

India-Russia Relations through the Ages

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Abstract

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a speech said when Indian kids are asked to mention the most valuable friend of India, they without any hesitation say it is Russia. From the very beginning of our foreign relations, we have Russia who stood beside us through thick and thin. Russia is an all-weather friend of India. Enunciation of the policy of non-alignment by India received accolades from the Soviet Union but ruffled the feather of America. After independence when India had a tussle with Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir only the Soviet Union had extended much required political support to India. During the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war and in particular, the 1971 war with Pakistan Indian sovereignty was threatened by America and Pakistan. Pakistan being a member of the US-led NATO alliance immediately sought help from America in the wake of an outbreak of war with India. Being a soft power, it was beyond India's military capability to rebuff the possibility of joint aggression by Pakistan and the USA. Considering this, India concluded Peace, Friendship, and Co-operation Treaty with the Soviet Union in 1971. This treaty proved to be a boon for India when the Indo-Pak war broke out and America and China the two most powerful countries backed aggressor Pakistan. The decision of the Soviet Union to move its fleet to the Indian Ocean area was considered an effective deterrent to the decision of the US to deploy its Seven Fleet from the Gulf of Tonkin to the Bay of Bengal during the Indo-Pak war.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India's growing friendship with America created rifts in the Indo-Russia relationship. Shifts from a socialist planned economy to liberalisation and opening of the Indian market to the outside world and foreign private investment in the Indian market and deepening cooperation with America have led to a tumultuous relationship between two old friends. Dilapidated relations somehow improved when India decided to release the five pilots of Russian origin sentenced to life for their involvement in the Purulia arms drop case. Russia extends its support to India for its claim of permanent membership in the Security Council of UNO. Presently Russia is the second-highest defence supplier to India. In the pandemic situation of covid 19, Russian President Putin visited India ignoring his health concern and promised to give medical aid in India's effort to fight covid 19.

Keywords: Non-alignment, Accolade, Soft power, Joint aggression, Deterrent, Tumultuous relationship.

Introduction:

Since the time India secured its hard-earned independence it made an endeavour to promote friendly relations with the Soviet Union. Indian Prime Minister Nehru was impressed by Fabian Socialism. In the course of time, it became more intense and intimate in view of the adoption of non-aligned principles by Pandit Nehru, the late Prime Minister of India. After independence, India had a dispute with Pakistan over the Kashmir issue. In this dispute, America supported Pakistan. As a result, India's relations with the US became strained and conflicting. During the Korean crisis, India did not take sides with Western alliances and adopted a neutral role in this crisis. These two incidents compelled the Soviet Union to change its

outlook on India. At that time economic development of the country was of paramount importance to the policymakers of India instead of forging any political alliance. Within a short period of independence, we needed help and support from other countries for our various development projects and USSR responded to it by making available financial aid, and credit for India. At that time India wanted to cultivate deep relations with the Soviet Union. So, India reposed faith in the Soviet Union.

Indian Prime Minister Nehru was a staunch supporter of the planned economy of the Soviet Union. India's five-year plan was formulated and also fundamental duties for Indian citizens were incorporated into the Indian Constitution following the Soviet Union. From the trends of India's economic and foreign policy, Soviet leadership realised that as one of the exponents of the non-aligned movement, India would never join America led Western alliance. Moreover, soviet leaders were enamoured of opposition to colonialism and imperialism by Indian Prime Minister Nehru. In the context of these incidents, India's relationship with the Soviet Union became more intimate. This relationship was further bolstered through the signing of a business agreement between the two countries. Indian Prime Minister visited Mosco in 1955 and this was followed by the visit of Soviet Prime Minister Bulganin and Communist leader Khrushchev in India in the month of November same year. Co-operation in the field of economic planning, technical cooperation and improvement of political relations was given emphasis during this tour. The Soviet Union gave assurance in establishing an iron and steel plant in India. Moreover, the Soviet Union has acknowledged Kashmir as an integral part of Indian territory. When Pakistan raised the Kashmir issue in UNO and demanded public voting on the disputed Kashmir issue the Soviet Union exercised its veto against that proposal.

To further improve the relationship between the two countries, Indian President Dr Rajendra Prasad visited the Soviet Union in 1960 and Soviet leader Khrushchev also visited India at the invitation of President Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Despite not being a party to the Soviet Union-led alliance on every crucial issue the Soviet Union had sided with India and extended much required help and assistance to India. On the question of incorporation of Goa with India, India's war with China in 1962 and the Indo-Pak war in 1965 Soviet Union proved to be a boon for India and helped India tremendously. China received severe flak from the Soviet Union for waging an undeclared war against India in 1962. Similarly, it played a very positive role during the Indo-Pak Wars of 1965 and 1971.

Peace, Friendship and Co-operation Treaty was signed in 1971 between India and the Soviet Union which heralded a new era of friendship between the two countries. Through this treaty, both countries pledged to maintain friendship, peace and security at every level including bilateral and international. Indo-Pak war broke out in 1971 following India's support of the freedom movement of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Soon after the emergence of animosity between India and Pakistan Soviet Union made an appeal for the end of turbulence and gory warfare and for an amicable settlement in East Pakistan on the basis of respect for the lawful rights and interests of its people. It also issued warnings to the governments of other countries to keep away from entangling themselves in the conflict which could further worsen the situation.

Pakistan was a party to the US-led NATO alliances. From the inception of the non-aligned movement, America was much concerned with the activities of India as being a staunch supporter of the non-aligned

movement. America advocated the concept that those who are not aligned with us are against us. Being a member of the NATO alliance Pakistan sought the assistance of America in its war against India in 1971. America quickly responded by sending a task force of its Seventh Fleet, headed by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, USS Enterprise from the Gulf of Tonkin to the Bay of Bengal, the Soviet Union moved its fleet into the Indian Ocean area. This decision of the Soviet Union acted as an effective deterrent to the US designs. India declared a unilateral ceasefire on 17th December 1971 since India had never any ulterior motive of capturing or claiming any territory of Pakistan. Thereafter, India and Pakistan concluded Shimla Agreement in 1972 and pledged to resolve bickering through bilateral negotiations. Not only to help India militarily the Soviet Union also provided financial grants for the development of science and technology and the execution of welfare planning in India. The Soviet Union aided India in overcoming the food crisis of 1973. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi proclaimed an internal emergency in 1975 and this undemocratic step was severely lambasted by many other democratic countries of the world. Only Soviet Union extended support to India by declaring a proclamation of emergency as a step towards the maintenance of internal law and order and to curb fissiparous tendencies in India.

During the reign of the Janata Government in 1977 strong bond of friendship prevailed between the two countries. In October 1977, Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai visited Moscow and held several rounds of discussions on various international issues with the communist leaders. Soviet Prime Minister paid a return visit to India in 1979 and signed a treaty on long-term cooperation in economic, scientific and technical fields. After the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, her son Rajeev Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India and he paid a visit to Moscow in 1985 where he was given a warm welcome by the Soviet leaders. He held several rounds of discussion with the Soviet leaders and finally signed two bilateral agreements on economic cooperation. As a result of the conclusion of bilateral agreements, the Soviet Union agreed to give India a credit of one million Roubles and agreed to offer greater cooperation in important sectors of the Indian economy.

The Indo-Soviet relations were further bolstered with a view to Soviet assurance to provide MIG-29 fighter/interceptor aircraft to India. The Soviet Union also pondered over the decision of supplying to India military aircraft equipped with airborne warning and control systems to withstand the proposed supply of US AWACS system to India's arch-rival Pakistan. A remarkable factor to note in the Indo-Soviet relationship is that India provided much-required help and assistance to the Soviet Union in exchange for Soviet Union's various economic and military assistance and good gesture and while doing so India had deviated from its self-proclaimed non-aligned principles. For example, India sharply criticised the French onslaught on Egypt during the Suez crisis but India did not denounce Soviet intervention in Hungary with the same forceful language as it did at the time of the Suez crisis. In 1965, India condemned American aggression in Vietnam and took the side of Vietnam. But India played a neutral role when it came to know about the military intervention of the USSR in Czechoslovakia. According to international relations experts so long USSR was powerful and had military, cultural, and economic sway across the world India extended wholehearted support to the Soviet Union. After the disintegration of the USSR and the collapse of Socialist countries when the absolute supremacy of the USA was established in the world, India began to tilt to America and it accordingly modified its foreign policy to the line of America.

After the dismantling of the USSR, Russia came into existence as a successor to the erstwhile USSR. In the changed circumstance, Russia was engrossed in the new state formation process and internal development. It mainly worked heavily on the reconstruction of the country's parlous financial condition and this impoverished financial condition was responsible for breaking up of USSR and ending the protracted cold war. During the cold war, USSR gave financial assistance to its aligned socialist countries in order to abate the gale of American capitalism which was looming over the skies of socialist countries. Capitalism from the very beginning was an ideological red rag to a bull like Russia. Maintaining military bases and large Armies in sensitive parts of the world to intercept America's military influence, spread of capitalism and open market economy USSR had been straining its economy and ultimately economic prowess of the USSR started eroding and the cold war came to an end and in the aftermath of cold war India's relation with Russia became nonchalant.

Advocacy of the policy of economic liberalisation and open market economy by the Indian Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in the country's domestic budget in 1992 invited irked from Russia but was welcomed by America. Dispelling all clouds of uncertainties India's relations with Russia began to move in the right direction from 1993. Indian Prime Minister visited Moscow in 1994 and signed two agreements-one was an extension of bilateral cooperation and the other was the protection of the interest of pluralistic states. From 1995 to 2000 many agreements on mutual cooperation were signed between the two countries. In March 1995, India and Russia signed agreements with a view to cracking down on illegal weapons smuggling and drug trafficking. In June 2000, the Indian External affair Minister (Jaswant Singh) paid a visit to Moscow and attended several rounds of high-level meetings to forge a strategic partnership. Both countries signed four key defence agreements. Four pilots of Russian origin were caught in Purulia arms drop case and sentenced accordingly. After high-level talks with Russia, India released them which greatly pleased the Russian Government.

The year 2000 witnessed a number of positive developments between India and Russia. The International "North-South" Transport Corridor Agreement (INSTC) had been ratified by all three original signatory states-India, Russia and Iran. It is a multi-modal transportation that came into existence on 12th September 2000 to promote transportation cooperation among the member countries. Russia ratified the extradition treaty with the object to curb terrorism. In February 2001, the Russian Deputy Prime Minister visited India and signed a deal for the supply and manufacture of the T-90 Main Battle Tanks (MBT). The two countries also entered an agreement for the promotion of aviation safety. With Russia's assistance Kudankulam Atomic Power Plant was set up in Tamil Nadu. Russia condemned the terrorist attack on Indian Parliament in 2001 and issued a warning to Pakistan to extirpate all terrorist camps and training centers in Pakistan and also pledged to take a stern step against cross-border terrorism sponsored by Pakistan. For the purpose of obliteration of international terrorism, a Joint Working Group was set up by the initiatives of both countries.

Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin visited India in 2002 and a Declaration on Strategic Partnership was signed between Mr. Putin and former Indian Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. In subsequent years Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee visited Russia and concluded agreements in the field of science and technology, space, earthquake research and a number of bilateral banking accords. Trade, economic cooperation, cultural cooperation, and agreements on various subjects ranging from defence, science and

technology including the supply of cryogenic engines, environments, etc. witnessed an enormous increase. The Indo-Russian strategic partnership has been founded on six key components-Politics, defence, trade, civil-nuclear energy, anti-terrorism cooperation and space exploration. During the cold war, India and the Soviet Union had a strong strategic, military, economic and diplomatic relationship. Presently, the Indo-Russia Intergovernmental Commission (IRIGC) is the main body that governs affairs at the governmental level between the two countries. Every year bilateral annual summit takes place between both countries. Both Russia and India issued joint statements ingeminating Pakistan to take stern steps for the suppression of terrorism and infiltration of terrorists across the Indian border. Russia also approved the steps which India had taken in Jammu and Kashmir for withstanding international terrorism by military means. India in its turn endorsed military action by Russia in Chechnya for the protection of territorial integrity and constitutional order against separatist activities of Chechens who were clamouring for liberty and a separate province.

Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh paid an official visit to Russia on 11-12 November 2007. Indian Prime Minister held a meeting with the Russian Prime Minister and signed three important agreements with Russia. These were: (1) Agreement between India and Russia on Cooperation in the Development and Production of Multi-Role Transport Aircraft (2) Agreement between India and Russia on Cooperation to Combat Illicit Trafficking in Narcotics, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors. (3) Agreement between the Indian Space Research Organisation and the Federal Space Agency of the Russian Federation in the field of Joint Moon Exploration. Russia supported India at the time of launching its first satellite 'Aryabhata' in 1975. The Year of Russia in India was held in 2008. Similarly, the Year of India in Russia was celebrated in 2009. India and Russia are members of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). India helped induction of Russia as a dialogue partner in the Indian Ocean Rim Association which may help Russia to play a major role in the Indian Ocean area. An important trait of India Russia's bonhomie is that in the present time, military cooperation is not confined to buyer and seller relationships. The two countries are actively engrossed in joint research development and production of sophisticated defence technologies and systems. The major military endeavours between India and Russia encompass (1) Brahmos cruise missile (2) Fifth generation fighter jet (3) Sukhoi-Su-30 MKI (4) Ilyushin/Hal Tactical Transport Aircraft (5) KA-226 Twin engine utility helicopters and (6) some frigates. India's Navy's first submarine, 'Foxtrot' came from Russia.

As Russia's antagonism with America became acute and its alliance with China more intimate, the old ties between India and Russia have become the geopolitical equivalent of a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. India has fallen into an abyss of despair as deep as the sea after the American retreat from Afghanistan and the taking over of Afghanistan by the Taliban. Over the last few years, Russia had beefed up its involvement with the Taliban and extended cooperation with Pakistan on issues related to Afghanistan. Russia's involvement with the Taliban and the wiping out of Indian economic and political influence in Afghanistan after taking over the reins of the country's administration by the Taliban and Russia's tacit support to Pakistan has created a major chasm in India-Russia relations.

Trade relations between India and Russia need improvement. Despite India's political differences with China trade relations continue to thrive. But the most surprising thing is that India's political relations with Russia are quite resilient while its commercial relationship with Russia is almost barren. The stark reality

is that Russian business elites are more interested in the European market and China while Indian business tycoons give emphasis on America and China. Of late, Indian business groups have realised the importance of improving relations with Russia in emerging sectors of economic engagement like mining, agro-industrial and high technology including robotics, nanotech and biotech.

The growing military partnership between Russia and China and their opposition to the Indo-Pacific framework has been a major source of irritant in the Indian relationship with Russia. India-Russia relations are likely to face some turbulence ahead on account of Russia's close friendliness and proximity with China and India's deeper cooperation with America, Japan and Australia in Indo Pacific region. The Indo-Pacific region was mainly formed with a view to containing Chinese dominance in this area. Russia does not accept Indo Pacific region on account of its ideological proximity with China. No issue affected the Indo-Russia relationship as much as the prevailing border tension between India and China. The Chinese aggression in April 2020 in the border areas of eastern Ladakh led to already staggering Sino-India relations to an inflexing point. At this juncture, hope was raised at certain quarters that Russia is alone capable of diffusing spiralling friction with China.

Both countries have acknowledged the importance of people-to-people contact between the two countries and increasing cooperation in educational and cultural spheres. Both countries have expressed willingness in the matter of improving commercial and economic relations and in this regard, both countries have taken positive steps in the matter of removing tariff barriers and other restrictions. Both India and Russia have expressed serious concern over the growing arms race and have made an incessant effort for disarmament. Both countries have reposed faith in the UN Charter in the matter of maintaining world peace and security. India and Russia jointly contributed military contingents and peacekeeping advisors to the UN mission on peacekeeping in war-ravaged countries for reconstruction. Russia has been vociferously working towards securing a permanent seat for India in the UN Security Council and strongly criticised China and Pakistan's opposition to India's bid to have a permanent seat in the Council. Russia regards India as an independent strong center of a multipolar world.

The leaders of the two countries have exchanged views on the covid-19 pandemic situation and highly expressed appreciation for the ongoing bilateral cooperation in the fight against covid-19 with respect to the "Sputnik-v" vaccine. Russia expressed gratitude for India's timely assistance in supplying critical medicine, including paracetamol, hydroxychloroquine and certain antibiotics during the first phase of the pandemic. During the second phase of covid 19 in April/May 2021, India was petrified by the rising number of positive cases and death due to a shortage of oxygen cylinders and critical medical equipment. India had a sigh of relief at the arrival of Russia's assistance. Russia provided ventilators, oxygen concentrators and other critical equipment.

Concluding Observations:

As of today, India's relationship with Russia is quite flamboyant though the lustres both the countries used to have during the cold war days are missing. After the disintegration of the USSR, changing international environment and shift in power from a bipolar world to a unipolar one compelled India to modify its foreign policy and lean more towards the American side. Some factors are responsible for coldness in Indo-Russia relations. China's closeness to Russia and India's growing new friendship with the US led to

the emergence of fissures in the age-old relationship between India and Russia. At present, the relationship between China and Russia is very close and quite vibrant. China happens to be the single largest trading partner of Russia. The main reason for the robust relationship between China and Russia is the economic sanction imposed by the America under CAATSA Act and European countries on account of Russia's intervention in Ukraine.

While India's newly found friendship with America has impelled Russia to stoop to China. Russia happens to be the biggest supplier of defence equipment to India for quite a long time. In recent times, America has surpassed Russia in defence equipment supply. Mostly from the year 2007, America has provided huge defence equipment to India and the import of huge quantity of defence equipment from America has invited exasperation of Russia. In order to improve its relationship with Russia Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Moscow and while addressing deliberation at a conference Indian Prime Minister quoted one old best friend is better than two new friends. In the month of February 2020, Ganga Volga Declaration was signed between the two countries. Russia is supporting India in various international forums. It has endorsed its support of India's claim of a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and also backed India to enter the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG). It has also supported India in abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. The only thorny issue is our growing proximity with America keeping Russia away from us. Therefore, India, in its national interest, needs to maintain balancing ties with both countries. Keeping this in mind India has already moved a way forward to sign a deal without caring for the consequences of American sanction under (the CAATSA) Act with Russia for obtaining a missile defence system. Despite India's close defence relationship with Russia, we have not succeeded in weaving robust economic relations with Russia and this area needs special attention from India's standpoint. Keeping this in mind both the countries proposed to set up a diamond hub in Mumbai so that Russia can directly send rough produce to India for final finishing. India is famous for cutting and polishing diamonds.

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