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## India-Russia and multipolar world order

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### Abstract

India-Russia share unique and special bondage in their bilateral relationship, officially labeled as “Special and privileged strategic partnership”. Russia has been a major super power and it is reasserting itself under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin. India is an emerging potential power in Indo-Pacific and it is the fourth largest economy in the world in term of purchasing power and parity. At varied multilateral forum, the leadership of both the nations has shared the common vision to shape the uni-bipolar world order into a multipolar world order. Recent transitions at global level and engagement of revisionist power China and status quoits US, also play critical role apart from India and Russia in setting stage for multipolar world order. This paper also throws light on the recent initiatives and equilibrium between India-Russia under BJP led Modi government.

**Keywords:** India-Russia, world order

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### Introduction

India-Russia are called natural allies and their relationship has been considered time-tested. It can be proved with the fact that, India-Russia treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation was signed in 1971, since then bilateral relationship has strengthened with each passing decade. It can be analyzed from the status of bilateral relations that two nation has elevated from “strategic partnership” in 2000 to “Special and privileged strategic partnership” in 2010.

This paper discusses India and Russia bilateral relations in changing world order. The world today is going through major transition. There are many factors responsible for this transition, such as there is power tussle between US, Russia and China due to multiple reasons, such as geo-politics, geo-economics and military indices.

“Virtually all major regional powers are increasingly asserting themselves to promote their own distinct interests, which often conflict with those of the US. Global politics has thus moved from the bipolar system of the cold war through a unipolar moment- highlighted by the gulf war- and is now passing through one or two uni-multipolar decades before it enters a truly multipolar 21st century” (Samuel P. Huntington, p. 35).

### *Concept of Multipolarity*

The concept of Multipolarity in International Relation theory, can be define as the emergence of new world order based on new balance of power. In cold war era, the world order was bipolar dominated by two sole superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union. However, this bipolar world order broke down with the disintegration of USSR in 1991. Since then, world is in the transition process of settling back to multipolar world order, with the diffusion of power among number of key players. Multipolarity indicates the presence of multiple centres of power, regional security structures and regional trading institutions etc. The more powerful countries, or poles, can also be regarded as regional hegemons (Arvind Gupta, p. 19).

As stated by author Sanjaya Baru that “The post WWII world order was defined as bipolar however, there was no bipolarism. The post-cold war world order passed through what was labelled as unipolar phase, although, there was no theory of unipolarism either. The “multipolar” distribution of power across nations has been a characteristic of human history long before researchers and analysts theorized on the structures of global power (Sanjaya Baru, p. 3).

Through 19th century, the ottoman, Russian, and Chinese empire lived next to the British in Asia. Hence since 19th century and even before that several great powers had survived simultaneously. The so-called Roman Empire was also limited to the Mediterranean and Black sea. Even when Mongols ruled over Eurasia in 13th and 14th century, rest of the part of Africa and America was not controlled by them. Thus, Multipolarity is both descriptive and analytical concept in understanding the co-existence of multiple centers of power.

After analyzing the historical configuration of power centers (i.e. Roman, Ottoman, Chinese) of world, it can be analyzed that multipolar world order which is now once again emerging after disintegration of Soviet Union is not new concept, however it was time test historical and traditional world order which existed for long time.

“unipolar” and “bipolar” world order existed for the brief period (approx. five decades) of post war and post-cold war era, which is a very short span of time when it is compared with the existence of multipolar world order legacy. In short it can be said that “The world has mostly been multipolar except during the Cold War years of 1945 to 1989” (Arvind Gupta, p. 19).

Author Sanjaya rightly questioned that “From where did the recent concept of ‘multipolarism’ come from?” Sanjaya subsequently analyzed that it is mainly a post-cold war Russian concept, focused at proposing a new world order, following Vladimir Putin’s statement at the Munich security conference in 2007, where President Putin stated the Russia’s position of “Multipolarism” in contrast to US projection of “Unipolarism” and “Globalism”. Cold war was an ideological based conflict between ‘Communism’ and ‘Capitalism’, - It seemed that Putin was seeking to provide a new ideological grab to an old rivalry (Sanjaya Baru, p. 4).

Russian scholar Alexander Dugin defines multipolarism as “a look into the future (that has not yet been) a project of organizations of the world order on a absolutely new principles and elements and thus, a serious revision of the ideological, philosophical, and sociological axioms that modernity rest upon” (Alexander Dugin). A theory of “Multipolarism” very much evidence of the fact that the resurrection of China, India and Russia, the increasing profile of key economies such as Japan and Germany, geo- political significance of associations of nations like European Union (EU), GCC, BRICS, EEF and the ASEAN are shaping a new global balance of power that is presently Uni- multipolar but bending towards multipolarity.

### ***Russia-US-China Troika***

Russia, US and China triad are dominating the world order today. In this 21st century, National interests are guided by economics majorly. US, China and Russia are the major driving force of global economy and according to World Bank these three nations are in top six nations as per gross domestic product based on purchasing power parity. The Russian economy ranks below China, the United States, India, Japan and Germany (The Moscow times, 2018/07/13).

US has been a major and sole super power since the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991. US has also been a dominant driver of world affairs in the last three decades. However, there is change in the foreign policy of US under Trump led government, such as adoption of ‘America first policy’, withdrawing from Paris accord on climate change and the transpacific partnership. These incidents have weakened the US preeminent dominant position in the world affairs.

As per US, China is a revisionist power, who is trying to change the current dominant position of US in International affairs. US also consider China as its competitor in the spheres of national security, Indo-Pacific region.

China has huge trade deficit with US, India and Russia. The huge trade deficit with China is one of the prominent causes of rift between US and China. Which is also the major reason for the ongoing confrontation between both the Nation. The harsh truth of reality is that both dominant and aspiring powers like the America and China, are anti-status quo (Sujan R Chenoy, xlii).

Russia annexation of Crimea in 2014 has led sanctions on Russia from Europe and America. These circumstances have forced Russia to diversify its trade relation and as result of that there is strengthening of ties between Russia and China in the last five years. China’s investment in Far East of Russia has touched new heights in the last five years.

Geographically, China borders four (Primorsky, Amur, Jewish Autonomous Oblast and Khabarovsk) of the eleven constituents of the Far Eastern Federal District (FEFD). These four FEFD constituents bordering China have much closer trade links with the rising power.

**Table 1:** Top export and import market for RFE

<b>Export</b>	<b>% share</b>	<b>Import</b>	<b>% share</b>
South Korea	28	China	45
China	23	South Korea	13
Japan	22	Japan	9
Belgium	11	USA	7
India	3	Brazil	3

**Source:** Deloitte CIS Research Centre

The data shows that China is the top trading partner in far east, accounting for 27 percent of the total commodity turnover (Nivedita Kapoor, p.3).

However, the overall trade equations are not in favour of Russia. There is huge trade deficit between the two nations and trade surplus is in favour of China. Russia is also apprehensive of China sole dominance in far east. Thus, Russia wants to diversify its trade relations by involving other nations and India as its long-time trade partner is more than welcome in this region. Recent initiative by Prime minister Modi has led India to be among top five export partners (table 1).

New trade initiative by India in far east and trade imbalance and strategic apprehensions between the Russia and china has opened a new door of opportunity between India and Russia.

### **India-Russia**

In BJP led Modi government and Putin government, there has been series of dialogues since 2014. Apart from annual bilateral summit, new avenues have been explored to give new anti- dot to deploring Russia-India ties, especially due to close proximity between India-US and between Russia-China as well. Russia's push for India as SCO permanent member in 2017, PM Modi was guest of honor at St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (2017), Informal summit in Sochi in May 2018, followed by Modi as chief guest in 5th eastern Economic Forum in 'far east' in September 2019 etc. are some of the major initiatives taken by both the sides to take bilateral relation to a new height. Though India-Russia are so called natural allies and time-tested friends however, this equation has not been materialized in economic terms.

### **Economic**

In 21st century, national interests of any nation are based on purely economic terms. The pragmatic barometer to measure the true ties between the two nations can be done by acknowledging their bilateral trade volume. India was Russia's 18th top exporters and 23rd top importers. The bilateral trade was barely \$ 9.51 million in 2014, which was nowhere near the goal of \$20 billion by 2015. The Druzhba-Dosti agreement 2014 set the new trade target of \$30 billion by 2025 (Nivedita Kapoor, p. 9).

**Table 2:** India-Russia bilateral trade (2010-2017)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Bilateral trade</b>
2010	8.5
2011	8.9
2012	11.04
2013	10
2014	9.51
2015	7.83
2016	7.71
2017	10.17

**Source:** Ministry of external affairs, Indian embassy in Moscow

The table 1 show low volume of trade approx. between \$7-11 billion in decade till 2017. In 2016, as trade partner, India stood at 17th position in Russia's list whereas Russia stood at 26th. A joint study report in 2005-6 noted that India constituted barely 1.1 percent of the total Russian trade on an average. However, the corresponding figure for Russia also stands at just one percent (India-Russia joint study group).

There are many factors responsible for poor economic trade relations, most important being, long distance travel time and poor transport connectivity issue; others factors are- lack of private investment, language barrier, geographical distance, lack of trade diversification etc.

Positive developments are that the investment target set at \$30 billion by 2025 was achieved 8 years ago before the schedule time of 2017. The new target has been reset to \$50 billion by 2025 (Press Trust of India).

Another development is proposal to establish alternate trade route between Chennai and Vladivostok, which would reduce the travel time between Russia and India by 16 days. This transport corridor could reduce the travel time by half, saving significant travel economic cost between India and Russia. Russian vast natural resources such as Gas, oil, rare earth metal, gold, diamond, etc. can be exported to India and Vice- versa. On the other hand, Indian resources such as – Indian agricultural products, Indian men power and so on and so forth.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi invitation to Vladivostok at 5th Eastern Economic Forum in September 2019, is a key landmark in Indo-Russian diplomacy that indicates the recently strengthened bilateral relationship in all the spheres and particularly India's interests in Russian Far East. At the same platform Prime minister Modi announced US\$ 1 billion credit for development in Russian Far East. while Moscow reaffirmed its commitment to increase its investments in India.

In the Defence sphere, Soviet Union and subsequently the Russian Federation has been major source of arsenal and technology transfer for India. Although in the past few years, India has diversified its arms trade by engaging with US, France and Israel as new defence trade partners. Despite that also, in the course of 2014-2018, Russia accounted of 58 percent of India's arms purchase, with Israel (15%) and the United States (12%) coming far behind. This shows that India-Russia defence partnership is robust and no other nation is even close in terms of defence trade partnership between both the nations (Jean-luc Racine, p. 66).

Apart from energy, logistics and defense, Russia also deserves a mention in the field of Space. Seven IAF pilot has been sent to Russia for training for India's first manned mission (Gaganyaan project) to space by December 2021.

### **From bilateral to Multilateral**

The Changing scenario in all over the world has impacted India as well. Especially After 2014, with the BJP led Modi government, there have been wide spread expansion and close people to people contacts increased all over the world. The personal visit by Prime Minister Modi to different nations has added a new zeal and vigour in strengthening multilateral relationship with rest of the world.

Policy of peaceful co-existence and non-violence has been integral part of India's foreign policy, which is very well reflected in inception of Non-Alignment Policy, where India was one of the founding leaders.

India's multi religious, multicultural historical heritage existence always inspires India to value dialogue as a mean of communication for settlement of differences with the neighboring countries. This principle is also reflected in India's foreign policy of 'neighbours first'. India is not guided by zero sum calculations but believe in resolving the global problem by working with all in cooperative spirit.

Today the country is multi-aligned, depending on its expanding national interests, India is free to engage with any power to fulfill its national objectives in harmonious way. This has enabled India to share democratic values with US and have a close relationship with Russian federation in military and energy affairs. This also permits India to establish close relations with both Israel and Palestine; Iran and Saudi Arabia; and Iran and US (Sujan R Chenoy p. xlvii).

India's good relation with both near and extended neighbor is part of Foreign policy- neighborhood first policy. India is committed to build capacities within South Asia in order to achieve an inclusive regional growth. Prime Minister Modi has stressed on development of shared prosperity with our neighbors via his slogan "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas", which means Collective efforts, Collective growth and mutual trust.

India is actively engaged with the key International organizations to be part of multilateral institutions and agreements such as Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Wassenaar group, Australian group etc. Apart from bilateral relations, India and Russia are partners in several International organizations and bodies such as BRICS, SCO, RIC etc. Russia has always supportive of India in multilateral affairs. Russia has always been supportive of India's entry into the permanent members of Security Council and Nuclear supplier group, which China is blocking constantly.

National interest of two nations can never be same, hence there are diverging views also, such as Russia supports China's BRI initiative whereas India boycotted it because it is a compromise with the India's regional sovereignty. Pakistan is supporting China in passing BRI through PoK

(Gilgit-baltistan) region, which is violating the constitutional principles of Sovereignty of India.

India is also suspicious of increasing proximity between Russia and Pakistan, which has resulted in joint annual military exercise (Druzhba) since 2017. At the same time, Russia is also apprehensive about India's Indo-Pacific concept. Possible outcome of QUAD, where India-US-Australia and Japan will work together, which China also consider against its BRI initiative. India's Indo-Pacific concept is also against the Russia's Asia-pacific concept.

After all the ups and downs, India-Russia bilateral relationship has reached a new level of partnership, which is much, more matured to deal with current world scenario. This maturity is visible in the diplomacy and political leadership of both the nations.

### ***Russia's approach for India***

India decision to go ahead with S-400 missile defense system deal with Russia despite US pressure is the evidence of special nature of friendship between Russia and India. In an interview with Hindu Russian ambassador to India, Nikolay Kudashev said that "Russia is not very much concerned about US sanctions. As far as Russia is concerned, our relationship with India is Independent, irrespective what a third world say, America or any other nation" (The hindu).

Both the nations agreed to trade in their national currencies, which could also be a welcome move to solve dependency on dollar for future bilateral trade and achieving the target of \$50 billion trade by 2025. Mr. Kudashev said that "So a practical solution is there and it started working. So far as the problem is concerned, it is no more there. Rather it is about building experience, the habit of payment in national currencies." (ibid).

On India's growing relationship with US, Mr. Kudashev said that "Russia is not concerned about India's growing ties with US. Because, first of all, there is trust between our leaders and our political establishments. We trust each other. Seeing India's vast territorial area, it is natural for India to develop ties with any nation. Russia feels that Indian influence, Indian role and Indian contribution in International arena is a positive factor. We are making multipolar world stronger" (ibid).

### ***Conclusion***

Civilizational heritage and soft power are the key features for the Indo-Russian relationship to surpass the turbulent world. Looking at the world purely from the 'balance of power' point of view will be a mistake. The 'balance of power' always does not necessarily bring peace and stability. Further, any breakdown in the balance of power can result into instability and conflagrations. This has been the lesson of the 20th century.

Failure of Westphalia treaty is an example that balance of power does not work always. In balance of power, every nation tries to maintain its regional hegemony which in long term clashes with another regional power which also tries to main its regional hegemony. In Asia, China is trying to break the regional hegemony of India in its neighbourhood like Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka through BRI. In the same way US is trying break the regional hegemony of Russia in its neighbourhood like Ukraine, Serbia, Poland, Belarus through NATO. Thus, in this type of world order scenario, it is need of the hours that the world needs alternate idea where peace must be priority over conflict.

The multipolar world order which is based on the balance of power theory has its own limitation such as this model does not provide solutions to imminent issues like conflicts, natural disasters, mis governance, extremism,

radicalisation, terrorism, inequalities and disparities etc. Thus, a unique approach is required to deal with all these problems.

There has been close interaction between the Indian and Russian thinkers like Gandhi-Leo Tolstoy. Nicholas Roerich studied Indian philosophy and he was influenced by philosophy of Ramakrishna and Vivekanand and the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Bhagavad Gita. These thinkers had realised way back that the ancient Indian-Russian civilisation, characterised by tolerance, harmony in diversity, ethics and morality, non-violence and the search for truth, had a message for the modern world marked by wars, conflicts, and violence.

In comparison to subjects of pure science (Maths, physical), International Relation is a new subject and since inception it is dominated by western ideas. As stated by author Mr. Arvind that Western scholars are beginning to realise that international relations theory is running out of steam. They are also looking for new ideas. The Chinese are searching for new ideas based on Chinese experience. Why not India?

Indian-Russian scholars and thinkers should also think in the direction of proposing a new International relation theory, based on the characteristics of Indo-Russian civilisation and cultural experience. Prime Minister Modi, has spoken at various multilateral forums on Indian themes such as *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (World is a family), *Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah* (*peace for all*). These are also reflected in the Indian foreign policy approaches such as Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) and *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas* (*we work together for everyone's development*), which can be applicable to the global situation as well (Arvind Gupta, p. 30).

Thus, after analyzing the concept of multipolarity and equations of major emerging regional powers such as Russia, china, and India in the world and in Asia in particular, it can be said that New Delhi and Moscow needs to overcome its defensive mindset in order to give an alternative idea for a multipolar world. India-Russia long lasting partnership and mutual trust can propose a new world order which is based on peace and coexistence. The new world order which cherish the idea of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*(World is a family) and prefer peace over conflict. The world order, which is also equally effective in dealing with the most basic problems of humanity such as poverty, natural disaster, terrorism, drug trafficking etc.

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