



## **INDIA-RUSSIA COLLABORATION WITHIN BRICS AND THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates the transforming India-Russia partnership within the multilateral context of BRICS and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) regarding strategic opportunities and geopolitical constraints. It discusses how both countries use BRICS and the EAEU to promote a multipolar world order, build defense cooperation, support energy security, build alternate trade and connectivity routes like the INSTC and the Chennai–Vladivostok Corridor, and highlight some emerging collaboration in high-tech areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure. While there are many positive trajectories, significant challenges inhibit the partnership given the close relationship between Russia and China, India's growing outreach to the West and partnerships such as the Quad, institutional opportunities (or lack thereof) in BRICS and EAEU, Western sanctions on Russia, and India's limited overland connectivity with Central Asia. Using a qualitative approach based on policy analysis and academic literature, this paper analyses the potential of India-Russia multilateral engagement and its implications to ultimately assess its contribution to regional stability, global governance reform, and India's foreign policy strategy.

**Keywords:** BRICS, EAEU, India-Russia relations, strategic cooperation, multipolarity, connectivity, Defense, de-dollarization.



## **INTRODUCTION**

India and Russia have always had a strong bilateral relationship which was originally created due to the Cold War circumstances and shared geopolitical interests. The Cold War brought India and the Soviet Union together as India looked to balance the growing ties of the U.S with Pakistan and the territorial aggression of China; the culmination of the relationship between India and the Soviet Union is amply demonstrated by the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation in 1971. Over the years, the relationship has survived major upheaval around the world after the Cold War, establishing new engagement processes while preserving the foundation of trust and cooperation.

The latest phase in the India-Russia bilateral ties started in the post-cold war-dominated period, with a declared "special and privileged strategic partnership" in the early 2000s. This form of engagement was reaffirmed for a long-dated cooperation basis through various critical sectors such as defense, energy, science, and technology. Institutions with high-level and structures like the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission were also instituted for this "special and privileged strategic partnership," contributing to making it one of the most comprehensive partnerships that India has with any global partner.

In the recent past, India and Russia have begun to grow their relationship beyond the confines of bilateralism and have taken it to multilateral venues like BRICS and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). These multilateral frameworks represent the changing geopolitical aspirations of both nations, reflecting their desire to promote a multipolar world order in direct opposition to Western world dominance in global governance, finance, and security. In this capacity, both nations want to reform the UN Security Council and the IMF through BRICS and establish new financial institutions with the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement.

India's participation in the EAEU., under Russia's leadership, also carries other opportunities for strategic connectivity and trade diversification avenues now and in Central Asia later to participate in planned projects like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the proposed Free Trade Agreements between India, Egypt, and Iran. Participation in these economic regional frameworks represents India's increased interest in accessing Eurasian markets and aligns with India's strategic foreign policy of autonomy and economic pragmatism.

This study looks at how these multilateral associations have become critical to India-Russia relations in the 21st century. It identifies the opportunities for new collaboration in defense, energy, infrastructure and and global governance, and the limits imposed by geopolitical tensions, institutional fragmentation, and shifting networks of global alliances. It also seeks to assess how effectively India and Russia have utilized BRICS and the EAEU to achieve their strategic ambitions and to re-position themselves in an emerging multipolar world.



## **1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

- To assess the economic and strategic prospects of India-Russia cooperation in BRICS and EAEU.
- To examine the challenges impeding deeper integration, including geopolitical divergences and institutional constraints.

## **2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

India and Russia began their existing relations during the Cold War era, when India, despite pursuing a position of non-alignment, moved toward the Soviet Union owing to mutual 'strategically' defined interests and regional security. This growing cooperation evolved into the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation signed in 1971, a landmark agreement that provided India with invaluable diplomatic and military support during the Bangladesh Liberation War. The Soviet Union became India's principal defense partner involving the supply of aircraft, tanks and submarines, and facilitated India's industrial development by the establishment of steel mills, heavy machinery factories, and civil nuclear developments.

After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 India quickly recognized the Russian Federation and worked to maintain the historical bilateral relationship. After some initial hiccups, India and Russia were able to revive and institutionalize this relationship as of the early-2000s by establishing a strategic partnership that evolved into a "special and privileged strategic partnership." The current phase is characterized by a normal transfer of weapons and ammunition between countries in the form of BrahMos missiles and AK-203 rifles. Relationship development includes civilian nuclear energy, including the construction of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant. At the same time, we have collaborated in the area of space technology and supported each other in multilateral institutions, which have reinforced the trust built up over decades.

## **3. INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH BRICS**

India sees BRICS as foundational and a proactive approach to a multilateral platform promoting inclusive multilateralism, reform of global governance institutions, and ensuring a stronger voice for the global south. As one of the founders of BRICS, India has consistently argued for the reform of organisations like the United Nations, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, seeing a contemporary reflection of the current global and political economy. In addition, India has focused on areas related to digital cooperation, climate financing, counter-terrorism, and the democratization of development finance. Among its accomplishments are its driving role in the New Development Bank (NDB) and the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) as the important component of providing alternative financial independence to member states.

While India supports BRICS expansion headquartered under a BRICS+ umbrella, it reluctantly accepts changes to BRIC+ process and governance structure, continuously monitoring and preserving the collective strategic balance especially during increasing geopolitical tensions with China while working with the other BRICS nations. During the 2023 and 2024 BRICS Summits, India's agreement to the admission of new countries such as Iran, Egypt, and the UAE while



stressing definable criteria and fair representation clearly shows India's prior history of agreement to BRICS expansion. India's continued advocacy for moderate and modular forms of cooperation relates to the refocus on areas such as digital infrastructure, health systems, and local currency trade. However, this approach is not isolated, but rather a part of a larger strategy to pursue a leadership role globally while still preserving autonomy in a complex international economic environment.

#### **4. INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE EAEU**

India's approach to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which is led by Russia, is part of a larger push to deepen economic integration with Central Asia and diversify trade routes beyond the sea. Since 2015, India and the EAEU have been negotiating Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the identified goal of accelerating exports from India to the EAEU member countries in critical sectors such as pharmaceuticals, information technology, textiles and agriculture. The EAEU represents an opportunity for India to reach new unexploited markets, invest in strategic sectors, and establish energy cooperation with Russia, Kazakhstan and other members for India's long-term energy security. Projects such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) are part of this endeavor and provides the shortest and most viable route to connect India with Europe via Iran and the Caspian Sea.

Nevertheless, India has to overcome considerable logistical and geopolitical obstacles in engaging with the EAEU. The lack of direct overland connections—exacerbated by Pakistan tensions—forces India to rely on multi-modal routes, restricting trade efficiency. The changing nature of EAEU and internal inequalities among members create difficulties in establishing and implementing a uniform trade regime. Western sanctions on Russia also hinder financial transactions and technology transfer, which means India must be prudent in pursuing its strategic and economic interests in Eurasia.

#### **5. STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES**

- **Defense Cooperation:** India's defense cooperation with Russia continues to be foundational to India's military capabilities. Large percentages of India's defense acquisitions directly stem from Russia, such as many of India's Su-30MKI fighters, T-90 tanks and T-72 tanks, and many of India's MiG aircraft. Their partnerships include joint ventures associated with the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, and the licensed production of AK-203 assault rifles in Amethi, and show a long-standing history of cooperative technology. Russia and India continue to conduct bilateral military exercises, as the INDRA series, which improves interoperability between the forces and builds preparedness. Russia is also still a significant partner in India's attempts to increase indigenous defense products and manufacturing through the "Make in India" program.

- **Energy security:** Russia is one of India's partners for energy security and diversification of energy sources. As a result of Western sanctions, India has increased its imports of discounted Russian crude oil significantly, which is now a major contributor to overall bilateral trade. Russian state-owned energy company Rosatom has been a large participant in development of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in Tamil Nadu, which is presently being expanded. Indian companies like ONGC Videsh have also been developing energy projects in Russia, such as Sakhalin-I and Arctic LNG, effectively securing long-term energy supplies.
- **Connectivity:** Connectivity projects are a strategic pillar of the India-Russia partnership. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), connecting Mumbai to St. Petersburg and via Iran and the Caspian Sea, provides a shorter and geopolitically more favorable route for trade than the Suez Canal. India continues to support the development of the proposed Chennai–Vladivostok Maritime Corridor, which would directly connect Indian and Russian ports. These initiatives improve logistics for trade, and serve as strategic alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative, aligned to India's vision for a multipolar regional order.
- **Technology Partnerships:** India and Russia are increasingly exploring avenues for cooperation in high-tech and emergent sectors. Building on past bilateral cooperation in relation to space, on projects such as the launch of Aryabhata and the training of Gaganyaan astronauts, both countries are expanding their relationship into new and emerging technology areas. Areas of shared interest and potential cooperation include artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, cyber security, and digital public infrastructure. The partnerships in these high-tech areas seek to generate innovation in both countries, enhance digital sovereignty, and position both India and Russia as powerful counterparts in the rapidly evolving global tech landscape.

## 6. CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

- **Geopolitical Divergences:** Despite their long history together, India and Russia are increasingly in different geopolitical orbits. Russia's strategic alignment with China, which has been underscored by each one's response to sanctions and the conflict in Ukraine, raises alarms in New Delhi, especially as border tensions with China come to the fore. India's increasing embrace of the West through initiatives like the Quad, as well as deeper defence and technology arrangements with the United States, may provoke Russia's concerns. While both parties claim to value strategic autonomy, different geographic and political alignments make operationalizing multilateral agreements such as BRICS and the SCO more complicated for both parties.
- **Institutional Barriers:** Institutional incapacity poses a serious barrier to greater cooperation through BRICS and the EEU. Unlike the SCO that has a standing secretariat and enforcement mechanisms, BRICS has neither of these. Even as a consensus-based

mechanism, BRICS goes at a geometrically slower pace where inertia comes to define the outcomes of BRICS' strategic agenda. Within the EEU, one of the reasons the trade and connectivity agenda is more static than it should be is the level of economic development of each EEU member state, as well as variance of political will across member states such as Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

- **Financial and logistical challenges:** Western sanctions on Russia have disrupted traditional banking systems and financial channels which have particularly impacted India's ability to make payments in sectors like defense procurement and energy trade. Alternative options such as the rupee-ruble payment method or transactions involving digital currencies have been implemented slowly and are underdeveloped. In addition, sanctions-related constraints impact logistical chains, delay delivery of spare parts for Russian-origin defense capabilities in India, and create uncertainty for ongoing and new joint ventures.
- **Constraints on connectivity:** A major impediment to India's engagement with the EAEU is the lack of direct overland access to Central Asia. Due to strained relations with Pakistan, India cannot reach Central Asia by the shortest route through Pakistani territory. As such, India must use complicated, longer multi-modal routes through Iran and the Caspian Sea, such as the INSTC. While these routes have potential, they require substantive new infrastructure, and the stability of the politics in the transit states in its path is unknown. Slow progress reduces the efficiency of trade and limits interest from the private sector in pursuing regional connectivity projects.

## CONCLUSION

The India-Russia alliance in BRICS and the EAEU represents a complex and evolving partnership in multiple dimensions. Shared goals for a multipolar world, strategic autonomy, and economic diversification is part of India and Russia's cooperation effort. Their important defense relationship and growing energy ties are key foundational elements of their partnership, but their relationship has now expanded into emerging areas of cooperation such as, digital technology, infrastructure connectivity efforts, and reform of multilateral institutions. Despite significant challenges including: geopolitical divergences driven by Russia's closer alignment with China, India's growing connections to the West, inefficiencies of BRICS and the EAEU, financial pressures arising from sanctions, and meaningfully limited overland connections, cooperation continues to unfold. Moving forward, India and Russia will need to collectively monitor the progress of their relationship to ensure trajectories of constructive engagement are advanced that will necessitate a pragmatic, multi-vector strategy that balances traditional cooperation to allow each country seek and capitalize on new opportunities, while undertaking advantage of the potential complexities of a changed global order.

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