

CHANGING DYNAMICS OF INDIA- RUSSIA STRATEGIC RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR IN UKRAINE

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2025 commemorated the 78th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Russia.¹ In the third decade of the 21st century, Russia continues to hold a significant position in India's foreign policy, and the reverse is also true. It continues to be a vital partner for India across various dimensions. India's ambitions for the future and its potential to attain great power status will require sustained backing from Russia. The extensive strategic partnership between the two nations is built on mutual understanding, aligned strategic interests, and enduring trust. As the decades unfold, this relationship is poised for significant progress. However, a notable change is apparent in the character, essence and scope of this developing partnership. Since the signing of the strategic partnership agreement back in 2000, considerable advancements have been made in multiple areas such as defence, nuclear energy, hydrocarbons, space exploration and science and technology. While there have been sporadic challenges concerning

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1. Annual Report, 2022, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, p. 94

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significant regional and global issues, the general alignment in the Indo-Russian relationship distinctly demonstrates the enduring trust between the two nations.² The key elements that have greatly impacted India's relationship with Russia include the necessity to counter hostile and unpredictable neighbours, a shared goal of creating a multipolar global order and a historically entrenched arms partnership. Indeed, Russia's desire to promote a multipolar world is in clear alignment with India's aspirations for a significant role in the international system. The convergence of strategic interests is anticipated to persist, potentially providing a degree of stability in the relationship.³

India has consistently prioritised the development of robust multi-dimensional ties with Russia. India's unwavering dedication to its strategic partnership with Russia, particularly in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, should be interpreted as an extension of its core strategic autonomy. Since the war in Ukraine that started in March 2022, New Delhi has refrained from voting against Moscow on almost all UN Resolutions concerning Ukraine. By expressing its reluctance to explicitly denounce the Russian military aggression, New Delhi sought to preserve its long-standing relationship with Moscow.⁴ The level of engagement between the two countries has been aptly described by India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar as "among

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2. Mohammad Samir Hussain, "Exploring the Potential of India-Russia Strategic Relationship", *Journal of Political Science*, vol. IX, no. 2, 2013.
 3. Spenser A. Warren and Sumit Ganguly, "India-Russia Relations after Ukraine", *Asian Survey*, vol. 62, no. 5-6, 2022. Accessed on May 15, 2025.
 4. Happymon Jacob, "Can India Bring Russia and Ukraine to the Table?", *Foreign Affairs*, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/india/can-india-bring-russia-and-ukraine-table>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

the steadiest of the major relationships of the world in the contemporary era.”⁵

Many in India and abroad have raised the critical question of why India abstains against Russia in the UN. The Indian decision is quite understandable because New Delhi continues to depend on Moscow for crucial defence components such as fighter jets, nuclear submarines, ground combat platforms and many others, thereby maintaining its reliance on Russia technology and support. In fact, the ongoing war has further compelled India to seek a wider array of weapon sources, as Russia faces challenges in fulfilling its own military needs due to the stringent sanctions.⁶

Ashley J. Tellis, a prominent expert on international affairs, argues that the choice to refrain from publicly denouncing Russia is influenced not by theoretical worries regarding the stability of the global order, but by deliberate Indian assessments of how distancing from Russia could jeopardise its security vis-a-vis China and Pakistan.⁷

This paper analyses the strategic relationship between India and Russia in the context of the ever-evolving international dynamics, especially following the Ukraine War. This analysis explores the implications of the current war on the future dynamics between New Delhi and Moscow. It raises concerns about whether the ongoing war will undermine the defence relations between the two nations. Additionally, it examines the challenges that have emerged in India’s relationship with Russia in the wake of the Russian invasion of

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5. Aleksei Zakharov, “India-Russia Relations in Troubled Times: Steady but Stagnating”, *Asie. Visions*, no. 140, 2024. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/ifri_zakharov_india_russia_2024%20(1).pdf. Accessed on May 16, 2025.

6. Vinay Kaura, “India’s Stake and Role in the US-China Strategic Competition”, *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, 23, no. 2, 2024, pp. 100-102. Accessed on April 12, 2025.

7. Ashley J. Tellis, “What is in Our Interest: India and the Ukraine War”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022. Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2022/04/what-is-in-our-interest-india-and-the-ukraine-war?lang=en>. Accessed on April 21, 2025.

Ukraine. Further, it discusses the changing dynamics of India-US relations amidst the Ukraine War. The paper posits that the current war may drive Russia to strengthen its ties with China, a country with which India has experienced long-standing border disputes along the Line of Actual Control in the Himalayas, thereby potentially presenting considerable security risks to India in the future.

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF RUSSIA TO INDIA

Russia holds considerable importance for India owing to their enduring strategic alliance, especially in the areas of defence, economics and nuclear power. Given its vast geographical expanse, abundant energy resources, sophisticated nuclear capabilities, and its status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Moscow continues to be viewed as a great power in the global arena. It occupies a vital position in the international structure and is often described as a great power with regional dominance and a distinct aim of preserving global stability.⁸

Russia remains acknowledged as a significant global power not only for its nuclear arsenal, but also for its role as a principal exporter of energy, food and raw materials. The nation's economy has so far demonstrated resilience against extensive Western sanctions, although these may have future repercussions.⁹ It continues to possess strategic significance for India, particularly in the light of its commitment to a multipolar world order. Despite the conclusion of the Cold War and the expanding collaboration between India and the United States in the 21st century, Russia remains a vital and dependable ally for India from political, strategic, security, economic, technological and energy perspectives. Moscow is politically and strategically significant for it holds the key to helping New Delhi safeguard its interests across the Eurasian landmass, especially in Afghanistan, Central

8. Emel Parlar Dar and Emre Erşen, *Russia in the Changing International System* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 3-4.

9. Nandan Unnikrishnan and Ankita Dutta, "Tracing the Strategic Dimensions of India-Russia Relations", *ORF Special Report*, no. 217, 2023, p. 12. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20240523183924.pdf>. Accessed on May 17, 2025.

Asia and West Asia. Post US exit from Afghanistan, India finds itself with diminished influence, and increasingly reliant on other key regional actors such as Russia.¹⁰

India upheld its position, asserting that strong multi-dimensional relations with Moscow are important for its national security. New Delhi has a strong desire to preserve its prolonged connections with Moscow while prioritising economic and security collaboration in a complicated geopolitical and geostrategic landscape. The key factor that renders Russia strategically important to India is Moscow's commitment to further enhancing its special privileged partnership with it, grounded in aligned foreign policy objectives, prolonged friendship and profound mutual trust, and to enhance mutually advantageous bilateral relations across multiple sectors.¹¹ With Russia, India has a prolonged understanding for cooperation in the domains of military armaments. Regarding space technology, India would not have achieved its current level without Russia's support. Furthermore, Russia has aided New Delhi in the development of a nuclear submarine project, leased a nuclear submarine and supplied Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft and high-precision signals for defence and security purposes.¹²

For many decades, Moscow has been the primary supplier of defence equipment to India. New Delhi's intention to maintain robust relations with Moscow is influenced significantly by various factors such as the latter's enduring backing of India's stance on Kashmir and the former's dependence on the latter's defence sector. This has resulted in India's reluctance to denounce Russia's invasion into Ukraine.

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10. Nivedita Kapoor, "Multi-alignment under 'Uneven Multipolarity': India's Relations with Russia in an Evolving World Order", *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 2023, p. 22. Retrieved from <https://www.vestnik.mgimo.ru/jour/article/view/3366/2501>; Accessed on May 20, 2025.
 11. Vinay Kaura, "India's Changing Relationship with Russia: Challenges and Convergences. *RUSI Journal*, vol. 163, no. 1, 2018, p. 51. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03071847.2018.1447851>. Accessed on June 20, 2025.
 12. Gleb A. Ivashentsov, "Russia-India: Strategic Partnership, Not Alliance", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2022, p. 102. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09700161.2022.2039579?needAccess=true>. Accessed on May 27, 2025.

Another area where Russia matters for India is in the energy dimension. The energy relationship between the two countries may further strengthen as Russia seeks to redirect its hydrocarbon and nuclear exports towards Asia. The pursuit of new markets for oil and natural gas, coupled with India's increasing energy requirements, is expected to enhance the existing energy ties between the two countries.¹³

Being one of the world's largest energy consumers globally, New Delhi relies significantly on imports to meet the majority of its growing energy needs. This practical approach, which is a hallmark of the Indian foreign policy, has resulted in New Delhi maintaining a neutral stance regarding the war in Ukraine, avoiding direct condemnation of Russia.¹⁴ Since June 2022, Russia has surpassed Iraq and Saudi Arabia to become the main supplier of crude oil to India. The volume of Russian crude oil shipments rose from 942,000 barrels per day in September 2022 to 970,000 barrels in October 2022. By March 2023, this figure had advanced to 1.6 million barrels per day. Nevertheless, in April 2023, Russian oil supplies exceeded the total shipments from Iraq and Saudi Arabia, underscoring the growing significance of Russia from India's energy security point of view.¹⁵

During the initial nine months of 2023, India incurred an average expense of \$525.60 per ton for Russian oil delivered, which encompasses shipping and insurance fees, in contrast to \$564.46 per ton for Iraqi oil of comparable quality. By the conclusion of that year, India had surpassed Europe to become the foremost buyer of seaborne Russian crude, while Russia had replaced Iraq as India's primary oil supplier. This strategic shift towards Russian crude has resulted in the saving of at least \$17 billion for New Delhi since 2022. From March 2022 to June 2025, more than 50 per cent of the discounted Russian

13. Warren and Ganguly, n. 3, pp. 811-12.

14. Kaura, n. 6, p. 101.

15. Lydia Kulik, "Russia-India Economic Cooperation: Current Trends and Promising Directions", *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2023, p. 163. Retrieved from <https://www.vestnik.mgimo.ru/jour/article/view/3374/2508>. Accessed on 15 May 2025.

crude oil exports to India were directed towards two Indian firms, Reliance Industries Limited and Nayara Energy.¹⁶

India has always provided support to Russia across various platforms, and, in return, Russia has consistently endorsed India's ambitions for a permanent position on the UN Security Council and membership in various nuclear non-proliferation regimes, particularly in the Nuclear Suppliers Groups (NSG). Additionally, it played a crucial role in easing border tensions between India and China during the Doklam crisis in 2017 and the Galwan military standoff in 2020.¹⁷ India's accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) received significant praise from Moscow. As New Delhi confronts the potential threat of a two-front war with China and Pakistan, India's military capabilities are set to be enhanced through its participation in these export control regimes.¹⁸

Over the years, Russia has offered India a wide range of sensitive and sophisticated military weapons and equipment, including a nuclear submarine, aircraft carriers, tanks, artillery, fighter aircraft, and missile systems.¹⁹ Russia stands as India's sole international collaborator in the realm of a successful nuclear energy programme. Recently, an agreement has been reached between the two countries to enhance the Kudankulam civilian

16. Vasabjit Banerjee and Tina Dolbaia, "Guns, Oil, and Dependence: Can the Russo-Indian Partnership Be Torpedoed?", *War on the Rocks*, September 23, 2025. Retrieved from <https://warontherocks.com/2025/09/guns-oil-and-dependence-can-the-russo-indian-partnership-be-torpedoed/>. Accessed on October 31, 2025.

17. Vaishali Jain, "Exploring the India-Russia Strategic Partnership amid the Ukraine Conflict", *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2024, p. 209. Retrieved from <https://www.journalofpoliticalscience.com/uploads/archives/6-2-50-160.pdf>. Accessed on June 8, 2025; and Unnikrishnan and Dutta, n. 9, p. 7.

18. Raj Kumar Sharma and Geetanjali Atri, "India and Russia in International Organizations: Motives, Strategies, and Outcomes", *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2023, p. 54. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/3368-5542-2-PB%20(1).pdf. Accessed on June 5, 2025.

19. Abhijit Mukhopadhyay, "Indo-Russian Economic Engagement: Legacy Issues, Dynamic Shifts, and Possibilities for the Future", *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2023, p. 153.

Being one of the largest arms exporters in the world, Moscow continues to provide a competitive advantage by delivering essential technologies that enable New Delhi to achieve its goal of manufacturing defence equipment domestically for own use and for export to other countries.

nuclear project in Tamil Nadu by adding six reactors, each with a capacity of 1,000 MW (Megawatts).²⁰

Being one of the largest arms exporters in the world, Moscow continues to provide a competitive advantage by delivering essential technologies that enable New Delhi to achieve its goal of manufacturing defence equipment domestically for own use and for export to other countries. Given India's procurement of the S-400 Triumph air defence missile system, the acquisition of varieties of new frigates,

the collaborative production of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile and assistance with the nuclear submarine programme, it is evident that Russia still holds immense strategic significance for India.²¹ Overall, India's strong relationship with Russia provides New Delhi with a unique opportunity to demonstrate its status as a rising power.

INDIA-RUSSIA DEFENCE RELATIONS

This section seeks to address the key questions: how will this war affect the future defence trajectory between New Delhi and Moscow? Will the ongoing war jeopardise the exchange of defence equipment between the two countries? One of the key pillars of the strategic partnership between India and Russia is defence collaboration. Over the years, the defence relationship has seen significant transformation, evolving from a simple buyer-seller interaction to a collaborative endeavour focussed on the joint

20. Ayesha Zafar, "India-Russia Relations: Navigating Partnership Dynamics in a Changing Global Landscape", *Security Distillery*, 2024. Retrieved from <https://thesecuritydistillery.org/all-articles/india-russia-relations-navigating-partnership-dynamics-in-a-changing-global-landscape>. Accessed on June 5, 2025.

21. Unnikrishnan and Dutta, n. 9, p. 8.

development and production of advanced military platforms. Even today, Russia continues to be a dominant supplier of different varieties of crucial weapon systems to India, but encounters tough competition from other key supplier countries such as the United States, France, Israel, etc.²² Undoubtedly, New Delhi has greatly benefited from the utilisation of Russian technology in the production of different varieties of weapons in its domestic defence industries.²³ However, in recent years, there has been a significant decline in import of weapons from Russia. India has sought to diminish its dependence on weapons of Russian origin to enhance relations with the United States, thereby gaining access to superior armaments from America, Israeli, France, Germany and other countries.²⁴

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Even during the Ukrain war there was regular official defence interaction between the two countries. India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval paid a two-day visit to Moscow in August 2022 and met his counterpart Nikolai P. Patrushev, for discussions on a broad spectrum of bilateral, regional and international matters. This was followed by a telephonic conversation on October 26, 2022, between the defence ministers of the two countries on the future trajectory of defence cooperation and matters related to Ukraine.²⁵

Despite the regular interactions between the officials, there have been signs of temporary decline in the defence engagement between the two countries since early 2022. The Indian military forces have participated in

22. Kaura, n. 6, p. 96.

23. Ipshita Bhattacharya, "The New Edge in India-Russia Relations: Probabilities", *South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF) Focus*, issue no. 48, 2020, p. 3.

24. Warren and Ganguly, n. 3, p. 813.

25. Annual Report 2022, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, p. 95.

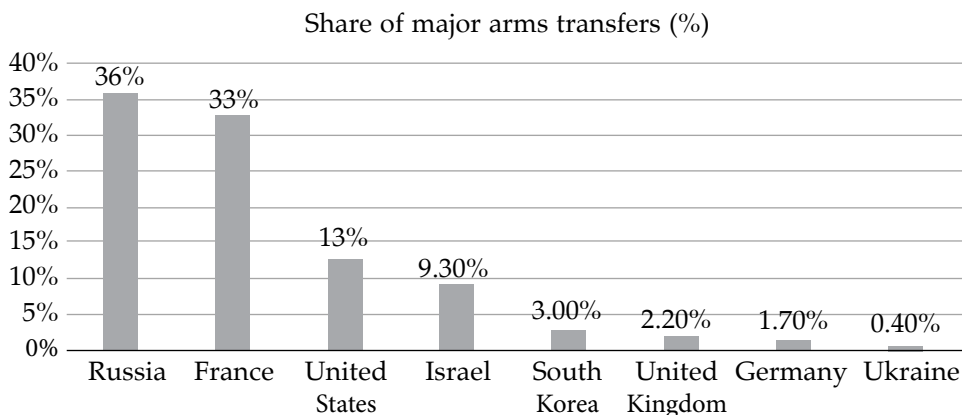
a limited number of joint military exercises with the Russian counterparts. In September 2022, the Indian military contingent took part in the Russia-led multilateral exercise named 'Exercise Vostok-2022', but its involvement was restricted to a strategic command exercise within the Russian Eastern Military District, avoiding participation in maritime drills in the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan, which elicited protests from Tokyo. Throughout 2022, there was no bilateral military exercise conducted between the two countries.

Defence and security understanding between the two partners will continue to endure, notwithstanding India's attempts to diversify its arms imports, and enhance domestic production of defence equipment. As usual such arms collaboration will continue to offer substantial advantages for India's security in the years to come. The arms transfers from Moscow have been vital for India's armed forces' defence preparedness. Although earlier attempts to procure arms from Western sources to assist in indigenous defence production were largely unsuccessful, recent initiatives to reduce reliance on Russian arms have shown greater promise. The recent import of advanced technologies, including remote sensing items, has significantly improved India's Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, providing the Indian military with a dependable alternative to the US Global Positioning System (GPS).

As per the Stockholm Institute of Peace Research (SIPRI) Fact Sheet, India sourced 36 per cent of its arms from Russia, which served as the primary arms supplier to India throughout both five-year periods, namely 2014-18 and 2019-23. However, its share declined from 76 per cent in 2009-13 to 58 per cent in 2014-18, and, subsequently, to 36 per cent in 2019-23.²⁶

26. Saroj Bishoyi, "Trends in Global Arms Trade & India", *Vivekananda International Foundation Brief*, April 2024, p. 18. Retrieved from <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/Trends-in-Global-Arms-Trade-and-India.pdf>. Accessed on October 31, 2025.

Fig 1: India's Major Arms Suppliers, 2019-23



Source: Saroj Bishoyi, "Trends in Global Arms Trade and India", *Vivekananda International Foundation Brief*, April 2024, p. 18. Retrieved from <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/Trends-in-Global-Arms-Trade-and-India.pdf>. Accessed on October 31, 2025.

Globally, Russian arms exports declined by 64 per cent from the period of 2015-19 to 2020-24, with Moscow representing just 7.8 per cent of global arms exports in the last five years.²⁷ Russia is currently facing tremendous challenges in selling military equipment to many countries, including India, owing to limitations imposed on its capacity to import specific sensitive materials, thereby hampering its arms industry. The sanctions imposed against Moscow are expected to have a lasting impact, hindering its access to cutting-edge technologies thereby reducing its capabilities to produce weapon platforms such as large surface vessels and aircraft carriers.²⁸ It has complicated the fulfilment of new orders for military equipment and the maintenance of existing contracts with both Russian and defence companies of other countries. The financial and technical restrictions will impact the provision of air defence, aerial capabilities, armoured units, naval capabilities,

27. Refer to SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2025/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2024>. Accessed on June 30, 2025.

28. Zakharov, n. 5, p. 7.

small arms, and more.²⁹ Despite its engagement in Ukraine, Russia has assured New Delhi that the remaining two S-400 systems will be delivered in 2026 to ensure that India's defence preparedness is upheld consistently.³⁰

In the midst of the unending Russia-Ukraine War and the complex security environment confronting India, former Indian Chief of Army Staff, General Manoj Pande has emphasised, "What we realized in the last couple of years, based may be on a direct fallout of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the pandemic situation...[was] that we need to become self-reliant. We also need to have more robust and secure supply chains ... to better handle security challenges as we move forward."³¹

Considering the intricate nature of the various security threats confronting India,³² it is of strategic importance that the armed forces are provided air defence systems capable of effectively neutralising Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), subsonic cruise missiles, infantry weapons and munitions; anti-tank guided missiles; artillery and artillery munitions; military automobiles; military engineering apparatus; tactical communication systems; small tactical UAVs; helicopters; light armoured vehicles and others.

In response to the technical sanctions placed on Russia, there was a notable increase in the manufacturing of unmanned aerial vehicles, the introduction of new guided weaponry, including advanced artillery munitions, the rapid advancement of Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) bombs, and varieties of tanks. Moscow and New Delhi need to remain committed to work together on initiatives designed to improve the existing Indian defence industrial base in response to the evolving security dynamics at the regional and global

29. Warren and Ganguly, n. 3, pp. 820-821.

30. Prateek Tripathi and Kartik Bommakanti, "Air Defence Mechanisms: A Primer on India and Pakistan," *ORF Issue Brief*, no. 809, May 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20250529084919.pdf>. Accessed on October 31, 2025.

31. Akriti Kalyankar (Vasudeva) and Dante Schulz, "Continental Drift? India-Russia Ties After One Year of War in Ukraine", *Stimson Centre*, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.stimson.org/2023/continental-drift-india-russia-ties-after-one-year-of-war-in-ukraine/>. Accessed on June 27, 2025.

32. Niladri Shankar Mukherjee, "India's Security Threats and Likely Solutions", *The Calcutta Journal of Global Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 2, May 2025, pp. 321-24. Retrieved from https://www.globaljournalceners.org/s/uploads/article/249/6_Vol_9_Issue_2_May_2025.pdf. Accessed on June 20, 2025.

levels. The Indian armed forces will continue to depend on systems and armaments of Russian origin.³³

In the next few years, the Indian Navy will be equipped with four stealth frigates, with two being imported and the other two constructed by the Goa Shipyard Limited in collaboration with Russian expertise. Besides, India intends to integrate a Russian nuclear-powered attack submarine by 2028 through a ten-year lease of the INS *Chakra* III. In 2023, India received three advanced Russian manufactured S-400 air defence squadrons and anticipates the arrival of two additional squadrons by 2025.³⁴

The military conflict with Pakistan in May 2025 highlighted the extent of India's reliance on Russian weapon systems as most armaments employed by New Delhi such as fighter aircraft, missiles and air defence systems are of Russian origin. The Indian Air Force (IAF) operated both the SU-30MKI and MiG-29 fighter jets, and a vital component of the nation's defence against Pakistani aircraft was the S-400 air defence system. Additionally, India deployed the S-125 Neva/Pechora and the 9K33 Osa missile systems for protection against Pakistan's UAVs and missiles, along with the ZSU-23-4 Schilka self-propelled anti-aircraft guns equipped with radar to intercept UAVs.³⁵

INDIA-RUSSIA ECONOMIC AND TRADE RELATIONS: MOVING IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION

The long-standing strategic relationship between India and Russia has not been adequately represented in their economic and trade interactions. For many years, economic and trade relations have been the weakest link between

33. Vasily Kashin, "The Changing Contours of Russia-India Defense Engagement", *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2023, p. 114. Accessed on June 21, 2024.

34. Daniel Markey, and David Brostoff, "Friends with Limits: The Future of Russo-Indian Defense Ties", *War on the Rocks*, 2025. Retrieved from <https://warontherocks.com/2025/04/friends-with-limits-the-future-of-russo-indian-defense-ties/>. Accessed on June 29, 2025.

35. Banerjee and Dolbaia, n. 16; Tina Dolbaia, et al., "Guns and Oil Continuity and Change in Russia-India Relations", Centre for Strategic and International Studies, August 22, 2025, p. 7. Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/guns-and-oil-continuity-and-change-russia-india-relations>. Accessed on October 31, 2025.

The total volume of trade and investments between the two sides for several years remains relatively far below the actual potential. Economic exchanges have been hindered by logistical challenges, influencing Russia to engage in trade more comprehensively with Europe or China.

the two sides. Despite its weak economic foundation, it has successfully endured over time and has even made remarkable advancements.³⁶ Both countries share economic and commercial connections across various sectors. Historically, the economic ties between the two sides have not only been limited but have also encountered numerous challenges. The total volume of trade and investments between the two sides for several years remains relatively far below the actual

potential. Economic exchanges have been hindered by logistical challenges, influencing Russia to engage in trade more comprehensively with Europe or China. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2017-18, imports from Russia constituted a mere 1.8 per cent of India's overall imports, which declined to 1.4 per cent in 2020-21 due to the global pandemic crisis. Conversely, Indian exports to Russia represented just 0.8 per cent of total Indian exports in 2021-22. Going by the present trends, both countries will need to elevate bilateral trade and investment to a higher trajectory of sustainable growth in the future.³⁷

Enhancing the existing bilateral trade between the two parties is crucial for addressing the challenges faced by the Russian economy due to the Western sanctions. The Ukraine War has undoubtedly affected the Russian economy, resulting in an approximate 3 per cent decrease in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022. The Western sanctions are anticipated to impede the possible growth of the Russian economy for the near future. To achieve economic stability, it is imperative for Russia to foster strong economic cooperation with both China and India to mitigate the adverse effects of these sanctions.³⁸

36. Alexey Kupriyanov, "Strategic Partnership between Russia and India from the Perspective of National Elites", *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2023, p. 34.

37. Mukhopadhyay, n. 19.

38. Kashin, n. 33, pp. 106-111.

Following the war in Ukraine, both countries have leveraged the situation to transform their political understanding into a meaningful economic collaboration. It presents a unique opportunity for both countries to establish a strong and significant economic partnership, thereby evolving beyond a simple buyer-seller dynamic.³⁹ The expanding economic potential of both countries is mutually beneficial in numerous ways. Key items of exports to Russia include pharmaceutical products, electrical machinery and components, coffee, tea, spices, a variety of food items, energy equipment, mechanical devices, textiles, fabrics and ready-made garments. In contrast, significant imports from Russia comprise oil, natural gas, diamonds, machinery and mechanical appliances, power equipment, transportation equipment, vehicles, aircraft, fertilisers, ferrous metals and their articles, as well as paper and paperboard.⁴⁰

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Table 1: India’s Major Items of Imports from Russia (in US\$ billions)

Product label	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Mineral fuels, oil and refined products	5.2	38	54
Fertilisers	0.77	3	2
Precious stones, metals, and jewellery	1.25	1.35	1.18
Animal or vegetable fats and oil	0.5	1	1.3
Project goods	0.5	0.56	0.78

Source: Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash, “A Deep Dive into the India-Russia Economic Relationship”, Observer Research Foundation, November 14, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/a-deep-dive-into-the-india-russia-economic-relations>. Accessed on June 22, 2025.

39. Akshaya Saroha and Mansi Mishra, “Indo-Russian Ties in the Wake of Ukraine Conflict: An Imperative to India’s Strategic Rise?”, *Calcutta Journal of Global Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 1, January 2025, pp. 42-43.

40. Hussain, n. 2.

Table 2: India's Major Items of Exports to Russia (in US \$ millions)

Product label	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Pharmaceuticals	480	430	386
Electrical machinery, parts, consumer electronics	548	121	347
Machinery and mechanical appliances	302	321	650
Iron and steel	240	160	287
Organic, inorganic chemicals, and compounds of precious metals and rare earths	257	452	547

Source: Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash, "A Deep Dive into the India-Russia Economic Relationship", Observer Research Foundation, November 14, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/a-deep-dive-into-the-india-russia-economic-relations>. Accessed on June 22, 2025.

The war in Ukraine has had a positive impact on the trade relations between the two countries, with India becoming Russia's second largest trading partner (for detail, see Tables 1 and 2).⁴¹ For many years, the bilateral trade hovered between US\$10 billion and US\$ 13 billion which was nowhere close to reaching the target of US\$ 30 billion trade turnover by 2025. Nevertheless, trade turnover between the two countries experienced a remarkable increase, reaching US\$49.4 billion in FY 2022-23.⁴² The bilateral trade between the two strategic partners for 2025 reached a total of US\$ 68.72 billion. Indian exports were valued at US\$ 4.88 billion, whereas imports from Russia totalled US\$ 63.84 billion. The primary items exported from India to Russia during 2025 consisted of engineering goods valued at US\$ 1.26 billion, electronic goods amounting to US\$ 862.48 million, organic and inorganic chemicals worth US\$ 545 million and various other items estimated at US\$ 248.40 million. While India's imports from Russia encompassed petroleum crude worth US\$ 56.8 billion, fertilisers valued at US\$ 1.84 billion, and

41. Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash, "A Deep Drive into the India-Russia Economic Relationship", Observer Research Foundation, November 14, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/a-deep-dive-into-the-india-russia-economic-relations>. Accessed on June 22, 2025.

42. Zakharov, n. 5.

several others. The significant rise in trade figures can be attributed mainly to India's heightened imports of crude oil.⁴³ India gains considerably from the availability of discounted Russian crude oil, increased from under 2 per cent of India's total imports prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine to more than 40 per cent as of June 2024.⁴⁴ As trade relations strengthened, Russia emerged as India's fifth largest trading partner, a significant increase from its previous position as the 25th largest in 2021-22 globally.⁴⁵ In addition to the rise in oil trade, there has also been a slight increase in non-oil trade within the overall trade portfolio. By the end of this decade, both countries seek to elevate their bilateral trade to US\$ 100 billion.⁴⁶

Prior to the onset of the war in Ukraine, Russia accounted for less than 1 per cent of India's import basket, but the share has surged to over 40 per cent since then. Between April and September of 2023, India's imports from Russia surged by more than 67 per cent, totalling US\$ 32.4 billion, while Indian exports to Russia were recorded at US\$ 2.01 billion. The imports from Russia specifically accounted for US\$ 30.4 billion. This notable rise in trade is primarily due to increased deliveries of crude oil and fertilisers. In contrast, imports from the United States and China experienced a significant decline during the same timeframe.⁴⁷ Should this trend persist, the trade volume between the two sides is anticipated to grow further, much ahead of the past low levels of their bilateral trade. Russian President V. Putin had, during his speech at the Valdai Discussion Club on October 27, 2022, highlighted that,

The pace of economic cooperation is growing today. Overall trade is growing. One example: Prime Minister Modi asked me to increase the supply of fertilisers, which is very important for Indian agriculture, and

43. Refer to "India-Russia Trade", India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), Retrieved from <https://ibef.org/indian-exports/india-russia-trade>. Accessed on October 29, 2025.

44. Chietigj Bajpae and Lisa Toremark, "India-Russia Relations", *Chatham House*, London, 2024, Retrieved from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/10/india-russia-relations>. Accessed on June 28, 2025.

45. Annual Report, 2023, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, p. 64.

46. Bajpae and Toremark, n. 44.

47. n. 45.

we did it. By how much do you think? The supply of fertilisers to India has increased by 7.6 times—not just by a fraction, but by 7.6 times. Bilateral trade in agricultural products has almost doubled.⁴⁸

Investments from both countries have been thriving, surpassing the earlier target of US\$ 30 billion in 2018, which has since been modified to US\$ 50 billion by 2025. While India's main investment in Russia is in the petrochemical industry, Russia's major investments in India are centred in oil and gas, petrochemicals, banking, railways and steel industries.⁴⁹ India's External Affairs Minister, Shri. S. Jaishankar visited Russia on December 2023, where he engaged in discussions with President Vladimir Putin, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade Denis Manturov regarding trade and economic, energy, connectivity, cultural exchanges and regional cooperation between the two sides.⁵⁰

INDIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS: CHALLENGES AHEAD

The Ukraine War, coupled with the stringent sanctions levied on Russia by the Western nations has resulted in considerable upheaval in the global order. It presented considerable challenges to the burgeoning strategic relations between India and Russia. It introduced new barriers to the political, diplomatic and defence interactions while exacerbating existing issues in fostering economic collaboration.⁵¹ However, India still regards Russia as a valuable and reliable strategic partner, and the challenges that India and Russia must address in their strategic relationship necessitate meticulous consideration.⁵²

48. Kulik, n. 15, p. 162.

49. n. 1, p. 95.

50. n. 45, p. 63.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

52. Nandan Unnikrishnan and Nivedita Kapoor, "Russia and India in the Evolving World Order—Introduction to the Special Issue", *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2023, p. 8.

One of the key dynamics that has emerged from the ongoing war in Ukraine pertains to the closeness between Russia and China. A crucial aspect of this relationship is that both nations face challenges from the United States across the political, economic and strategic dimensions, pressures that a strong China can endure, unlike the weakened economy of Russia. Russia is most likely to become more reliant on China for economic and strategic matters.⁵³ The motivations for Russia's strategic partnership with China are significant. On political and economic matters, they complement each other. China's superpower ambitions and its relentless demand for military technology serve as strong attraction for a financially struggling Russia. However, the strengthening of ties does not imply that both nations agree on every regional and global matter.⁵⁴

The political and economic isolation of Russia is expected to intensify, leading to a greater dependence on China, which may position Moscow unfavourably in the context of China's military standoff with India. Over the years, Russia has sought to strengthen its relationship with China as a counter-balance to the United States. Moscow and Beijing have established a partnership that is poised to develop into a comprehensive military alliance, which could complicate the relations between India and Russia due to India's long-standing rivalry, and the ongoing border tensions, with China.⁵⁵ As rightly commented by India's strategic analyst, Happyymon Jacob, that as the war continues, Russia's reliance on China intensifies, thereby diminishing its capacity and inclination to assist New Delhi in its strategic rivalry with China.⁵⁶

The war in Ukraine has helped to cement the growing ties between Russia and China. Indeed, Russia is increasingly aligning itself with China. This shift, provided by its isolation from the United States and Europe, complicates Russia's ability to sustain its existing security partnerships with India. The deepening relationship had enhanced much before the war in Ukraine.

53. Bhattacharya, n. 23, p. 7.

54. Kaura, n. 11, pp. 54-55.

55. Warren and Ganguly, n. 3, pp. 812-813.

56. Jacob, n. 4.

With growing understanding and collaboration, China could affect the Russian policy regarding India's security issues. Beijing may exert influence on Russia to halt the sale of new systems or the transfer of spare parts to India, significantly diminishing India's military capabilities.

In fact, military cooperation between the two sides broadened in response to Russian military actions in Syria and Ukraine. By 2019, the relationship had evolved into a robust alliance. Given Russia's increasing political and economic isolation from Europe and the United States, it is probable that Russia will continue to pivot more towards China.

Russia that aligns more closely with China may prove to be a less dependable ally for India for leverage in Beijing, which could have significant consequences for the current border tensions in Ladakh and any sort of future conflict along the border areas. So far, Russia has maintained a neutral stance regarding the situation in Ladakh; however, there is no assurance that this position will remain unchanged going forward.⁵⁷

With growing understanding and collaboration, China could affect the Russian policy regarding India's security issues. Beijing may exert influence on Russia to halt the sale of new systems or the transfer of spare parts to India, significantly diminishing India's military capabilities until it can transition to alternative supplier countries. China could also urge Russia to shift its pro-India stance on Kashmir or to acknowledge its territorial assertions in the contested regions of northern and northeastern India. Furthermore, considering China's investments in Pakistan's infrastructure and economic development as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China can convince Russia to strengthen its current partnership with Pakistan.⁵⁸

The supply of advance and highly sophisticated weapon systems by Russia to China would raise significant concerns for India, particularly as the Moscow arms industry increasingly relies on dual use components sourced from

57. Warren and Ganguly, n. 3, p. 818.

58. Murad Ali, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Prospects and Challenges, *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2020, pp. 104-105.

Beijing.⁵⁹ Russia's inclination towards China and India's evolving threat perception may influence New Delhi to align more closely with Washington on significant geostrategic matters. Strengthening ties with the United States has emerged as a strategic imperative for India in the 21st century, particularly as both nations face growing antagonism from China. New Delhi considers the United States as its most important partner, while China is seen as the biggest threat to India's security.⁶⁰

The present situation influenced India to seek alternative sources for the production and maintenance of various weapon systems, particularly advanced systems that rely on high-end semiconductors currently inaccessible to Russia due to the Western imposition of sanctions.

The other significant challenge in the burgeoning strategic relationship between the two countries has to do with meeting India's defence requirements in the face of Russia's inability to provide the arms and equipment requirements on time. The war in Ukraine has significantly disrupted the arms relationship between the two countries. The present situation has influenced India to seek alternative sources for the production and maintenance of various weapon systems, particularly advanced systems that rely on high-end semiconductors currently inaccessible to Russia due to the Western sanctions.

To effectively address the reduction in Russian arms imports, India must expedite its initiatives for domestic defence indigenisation, a strategy already being pursued by the Indian government. Under the initiative of a self-reliant India, progress has been made in this area, leading to the cancellation of multiple contracts for imported weapon systems in January 2022. In recent years, New Delhi has enhanced its arms collaboration with various supplier nations, including the United States, France and the United Kingdom. Notably, according to a SIPRI report, India's arms import from the United States rose from 7 per cent during the period 2000-12 to 15 per cent from

59. Bajpae and Toremark, n. 44.

60. Kaura, n. 6, pp. 92-93.

2019-21. Additionally, France has become a significant arms partner, with its share increasing from a mere 2 per cent between 2000 and 2015 to 16 per cent between 2016 and 2020. Besides, Israel could serve as a viable supplier of spare components for India's MiG aircraft.⁶¹ With developing security and strategic understanding, the United States has expressed its readiness to not just collaborate with India on the joint production and development of sophisticated weapon systems but also to provide advanced defence technology to the country.⁶²

CHANGING DYNAMICS OF INDIA-US RELATIONS AMIDST UKRAINE WAR

India and the United States hold a significant position in one another's strategic considerations, and the evolving geopolitical and geostrategic landscapes support a closer strategic engagement between the two sides.⁶³ The last over two decades since the turn of the 21st century have witnessed strong collaboration between the world's two largest democracies, focussed on strategic interests, economic connections, burgeoning cooperation in defence and security and other crucial areas. To take the relationship further forward, the United States had, in 2016, designated India as a major defence partner and subsequently granted India Strategic Trade Authorisation Tier 1 (STA-1) status in 2018. Furthermore, in 2019, the Industrial Security Annex (ISA) was signed to promote the transfer of defence technology. In June 2023, US Secretary of Defence Austin visited India, where the two parties announced the initiation of negotiations regarding the Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) and the Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RPDA). In the light of India's diversification for defence imports, the share of the US in India's total defence trade is experiencing a sharp increase, whereas Russia's share is on the decline. The volume of defence trade has surged from nearly zero in 2008 to over US\$ 20 billion by 2020. Seemingly,

61. Warren and Ganguly, n. 3, pp. 820-823.

62. Kaura, n. 6, pp. 97.

63. Monish Tourangbam, "Shifting Geopolitics and Anatomy of India-US Relations", *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, April-June 2021, vol. 16, no. 2, April-June 2021, p. 163.

the US' share in defence exports has risen considerably, from 7.6 per cent during the period 2009-13 to 13 per cent in the years 2019-23.⁶⁴ Therefore, since 2013, the US has been the third largest arms supplier to India.⁶⁵

Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, there has been a noticeable increase in defence cooperation between the two nations. Emphasising the significance of the close engagement, US Vice President JD Vance has described the relationship as “the cornerstone of global progress” that would threaten the world order if the two “fail to work together successfully”.⁶⁶ At a moment when the delivery of the Project 971 Akula (Schuka-B) class nuclear-powered submarine and the two Project 1135.6M *Admiral Grigorovich* class guided missile frigates from Russia has been delayed, India's Defence Ministry approved the procurement of 73,000 Sig Sauer assault rifles from the United States in December 2023.⁶⁷ The growing defence ties between the two nations are evident in the fact that India has invested nearly US\$ 30 billion in defence equipment purchases from the United States since 2008.⁶⁸

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi went even further to describe the partnership as the “defining partnership of this century”. He further added, “Through the long and winding road that we (India and the US) have travelled, we have met the test of friendship.” However, the expanding relations between the two countries are not without issues and challenges. It has been very rightly pointed out by US Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jonathan Finer that there are several “difficult issues” that remain in the relationship “right up to the present day.”⁶⁹

64. Chunhao Lou, “U.S.–India Defense Cooperation: Progress, Motivation and Constraints”, *China International Strategy Review*, vol. 6, 2024, pp. 305-309.

65. Bishoyi, n. 26, p. 20.

66. Isha Desai, “US-India Relationship on Brink of Breakdown? Trump, Modi and Russian Oil”, Australian Institute of International Affairs, October 27, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/us-india-relationship-on-brink-of-breakdown-trump-modi-and-russian-oil/>. Accessed on October 29, 2025.

67. Kaura, n. 6, p. 102.

68. Jeff M. Smith, “India, Russia, and the Ukraine War”, The Heritage Foundation, 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/india-russia-and-the-ukraine-war>. Accessed on June 20, 2025.

69. The statement was found quoted in Harsh V Pant and Vivek Lall, eds., *Aligned but Autonomous: India-US Relations in the Modi Era* (New Delhi: ORF and *Global Policy Journal*, 2024), pp. 6-7.

As the relations have grown, the US has aimed to shape India's foreign policy, particularly regarding its stance on Russia and China, albeit with limited success. As expected, India did not align its position with the US by voting against Ukraine at the UN bodies. India's decision to abstain has faced a significant backlash from US policymakers and analysts. In fact, former US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun has stated, "India is at risk of abdicating its position of respect as one of the world's leading democracies. Long time friends of India in the United States—from all sides of the political spectrum—view this as a surrender of India's moral leadership." Nonetheless, considering the longstanding relationship that India has maintained with Russia for several decades, US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken remarked, "India's relationship with Russia was developed over decades at a time when the United States was not able to be a partner to India."⁷⁰

By endorsing the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) in December 2022, the US sought to decrease India's reliance on defence equipment of Russian origin. The perspective of both countries regarding Russia-Ukraine is notably divergent. India declined to align with the United States in its efforts to politically isolate, and impose economic sanctions on Russia. Rather, India seized the chance to significantly boost its acquisition of Russian oil at a reduced price. Clearly, India seeks to preserve its strategic autonomy instead of becoming a mere "follower" that simply adheres to the directives of the United States.⁷¹

Recent tensions in the strategic relationship between the two sides have compelled New Delhi to reaffirm its strategic independence and foster engagement with China and Russia. These developments signify a notable change in the dynamics of the US-India partnership. As US President Trump aims to establish a ceasefire in Ukraine, India finds itself under increasing pressure. The Trump Administration has enacted a 50 per cent tariff on India which New Delhi has characterised as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable". Being the second-largest purchaser of Russian crude,

70. Chirayu Thakkar, "Russia-Ukraine War, India, and US Grand Strategy: Punishing or Leveraging Neutrality?", *Policy Studies*, vol 45, nos. 3-4, 2024, pp. 601-602.

71. Lou, n. 64, pp. 312-314.

which accounts for nearly 40 per cent of its total imports, India is caught in a difficult position. Initially, Washington seemed prepared to disregard New Delhi's acquisition of the discounted Russian crude, considering India's status as a significant oil importer.⁷² India's External Affairs Minister's Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal emphasised, "The United States has in recent days targeted India's oil imports from Russia. We have already made clear our position... our imports are based on market factors and aimed at ensuring energy security for 1.4 billion Indians."⁷³ India rightly contends that its strong ties with Moscow do not imply support for Russia's conduct in Ukraine, and asserts that its reliance on Russian crude oil has contributed to the stabilisation of global energy prices.⁷⁴ US President Trump is determined to implement maximum pressure strategies, which he had previously employed effectively against India to halt Iranian oil imports. This time, the focus is on preventing India from importing oil from Russia.⁷⁵ The Trump Administration's decision to impose increased tariffs in reaction to India's acquisition of Russian oil contradicts the statement made a few years ago by former US Commerce Secretary Janet Yellen, who asserted that "India can buy as much Russian oil as it wants."⁷⁶ Imposition of elevated tariffs poses a challenge to the strategic partnership that the two countries enjoy, which has been reinforced in recent years through defence and high-technology exchanges, and Indo-Pacific partnerships. India justifiably views this action as unilateral and inequitable, particularly as it contravenes the principles of non-discrimination and fair trade established by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In response, India continues to be dedicated to a nuanced strategy that balances economic consequences while maintaining

72. Chietigj Bajpae, "Trump's Tariffs put Strain on US-India Ties, but Relations will Endure in the Long Run", Chatham House, August 12, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/08/trumps-tariffs-put-strain-us-india-ties-relations-will-endure-long-run>. Accessed on October 29, 2025.

73. Jayanth Jacob, "'Unfair, Unjustified and Unreasonable': India Slams Trump's Additional Tariff Over Russian Oil Imports", *The New Indian Express*, August 7, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Aug/06/unfair-unjustified-and-unreasonable-india-slams-trumps-additional-tariff-over-russian-oil-imports>. Accessed on October 29, 2025.

74. Bajpae, n. 72.

75. Thakkar, n. 70, p. 608.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 602.

New Delhi strongly believes that maintaining amicable relations with the United States, Russia, China and others provides India with numerous benefits.

a lasting partnership with Russia, and exploring new relations.

In a notable development following the United States' imposition of a 50 per cent import tariff on Indian exports, both nations renewed a 10-year defence framework agreement on October 31, 2025, reaffirming their strategic partnership aimed at improving military coordination, intelligence sharing, and technological collaboration.⁷⁷ The US tariff shock has nudged India to re-engage with China after years of strained ties since the 2020 border clash.

FUTURE SCENARIOS AND POLICY OPTIONS FOR INDIA

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, India has attracted the attention of the US, Russia, China and other European countries to sway its stance. Instead of yielding to the influence of any of these countries, New Delhi is dedicated to realising a vision of a multipolar world.⁷⁸ As a responsible emerging power in the international system, India has upheld a principled and autonomous stance regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine. New Delhi strongly believes that maintaining amicable relations with the United States, Russia, China and others provides India with numerous benefits.

India's strategic policy choices in an evolving global order emphasise the importance of maximising national interests through adaptable strategies, reinforcing both regional and international partnerships, augmenting its influence in fostering a more collaborative and stable global environment.

77. Deepanshu Sharma, "India, US Sign 10-Year Defence Pact Amid Trade Tensions", *The Sunday Guardian*, October 21, 2025. Retrieved from <https://sundayguardianlive.com/news/india-us-sign-10-year-defence-pact-amid-trade-tensions-158941/#:~:text=India%20has%20pledged%20increased%20U.S.,to%20challenge%20the%20broader%20relationship>. Accessed on November 1, 2025.

78. Boas Lieberherr, "Russia's War in Ukraine: India's Balancing Act", *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, no. 305, 2022, p. 1. Retrieved from <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse305-EN.pdf>. Accessed on July 6, 2025.

This approach entails balancing relationships with the major powers, interacting with the middle powers, and prioritising development diplomacy. New Delhi needs to adopt a flexible stance regarding international alignments, placing its national interests at the forefront of its relations with significant powers such as the US, Russia and China.⁷⁹

The war in Ukraine has further complicated the already complex dynamics of forces affecting India's continental and maritime fronts, rendering its strategic challenges more daunting and its options more intricate.⁸⁰ It is expected to exercise caution in taking any steps that could adversely affect its international reputation and economic interest. India is in a critical situation as it must identify its strategic position in the light of the growing relationship between Russia and China, coupled with the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West. So far, India has consistently maintained that engaging with the US and Russia simultaneously is crucial for effectively addressing the rise of China that poses serious security concerns to our country.⁸¹ India seeks to avoid alliances and instead cultivates better relations with multiple partners to further its national interest. New Delhi wants to maintain good relations with all the great and middle powers.

In the backdrop of the evolving global scenario, India is confronted with policy choices that focus on preserving its strategic independence and balancing its relations with Russia and the West. This involves addressing

India seeks to avoid alliances and instead cultivates better relations with multiple partners to further its national interest. New Delhi wants to maintain good relations with all the great and middle powers.

79. Ram Sunder Kumar, et al., eds., "India and BRICS: An Analysis of Challenges Faced by India Amid Russia-Ukraine War", in *Proceedings of the 2nd Pamir Transboundary Conference for Sustainable Societies*, 2024.

80. P.S. Raghavan, "Ukraine Crisis: A Point of Inflection for the Emerging World Order", in *Ukraine Crisis: A Point of Inflection for the Emerging World Order* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 2022), pp. 19-20.

81. Shivshankar Menon, "The Fantasy of the Free World: Are Democracies Really United Against Russia?" *Foreign Affairs*, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2022-04-04/fantasy-free-world>. Accessed on July 9, 2025.

possible economic consequences, including increased oil prices and trade interruptions, while simultaneously handling diplomatic pressures to conform to the Western sanctions. India's strategy so far has been to prioritise dialogue and diplomacy, advocating for a peaceful resolution while maintaining engagement with all countries.

India has consistently upheld a neutral position, refraining from voting at the UN on the Ukraine War, and highlighting its dedication to strategic autonomy. New Delhi's foreign policy, characterised by the concept of strategic autonomy, focusses on fostering relationship with key players outside the realm of geopolitical polarisation. India's neutral position may enable it to serve as a potential mediator that is acceptable to both Russia and the West. From the futuristic security point of view, provoking Moscow is not a viable option, as it could push Russia further into China's sphere of influence. A weakened Russia complicates India's strategic landscape. Consequently, New Delhi aspires for a swift conclusion to the ongoing war. In the meantime, it is expected to maintain a balanced approach to mitigate its strategic setbacks. India seeks to balance its historically strong relations with Russia alongside its expanding strategic partnership with the United States and other Western countries.⁸²

As regards the challenges related to meeting defence equipment requirements for the armed forces, it is highly imperative that New Delhi enhance its indigenous defence manufacturing, and research and development capabilities. This is crucial for India to achieve self-reliance and assert itself as an independent power on the global stage. This strategy would allow India to articulate its perspective with increased clarity and confidence, while also reducing its excessive dependence on Russian military supplies. Additionally, India could explore collaborations with various original equipment manufacturers belonging to several other countries to diversify and strengthen its military modernisation initiatives. Expanding the scope of defence collaboration will definitely enhance India's strategic autonomy and

82. Lieberherr, n. 78, p. 1.

broadening its geopolitical reach, thereby enabling it to efficiently confront its adversaries and serve its national interests.⁸³

CONCLUSION

India has always considered Russia as the most reliable and long-term strategic partner and will continue to do in the future. India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, during his five-day visit to Moscow in December 2023, described Russia as a "valued and a time-tested partner of India". He was all praise for the exceptional nature of India's relationship with Russia. He further added that the ties between the two sides are based on strategic convergence on geopolitical interests.⁸⁴

The recent developments present new challenges in enhancing the strategic partnership between the two countries, not just bilaterally, but also concerning regional and global security issues. The escalating tensions between the United States and China significantly influence the evolving situation. These dynamics have a direct effect on the interests of both countries.⁸⁵ The bilateral engagement between the two sides has continued to intensify, even in the face of the complex and challenging geopolitical landscape created by the unfortunate war in Ukraine. India's commitment to its most trusted partner Russia is evident in New Delhi's ability to maintain a deliberate stance of neutrality towards Moscow, despite immense pressure from the Western countries. India's abstentions from participating in the multiple votes at the UN Security Council that denounce Russia's military aggression in Ukraine serve as an indication of New Delhi's preferential treatment towards Moscow.

The war in Ukraine has strengthened the partnership between Russia and China, diminishing Moscow's status as an independent entity and enhancing Beijing's influence, particularly at a time when the relations

83. Prashant Sharma, "Achieving Indian Interests Amidst Russia-China Concord", *Indic Researchers Forum*, March 30, 2024. Retrieved from <https://indicrf.org/article/geopolitics-and-ir/achieving-indian-interests-amidst-russia-china-concord>. Accessed on October 29, 2025.

84. Zafar, n. 20.

85. Ivashentsov, n. 12, p. 101.

Despite India's efforts to diversify its arms acquisitions over the past 20 years, Russia continues to be an essential and, indeed, a highly sought after supplier of sophisticated weapon systems and spare parts for India.

between the rivalling neighbours, India and China, are strained. Consequently, the necessity of preventing Russia from viewing China as its sole dependable ally has led New Delhi to subtly back Moscow, with the expectation that this posture will ultimately prove to be advantageous for it.⁸⁶

Situated between two nuclear armed adversaries, China and Pakistan, with which it has prolonged border disputes, the political and military elites in India are convinced that the country cannot risk undermining its military capabilities that continue to be reliant on Russia for maintenance and upgradation of advance weapons and equipment, by standing up against Moscow.⁸⁷

The ongoing war in Ukraine, with no immediate positive sign of a resolution, will definitely have its impact on the relations between the two countries. Should the sanctions on the Russian arms sector persist, and if the war in Ukraine evolves into a prolonged engagement, coupled with sustained high demand from the Russian military for weapons and equipment, it is likely that Russia's arms exports to India may face significant restrictions for an extended period.⁸⁸

Despite India's efforts to diversify its arms acquisitions over the past 20 years, Russia continues to be an essential and, indeed, a highly sought after supplier of sophisticated weapon systems and spare parts for India. Unlike the Western countries, Russia has always been ready to offer India advanced strategic technologies. It has been actively engaged in the co-production and co-development of high-tech weapon systems, facilitating their manufacture within India, and does not impose stringent end-user restrictions. Such an approach significantly enhances the value of India's

86. Tellis, n. 7, p. 5.

87. Smith, n. 68.

88. Warren and Ganguly, n. 3, p. 819.

defence relations with Russia.⁸⁹ Currently, if Russian arms and equipment are not available, India has alternative options to effectively ensure military readiness for the Indian armed forces.

The recent visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to New Delhi, occurring after a four-year hiatus since 2021, is of great importance due to the prevailing geopolitical challenges, particularly in the light of Washington's punitive actions aimed at constraining the development of India-Russia relations. This visit underscored the robustness of the special and privileged strategic partnership between the two nations. It also signifies a joint strategy focussed on redefining and enhancing the India-Russia partnership across various sectors, including energy, defence, critical minerals, nuclear and civil collaboration, as well as a definitive economic agenda that extends through 2030. Both parties are dedicated to safeguarding their shared interests from external pressures and to further expanding their cooperation.⁹⁰

On the one hand, the Indian government has shown interest in acquiring more batteries of the S-400 missile defence system and in collaborating on the production of the latest S-500 system. Meanwhile, Russia's proposal of platforms like the SU-57, along with the potential for joint manufacturing, indicates that its increasing alignment with China has not diminished its strategic relationship with India. For New Delhi, this development is both comforting and strategically advantageous, offering further incentive to sustain and enhance the defence partnership. Moscow remains committed

The Indian government has shown interest in acquiring more batteries of the S-400 missile defence system and in collaborating on the production of the latest S-500 system.

89. Tellis, n. 7, p. 3.

90. Anil Wadhwa, "President Vladimir Putin's Visit to India: Key Takeaways", Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi, December 8, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2025/december/08/President-Vladimir-Putin-s-visit-to-India-Key-Takeaways>. Accessed on January 12, 2026; Ivan Lidarev, "India-Russia Relations: The Message Behind Putin's Visit", *ISAS Brief*, No. 1324, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, December 12, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/ISAS-Brief-1324HK-HS.pdf>. Accessed on January 13, 2026.

to the development, production, and maintenance of military equipment in accordance with India's *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiative.⁹¹

With the relationship between Russia and China becoming closer and deeper, India's quest for a strong strategic partnership with Russia will be less motivated by a common rivalry with China. India's steadfastness in maintaining its strategic partnership with Russia amidst the conflict in Ukraine should be interpreted as a reaffirmation of its core non-aligned policy. The present state of the arms supply relationship and the closer alignment between Russia and China have not altered the interests of the countries in establishing a multipolar world order. One thing is very clear that so far, Russia has consistently supported India, avoiding actions that would favour China.

India and Russia possess a deep understanding that can assist in addressing the challenges presented by the ongoing war in Ukraine and enhance their economic collaboration by utilising their distinct advantages and cooperation across various sectors. The initiation of the Russian markets for Indian products and services, along with the execution of the programme for the Development of Strategic Areas of India-Russia Economic Cooperation till 2030, aims of seeking to achieve a target of US\$ 100 billion and to rectify the existing trade imbalance.⁹² In spite of the intricate challenges they may encounter, New Delhi and Moscow can successfully recognise and develop avenues for collaboration in the pursuit of their common goals. The bond between the two sides remains strong and enduring. Owing to its proximity to both conflicting nations, India must assume a significantly larger role in resolving the current war, thus, mitigating the difficulties it presents to India-Russia relations.

91. Harsh V. Pant and Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash, "Putin in India: Looking Beyond Deals", Observer Research Foundation, December 11, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/putin-in-india-looking-beyond-deals>. Accessed on January 12, 2026.

92. See, "Joint Statement following the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, December 5, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/40410>. Accessed on January 12, 2026; Jagatbir Singh, "The Defence Dimension of President Putin's Visit to India", United Service Institution of India, December 12, 2025. Retrieved from https://usiofindia.org/pdf/Edited_SP_Jagatbir_Singh.pdf. Accessed on January 12, 2026.