

Flagship projects like the BrahMos missile system and the licensed production of Su-30MKI aircraft and T-90 tanks exemplify this deepening collaboration. While India has, in recent years, begun to diversify its defense procurement sources, Russia remains a crucial partner, providing sophisticated weaponry and technologies often without the end-user restrictions imposed by other nations. Regular joint military exercises, such as the INDRA series, further enhance operational synergy between the armed forces of both countries.

However, the relationship is not without its complexities. Russia's growing strategic alignment with China, India's primary geopolitical rival, poses a potential challenge. Similarly, India's deepening ties with Western nations, particularly the United States through initiatives like the Quad, introduce a delicate balancing act. India's neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict has also drawn criticism from some Western allies, while Russia has, at times, expected stronger support from India. Navigating these geopolitical pressures requires diplomatic finesse and a continued focus on mutual interests.



**The fundamental drivers of the India-Russia relationship – historical trust, strategic convergence on a multipolar world, and mutual economic benefits – remain strong. India views its partnership with Russia as crucial for maintaining its strategic autonomy and pursuing its national interests in a complex global environment. For Russia, India is a vital partner in its "pivot to the East" and a key player in its efforts to counter Western sanctions and forge a new world order.**

The economic relationship between India and Russia has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, marked by both deepening interdependence and emerging complexities. Traditionally rooted in defense cooperation and Soviet-era ties, the economic dimension has gained new impetus, particularly in the wake of geopolitical shifts and evolving global dynamics.

India and Russia share a long-standing strategic partnership, formalized in 2000 and elevated to a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" in 2010. While defense has historically been a cornerstone, economic engagement has been steadily growing. The two nations established diplomatic relations in 1947, and during the Cold War, the Soviet Union emerged as a crucial ally and economic partner for India.

The most notable recent development in India-Russia economic relations is the significant increase in bilateral trade, especially after the Ukraine conflict began in February 2022. Western sanctions on Russia led to a curtailment of its access to traditional markets, making India a crucial economic partner.

Bilateral trade reached an all-time high of \$65.7 billion in the fiscal year 2023-24, a substantial increase from around \$12 billion before the conflict. This surge made India Russia's second-largest trading partner. Both countries aim to increase this figure to \$100 billion by 2030. A significant portion of this trade is driven by India's import of discounted Russian crude oil. Before the Ukraine war, Russian oil constituted less than 2% of India's total oil imports, which surged to over 40% by June 2024. Russia has become one of India's top crude oil suppliers.



While oil dominates, there is a growing diversification in the trade basket. India's exports to Russia now include more consumer electronics, machinery, mechanical appliances, iron and steel, and organic chemicals. Russia's exports to India also include fertilizers, mineral resources, precious stones, and vegetable oils. To facilitate trade, especially in light of Western sanctions, the Indian Central Bank has allowed Russian entities to open special Vostro accounts in Indian banks, enabling transactions in local currencies. This mechanism helps in bypassing some of the challenges posed by international sanctions.

Beyond trade, investment flows between the two countries are also significant, with a goal to reach \$50 billion in bilateral investment by 2025. Primarily focused on the oil and gas sector (e.g., ONGC Videsh's investments in Sakhalin-1 and Imperial Energy) and pharmaceuticals. Majorly in sectors like oil and gas (e.g., Rosneft's acquisition of a majority stake in Nayara Energy), petrochemicals, banking, railways, and steel.

The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant is a flagship project, with Russia supplying technology and equipment for multiple units. Plans for the construction of additional Russian-designed nuclear power plants in India are underway. Projects like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor aim to improve connectivity and facilitate trade between the two regions.

The significant increase in oil imports has led to a trade imbalance, with India's imports from Russia being considerably higher than its exports. This has resulted in an accumulation of Indian rupees with Russian entities. Western sanctions on Russia continue to pose challenges to banking channels and payment mechanisms, necessitating the development of alternative solutions like the rupee-ruble mechanism.

India is also pursuing diversification of its defense and energy procurement, seeking partnerships with other countries, including the US and France. This could potentially impact the long-term reliance on Russia. India's strengthening strategic partnership with the United States, especially in defense and technology, sometimes creates a delicate balancing act in its relationship with Russia. The growing alignment between Russia and China, particularly in



the context of Western sanctions, is being closely watched by India, given its own geopolitical considerations.

The recent economic relations between India and Russia are characterized by a significant upswing in trade, primarily driven by India's energy needs and Russia's search for new markets. While the traditional defense partnership remains important, the economic dimension has gained unprecedented prominence. However, challenges such as trade imbalances, sanctions, and evolving geopolitical alignments need careful navigation. As both nations continue to prioritize their strategic autonomy and mutual interests, their economic engagement is likely to adapt and evolve, exploring new sectors and mechanisms for sustained cooperation in the coming years. The focus will be on balancing the benefits of this partnership with broader global engagements and strategic considerations

The recent operational deployment and India's pursuit of additional S-400 missile defense systems from Russia underscore the critical importance of this acquisition for India's national security strategy. This deal, inked in 2018 for \$5.43 billion for five units, has moved beyond mere procurement to become a crucial element in bolstering India's air defense capabilities, particularly in the face of evolving regional security challenges.

The S-400 deal is a testament to the enduring defense relationship between India and Russia. For decades, Russia has been a key supplier of military hardware to India, accounting for a significant portion of its arsenal. This partnership has evolved beyond a simple buyer-seller dynamic to include joint research, development, and production of advanced defense technologies like the BrahMos missile.

Despite pressure from the United States, which imposed sanctions on Turkey for a similar acquisition under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), India has steadfastly pursued this deal, prioritizing its national security interests and strategic autonomy. India has maintained that its defense procurement decisions are based on its threat perceptions and requirements.

India's decision to acquire the S-400 also reflects the complex geopolitical landscape of the region. China's acquisition of its own S-400 systems has been viewed as a significant





enhancement of its air defense capabilities, prompting India to seek a similar advantage to maintain a strategic balance. The S-400 is considered capable of countering advanced fighter aircraft and ballistic missiles, thus providing India with a crucial defensive shield. Furthermore, while India is diversifying its defense partnerships, its reliance on Russian military equipment remains substantial. The S-400 deal is a key element in India's efforts to modernize its armed forces and enhance its overall deterrence posture.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite the evolving geopolitical landscape and emerging challenges, the relationship between India and Russia remains a significant and resilient partnership. Rooted in historical trust and mutual strategic interests, it spans a wide range of sectors, from defense and energy to trade and technology. India's ability to balance its ties with Russia alongside its growing engagements with the West will be crucial in shaping the future trajectory of this important relationship. The emphasis on strategic autonomy in India's foreign policy will continue to guide its engagement with Russia, ensuring that it serves India's national interests in a complex and rapidly changing world.

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