

Indo-Russia Relations: A Political Analysis

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Abstract

Global Political scenario has always been influenced by relations between the states, which in turn affects the global order. The Indo-Russia relations cannot be explained merely as a Bi-lateral relationship. The seven decade friendship between these two Asian giants should be analysed in the spheres they collaborated in the context of the impressive magnitude of their engagements. The historic relationship had withstood the turbulence of cold war, aftermath of the collapse of USSR and the challenges posed by a unipolar world order. Russia's resurrection after the Soviet collapse and India's fast paced development gave these nations new arenas for cooperation and engagement. The purpose of this paper is to study this enigmatic relationship between these two nations using a theoretical approach, drawing from primary and secondary published data. By exploring Indo-Russian relations in the historical and current International scenario, this paper attempts to chart out the scope for furthering constructive engagement in the evolving Indo-Pacific scenario.

Keywords: Soviet Union, Bolshevik Revolution, Non-Alignment, Indo- Pacific, Multipolarity

Origin Of Ties

The formulation of an independent foreign policy by India after Independence was a conscious step taken by the Indian leadership, to stay away from the political rivalry between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the USA led bloc that divided the world into two ideological camps. This led to the Indian initiative for a Non-Alignment Policy in the world by the newly independent states of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The Indo-Soviet relationship started even before India's independence from British Colonial rule. In 1927 Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, visited the Soviet Union for the first time on the 10th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. The visit can be

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marked as the beginning of the relationship between the Soviet Union and the future political elite of the Republic of India. It should be noted that the Soviet Union recognised India and diplomatic relations were established on 13th April 1947, even before India was officially an independent and sovereign state.

The Indo-Soviet Relations is seen as a phenomenon in the international political arena. In the beginning both countries were distant in their relationship as the Soviet Union was of the impression that India was a tool of the Anglo-American neo-imperial policies in the Asian region. This attitude of the Soviet leadership towards India changed when the Indian foreign policy, reflecting India's strategic autonomy and its non-alignment strategy, came to be seen as a faithful step taken by India without any external influences, pressure or as a mere narrow national interest. India's espousal of the Panchsheel doctrine of non-interference and respect for sovereignty, stemming from the 1954 India-China Agreement and further as the basis of the 1957 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, Indonesia established India's credentials as the leader of the developing world. This was to have a hugely positive impact on the India-USSR relationship. The USSR's endorsement of India's non-alignment policy is one such point in the relationship, as it tries to showcase the depth of the Soviet Union's trust in Indian foreign policy even though the Non-Alignment Movement was to stay away from the two superpowers and their respective blocs. The Indo-Soviet relationship was also influenced by the Soviet Union's desire to engage with the newly de-colonised Afro-Asian states. The USSR projected itself as a champion of freedom from colonialism and imperialism. It made considerable headway into these countries on the basis of its anti-colonial and anti-imperialist principles.

India in Russian Multi Polarity and Indian Moment

Indo Russia relations which went in to inactive mode during the collapse of Soviet Union disintegration saw its revival in 2000s during the beginning of the Presidency of Vladimir Putin. This restructuring of relationship was cemented by the upgradation of the bilateral relationship. In October 2000 President Putin's visit to India marked the establishment of the "India-Russia Strategic Partnership", which was elevated to the level of a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" in 2010.

The strong bilateral relationship which got stronger in every aspect of engagement between these two states gave a new vision to work together for a multipolar world order which both nations strive to achieve. The Russian vision of creating a multipolar world order is not just the

idea of increasing its presence in the global political order but it also has a strain of creating new powers in different parts of the world in which India has a special status as a major power in the Indian Ocean Region. How Russia sees India in its Multipolar world order is a debatable topic but there are different structures through which Russia gives India the stature of powerful player in the evolving Multipolar world order.

The Formation of BRICS, Inclusion of India in to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation can be seen as a Russian way of creating a Neo-global order which echoes the idea of multipolarity in the current Unipolar world order. It can be assumed that in the South Asian context Russia gives the primacy to India when it comes to this equation of Russian Multipolar world order. This Vision of Russia can be analysed from the perspective of accommodation of new powers in the world political stage. This idea of accommodation is being supported by some American scholars who termed it as the idea of compromise-Accommodation. Authors of the book “Accommodating Rising Powers” put forward “the conception of accommodation that existed before and guaranteed a certain stability and balance of power in the international order”. (Anatoly Torkunov, 2018). The accommodating principle followed by Russia by creating groupings of nations from different parts of the world can be analysed as a different aspect of the Multipolar world order that is evolving as these countries belong to rapidly developing economies. According to Professor Tatiana Shakleina (Tatiana, 2016) of MGIMO, These countries are also trying to formulate a common economic, security, and political strategy that will safeguard their group interests, will demonstrate their alternative position on world and regional development, and on issues of war and peace (military intervention and regime change), which gives India a face of leader in the South Asian and Indian Ocean Region to influence and formulate the Multipolar world order.

If the Russian vision of Multipolar world order is by creating new power centres and accommodating new powers in the global power politics, India also is keen to create a Multipolar world order based on justice and equality in every aspect of world functionality, which should follow the globalisation of inclusiveness for the development of growing economies in the third world and tries to secure the national and international interests through different aspects of functioning. This is the reason why India has its own sphere of Multipolarity which propounds polycentric power equations in international relations by maintaining strategic autonomy in the foreign policy decisions it takes, which is parallel according to the vision of Russian Multipolar world order, which makes Indian interests

appealing to Kremlin. This gives the Indian policy of Multipolarity a unique feature which was reflected during the Ukrainian Crisis. The Indian Government refused to condemn the acts of Moscow for its Special Military Operations in Ukraine and join the US led bloc. According to Derek Grossman of Rand Corporation (Grossman, 2022) Modi has managed to elevate India's global stature, Each of the other major powers—the United States, Russia, and China—are intensely courting India to deny a strategic advantage to their adversaries. This act of India in keeping its neutrality and independence in the current global context can be termed as India's moment in the evolving multipolar world order. These actions of India which was coined as “Ultra Realist Policy and protect Indian interests above all else will contribute to India's rise to great power status and shift the global system toward even greater multipolarity” (Grossman, 2022).

India- Russian engagement in Indo Pacific and its Future

The Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed by Soviet Union and India on August 9th, 1971 can be seen as the inception of the engagement between Russia and India in the most crucial geo political hotspot of the world. This engagement transformed the geo politics of South Asian region, which also gave a new idea of the Indo-Pacific between India and Russia. Engagement by these two states was reflected in the Geo Political Situations that happened in the Indian Ocean Region. It should be also worth mentioning that these events in the 1970s where India and Soviet Russia decided to engage in the region is even before the US concentration to the idea of Indo Pacific. This shows the historical background of Indian interest in Indo Pacific as its sphere of influence and answers why it needs Russia to be a part of the geo political equation on the Indo-Pacific.

In the present context the geo politics have changed, after the collapse of Soviet Union, Russian Federation who have inherited the power of erstwhile USSR have changed the foreign policy concept of Russia in which they oppose the idea of Indo Pacific which is seen brainchild of US foreign policy, but agrees on the term Asia Pacific which to an extent is considered as US made concept. In the foreign policy of United States of America Indo-Pacific is considered as a “free and open” region, but for India it has seen this region as “free, open and inclusive”, which is multi polar in character to include countries like Russia in the geo political developments of the region. The main reason why India wants Russia in the geo politics of Indo Pacific is because it gives more multipolar nature to the region and also keeps Chinese dominance in check which is a threat to the Indian interests in the Indian Ocean and Pacific

Regions. In the economic sphere Chennai -Vladivostok maritime route gave new opportunities for countries like India to invest in Russia's Far East which gave new markets to Indian products. These initiatives are part of India's Act Far East policy which seeks to connect with the Asian part of Russia (Sharma, 2021). Although Russia rejects and oppose the idea of Indo Pacific, its acts in the regions in the form of new partnerships with regional organisations like ASEAN and SAARC talks volumes of the shifts that is happening in the policy of strategy and engagement in the region. This shift can be analysed from the fact that Indo-Pacific can be used as a platform for Russia to stay visible in the global power politics which is witnessing a shift from the western hemisphere to the east from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. It also serves as a base for Russia to promote its Multipolar world order vision which majority of the states belonging to the Indo Pacific stands for. This is the point where India tries to play a role to bring in Russia to the region.

This engagement is also witnessed between India and Russia also in the regional and multilateral groupings that is being made strong. The involvement of India and Russia in BRICS not only brought about a new political trend in the international political order, but created a new power dynamic in the Indo-Pacific region. This change in the political power dynamics was seen when Russia pushed for India's entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which led to India gaining full membership in 2017. The primary reason why Russia wanted India in SCO was to stop Chinese dominance in the organisation. Moreover, Russia was giving India a space to be a part of the organisation, as Russia considered India's position as a regional power and also the diplomatic and political clout of India is far reaching even in Central Asia which will help in the consolidation of power by the organisation in strategic areas of Asia. With Russia's resurgence under President Vladimir Putin as a major "petro-power" in the 2000s, Moscow has attempted to get back into the Asian game. Besides strengthening military forces in the Far East, Russia has ramped up its "soft power" activities and has led a campaign of "soft balancing" aimed against the United States (BURGESS, 2019). If Russia sees it as an opportunity to create a space in the Indian Ocean region by politically supporting India through these organisations, India sees it as an opportunity to balance China's power in the region along with expanding its influence to most important geo-political parts of the world. The Indo-Russian political relations have seen many ups and downs, but it can be inferred that relationship between both the states in their political sphere have only become deep where they have mutual respect for their foreign policies and engagement. Moreover, when it comes to engagements, they make sure that there is a

reciprocity between two states by backing themselves at the time of crisis, and reassuring that this all-weatherly friendship should be maintained in the future. The significance of bilateral relationship between India and Russia is increasing as the world is seeing a transition in its geo-political context where the Asian region and Indo-Pacific specifically will be a focal point in the engagements between different powers of the world. While taking in to consideration the above stated facts regarding current Russian interest in the region, it is in India's interest to engage Russia in Indo Pacific as a substitute for Greater Eurasia concept.

As India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar had stated in 2019 (Affairs, 2019), "Russia is a Pacific Power which has Indian Ocean interests" while "India is an Indian Ocean power with very strong and growing Pacific interest".

Conclusion

From the analysis of India Russia relations through a Russian prism it can be inferred that Russia tried to make India a regional power in the Indian Ocean Region to concretise their interest and keep a check on the western powers like the US who try to control the region with their superior naval capabilities. This poses a threat to the growth of Russia as a leader in the Eurasian region. Although India has the support of Russia to become a permanent member of the security council, China always objects to India's addition. It can be pointed out that Russia wants India in the security council not only to create a strong ally to stop any irrational move from the western powers but also to make sure that Chinese power is contained or controlled in world power politics. From the view of India, the relationship with Russia is seen as an alternative to make sure that the US does not get involved in this region more than expected, as the dominance of any one country in the region is a threat to Indian sovereignty and integrity. For Russia, India is a strategic partner to increase its influence against the USA and its western allies who are dominating the Indo-Pacific region which can be a threat to Russia in the future.

If Indo-Soviet relationship was seen on the basis of how the world tried to evolve into a post-world war scenario, India Russian relations give a new direction to it by creating a new type of global politics which opposes unipolar world order and creates a multi polar one. Although the Ukrainian crisis brought a worldwide isolation of Russia, the Indian policy to not engage in any level either by supporting the Western powers or by opposing Russia is a reflection in itself of the Indian policy to make sure that it supports Russia. Moreover India needs Russia

by its side as a balancer and net security provider as Chinese intrusions are increasing in the border which is a priority for India.

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