

India's Strategic Considerations With Russia In The Post-Russia-Ukraine War Era

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Abstract

This article examines India's strategic considerations in the aftermath of the Russia crisis, explicitly focusing on India-Russia relations. The article analyses the factors influencing India's approach towards Russia, particularly in defense cooperation while considering the implications of China's rising influence on India's strategic calculations. By conducting a case study of India-Russia relations, the paper investigates the dynamics of defense collaboration, the significance of Russia as a defense partner for India, and the evolving regional security landscape shaped by China's ascent. The research provides insights into India's strategic alignments and decision-making processes in the post-Russia crisis era, considering Russia's new foreign policy emphasizing India and China. Furthermore, the paper examines the encircling impact of China's rising influence in South Asia on India, highlighting India's abstention in the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a reflection of its difficult position amidst these geopolitical developments. The findings of this research contribute to the understanding of India's strategic responses and decision-making frameworks in the context of shifting regional dynamics, considering the implications of Russia's foreign policy approach and China's growing power.

Keywords: *India, Russia, post Russia-Ukraine war, strategic considerations, defense cooperation*

Introduction

The relationship between India and Russia, deeply rooted in historical ties and nurtured by generations of leaders from both nations, is of significant relevance in the current geopolitical context. This enduring partnership, which is unique in its depth and breadth, is exemplified by the close personal rapport shared between the Prime Minister of India and the President of Russia. The Indian Prime Minister has been honored as one of the few foreign leaders to receive Russia's highest state decoration (Dmitri Trenin, 2021). This unique bond, particularly in the aftermath of the Russia crisis and amidst China's rising influence, forms the backdrop of this research.

Beyond official channels, a mutual sense of trust and reliability exists between the Russian populace and India. Similarly, most Indians regard Russia as a steadfast and faithful friend throughout India's 75-year independence journey. Russia's National Security Strategy further affirms this sentiment unveiled in July 2021, which designates India as a Priority

Strategic Partner, signifying the elevated stature of this bilateral relationship within Russia's strategic considerations.

India-Russia relations, a unique and significant partnership, have withstood various challenges. Originating during the Soviet Union era, these ties have adapted to shifting geopolitical landscapes. A key pillar of this relationship is defense cooperation. Russia has been India's primary arms and military technology source throughout history. Despite occasional hurdles, this partnership has significantly bolstered India's defense capabilities through joint ventures and technology transfers. The enduring strategic partnership, rooted in historical connections and shared ideological underpinnings, has been further strengthened by collaborative efforts in defense affairs with Russia (Stobdan, 2010, p. 129). Established in 2000, this official alliance has been guided by a convergence of interests and a foundation of mutual trust. Notably, Russia has played a pivotal role in enhancing India's defense capabilities by facilitating its modernization endeavors by providing cutting-edge military equipment, transferring critical technologies, and establishing joint production capabilities.

Both nations recognize the strategic importance of their relationship, notwithstanding occasional hurdles in arms supplies and differences in approach. They have worked to adapt their collaboration to meet evolving needs and capabilities. Consolidating the enduring partnership with India remains a top priority in Russia's agenda, particularly in light of President Putin's overarching vision to extend Russia's strategic influence from West Asia through Southeast Asia.

In this context, India's pivotal role within the broader Indian Ocean-Pacific strategy, supported by major global players, including the United States, positions New Delhi as a crucial and strategic ally in Moscow's eyes. Furthermore, converging both nations' strategic roles and interests in the Asia-Pacific region is a unifying force, bridging existing disparities.

Both leaders emphasized the significance of their unique and privileged strategic partnership. This partnership is essential for global peace stability and shaping "*a more just and open world order*". These shared objectives further bolster the strategic trust between the two nations.

Given the current global political landscape, the recent Russia-Ukraine crisis has created a crucial juncture requiring a reexamination of India's strategic alignments and decision-making frameworks. This crisis has sent disruptive shockwaves across the global geopolitical landscape, raising uncertainty and prompting questions about the stability of established alliances. India's stance following the Russia-Ukraine war carries significant strategic implications. This article aims to provide a nuanced analysis of India's defense collaboration with Russia while also considering the impact of China's escalating influence on India's strategic assessments. It is imperative to scrutinize the post-crisis phase, referring to the period after the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, to grasp the evolving global paradigm and its influence on India's strategic alliances.

In addition to the challenges posed by the Russian crisis, India is grappling with the implications of China's growing influence in South Asia (USIP, 2020, p.6). China's ascent as a global power has reshaped alliances and strategic calculations among regional actors, directly

impacting India's strategic alignments and responses to regional geopolitical developments. As China's power expands, India must carefully evaluate its position and recalibrate its approach to safeguard national interests and ensure regional stability.

This article analyzes India's defense cooperation with Russia, considering the implications of China's mounting influence on India's strategic calculus. A meticulous examination of the post-crisis era following the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is indispensable for a nuanced understanding of the shifting global dynamics and their repercussions on India's strategic alignments. Through an in-depth case study of India-Russia relations, this research probes into the intricacies of defense collaboration, the pivotal role of Russia as a defense partner for India, and the evolving regional security landscape shaped by the ascent of China. It offers invaluable insights into India's strategic orientations and the decision-making processes in the post-Russia crisis era while accounting for Russia's foreign policy stance and the implications of China's burgeoning power. With a grasp of these multifaceted dynamics, India can adeptly navigate the complexities of the geopolitical terrain and safeguard its national interests with efficacy.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study utilizes a qualitative case study approach to examine the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on India-Russia relations. This approach is selected for its ability to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of complex geopolitical relationships, particularly in the context of evolving regional dynamics. The theoretical framework guiding this study incorporates three key concepts. Firstly, it focuses on strategic considerations, examining how geopolitical factors, defense cooperation, and shifts in regional power dynamics influence India's post-crisis stance towards Russia. Secondly, the study employs the concept of balancing in international relations to examine how India navigates its strategic autonomy, particularly in its relationships with Russia and China. Traditionally, India has maintained close defense and diplomatic ties with Russia, but the Russia-Ukraine conflict has complicated this relationship due to Russia's growing alignment with China—India's regional rival. India seeks to balance these relationships by continuing its defense cooperation with Russia while managing its concerns over China's rising influence, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. This balancing act is critical for India to maintain its strategic autonomy, ensuring that it can make independent foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, the study considers Russia's revised foreign policy, which increasingly emphasizes stronger ties with China, driven by Western sanctions post-Ukraine conflict. This development influences India's strategic calculations, as it must assess the risks and benefits of continuing its relationship with Russia without alienating other global partners, such as the United States, while counterbalancing China's assertiveness. Ultimately, the study explores how India carefully maneuvers these evolving dynamics to safeguard its national interests and regional influence amidst shifting global power structures.

For the analysis, the study draws on secondary sources, including official documents, reports, and publications from the Indian government (e.g., Ministry of External Affairs,

Ministry of Defence), Russian government (e.g., Ministry of Foreign Affairs, official policy statements), and reports from academic institutions and think tanks such as the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. These sources were carefully selected for their credibility, relevance, and focus on India-Russia relations, defense cooperation, and the regional security landscape, particularly in the post-Ukraine conflict era.

To analyze the data, the study employs a qualitative content analysis method. This involves systematically reviewing and interpreting textual data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to India's strategic considerations and its balancing act between Russia and China. Specifically, the content analysis focuses on examining India-Russia defense cooperation, the geopolitical dynamics that have been reshaped by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and policy shifts in India's foreign policy in response to Russia's evolving approach. This methodology enables a deeper understanding of India's strategic responses and the broader regional implications in light of the ongoing conflict.

India-Russia Relations Before Russia's War on Ukraine

India and Russia have enjoyed a longstanding and robust partnership, a fundamental pillar of India's foreign policy. The development of bilateral relations between the two nations has spanned several decades and encompassed various sectors, including political, security, defense, trade and economy, science and technology, culture, and people-to-people ties.

The foundation of the India-Russia strategic partnership was laid in October 2000 when President Vladimir Putin visited India, culminating in signing the "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership". This landmark event marked a significant shift in the bilateral relationship, elevating it to a qualitatively new level of cooperation (Almas Haider Naqvi, Syed Qandil Abbas, 2022, p.111). Over time, India and Russia further deepened their ties, elevating their strategic partnership to a "*Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership*" during President Putin's visit to India in December 2010 (Almas Haider Naqvi, p. 112). This enhanced status highlighted the unique nature and importance of the bilateral relationship.

Under the strategic partnership framework, both countries established various dialogue mechanisms at political and official levels. These mechanisms served as platforms for regular interaction, fostering cooperation, and ensuring effective follow-up on joint activities.

Bilateral trade between India and Russia has experienced steady growth in recent years, highlighting the strengthening economic ties between the two nations. The trade figures (see *image 1*) reflect this positive trend, with increasing trade value. These figures reflect the growing economic engagement and confidence in trade and investment between India and Russia.

Table 1: Bilateral trade between India and Russia from 2010 to 2017

Year	Bilateral Trade (\$ Billion)
2010	8.5
2011	8.9
2012	11.04
2013	10
2014	9.51
2015	7.83
2016	7.71
2017	10.17

Source: Nivedita Kapoor (2019, p.8)

Regarding political relations, with Prime Minister Modi assuming office in India, the global and regional geopolitical landscape experienced substantial transformations. This prompted India to reevaluate its strategic focus. Throughout history, India and Russia have maintained a robust partnership, marked by a considered approach towards engagement with other major powers. This approach aimed to foster a durable and resilient relationship between two nations in developmental ascendancy. During this period, Russia was inclined towards fortifying its ties with China, a response to sanctions levied by Western nations following the annexation of Crimea. Concurrently, Prime Minister Modi's administration embarked on domestic reforms to attract investments and technology from the United States and Western countries. This effort was underscored by an emphasis on diversifying relations, notably with the United States and Western nations.

However, this diversification led to bilateral issues, introducing uncertainties in the India-Russia relationship. The foremost concern was India's increasing alignment with the United States, which Russia perceived as a rival. In parallel, Russia deepened its partnership with China, an inclination viewed as competitive by India. The India-China relationship experienced further strain following a border conflict in the Himalayas. Simultaneously, Russia's ties with the United States faced turbulence after the Ukraine crisis 2014, resulting in an aggressive dynamic.

Recognizing the urgency of addressing outstanding issues and strategic misunderstandings, Prime Minister Modi engaged in a pivotal telephonic conversation with President Putin in August 2021. This dialogue reactivated the Joint Working Group mechanism established between Russia and India in the early 2000s, focusing on discussions about the situation in Afghanistan. During a meeting in October 2021, India and Russia, Iran, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan issued the Delhi Declaration on Afghanistan (Claudia Chia, Zheng Haiqi, 2021). Russian National Security Adviser Nikolay Patrushev visited India in September and October 2021, underscoring the commitment to strengthening ties. During the 21st summit, both leaders expressed contentment with the progress achieved in their unique and priority strategic partnership.

They issued a joint statement delineating India and Russia's dedication to cooperation for peace, progress, and prosperity. This commitment spanned a wide array of bilateral cooperation areas. Notably, 28 agreements were signed at national and organizational levels, covering trade, energy, science and technology, intellectual property, aerospace, geology exploration, cultural exchange, and education, and culminating in the elevation of the bilateral consultation mechanism to a 2+2 format—a model presently upheld by India with other QUAD nations (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021). This period encapsulates the intricate dynamics and evolving priorities within the India-Russia relationship. These developments are contextualized against shifting global geopolitical currents and regional imperatives.

Joint military exercises between the three Armed Forces of India and Russia are conducted under the name "INDRA". The Indra Tri-Service exercise was initially scheduled for September 2022 in Kaliningrad but has been postponed to 2023, continuing a trend of delays for the exercise over the past two years. In addition, an Indian contingent took part in the International Army Games in August 2022 and Exercise Vostok in Russia in September 2022. Both nations have sustained regular high-level exchanges between military leaders to enhance political trust and share expertise. The ongoing execution of the INDRA exercise, which commenced in 2003, underscores the robust defense collaboration between India and Russia. To date, there has been only one bilateral exercise, consisting of naval drills in the Bay of Bengal in November 2023. Furthermore, India has engaged in two multilateral exercises "Vostok 2022" and "MILAN 2024" (Aleksei Zakharov, 2024).

Additionally, the Avia-Indra exercise, established in 2014, was sustained annually. Likewise, the INDRA Navy exercise, formed in 2003, was also upheld on a biennial schedule. Notably, Russia's participation in the PASSEX - International Passage Exercise, a maritime exercise aimed at maintaining freedom of navigation, further underscored their commitment to military cooperation. This collaborative military engagement exemplified the depth of mutual trust and strategic partnership between India and Russia before the Ukraine conflict eruption.

One of the critical areas of cooperation between India and Russia has been in the defense sector. The bilateral military-technical cooperation between the two nations evolved beyond a mere buyer-seller relationship to encompass joint research, development, and production of advanced defense technologies and systems (see image 2). The India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military & Military-Technical Cooperation, co-chaired by the defense ministers of both countries, played a crucial role in facilitating collaboration. The commission held annual meetings, with the most recent one in New Delhi on December 6, 2021 (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021).

Table 2: Defense deals between India and Russia during 2018-19

Year	Deal	Amount
2018	S-400 missile defence system	\$5.2 billion
2018	Project 11356 class frigates (2)	\$950 million
2019	Akula class nuclear-powered submarine	\$3 billion
2019	T-90 tanks	\$2 billion
2019	Igla-S Very Short-Range Air Defence Systems	\$1.47 billion
2019	JV to manufacture of AK-203/103 rifles	\$ 1 billion

Source: Indian Defense Industries, 2019

Moreover, nuclear energy cooperation has also been a significant aspect of the bilateral relationship. Russia emerged as a vital partner for India in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) is a flagship project between the two countries. While Units 1 and 2 of KKNPP have already become operational, construction is underway for Units 3 and 4 (Ministry of External Affairs, 2012, p.2).

India and Russia have long-standing collaborations in space exploration. Their cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space extends back almost four decades. The two nations have collaborated closely on India's ambitious human spaceflight program, "Gaganyaan" (Aditya Pareek & Andrey Gubin, 2021, p.3,8).

India and Russia have fostered extensive cooperation in science and technology. A new five-year roadmap for bilateral STI (Science, Technology, and Innovation) cooperation, replacing the previous ILTP (Integrated Long-Term Program), guided the bilateral engagement in this field. This roadmap aimed to promote co-innovation, exchanges, and joint initiatives.

Furthermore, cultural cooperation has played a significant role in strengthening people-to-people ties between India and Russia. Russian institutions have shown a keen interest in Indian studies, with the Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre in Moscow maintaining close cooperation with leading Russian institutions. The teaching of various Indian languages, such as Hindi, Tamil, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Urdu, Sanskrit, and Pali, has been integrated into the curriculum of Russian educational institutions. Indian art forms, including dance, music, yoga, and Ayurveda, have also garnered substantial interest among the Russian populace (Embassy of India in Moscow, 2022).

Overall, the India-Russia relationship before the Russia-Ukraine conflict was characterized by a multifaceted and comprehensive partnership, encompassing defense, nuclear energy, space cooperation, science and technology, and cultural exchanges. The two countries had established solid institutional mechanisms to facilitate dialogue and the implementation of cooperative initiatives. The strategic partnership between India and Russia had evolved into a unique and privileged relationship, emphasizing the significance of their bilateral ties. However, it is essential to note that the context and dynamics of the India-Russia

relationship may have been influenced by the subsequent Russia-Ukraine conflict, which could have implications for the future trajectory of their cooperation.

Impact of Russia's War on Ukraine on India-Russia Relations

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has significantly impacted the relations between India and Russia, leading to a complex interplay of consequences that have shaped their bilateral dynamics. The conflict has presented challenges and opportunities, influencing political, economic, and strategic interactions. One notable consequence has been the strain on India's delicate balancing act between Russia and Ukraine. India's historical alliance with Russia has raised concerns in Ukraine due to the perception of India's support for Russia's actions in the conflict. This balancing act has tested India's ability to maintain its traditionally strong ties with Russia while avoiding alienation from Ukraine, an important partner for India in defense cooperation and agriculture.

Economically, the conflict has affected the trade relations between India and Russia. The sanctions imposed on Russia by Western nations have indirectly impacted India's trade with Russia, resulting in disruptions and challenges in their economic cooperation. India has carefully navigated the financial fallout, aiming to sustain economic ties with Russia while avoiding confrontations with Western powers (Ian Hall, 2023).

Additionally, the conflict has influenced India's energy security strategy. As a major importer of energy resources, India has sought to diversify its energy sources to ensure security. The tensions arising from the Russia-Ukraine conflict have prompted India to reevaluate its reliance on Russian energy, leading to the exploration of alternative options such as renewable energy and diversification of energy suppliers.

Strategically, the conflict has scrutinized India's relationship with Russia, particularly its growing partnership with the United States. It has raised questions about the alignment of India's foreign policy and its impact on regional stability. India has sought to strike a delicate balance between its strategic partnerships with Russia and the United States to safeguard its national interests.

Furthermore, China's rising influence and strategies have added complexity to India-Russia relations and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. China's economic interests, strategic calculations, and geopolitical rivalries with the United States have implications for India and Russia. As China actively engages with both countries, its growing economic clout and partnerships with Russia can influence Russia's actions and alignment with India. Moreover, China's pursuit of its strategic goals and impact on regional stability can shape the dynamics among these nations. Navigating this intricate landscape requires careful diplomacy and a nuanced understanding of China's intentions and the broader geopolitical context. The combination of China's rising presence and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict adds further complexity to the already multifaceted dynamics of India-Russia relations.

India's Response to Russia's War on Ukraine

India's measured response to Putin's conflict in Ukraine aligns with its longstanding diplomatic tradition of refraining from direct censure of major powers engaged in foreign conflicts. This approach finds its roots in India's historical stance of non-alignment, which extends to wars it may fundamentally oppose, such as the U.S. intervention in Iraq (Jeff M. Smith, 2023). This nuanced approach underscores India's commitment to maintaining a balanced and pragmatic foreign policy, carefully navigating geopolitical complexities while upholding its strategic interests.

India's stance towards Russia's actions in Ukraine has been marked by a cautious diplomatic approach, characterized by abstentions in U.N. votes. While refraining from overt criticism, India has indicated discomfort with the unfolding events. This response is driven by a complex interplay of domestic economic considerations and overarching strategic priorities, notably its concerns about China. Preserving the relationship with Russia is of paramount importance to India. This partnership ensures Moscow's neutrality in potential conflicts between India and China and facilitates a cost-effective military supply chain. India intends to avoid entanglement in a regional competition beyond its immediate strategic interests.

The war in Ukraine presented diplomatic and economic challenges for India. Diplomatically, India sought acceptance from the United States, its primary partner in countering China, for its neutral stance. The US recognized India's strategic importance within the Quad and its Indo-Pacific strategy and thus did not pressure the Indian government to change its position in Ukraine (Kate Sullivan de Estrada, 2023). India was unconcerned about European criticism due to its self-serving stance on Chinese aggression (Jan Gallemí, 2022).

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has had a notable adverse impact on India's economy, reducing its growth prospects and instigating an inflationary crisis. To counter these challenges, India took proactive steps to address inflation's economic and social repercussions, mainly driven by escalating food and fuel prices. One of the critical measures involved India's decision to procure discounted Russian oil and fertilizer. This strategic move aimed to stabilize its economy, alleviating the strain caused by the price surge and providing relief to its populace. It can lead to India's response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict standing out among significant democracies and U.S. strategic partners. While uncomfortable with Moscow's actions, India has maintained public neutrality, abstaining from condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine and refraining from openly blaming Russia for the crisis. This approach has disappointed some in the United States, revealing a significant divergence between Washington and New Delhi on the issue of using force to change borders.

Despite its neutral stance, India has actively pursued avenues for ending the conflict, privately and publicly urging Russia to engage in negotiations with Ukraine and the West. Many Indian strategic elites have perceived India's diplomatic neutrality as subtly favoring Moscow, which appears incongruous considering India's alignment with the United States in countering Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific (Ashley J. Tellis, 2022). India's decision to maintain neutrality stems from its historical dependence on Russia and past instances of

feeling marginalized by the West. While India has been diversifying its defense supplies and reducing its reliance on Russia recently, this does not signify an immediate shift in the India-Russia relationship but rather a gradual drift apart.

India is closely monitoring the geopolitical implications of the conflict, particularly Russia's reliance on China following its isolation from the West. Additionally, India is observing if European nations, such as Germany, will bolster their military capabilities and perceive China as a strategic threat due to the Ukraine war (Tim Hildebrandt, 2023). Based on these developments, India may consider strengthening security and defense relations with European countries. In the short term, India might adjust its aggressive net-zero climate plans due to declining growth rates and the surge in oil and gas prices, potentially increasing coal consumption.

India's response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict involves balancing domestic economic considerations and higher strategic priorities. Maintaining neutrality allows India to preserve its relationship with Russia while focusing on more immediate concerns, notably countering China. Throughout this process, India remains engaged in diplomatic efforts, economic measures, and peace negotiations. As the geopolitical landscape evolves, India will carefully assess the implications of the conflict and make strategic decisions aligned with its national interests. On the other hand, India's refusal to halt its purchase of Russian oil and military equipment and its abstention on UN votes condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine has strained the bilateral relationship. It could potentially hinder future cooperation (Gareth Price, 2022). In 2018, India inked a \$5 billion deal with Russia to procure S-400 surface-to-air missile systems, which are slated for delivery (Shaza Arif, 2021, p.41). India has argued that it needs to be more logical for the US to prevent India from acquiring a critical defense system necessary for its security, especially considering the US's delayed offer of a comparable missile system.

India's response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict has underscored its dependence on Russian military equipment, a legacy of the Cold War era. While acknowledging differences, India and the United States are committed to addressing these divergences and maintaining a robust bilateral relationship. Recognizing New Delhi as a central player in maintaining security in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States has been actively bolstering its defense partnership with India. In a move to ease tensions, the US House of Representatives, in June 2022, urged the Biden administration to grant an India-specific waiver under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) (Aparna Pande, 2023). This crucial waiver would exempt India from CAATSA sanctions designed to restrict countries from purchasing military systems from Russia. By providing this exemption, Secretary of State Blinken holds the authority to prevent further strain in the bilateral relationship, signaling a proactive step towards strengthening ties with India.

The Ukraine crisis has highlighted India's reliance on Russian military equipment, but it also seeks to diversify its defense acquisitions. Notably, the United States has become a significant defense supplier for India, with over \$20 billion in arms purchases in the last decade. The Indian Navy ranks as the second-largest operator of P-8I Poseidon maritime

patrol aircraft globally (Rupakjyoti Borah, 2023), while the Indian Air Force possesses the second-largest C-17 fleet worldwide, surpassed only by the United States.

While important issues, such as US concerns regarding the protection of minorities in India, remain on the bilateral agenda, both countries recognize their critical partnership. The Biden administration has reaffirmed India's importance as a strategic partner due to its shared global interests, particularly in competition with China (National Defence Journal, 2023). India, in turn, has shown its eagerness to collaborate with the United States, signaling a departure from its Cold War-era rejection of American overtures. This growing strategic alignment demonstrates the mutual benefits both nations derive from their partnership.

Balancing Relations with Russia and China in a Shifting Geopolitical Landscape

In the post-crisis era, India's approach towards Russia is shaped by many factors, encompassing geopolitical dynamics, defense cooperation, and regional power shifts. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has added complexity to India's strategic considerations, necessitating carefully navigating the evolving relationship. India acknowledges the importance of maintaining a delicate equilibrium between its longstanding ties with Russia and concerns regarding China's assertiveness in the region.

As nations grapple with balancing relations with major powers like Russia and China amidst an evolving geopolitical landscape, India's response to this challenge is closely attuned to Russia's evolving foreign policy. Russia's recognition of India and China as pivotal countries aligns with India's endeavors to strike a balance amid changing power dynamics. This recognition underscores the significance of India's response to this power transition, influencing regional security dynamics and contributing to the broader geopolitical landscape.

India's approach to maintaining relationships with Russia and China involves meticulously considering Russia's evolving foreign policy. Recognizing the strategic importance of robust ties with India and China, India's response to this power transition becomes even more critical in shaping regional security dynamics. It is evident that India's efforts to strike a delicate balance between Russia and China are aligned with its interests and contribute to Russia's policy objectives, thus bolstering the broader geopolitical landscape. This approach optimally serves India's national interests in several key ways.

Firstly, India maintains an equilibrium in its relations with two crucial partners, Russia and China, promoting cooperation across various bilateral domains. Secondly, India leverages its political advantages to establish a framework that aligns with its defined "rules of the game". Thirdly, in times of crisis, India seizes opportunities to secure benefits. For instance, despite Western sanctions, it continues to pursue procurement contracts for weaponry with Russia and actively seeks discounted oil purchases. This demonstrates India's favorable position to enhance its stature and derive benefits even amidst crises.

The shifting power dynamics, characterized by China's ascent as a global economic powerhouse and Russia's assertive foreign policy stance, have reconfigured the balance of

power. Countries must evaluate the potential risks and benefits of aligning with either control or adopting a nuanced approach that accommodates both. As a pivotal player in the region, India has implemented various strategies to balance its relations with Russia and China while safeguarding its national interests.

India's enduring strategic and defense partnership with Russia is a testament to its dedication to maintaining a solid alliance amid this transformative shift in power dynamics. Despite its recent overtures towards closer ties with the United States, India has consistently upheld its longstanding connections with Russia, recognizing its strategic value in navigating the evolving regional landscape. This balanced approach reflects India's astute understanding of the complexities and interdependencies inherent in the contemporary geopolitical arena.

Simultaneously, India recognizes China's economic potential and influence and has engaged with the country on economic fronts (Tanvi Madan, 2020, p.4). However, India exercises caution regarding China's assertive actions, particularly along the disputed border. India has forged partnerships with other countries, including the United States, Japan, and Australia, to counterbalance China's influence, contributing to its overall balancing efforts (Sujan R. Chinoy, 2020). Given its geopolitical positioning and internal economic capabilities, India possesses all the necessary conditions to become an indispensable regional and global partner. For example, the other three members of the QUAD, despite their strong desire for India to sever its economic ties with Russia and support Western sanctions against Moscow, have not condemned India. They temporarily accept New Delhi's foreign policy regarding the Ukraine crisis. This is because significant countries need to strengthen their relationship with India on a different front: the strategic competition with China in the Indo-Pacific region, where India holds considerable potential and occupies the best position to challenge China's rise.

By maintaining robust ties with Russia and engaging constructively with China, India aims to safeguard its national interests, enhance regional stability, and capitalize on the benefits of engaging with both powers. The multifaceted approach, encompassing strategic partnerships, defense cooperation, economic engagement, and active participation in regional forums, exemplifies India's efforts to balance relations with Russia and China. This approach equips India to navigate the complexities of the shifting geopolitical landscape while upholding its interests and promoting regional cooperation.

Prospects for India-Russia Relations in the current context

India-Russia relations have endured the test of time, characterized by a deep-rooted partnership built on trust, shared interests, and historical connections. India's strategic considerations in its relationship with Russia have gained heightened significance in the post-Russia-Ukraine war scenario. As geopolitical dynamics evolve, the prospects for India-Russia relations remain promising, contributing to regional stability in South Asia and beyond.

Defense cooperation stands as a vital pillar in India-Russia relations. Both nations have fostered a robust defense partnership, which is evident through joint military exercises,

technology transfers, and arms trade. This collaboration has been instrumental in enhancing India's defense capabilities and facilitating the modernization of its armed forces. The recent agreement between India and Russia to acquire the S-400 air defense system exemplifies the continued importance of defense ties (Shaza Arif, 2021). Such collaborations strengthen India's security posture, acting as a deterrent to potential conflicts and maintaining a delicate balance of power.

Amidst the evolving regional security landscape shaped by China's ascent, the significance of Russia as a defense partner for India becomes even more pronounced. Despite China's increasing hostility and power, India will unlikely abandon its longstanding security relationship with Russia. India will exert significant efforts to preserve this partnership, partly driven by a lack of confidence in the United States as a reliable security ally (Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, 2022, p.19). Russia's unwavering support for India during difficult times has established it as a country that Indians perceive to stand by their side, even if motivated by its interests. Consequently, Russia will maintain a favorable position within India's national security apparatus.

Cultural and people-to-people exchanges play a crucial role in fostering stronger India-Russia relations. Both countries have rich cultural heritages and a long history of cultural interactions. Educational and cultural exchange programs and tourism facilitate greater understanding and closer ties between the peoples of India and Russia (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021). These exchanges deepen the appreciation of each other's traditions, languages, and values, strengthening the foundation of bilateral relations and promoting people-to-people connectivity.

However, India and Russia also face challenges that require careful management. The evolving global geopolitical landscape, India's pursuit of diversified strategic partnerships, and Russia's engagements with other countries necessitate constant adaptation and recalibration of the relationship (Nivedita Kapoor, 2019, p. 3,6). For instance, the political relations between the two countries face the risk of weakening due to factors beyond Moscow's control. The breakdown in relations with the West has prompted Russia to seek a more robust partnership with China. Meanwhile, the escalating competition between India and China and the unresolved border dispute present significant challenges for Russia in maintaining a balanced relationship with India and China. If the India-China border issues worsen, managing this relationship becomes increasingly tricky. So, sustaining open lines of communication, engaging in regular high-level dialogues, and addressing differences constructively are crucial to navigating these challenges and seizing opportunities for further strengthening bilateral ties. Despite these challenges, the outlook for India-Russia relations appears promising in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine war. The foundation of this relationship rests on defense cooperation, economic engagement, multilateral collaboration, and people-to-people exchanges. As India and Russia continue to explore new avenues of cooperation and address emerging challenges, their collaboration strengthens bilateral ties and contributes to regional stability in South Asia and beyond. Nurturing the India-Russia partnership remains crucial for fostering a peaceful, prosperous, and stable regional order that benefits both nations and the wider international community.

While India's relationship with Russia will not face significant pressure as in the first scenario outlined, it may not deepen and expand to the extent necessary for long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, the mutual respect and historical cooperation between the two nations will ensure a solid foundation for the foreseeable future. India will continue to value its security ties with Russia, recognizing their importance in facing regional challenges and safeguarding its national interests. As China's influence grows, the evolving regional security landscape calls for India to carefully navigate its partnerships and leverage its defense collaboration with Russia to maintain regional stability.

Moreover, India is actively pursuing multilateral and bilateral defense cooperation with crucial security partners in the Indo-Pacific region to effectively address the challenges arising from the Russia-China-India triangle dilemma. This strategic approach allows India to navigate the evolving regional security landscape and mitigate the complexities inherent in this triangular dynamic. By strengthening ties with like-minded nations in the Indo-Pacific, India can bolster its defense capabilities, expand its network of allies, and foster stability within the region. This proactive approach to defense cooperation complements India's enduring partnership with Russia and contributes significantly to upholding a favorable balance of power in the face of China's growing influence.

Conclusion

After the Russia-Ukraine conflict, India has faced a complex and nuanced set of strategic considerations. Balancing its relationship with Russia, a long-standing ally, and managing China's escalating influence in the region presents a multifaceted and challenging task. A detailed analysis of India-Russia relations reveals the intricate factors that influence India's approach, particularly in defense cooperation and the ever-evolving landscape of regional security dynamics.

India's enduring defense alliance with Russia holds significant sway over its strategic calculus. Russia has been a crucial source of military equipment, bolstering India's efforts in defense modernization. However, the recent shift in Russia's foreign policy priorities, focusing on strengthening ties with India and China, has added a layer of complexity to India's decision-making processes. The challenge is to preserve its historical rapport with Russia while addressing concerns over China's assertive stance in the region.

China's growing influence in South Asia and its encircling impact on India has prompted the country to reassess its position and adjust its response to regional geopolitical developments. India's abstention in the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a testament to its delicate balancing act. It strives to protect its national interests while avoiding unnecessary confrontation with Russia and China. This nuanced approach stems from India's recognition of the importance of maintaining stable relations with both countries. By abstaining from the resolution, India aims to demonstrate its commitment to neutrality and avoid taking sides in the conflict, ensuring it can continue pursuing its national interests and regional stability.

Looking ahead, the prospects of India-Russia relations will depend on various factors. Russia's new foreign policy approach, emphasizing ties with both India and China, will shape India's response (Heather Ashby & Mary Glantz, 2023). India will carefully navigate its relations with both countries due to its national interests and evolving regional dynamics. To mitigate risks associated with overdependence, India will likely diversify its defense partnerships and explore collaborations with other nations, enabling greater strategic flexibility. Additionally, India will focus on strengthening its indigenous defense capabilities and investing in research and development to enhance self-reliance.

In conclusion, India's strategic considerations in the post-Russia-Ukraine war era necessitate a delicate balance between its longstanding ties with Russia and concerns regarding China's assertiveness. The evolving regional security landscape, the dynamics of India-Russia relations, and Russia's significance as a defense partner will continue to influence India's strategic alignments and decision-making processes. It is important to note that India will not abandon its relationship with Russia; however, embracing diversification and competition among suppliers will only work to India's advantage. By pursuing a nuanced and pragmatic approach, India can safeguard its national interests while promoting regional stability and peace.

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