

# India and Russia in the Architecture of Greater Eurasia: Convergence, Contestation, and Strategic Futures

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## Abstract

This chapter examines the evolving roles of India and Russia within the emerging framework of Greater Eurasia, a geopolitical concept advanced by Russia to promote a multipolar, continent-wide architecture of cooperation. Drawing upon classical and contemporary geopolitical theories, including Mackinder's Heartland thesis and neo-Eurasian perspectives, the study situates Greater Eurasia as a contested and dynamic strategic space shaped by competing regional visions and power asymmetries. The analysis highlights the convergence between India and Russia in their shared commitment to multipolarity, sovereignty, and regional stability, as reflected in their cooperation across platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. At the same time, it underscores key divergences arising from India's multi-aligned foreign policy orientation and Russia's continental strategic focus, particularly in the context of China's expanding influence through trans-regional connectivity initiatives.

The chapter further explores the role of economic and infrastructural linkages, including the International North-South Transport Corridor and prospective engagement with the Eurasian Economic Union, in shaping the geoeconomic dimension of India–Russia relations. It argues that while the bilateral partnership remains resilient and strategically significant, it is increasingly mediated by structural constraints such as the China factor, limited economic integration, and institutional fragmentation within Eurasia. Ultimately, the study contends that Greater Eurasia is best understood not as a coherent regional order but as an evolving and contested geopolitical space, within which India and Russia must continuously negotiate their interests and strategic priorities. The future trajectory of their engagement will depend on their capacity to manage divergences while deepening cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

## Introduction

Eurasia has re-emerged as a central arena in contemporary geopolitics, reflecting both historical continuities and new strategic transformations. The growing salience of the region is closely tied to the idea of the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP), a concept advanced by Russia to promote a continental framework of cooperation that transcends Western-centric institutions. This vision seeks to integrate regional mechanisms such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and broader connectivity initiatives into a flexible and inclusive geopolitical space (Karaganov, 2017). In this evolving landscape, India and Russia occupy significant yet distinct positions. While Russia envisions Eurasia as the core of its geopolitical identity, India approaches the region through a strategy of multi-alignment, balancing continental engagement with its Indo-Pacific commitments.

This paper examines the role of India and Russia within the Greater Eurasian framework, focusing on the interplay between convergence and divergence in their strategic orientations. It argues that although the India–Russia partnership continues to provide a stable foundation for cooperation in Eurasia, it is increasingly shaped by structural constraints such as China’s rise, shifting economic dynamics, and evolving institutional architectures. The analysis draws on official policy documents, think-tank reports, and scholarly literature to provide a balanced and critical assessment of their engagement in Greater Eurasia.

The geopolitical significance of Eurasia has long been recognized in classical and contemporary strategic thought. Halford Mackinder’s Heartland theory famously posited that control over the Eurasian landmass would confer global dominance, highlighting the enduring strategic centrality of the region (Mackinder, 1904/2004). Although formulated in the early 20th century, this perspective continues to inform contemporary analyses of Eurasian geopolitics, particularly in the context of great power competition and continental connectivity.

In the post-Cold War era, Russian strategic thought has revived and adapted these ideas through the lens of Neo-Eurasianism. Scholars such as Alexander Dugin emphasize the civilizational distinctiveness of Eurasia and advocate for a multipolar world order that resists Western hegemony (Dugin, 2012). Similarly, Richard Sakwa conceptualizes Eurasia as a “contested space” characterized by overlapping regional orders and competing visions of integration (Sakwa, 2015). These theoretical perspectives underscore the importance of examining Eurasia not merely as a geographical entity but as a dynamic arena of political, economic, and normative contestation.

From an International Relations perspective, the concept of multipolarity provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the Greater Eurasian project. Both India and Russia advocate for a more balanced distribution of global power, emphasizing sovereignty, non-interference, and pluralism in international governance. However, their interpretations of multipolarity differ in practice, reflecting their distinct strategic priorities and regional engagements. This divergence is particularly evident in their approaches to China and regional connectivity initiatives.

### **Russia’s Vision of Greater Eurasia**

Russia’s articulation of the Greater Eurasian Partnership represents a strategic response to the changing global order, particularly in the aftermath of its deteriorating relations with the West following the 2014 Ukraine crisis. The GEP seeks to position Russia as a central actor in a reconfigured Eurasian order, linking regional organizations and fostering economic and political cooperation across the continent (Putin, 2016). The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) serves as a key institutional pillar of this vision. Established in 2015, the EAEU aims to promote economic integration among its member states by facilitating the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor (Eurasian Economic Commission, 2023). Russia has also sought to expand the EAEU’s external partnerships, including potential engagement with India, as part of its broader Eurasian strategy.

In addition to economic integration, Russia emphasizes security cooperation through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO provides a platform for addressing regional security challenges, including terrorism, extremism, and instability in Central Asia (SCO Secretariat, 2023). By integrating economic and security dimensions, Russia aims to create a comprehensive framework for Eurasian cooperation.

At the same time, Russia's Eurasian vision is shaped by its relationship with China. While the two countries share a strategic partnership and cooperate on initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Russia remains cautious about China's growing economic dominance in Eurasia. The GEP can thus be seen as an attempt to balance cooperation with China while preserving Russia's strategic autonomy.

#### India's Eurasian Strategy: Strategic Autonomy and Multi-Alignment

India's engagement with Eurasia is guided by its long-standing commitment to strategic autonomy, which emphasizes the ability to pursue independent foreign policy choices while maintaining diversified partnerships. Unlike Russia, India does not view Eurasia as a singular geopolitical project but as part of a broader strategic landscape that includes the Indo-Pacific and global multilateral institutions.

Historically, India's engagement with Eurasia has been shaped by its close relationship with the Soviet Union, which laid the foundation for contemporary India–Russia ties. In the post-Cold War period, India has sought to expand its engagement with Eurasia through multilateral platforms such as the SCO and BRICS. India's membership in the SCO reflects its interest in regional security cooperation and its recognition of Eurasia's strategic importance (Ministry of External Affairs 2023).

Connectivity initiatives play a central role in India's Eurasian strategy. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a key project aimed at enhancing connectivity between India, Russia, and Central Asia. By providing an alternative route that bypasses Pakistan, the INSTC facilitates trade and strengthens India's access to Eurasian markets (Press Information Bureau [PIB 2024]). Similarly, India's investment in Chabahar Port in Iran underscores its commitment to expanding regional connectivity and counterbalancing competing initiatives such as the BRI.

India's Eurasian strategy is also shaped by its Indo-Pacific engagements, which emphasize maritime security and partnerships with countries such as the United States, Japan, and Australia. This dual orientation reflects India's attempt to balance continental and maritime priorities while maintaining strategic flexibility.

#### India–Russia Bilateral Relations in the Eurasian Context

The India–Russia relationship constitutes a cornerstone of their engagement in Eurasia, characterized by deep historical ties and a high degree of strategic trust. The bilateral partnership, formally described as a “Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership,” encompasses a wide range of sectors, including defence, energy, and technology (MEA, 2023).

Defence cooperation remains a central pillar of the relationship, with Russia serving as a major supplier of military equipment to India. This cooperation not only enhances India's defence capabilities but also reinforces the strategic dimension of their partnership. In the Eurasian context, defence ties contribute to regional stability and provide a basis for broader cooperation in security-related issues.

Energy cooperation is another key area of convergence. Russia has emerged as a significant supplier of oil and gas to India, particularly in the context of shifting global energy markets. Nuclear energy cooperation, exemplified by projects such as the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, further strengthens their partnership and underscores the importance of energy security in Eurasian geopolitics (Rosatom, 2023).

Despite these strengths, economic ties between India and Russia remain relatively underdeveloped compared to their potential. Efforts to enhance trade and investment, including discussions on a free trade agreement with the EAEU, reflect ongoing attempts to address this gap.

### **Connectivity and Geoeconomics in Greater Eurasia**

Connectivity and geoeconomic considerations are central to the Greater Eurasian framework, reflecting the importance of infrastructure and trade networks in shaping regional dynamics. The INSTC represents a significant area of India–Russia cooperation, offering a multimodal transport corridor that connects India with Russia and Central Asia through Iran. According to official estimates, the INSTC can significantly reduce transportation costs and transit times, thereby enhancing economic integration (PIB, 2024).

The EAEU also plays a critical role in promoting economic connectivity within Eurasia. By facilitating the free movement of goods and services, the EAEU aims to create a unified economic space that can engage with external partners, including India. However, progress in establishing a formal economic partnership between India and the EAEU has been slow, reflecting both structural challenges and differing priorities.

At the same time, competing connectivity initiatives, particularly China’s BRI, have reshaped the geoeconomic landscape of Eurasia. While Russia has sought to align the EAEU with the BRI, India has expressed reservations about the initiative, particularly in relation to sovereignty concerns. This divergence highlights the complexities of connectivity politics in Eurasia and underscores the need for alternative frameworks such as the INSTC.

### **The China Factor and Strategic Constraints**

China represents a critical variable in the India–Russia relationship within Greater Eurasia. Russia’s deepening partnership with China, driven by shared geopolitical interests and economic complementarities, contrasts with India’s more cautious and competitive approach toward Beijing. This asymmetry creates both opportunities and challenges for India–Russia cooperation.

China’s BRI has emerged as a dominant force in Eurasian connectivity, shaping regional trade and infrastructure networks. While Russia views the BRI as a potential partner for its Eurasian integration efforts, India has raised concerns about the initiative’s implications for sovereignty and regional balance. These differing perspectives complicate the prospects for trilateral cooperation and highlight the limitations of a unified Eurasian vision.

At the same time, the India–Russia–China triangle reflects broader dynamics of multipolarity, where cooperation and competition coexist. Managing these dynamics requires careful balancing and underscores the importance of flexible and inclusive approaches to regional cooperation.

### **Institutional Dynamics in Eurasia**

Institutional frameworks play a crucial role in shaping Eurasian geopolitics, providing platforms for cooperation and coordination among regional actors. The SCO serves as a key mechanism for addressing security challenges and fostering political dialogue, while the EAEU focuses on economic integration.

In addition to these regional institutions, broader platforms such as BRICS contribute to the development of alternative models of global governance. By promoting cooperation among emerging economies, BRICS reflects the growing importance of non-Western institutions in shaping the global order.

However, the institutional landscape of Eurasia remains fragmented, with overlapping mandates and varying levels of effectiveness. This fragmentation limits the coherence of the Greater Eurasian project and underscores the challenges of building a unified regional architecture.

### **Convergences and Divergences: A Critical Assessment**

The India–Russia partnership in Greater Eurasia is characterized by a combination of convergence and divergence. Areas of convergence include their shared commitment to multipolarity, sovereignty, and regional stability, as well as their cooperation in defence, energy, and connectivity.

At the same time, significant divergences persist, particularly in relation to China, economic integration, and strategic priorities. India’s Indo-Pacific orientation contrasts with Russia’s continental focus, while their differing approaches to connectivity initiatives reflect broader geopolitical differences.

These dynamics highlight the importance of distinguishing between structural and policy-level constraints. While structural factors such as China’s rise and global power shifts shape the broader context of their relationship, policy choices and institutional frameworks play a critical role in determining the extent of cooperation.

### **Future Trajectories of India–Russia Engagement in Greater Eurasia**

The future of India–Russia engagement in Greater Eurasia will depend on their ability to navigate a complex and evolving geopolitical landscape. Potential scenarios include deepening cooperation in areas such as connectivity and energy, as well as the possibility of strategic stagnation if divergences persist.

Emerging issues such as energy transitions, Arctic routes, and digital connectivity are likely to play an increasingly important role in shaping their engagement. By leveraging their complementarities and addressing structural constraints, India and Russia can contribute to the development of a more balanced and inclusive Eurasian order.

### **Conclusion**

Greater Eurasia represents a dynamic and contested geopolitical space, characterized by competing visions of integration and regional order. Within this framework, India and Russia occupy distinct yet intersecting positions, reflecting their shared interests and divergent priorities.

While their partnership remains a key pillar of Eurasian geopolitics, it is increasingly shaped by external factors such as China’s rise and the evolving global order. The future of their engagement will depend on their ability to balance cooperation with competition and to adapt to the changing dynamics of the Eurasian region.

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