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Indo- Russian Collaboration and Growing Influence in South Asia: An Analysis

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the Indo- Russian collaboration and its growing Influence in South Asia. Russia's involvement in South Asia is a reflection of its larger plan to uphold regional stability while making sure that its alliances especially with India help it achieve its geopolitical goals on a worldwide scale. Russia regards India as a significant ally in balancing Western dominance as it works to remain relevant in a multipolar world. To conduct this study Qualitative methodology has been used with respect to analytical approach. This Paper highlights Indo-Russian collaboration such as defence, trade, economic collaboration and cooperation in organizations like SCO and BRICS, that has become increasingly prominent in recent years. The main inspiration of the study was to understand Collaboration of Russia with India as a result of geopolitical and geostrategic considerations. Therefore, this study recommends that India and Russia must act politically maturely for long-term relationship to last. Additionally, India must have enhanced its regional power by cultivating closer ties with Russia. In this way both countries gain strategically and economically from one another by embracing cooperation in several fields.

Keywords: BRICS, Defence Collaboration, Multipolar World, Regional Influence, SCO, South Asia, Strategic Interest, Trade Ties.



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Introduction

The world is transitioning from a West-dominated unipolar order to a multipolar one where countries like Russia are crucial in redefining the dynamics of the world. As the legitimate successor to the Soviet Union, Russia was once a superpower, and its ambition for dominance is influencing its engagement in South Asia. Since South Asia was a major market for Russian weapons, Russia has been interested in this region. Russia was oriented toward India both during and after the fall of the Soviet Union. Russia's geopolitical interest in South Asia stems from its desire to challenge American hegemony in South Asia, compete with China, and find warm water. India and Russia maintained close ties at the highest levels for decades. Indo-Russian contacts were established before India gained its independence, they didn't really take off until the 1960s and 1970s. The majority of Analysts today conclude that the connection between two states has evolved to the point where it can be described as time-tested (Stobdan, 2010).

Indo-Russian ties have been characterized by a high level of political and strategic confidence throughout the previous few decades, especially during the Soviet Union period. During another half of the 20th century, India and Russia took positions on global matters that mirrored their similar political and strategic perspectives. The Soviet Union's backing of India's stance on Kashmir significantly bolstered India's status in the global landscape. However, the people-to-people and cultural exchanges that had been thriving under the Soviet Union, supported by substantial financial support and scholarships for frequent travel, gradually Increase. Both the number of Indian colleges offering Russian language instruction and the number of students enrolled in these programs have rapidly increased (Shah, 2001).

The joint statement issued in 2010, marking the tenth anniversary of the two countries' "Declaration on Strategic Partnership," indicated that the cooperation had evolved into a special and privileged strategic partnership. Mutual trust and interests are the cornerstones of India's relationship with Russian Federation. India benefited immensely from the Soviet Union in the early years of this partnership in terms of building its key sectors and setting the groundwork for future expansion. India and Russia's military-technical cooperation has been the mainstay of their bilateral relationship and will be decisive for years to come (Kundu, 2001).

Russia's unrestricted provision of its advanced defense technologies and equipment, such as the Sukhoi 30 MKI, to India is very significant. India also received assistance from Russia in building the Arihant submarine. At first, one of the goals of Russian foreign policy was to limit US. As a result, the two nations move from the romanticism of their Indo-Soviet relations and interact pragmatically. The future of the Indo-Russian relationship could be significantly refer by their common objectives, which have been fueled by both bilateral and international origin. From 2011, these concerns received fresh attention and many efforts begins to resolve these concerns. However, as India is more interested in increasing its influence in South Asia, and Russian policymakers view India as an ally to increase their influence in the region.

Literature Review

Since their official founding in April 1947, relations between India and Russia have undergone several stages. India and Russia have maintained and, in some cases, even strengthened their strategic alliance, despite numerous predictions that it would diminish after the Cold War. This could only indicate that both nations' continued efforts to deepen their ties make sense from a geopolitical standpoint. Both countries have provided a historical overview of the alliance, and also involves in the military cooperation that has been traditionally the pillar of special and

privileged partnership between them, and considers the present geopolitical landscape that may affect it (Unnikrishnan & Dutta, 2023).

The foundational element of Russian policy portfolio has proven resilient in South Asia, and it appears that Russia will stick with them even after Putin era end as well. Under President Putin, Russia is adopting a changing foreign policy approach that has made it easier for its diplomatic, trade, financial and defense partnership with other sovereign nations in the South Asia to realign. In addition to seeking a peaceful resolution in Afghanistan, Russia is committed to combating terrorism and extremism, advancing commerce, fostering socioeconomic growth, and preserving regional security and peace (Shah & Afgun, 2020).

After the Cold War ended, India's relations with Russia have not improved much. Even if their respective relationships with other governments have expanded quickly, their bilateral connections, which are officially known as a "special and privileged strategic partnership," are mostly focused on defense cooperation today, with the economic alliance remaining listless. India-Russia relations have fluctuated during the first five years of the BJP-led administration. Both Russia's and India's foreign policies are undergoing certain changes as a result of their respective domestic agendas, and the shifting global landscape has improved our comprehension of how these factors have affected their bilateral relations (Kapoor, 2019).

The nature of relation between India and Russia has changes significantly as a result of great power reorientation, the changing circumstances in South Asia, and the conclusion of cold war. Russia has a very small and passive part in this realignment. India no longer saw it as a strong counterbalance to Pakistan because of its own internal turmoil following the conclusion of Cold War and its withdrawal from international affairs to address them. Alongside similar global trends, the country's economic liberalization has led to an increase in its political and economic links to the United States. Then-President Bill Clinton's 2000 trip to India marked a momentous pivotal point in the development of US-Indian ties, which have continued to grow ever since that create problem between India and Russia further (Menon & Rumer, 2022).

Their collaboration in international organizations and a forum like the United Nations, Russia-India-China (RIC), BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) reflects India and Russia's shared vision of a multipolar world. Because it was not a founder, India has been more enthusiastic with BRICS and SCO. India-Russia ties are challenged by the growth of BRICS and a possible free trade deal, which calls for increased bilateral interaction. Russia and India are also working together to create regional SCO and BRICS platforms. Moscow has maintained its support for New Delhi on matters like Kashmir, terrorism, and the UN Security Council despite Russia's increasing closeness to China (Sharma & Atri, 2023).

Methodology

This Paper has employed qualitative methodology to investigate Indo- Russian collaboration and its growing Influence in South Asia. In order to comprehend the official stances and policies, one might examine official government documents, policy papers, and statements from India, and Russia. Conducting qualitative research involves a systematic approach to gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data in a comprehensive manner by moving forward and coming to a conclusion using historical and analytical method. It provides research study's Analytical data and proof and examine both new and established ideas between the two nations in context of strategic, diplomatic and trade ties. Various sources, such as literature review, research paper, reports, and news articles have been reviewed for the purpose to obtain a more comprehensive assessing the Indo-Russian

collaboration towards South Asia region and the consequent Growing influence in other countries of South Asia.

Results and Discussion

This Paper reveals Indo- Russian growing influence towards South Asia and highlighting its significance in addressing Indo-Russian Collaboration. A naturally occurring geographical entity commonly known as the Indian Subcontinent is formed by the Himalayan Mountains, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal. Indians have always felt secure because of the mountains and seas, which are seen as protective boundaries. Russia has been interested in South Asia region since the beginning because it is one of the most important regions in world affairs. Russia's three primary goals underpin its strategic interest in South Asia. The first is the routes of its gas pipeline through the region. Second, its security concerns about Afghanistan, including the drug trade and the entry of militants into Central Asian Republics; and third, its ambition to gain access to the Arabian Sea and the Middle East, which is rich in oil (Naqvi & Abbas, 2022).

Due to the fact that South Asia offers the quickest trade routes to the Middle East, Europe, and Africa, it has become strategically important to major nations like Russia. Therefore, Russia's primary goal is to find ways to use South Asia to further its political, economic, and strategic objectives. The worldview of Russia's commercial and political elite is shifting. Russia is currently working to establish itself as a global power that is indispensable. India views South Asia as an extremely important region, and its outer borders serve as India's own natural defense lines. Republic of India, a major force there, considers South Asia region to be within its area of influence from so many years (Pant, 2017).

Starting in November 2013, the crisis in Ukraine triggered a cascade of geopolitical events worldwide. The circumstances are worsened as West responded to Russia by implementing sanctions, resulting in deteriorating relations with the West. These events forced Moscow to modify its military and security documents in light of the shifting geostrategic and geo-economics landscape. This quick change suggested that Russia's views of its strategic environment, as well as the tools and actions it uses to achieve its strategic objectives, are changing in some way in the light of recent events.

By collaborating with the other parties and multilateral organizations, its foreign policy concluded that Russia aspires to achieve peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan as a peace-loving sovereign neutral state with a stable economy. The Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation and the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020 both highlight Russia's perspective on the South Asian region. Based on both documents, Russia aims to transform the Indian Ocean into an area of peace and stability, and the security issues in South Asia and Afghanistan negatively impact the global environment (Blank, 2022).

Indo- Russian Strategic Interest in South Asia

Since South Asia is Russia's largest armaments market, its military and industrial might are the region's most powerful implementers and influencers, hence South Asian security has long been a concern for Indian and Russian intelligence services. Their political-security and economic agendas coming together its overall strategic calculus is reflected in its bigger strategic goals in South as well. More precisely, Russia's broader strategic thinking is reflected in its South Asia policy.

Its objectives are:

- To weaken US influence, especially Washington's involvement, in the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.
- To identify substitute markets for Russian gas and oil (goods and services).
- To bring its vision of Pan-Eurasian unity to fruition in order to regain its position as a major power.
- To establish a regional political and economic order ruled by Moscow and New Delhi while working closely with India.
- To bring EAU and SCO together and make the "Greater Eurasia".

The main factor influencing India and Russia's bilateral economic relationship is that India serves as a Russian armaments market. Russia has strong strategic reasons for being involved in Afghanistan; even after losing the Soviet-Afghan war, it remained in the country. Its main goal was to prevent an existing Communist government in the Soviet Union's neighbor from being overthrown by insurgency, as this could cause resentment among the Soviet Union's Central Asian citizens.

The strategic need to handle Afghanistan following the U.S. withdrawal in 2014 is one of the main drivers of Russia's recently developing relations with Pakistan. Pakistan, a key ally of the United States, felt uneasy following the Indo-US nuclear agreement and tended to align itself with the Russian and Chinese blocs. Afghanistan's predicament and other important elements, such as counterterrorism, smuggling, and anti-drug initiatives, require coordination with Pakistan, according to Russian federation. South Asia is one of the most difficult region for Russia in the current situation because it is worried about both security and its ambition to become a major economic force in order to convince its substantial financial interests in the new global (Ali & Najam, 2022).

Indo- Russian Collaboration towards South Asia

Beyond their long-standing military relationship, India and Russia are expanding their cooperation in South Asia by concentrating on a number of projects. The projects like the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Bangladesh and collaborative ventures in infrastructure management in Sri Lanka, are significant collaboration between India and Russia, these collaboration seeks to promote regional growth. Through non-interference policies, both countries aim to moderate China's influence while fostering stability, particularly in states like Afghanistan. They collaborate in the fields of economics and defense as well, taking advantage of Russia's military might and India's advantageous location to promote regional multipolarity (Xavier & Daley, 2024).

• Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant

A significant Indo-Russian collaboration is the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Bangladesh, which aims to construct two 1,200 MW VVER-1200 reactors, achieving a combined capacity of 2,400 MW. The initiative aims to support Bangladesh's shift to nuclear energy and enhance its energy security. The General Contract for the Rooppur nuclear power project, estimated at US\$12.65 billion, was signed on December 25, 2015, by representatives from the Russian state nuclear company Rosatom and the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission. In 2017, the construction of first unit started. The Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Bangladesh, marking the nation's inaugural nuclear energy initiative. Rosatom, Russia's national nuclear company, is principally in charge of the project and is in charge of its main funding and construction (Choudhury, 2017).

India was requested to take part in a special tripartite agreement inked in 2018 by offering assistance with non-critical construction jobs and staff training, strengthening regional nuclear energy cooperation while upholding international safety standards. Second unit construction began in July 2018. To guarantee its implementation, the pact provides a framework for collaboration between specialists from Bangladesh, India, and Russia. Russian businesses are building the most important infrastructure and nuclear reactor. Besides strengthening ties between Russia and India, this partnership positions both nations to significantly impact South Asia's energy market amid increasing competition from other regional players (Ashraf & Aslam, 2018).

- **TAPI Pipeline and Russian Interest**

TAPI initiative is regarded as a strategic response to regional energy dynamics, particularly concerning China's influence, and is crucial for India's energy security. Russia has shown interest in aiding the project, especially as geopolitical factors change after its growing isolation as a result of Western sanctions, despite its more supportive position and little direct involvement. TAPI is seen by Russia as a way to facilitate energy exports from Central Asia and increase its influence in South Asia. It supports collaborative regional initiatives and India's larger diversifying energy sources plan. Afghanistan's security challenges have created obstacles for the project, yet discussions continue to explore feasible methods to bring it to fruition (Fazl-e-Haider, 2024).

According to a framework agreement reached in December 2010, Russian PM stated that Russia is thinking about joining the TAPI pipeline, a project being sponsored by the Asian Development Bank that will supply gas along the historic Silk Road. The project's primary supply would be Gazprom, the biggest natural gas extractor in the world. India is anticipating that Russia will support the project with stability and competence, act as a guarantee for the pipeline's connecting connection between South and Central Asia, and act as a possible mediator between India and Pakistan, with which Russia has an option of increasingly improving relations (Huda & Ali 2017).

Recent events, however, suggest that things have picked up speed again, since work on the Afghan portion is scheduled to resume in September 2024. When the pipeline is up and running, it ought to receive about 33 billion cubic meters of gas a year, with about 42 percent of that supply going to India and Pakistan. India and Russia are now major players in the energy dynamics of Central and South Asia thanks to this partnership, which not only attempts to address rising energy demands but also represents regional cooperation in the face of long-standing tensions. Certainly, Russian participation in the TAPI pipeline would signify a major progress for Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) concept, as GEP is an essential and central element of Moscow's regional approach.

- **Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport**

India and Russia are collaborating through a joint venture to operate the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA) in Sri Lanka. This partnership between the Russian Airports of Regions Management Company and Indian firm Shaurya Aeronautics has been awarded a 30-year management contract for the airport by Sri Lanka's Cabinet. Given the airport's close vicinity to the strategically significant Hambantota Port, which is leased to China, this program seeks to enhance the airport's operational viability and balance out Chinese influence in this region. The choice to grant this contract is indicative of Sri Lanka's attempts to resuscitate the airport, which has been known as the world's emptiest airport due to poor traffic since it opened in 2013 (Mishra, 2021).

Amid the financial upheaval of 2022, Sri Lanka strategically collaborates with Russia and India, entrusting the administration of Mattala Airport to achieve sustained growth. The joint venture is a significant step in the country's economic recovery and demonstrates its tenacity and dedication to building strategic partnerships for long-term prosperity and infrastructure development. Given the airport's close proximity to the Chinese-run Hambantota Port, the joint venture seeks to strategically challenge Chinese influence in the neighborhood while simultaneously increasing operational efficiency and revenue generation. This partnership is important for South Asian geopolitical stability as well as economic reasons (Suryanarayana, 2024).

- **Chennai- Vladivostok Maritime Corridor**

Russia and India had also launched the Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor (CVMC) as a strategic initiative to enhance trade links between the two nations. This 10,300-kilometer line, which was opened in 18 Nov 2024, connects Chennai to Vladivostok and important Indian ports including Paradip and Visakhapatnam. It takes about 35 to 40 days to travel the 8,675 nautical miles that make up the present commercial route between Mumbai and St. Petersburg, Russia. This distance can be covered quickly by a large container ship operating at its typical cruising speed of 37-46 kilometers per hour. There is a great chance that this corridor will open up new avenues for collaboration and trade (Sharma, 2024).

By cutting transit times by as much as 40%, the corridor enables freight shipment to occur in about 24 days as opposed to more than 40 days via conventional methods. This route is already being used to transport important goods including textiles, fertilizers, liquefied natural gas, and crude oil, supporting India's Act East Policy and strengthening marine relations between the two nations. In addition to facilitating easier trade, this maritime corridor is essential for bolstering India-Russian ties in the face of changing geopolitical conditions. The CVMC improves logistical efficiency and aids India's ambitions to diversify its trade routes by offering a direct sea route that avoids clogged traditional routes. The corridor is anticipated to significantly promote economic integration and resilience in global supply chains, making it a crucial component of both countries' long-term strategic cooperation, given that bilateral commerce between India and Russia reached around \$66 billion in 2024.

Indo- Russian collaboration 2010 – 2024: Key Aspects

Indo-Russian collaboration has been marked by a significant degree of political and strategic trust that these nations have exhibited towards one another over the years. The Indian government transformed in 2014, with the BJP's Narendra Modi assuming the role of prime minister. It was a year when Russia focused intensely on its internal matters, particularly the Ukrainian conflict. When Modi's BJP-led administration took office in 2014, it recognized the urgent necessity to mend India's relations with Russia in the face of a rapidly shifting regional and international landscape. (Kumar, 2019).

- **Economic Cooperation and Trade Ties**

The domains of technology and innovation, and economic cooperation were designated as focal matter in the 2014 joint statement released by Russia and India, which was intended to offer a vision for their partnership for the next ten years. India also boasts a sizable basic industrial sector, both public and private, which forms the basis of its economic growth. Russia and India economies are expanding and have more opportunities to investigate new areas of interest convergence as a result of the global market shifts. The economies of the two nations complement one another and a healthy competition exist between two states. Due to its abundance of natural resources, Russia

has enormous potential for market expansion. Because Russia and India have been focusing more on the one another rather than the west that increase the overall potential for collaboration. India will always be a big market for Russian raw resources and energy as Russia continues to be a big market for Indian products (Abhijit, 2023).

Table: 1
Indo- Russian Bilateral Trade (2010- 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: Report of ORF occasional Paper (Kapoor, 2019)

- **Defense Partnership**

India imports more than 70% of its weapons, which comes to more than USD 2 billion a year, while having a defense expenditure of USD thirty-four billion. The most encouraging aspect of Indo-Russian defense cooperation is the growing emphasis on long-term technology transfer, modernization of current equipment, and equipment in the Russian arsenal. Russia has a formalized system in place at the defense ministerial level for India to keep an eye on military-technical collaboration. Defense cooperation is a significant and pivotal pillar of indo- Russian collaboration and it is guided by many agreement and deals between two states (Sultan, 2019).

Table: 2
Indo- Russian Defense Deals (2018- 19)

Year	Deal	Amount
2018	S-400 missile defense system	\$5.2 billion
2018	Project 11256 class frigates	\$950 million
	(2)	
2019	Akula class nuclear- powered submarines	\$3 billion
2019	T-90 Tanks	\$2 billion
2019	JV to manufacture of AK-203/103 rifles	\$1 billion

Source: Report of ORF occasional Paper (Kapoor, 2019)

BRICS and SCO Engagement

India and Russia's economic and the military's power have influenced their bilateral relationship. There weren't many significant international institutions where India and the Soviet Union could communicate and engage, other from the UN and the Non-Aligned Movement. India and Russia continue to interact and figure out how to manage their relationship in the face of the changing global political landscape (Larson, 2019). Russia and India's involvement in the SCO and BRICS has been characterized by a strategic partnership that has adapted to changing global circumstances. Regular high-level discussions between Russia and India on trade, investment, economic cooperation, and sustainable development have been made easier by BRICS summit. In the context of the SCO, India and Russia met bilaterally several times with the goals of strengthening counterterrorism efforts, thwarting extremism, and advancing regional stability.

Conclusion

The Indo-Russian collaboration in South Asia is progressing, emphasizing defense, economic relationships, and regional stability. Both countries aim to strengthen their strategic alliance by collaborating on military production and tackling shared security issues in light of increasing geopolitical tension. Russia and India have traditionally had and still have friendly relations in number of collaboration towards South Asia. A significant Indo-Russian collaboration is the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Bangladesh, which aims to construct two 1,200 MW VVER-1200 reactors, achieving a combined capacity of 2,400 MW. Both India and Russia are also collaborating through a joint venture to operate the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA) in Sri Lanka. The Indo-Russian relationship encompasses various dimensions, including political, economic, and military factors. However, the future of relations between Russia and India seems bright despite many obstacles as both nations are working to deepen their relationship as they see the possibility of mutually beneficial collaborations.

Recommendations

- India and Russia ought to team up on shared defense manufacturing to boost military strength and offset China's dominance in South Asia, utilizing India's knowledge in managing Russian military hardware.
- Ongoing collaboration on nuclear energy, like the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Bangladesh, will meet regional energy demands while supporting the climate objectives of both countries.
- Indo-Russian economic relations should be enhanced by bolstering trade agreements and collaborative ventures in infrastructure initiatives that can offer sustainable options to Chinese investments in South Asia.
- Encouraging cultural interactions, and collaborative efforts will enhance connections among individuals from Indo-Russian and South Asian countries. This will establish reciprocal understanding and goodwill, countering outside pressures and promoting regional stability.
- The two nations should also collaborate on crisis management tactics, fostering stability in South Asia by tackling challenges such as terrorism and regional disputes through diplomatic avenues.

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