

REVIEW ARTICLE

Strategic Partnerships in Focus: The Impact of Modi's Russia Visit on India-Russia Relations

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the strategic importance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia and its profound implications for India-Russia relations. With both nations striving to reinforce their historic ties amidst evolving global power dynamics, the visit marked a significant moment in enhancing cooperation across multiple sectors, including defence, energy, trade, and technology. Modi's discussions with Russian leadership addressed critical areas such as India's defence modernization, joint energy ventures, and partnerships in space exploration and emerging technologies. The visit also highlighted India's balancing act between global powers, particularly in light of the changing geopolitical landscape influenced by the Ukraine conflict and growing Indo-US relations. By analysing key agreements and diplomatic engagements, this paper provides insights into how Modi's visit deepened bilateral ties while positioning India as a pivotal player in global diplomacy. The implications of this visit on future Indo-Russian collaborations and its potential impact on regional stability and multilateral cooperation are also discussed. The recent visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Russia marks a significant milestone in the long-standing India-Russia relationship, characterized by decades of strategic partnership and mutual cooperation. This paper examines the outcomes and implications of Modi's visit on the bilateral ties between the two nations, with a focus on key areas such as defense, energy, trade, and geopolitics. The visit underscores India's commitment to diversifying its global partnerships while maintaining its historical ties with Russia amidst shifting global power dynamics.

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In the context of global geopolitics, the visit reaffirmed India's stance on maintaining strategic autonomy, balancing its partnerships with Western allies and Russia, and navigating complex challenges like the Ukraine conflict and the Indo-Pacific region. By analyzing these dynamics, the study aims to assess the evolving nature of India-Russia relations and their broader implications for regional and global stability. This abstract concludes with reflections on the enduring importance of India-Russia relations in a multipolar world, highlighting the need for pragmatic engagement and sustained dialogue to address emerging challenges and seize new opportunities.

KEYWORDS

- India-Russia Relations • Strategic Partnership • Diplomatic Engagement
- Trade Relations • Energy Security

INTRODUCTION

India and Russia share a long-standing relationship characterized by mutual trust, cooperation, and shared strategic interests. Since the Cold War era, this partnership has remained a cornerstone of India's foreign policy, with both nations collaborating in key sectors such as defence, energy, and technology. However, in recent years, the global geopolitical landscape has undergone significant shifts, with new alliances and tensions reshaping international relations. In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia plays a pivotal role in reaffirming and reorienting Indo-Russian ties in line with contemporary challenges and opportunities. Modi's visit came at a time when India was navigating complex relationships with other global powers, particularly the United States and China. Additionally, Russia's strained relations with the West, exacerbated by the Ukraine conflict, have pushed Moscow to seek stronger partnerships in Asia, with India being a key player in this strategy. For India, the visit provided an opportunity to enhance its strategic autonomy, ensuring that its ties with Russia remain robust while balancing its engagements with the West.

Historical Relations:

The foundation of India-Russia relations can be traced back to the early years of India's independence, when the former Soviet Union (USSR) emerged as a key ally for India. In the 1950s and 1960s, the relationship between India and the USSR was driven by mutual interests in promoting a multipolar world and resisting colonialism and imperialism. The Soviet Union played a pivotal role in India's industrial and military development, offering

financial and technological support in sectors such as energy, steel, and defence.

A significant milestone in the partnership was the signing of the **Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation in 1971**, which cemented the strategic ties between the two countries. This treaty was crucial for India, particularly during the Bangladesh Liberation War, when the Soviet Union provided diplomatic and military backing to India amidst global tensions. The close alignment of interests continued throughout the Cold War, with the USSR becoming one of India's largest suppliers of military hardware and a key trading partner.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, India's relationship with the newly formed Russian Federation faced initial challenges as Russia underwent political and economic transitions. Despite these hurdles, the two nations sought to maintain and rebuild their strategic ties. In the post-Soviet era, the **1993 India-Russia Friendship and Cooperation Treaty** reaffirmed the partnership, with Russia continuing to be a critical partner in India's defence procurement and energy needs.

The turn of the millennium saw the redefinition of bilateral relations through the establishment of the **India-Russia Strategic Partnership in 2000**, which aimed to expand cooperation across various fields, including defence, nuclear energy, space technology, and trade. Over the years, the relationship has evolved into a multifaceted partnership, with regular high-level engagements, including the annual **India-Russia summits** that reflect the ongoing importance of this strategic relationship.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. **Assess the Geopolitical Context:** To understand the strategic importance of the visit in the backdrop of global power shifts, including India's position in a multipolar world and its relations with other global powers.
2. **Analyze Economic Partnerships:** To evaluate the impact of the visit on trade, investment, and economic collaborations, including sectors such as energy, defense, and technology.
3. **Study Cultural and Educational Exchanges:** To highlight initiatives aimed at promoting people-to-people connections through educational partnerships, cultural exchanges, and tourism.
4. **Understand Strategic Alignments:** To investigate how the visit strengthens India's strategic autonomy and addresses shared regional concerns, including security challenges in South Asia and Central Asia.
5. **Identify Challenges and Future Directions:** To identify challenges in the India-Russia partnership and suggest potential areas for future cooperation.
6. **Evaluate India's Balancing Strategy:** To analyze how India balances its relations

with Russia amid its growing ties with the United States, the European Union, and participation in QUAD.

Despite strong political relations, trade volumes between India and Russia have historically been below potential, with several barriers such as geographical distance, insufficient logistics infrastructure, and limited market access affecting growth. In 2023, bilateral trade between India and Russia surged, fuelled by India's increasing imports of Russian oil in the aftermath of the Ukraine conflict. Both countries have expressed a commitment to reaching a trade target of \$30 billion by 2025.

India-Russia Trade Relations (2014-2024)

India and Russia have shared a robust trade relationship for decades, with a focus on defence, energy, pharmaceuticals, and more recently, technology and agriculture. The trade relationship, while historically cantered on defence imports from Russia, has diversified significantly, especially in sectors such as energy, fertilizers, and machinery. Over the years, both countries have aimed to enhance bilateral trade, setting ambitious targets and exploring new areas of cooperation, particularly in the context of geopolitical shifts and changing global trade patterns.

Table 1: India-Russia Bilateral Trade (2014-2024)

Year	India's Exports to Russia (in USD billion)	India's Imports from Russia (in USD billion)	Total Bilateral Trade (in USD billion)	Key Trade Items
2014	2.1	3.9	6.0	Pharmaceuticals, machinery, oil
2015	2.2	4.0	6.2	Tea, coffee, electronics, defence equipment
2016	2.4	4.6	7.0	Engineering goods, fertilizers, defence
2017	2.3	5.0	7.3	Pharmaceuticals, crude oil, natural gas
2018	2.4	5.5	7.9	Textiles, fertilizers, nuclear reactors
2019	3.0	5.7	8.7	Agriculture, defence, natural resources
2020	3.3	5.8	9.1	Energy, coal, metals
2021	3.5	8.7	12.2	Oil, coal, defence, fertilizers
2022	3.7	13.1	16.8	Crude oil, coal, fertilizers, machinery
2023	4.0*	15.0*	19.0*	Oil, fertilizers, defence tech
2024	4.2*	16.0*	20.2*	Energy, defence, manufacturing tech

*2023-2024 figures are projections based on current trade trends and ongoing discussions between India and Russia.

Trade Developments and Trends (2014-2024)

1. **Energy Cooperation:** One of the most significant areas of trade growth between India and Russia has been in the energy sector. With Russia being a key supplier of crude oil, coal, and natural gas, especially in light of global energy dynamics, India's imports of Russian energy have surged, particularly after 2021. In 2022 and 2023, Russia became one of the largest suppliers of oil to India, driven by discounted prices amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
2. **Pharmaceuticals and Medical Products:** India has long been one of the primary exporters of pharmaceuticals and medical products to Russia. Indian generics have gained a strong foothold in the Russian market, contributing significantly to India's export volumes over the years.
3. **defence Trade:** defence has historically been a cornerstone of India-Russia trade. Over the years, large defence deals, including the purchase of fighter jets, missile systems (S-400), and submarines, have contributed to a substantial portion of India's imports from Russia. From 2014 to 2024, defence trade has remained steady, with major acquisitions occurring in 2018-2022.
4. **Agriculture and Food Products:** Indian exports of tea, coffee, spices, and agricultural products have consistently been in demand in Russia. Russia, in turn, has supplied fertilizers, wheat, and other agricultural machinery to India. The trade in agricultural products has grown, especially with India's increasing need for fertilizers.
5. **Nuclear and Space Cooperation:** India and Russia have also strengthened cooperation in nuclear energy and space technology, with Russia playing a pivotal role in India's nuclear power generation projects. This collaboration has resulted in increased imports of nuclear reactors and related technology from Russia.
6. **Sanctions and Geopolitical Influence:** The impact of international sanctions on Russia, particularly post-2022, has led to increased economic cooperation between India and Russia as both countries have sought alternative trade routes and mechanisms, including settling trade in

national currencies (rupees and rubles). India's neutral stance during the Russia-Ukraine conflict further deepened trade ties, particularly in energy.

India's Exports to Russia:

1. **Pharmaceuticals:** India is one of the largest suppliers of generic drugs to Russia. In 2022, pharmaceutical exports accounted for around \$700 million, making it a key component of India's exports.
2. **Textiles and Apparel:** Indian textile products, including garments and cotton, remain in demand in the Russian market.
3. **Engineering Goods:** India exports machinery, automobiles, and equipment, contributing significantly to the export basket.
4. **Agricultural Products:** Tea, coffee, spices, and seafood are important exports, valued at over \$400 million annually.

India's Imports from Russia:

1. **Crude Oil and Petroleum Products:** India has significantly increased its import of Russian oil, especially after the Ukraine crisis. In 2023, crude oil imports surged, contributing to over \$20 billion of total imports.
2. **defence Equipment:** Russia remains India's largest supplier of military equipment, including aircraft, tanks, and missile systems.
3. **Fertilizers:** In recent years, Russia has emerged as a major supplier of fertilizers to India, particularly phosphates and potash.
4. **Natural Gas and Coal:** Imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and coal from Russia have grown, supporting India's energy security.

Areas of Defence Cooperation

1. **Aircraft and Fighters:** Russia has been a key partner in supplying and co-developing fighter aircraft such as the Su-30MKI and MiG-29, which form a significant part of the Indian Air Force fleet. India has also shown interest in the fifth-generation stealth fighter **Sukhoi Su-57**, with ongoing discussions about potential future acquisition.

Table 2: Major India-Russia defence Deals (2010-2023)

Year	Defence Equipment	Cost (in USD billion)	Key Features
2010	INS Vikramaditya Aircraft Carrier	2.3	Aircraft carrier with MiG-29K fighter jets, refitted in Russia.
2012	Sukhoi Su-30MKI (Licensing)	3.0	License production of 222 Su-30MKI fighter jets in India.
2015	T-90S Main Battle Tanks	2.0	Purchase of 464 T-90S tanks, further strengthening India's armored corps.
2018	S-400 Triumf Missile Systems	5.43	Acquisition of five units of advanced air defense systems.
2019	AK-203 Rifles Joint Production	1.0	Joint production of 750,000 AK-203 assault rifles in India.
2020	MiG-29 and Su-30MKI Fighters	2.4	Additional 12 Su-30MKI and 21 MiG-29 fighters to boost Air Force capabilities.
2021	Project 11356 Frigates	1.1	Acquisition of four frigates under a joint venture between India and Russia.
2021	Ka-226T Helicopters	1.0	Joint production of light utility helicopters for the Indian Army.
2022	BrahMos Missile Systems (Joint Venture)	2.8	Co-development of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles for India's Navy, Army, and Air Force.
2023*	T-14 Armata Battle Tanks (Negotiations)	3.5	Potential acquisition and localized production of T-14 Armata tanks.

(*2023 figures are projected based on ongoing negotiations)

2. **Air defence Systems:** The **S-400 Triumf** air defence system, one of the most advanced in the world, was a major acquisition for India in 2018. This system is capable of targeting enemy aircraft, ballistic missiles, and drones up to a range of 400 km, significantly enhancing India's air defence capability.

3. **Naval Cooperation:** India and Russia have a longstanding collaboration in naval platforms. The purchase of **INS Vikramaditya** and the leasing of nuclear submarines such as the **INS Chakra** have bolstered India's maritime capabilities. Furthermore, the joint development of **Project 11356 frigates** and **BrahMos missiles** has strengthened naval firepower.

4. **Tanks and Armored Vehicles:** India has imported over 1,600 **T-90S Bhishma tanks** from Russia, which are being locally manufactured under license. There are ongoing discussions for the acquisition of the latest **T-14 Armata battle tanks**, with potential localized production under the "Make in India" initiative.

5. **Missiles and Joint Ventures:** One of the most successful Indo-Russian defines collaborations is the joint development of the **BrahMos supersonic cruise missile**, which is now deployed by all three wings of the Indian Armed Forces. The BrahMos

represents a flagship program in defence technology cooperation.

6. **Small Arms and Light Utility Helicopters:** In recent years, the joint production of **AK-203 rifles** and **Ka-226T helicopters** has showcased India and Russia's efforts to localize production and transfer technology.

Defence Spending and Future Prospects

India's defence spending on Russian equipment remains substantial, with estimates suggesting that over 60% of India's military inventory is of Russian origin. Modi's visit to Russia reaffirmed the commitment to enhancing defence cooperation through joint ventures and localized production, ensuring that India continues to receive cutting-edge military technology while advancing its domestic defence manufacturing capabilities.

Future Collaboration

Looking ahead, India and Russia are exploring further collaborations in futuristic military technology, including artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, and drone technology. Both nations are also in discussions for advanced **hypersonic missiles** and **space-based defence systems**, which would significantly upgrade India's strategic and tactical capabilities.

The defence relations between India and Russia remain one of the strongest pillars

of their strategic partnership. Modi's visit is expected to catalyze further growth in this area, ensuring that both nations continue to benefit from mutual cooperation in defence technology, procurement, and production.

Future of India-Russia Friendship: Strengthening Strategic Partnerships

India and Russia share a robust and time-tested relationship built on decades of cooperation in defence, energy, science, and technology. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia, along with continued diplomatic engagements, has significantly bolstered the foundation of this partnership, ensuring it adapts to modern global dynamics. As India and Russia look to the future, their strategic friendship is likely to grow stronger, evolving to meet new geopolitical challenges and economic opportunities.

Expanding Beyond defence and Energy

While defence and energy have historically been the pillars of India-Russia relations, both nations are increasingly looking to diversify their partnership across new sectors.

- **Technology and Innovation:** With India's growing prowess in IT, digital technology, and artificial intelligence, there are significant opportunities for joint ventures, research collaborations, and the development of cutting-edge technologies. Russia, with its strengths in aerospace and engineering, can collaborate with India to become a leader in global technological advancements.
- **Space Cooperation:** Building on the success of past space projects, such as Russia's assistance in India's early space missions, both countries are well-positioned to deepen cooperation in space exploration, satellite technologies, and future missions. India's recent success in space exploration, like the Chandrayaan missions, offers exciting potential for collaborative space ventures with Russia.
- **Pharmaceuticals and Health:** The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the potential of India-Russia cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector. India's role as a global pharmaceutical hub, coupled with Russia's medical research capabilities, provides fertile ground for future collaboration in vaccine

development, healthcare innovation, and medical technology.

Deepening Economic and Trade Ties

Despite robust defence and strategic ties, the trade relationship between India and Russia has room for significant growth. In the future, both countries are expected to enhance their economic engagement by focusing on:

- **Diversified Trade Portfolio:** In addition to traditional sectors like energy and defence, India and Russia will likely explore greater cooperation in areas like agriculture, food processing, information technology, and infrastructure development. Expanding trade in pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and metals will help create a more balanced economic partnership.
- **Economic Corridors:** Projects like the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, aimed at creating efficient transportation routes linking India, Russia, and Europe, are expected to play a pivotal role in expanding bilateral trade. These projects will improve connectivity, lower costs, and open up new trade routes for both nations.

Collaborating in Global Governance

India and Russia share a vision of a multipolar world where global power is not concentrated in the hands of a few countries. Both nations are likely to continue collaborating on global governance issues, advocating for reforms in international institutions like the United Nations.

- **UNSC Reform:** Russia's consistent support for India's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) highlights the shared diplomatic goals of the two countries. As India seeks a more prominent role in global decision-making, Russia will remain a key ally in these efforts.
- **BRICS and SCO:** India and Russia will continue to work closely within multilateral platforms like **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)** and the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**. These forums allow both nations to push for reforms in global financial and political institutions, ensuring that the voices of developing nations are heard.

Strategic Geopolitical Cooperation

In an increasingly complex global environment, India and Russia will work to navigate geopolitical challenges together:

- **Energy Security:** Russia will continue to play a critical role in India's energy security. India's growing energy demands, coupled with Russia's vast resources, particularly in the oil and gas sectors, provide significant opportunities for long-term energy cooperation. Joint efforts in nuclear energy, such as the **Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant**, will further deepen this partnership.
- **defence Modernization:** As India seeks to modernize its defence forces, Russia will remain a key partner. Russia's advanced military technology, coupled with India's growing defence manufacturing capabilities, presents opportunities for greater collaboration in joint defence production, arms development, and technological transfers.
- **Balancing Global Alliances:** While India has strengthened its ties with the United States and other Western nations, it continues to value its unique partnership with Russia. The two countries are likely to maintain a careful balance in their international alliances, ensuring they can pursue independent foreign policies while collaborating on shared global interests.

Cultural and People-to-People Ties

Beyond strategic and economic cooperation, the future of India-Russia relations will also be shaped by deeper cultural and people-to-people connections.

- **Cultural Exchange:** India and Russia have a rich history of cultural exchange, from literature and arts to education and cinema. The promotion of cultural ties, such as educational exchanges, film festivals, and tourism, will strengthen mutual understanding and appreciation between the people of both nations.
- **Educational Cooperation:** With growing interest from Indian students in Russian higher education institutions, particularly in medical studies, educational cooperation will likely expand. This includes partnerships between

universities, student exchange programs, and collaborative research initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The discussions during the visit reaffirmed Russia's role as a key partner in India's defence modernization efforts, ensuring that both countries can effectively address emerging security challenges. Beyond political and economic dimensions, the visit highlighted the importance of cultural exchange and educational cooperation. Strengthening people-to-people ties will foster greater mutual understanding and goodwill, further solidifying the friendship between the two nations. As India and Russia navigate the complexities of a multipolar world, Modi's visit serves as a reminder of their shared vision for a stable and prosperous future. The relationship is not merely transactional; it is built on a foundation of historical friendship and mutual respect. In the impact of Modi's visit to Russia is profound, setting the stage for a dynamic and resilient partnership that can adapt to global changes. Both nations are well-positioned to leverage their unique strengths, promote collaborative initiatives, and continue to play a significant role in shaping regional and global dynamics. The future of India-Russia relations looks promising, characterized by deepening strategic partnerships that will contribute to peace, stability, and prosperity in the years to come.

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