



INDIA - RUSSIA RELATIONS - GS II MAINS

Q. Despite rising global geo-political challenges, India-Russia relations are “very steady and very strong”, with long-term arrangements in areas like trade, energy, fertiliser and coking coal. Elucidate (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *India, Russia to Boost Energy Ties, Defence Item Production*

What's in the news?

- Amid continued efforts by the West to pin Russia down in Ukraine, external affairs minister S Jaishankar backed ties with Moscow, calling it a valued and time-tested partner with which India enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship that's based on strategic convergence and geopolitical interests and realities.

Key takeaways:

- They discussing ways to further enhance energy ties and to augment defence cooperation through joint production of military equipment.
- They also focused on the situation in Gaza and Ukraine while discussing regional and global issues.
- In what was their 7th meeting this year, Lavrov **reiterated Russia's support to India's candidature for permanent membership of the Security Council**, while lauding India's G20 presidency for not allowing the joint communique to be biased or one-sided. Lavrov underscored the importance of energy ties, which has seen India emerging as one of the largest importers of Russian fuels, saying it's a strategic area for India-Russia relations and that he and Jaishankar agreed on the **expansion of exports of hydrocarbons to the Indian market as well as cooperation for peaceful uses of nuclear energy**.
- India and China remain the only major powers to have never explicitly condemned Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. Jaishankar said after his meeting with Lavrov that PM Modi will have his annual summit with Putin next year.
 - The meeting couldn't take place in 2022 & 2023, as Putin was focused on the Ukraine war and India was engaged in hosting the G20 summit.
- Stating that India-Russia relations remained “**very steady, very strong**”, Jaishankar said long-term arrangements were discussed in areas like trade, energy, fertiliser and coking coal.

India-Russia Relations:

Backdrop:



- Russia has been a longstanding and time-tested partner for India. Development of India-Russia relations has been a key pillar of India's foreign policy.
- In the Cold War era, India had signed the **Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR in August 1971**, just before the onset of the Indo-Pak War in December 1971. This was a significant deviation from India's previous position of Non-Alignment during the Cold War.
- Post the Cold War era, **A Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership** was signed in October 2000. Since then, the ties have acquired a qualitatively new character with enhanced levels of cooperation in almost all areas of the bilateral relationship. Under the Strategic Partnership, several institutionalized dialogue mechanisms operate at both political and official levels to ensure regular interaction and follow up on cooperation activities.
- During the visit of the Russian President to India in December 2010, the Strategic Partnership was elevated to the level of a "**Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership**".
- The 21st India- Russia summit took place in December 2021 where the leaders reiterated a **Partnership for Peace, Progress and Prosperity**.

Areas of Cooperation:

1. Defence partnership:

- Defence ties are one of the highly influential aspects of India-Russia relations.
- Relations include technology transfer, joint development, marketing & selling and export of equipment.
- It has provided significant enhancement to India's indigenous defence manufacturing.
- Some of the major defence collaboration programs are **BrahMos Cruise Missile** program, Sukhoi Su-30, S-400 and Tactical Transport Aircraft.

2. Energy Security:

- In Energy sector Russia has built **nuclear reactors** in India (Kudankulam reactors), adopted strategic vision in nuclear energy, offered oil, gas and investment opportunities in the fuel sector of Russia e.g., Sakhalin I etc.

3. Space technology:

- India and Russia have a four-decade strong relationship in the field of space.
- The former Soviet Union launched India's first two satellites, Aryabhata and Bhaskara.
- Russia has provided India **Cryogenic technology** to build heavy rockets.

4. Global Partnership:

- Russia has supported India's bid for permanent seat in **UNSC**.
- It has been favouring Indian entry to **Nuclear Supplier Group**.
- Both countries coordinate each other over various forums including **BRICS, SCO, G20** etc.

5. Cultural Cooperation:



- From people-to-people contacts (through programs like ‘**Namaste Russia**’) to sharing educational brilliance of both the countries through institutes like Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre, both the countries have had good cultural links.
- There is strong interest among Russian people in Indian dance, music, yoga and Ayurveda.
- As Russia and India both desire a multi-polar world, they are equally important for each other in fulfilling each other’s national interests.

Growing Challenges:

Due to the changing geopolitical scenario, the relationship between both countries is not as good as it used to be in the cold war era.

1. India’s recent proximity to the United States:

- Rapidly expanding ties and growing defence relationship between India and US, and India joining QUAD group led by the US has led to a strategic shift in Russia’s foreign policy, pushing it to align with China.

2. Defence partnership:

- India has been recently diversifying its defence relations with US, Israel, etc, leading to a reduction in Russia’s share of Indian defence imports.

3. One Dimensional Trade:

- India Russia trade has been mostly restricted to defence trade.
- Trade in 2017-18 was \$10.7 billion, which is far below potential in comparison to India’s trade with China (\$89.7 billion), the United States (\$74.5 billion).
- Other challenges in boosting trade include: number of issues that hinder India-Russia trade, like connectivity issues, distance, weak banking links, cumbersome regulations on both sides and Russia’s restrictive visa regime.

4. Change in Russia’s foreign policy posture: tilting towards Pakistan, China and even recognizing Taliban.

- Pakistan - conducted military exercise; signed a military-technical cooperation agreement for arms supply and weapon development.
- China - increasing strategic military relations between the two nations; Russia selling advanced military technology to China; endorsing China’s One Belt One Road initiative.

5. Differences over the Indo-Pacific:

- Both India and Russia have a difference of opinion in understanding the concept of the Indo-Pacific.
- Russia opposes the term Indo-Pacific as the term is primarily a US-led initiative aimed to contain China and Russia.
- **Russia does not accept the concept of QUAD. Instead, Russia supports the concept of Asia Pacific.**

Importance of mutual relationship:



- Russia is important to India as it could help to balance Chinese aggression in the region (Russia organized India-China meeting for peace talks after deadly clashes in Galwan Valley), for **combating terrorism** (early finalization of India's proposed Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism) and for support at Multilateral forums like UNSC, NSG, etc.
- Similarly, India is significant for Russia as it wants India's help to **lessen its growing dependence on China**, to revive Eurasian Economic Union and help Russia re-establish its hegemony.

Regaining India-Russia Relationship:

1. Sochi Informal Summit 2018 - The strategic partnership between the two has been elevated into a "special privileged strategic partnership".

2. Reinforced defence ties - Both countries finalized Su-400 air defence systems and nuclear-powered submarine (Chakra III) deal, construction of Ka-226 helicopters in India under Make in India initiative.

3. Improving Trade Relations - India Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue was started in 2018 to achieve the target of \$30 billion investment goal by 2025 between both the countries

4. India participated in **Eastern Economic Forum** (2020) which aims to support the economic development of Russia's resource rich Far East. India has extended a \$1 billion line of credit for the development of this region. Also, proposal for maritime route between Chennai and Vladivostok has been made.

5. Strengthening Energy cooperation - Cooperation in development of oil in Russia including its arctic shelf and joint development of projects on the shelf of the Pechora and Okhotsk Seas. For increasing connectivity both sides called for the development of **International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.

Potential Areas for Deepening Ties:

1. Connectivity - There is scope for improvement in trade between Russia and India if the **International North-South Transport Corridor** through Iran, and the **Vladivostok-Chennai Sea route** can be operationalised.

2. Technology - India can benefit from hi-tech cooperation with Russia in the fields of artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, outer space, and nanotechnology.

3. Education, R&D - India can also cooperate with Russia on upgrading its basic research and education facilities.

4. Diversifying Economic Engagement - Apart from traditional areas of cooperation such as weapons, hydrocarbons, nuclear energy, and diamonds, new sectors of economic engagement are likely to emerge - mining, agro-industrial, and high technology, including robotics, nanotech, and biotech.

5. Mutual benefits in trade of natural resources such as timber, and agriculture can also be harnessed.

6. India must concentrate on **export** of its strength areas (sectors such as IT/ITeS, pharmaceuticals and healthcare).



7. Climate Action: India and Russia.

WAY FORWARD

- **Engaging Russia into Indo-Pacific Narrative** - India should pursue and facilitate Russia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific.
- Russia's active engagement in the region would contribute to making the Indo-Pacific truly "free and inclusive".
- **Prioritizing RIC in Indian Foreign Policy** - India must promote a mutually beneficial trilateral cooperation between Russia, India and China, that could contribute towards the reduction of mistrust and suspicion between the three countries.
- **Cooperation At Multilateral Forums** - strengthening ties through various multilateral organizations including BRICS, RIC, G20, East Asia Summit, and SCO, where avenues for cooperation on issues of mutual importance exist.
- India has to balance itself between Russia and the US, both of whom look up to it for cooperation and engagement.

Despite growing divergences on various areas, both sides know the importance of each other in this rapidly changing, uncertain global environment. India's investment in the Far East, which is often neglected given that Russia is seen as a European power in the post-Soviet era, also underlines India's desire to draw Russia into its strategic forays in the Indo-Pacific.

