



India's engagement with Russia

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(Mains GS 2 : Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India)

Context:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi for the 21st India-Russia Summit meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlights India's historical relationship with Russia which spans over the last seven decades.
- Both leaders put constant efforts to nurture and to provide further impetus to the 'India-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'.

Close cooperation:

- While the relationship has stagnated in some areas and atrophied in some others, the strongest pillar of the strategic partnership is the defence basket.
- Both countries work closely together to ensure peace, stability, mutual economic development and advanced and emerging fields of defence technology.
- The biggest takeaways from the annual summit and the inaugural 2+2 ministerial talks were the signing of 10-year military-technical partnerships, as well as the plan to jointly produce the AK-203 assault rifles under the 'Make in India' initiative.
- Thus in the new grammar of multipolarity and globalisation, it is of utmost importance for dependable partners to ensure enduring sensitivity to their mutual interests.

Practical approach:

- The robust partnership between India and Russia has come out of the shackles of the Cold War inheritance and practical and result-oriented approach will pave the way for the most reliable partnership.

- Relations between the two countries have deepened with time irrespective of the quagmire of realpolitik as it is built on the firm foundation of strategic national interest and the synergy of geopolitics.

Towards a special relationship:

- Russia has been one of India's closest friends and allies with the signing of the "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership" in October 2000 which unlocked new opportunities in strategic, science and technology, space, energy, nuclear ties, trade and commerce, culture and a people-to-people connect.
- For smooth functioning of this strategic partnership, it was governed by an institutionalised dialogue mechanism involving key stakeholders at the political and official levels.
- Mr. Putin's visit to India in December 2010 heralded a new chapter in India-Russia relations when the Strategic Partnership was elevated to the level of a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership".

Work together closely:

- India and Russia are already partners in several multinational forums like Brics (also involves Brazil, China, South Africa), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (also involves China, Pakistan and Central Asian countries) and the RIC (Russia, India and China).
- These forums give an opportunity to Moscow and Delhi to work together closely on both bilateral and global issues.
- And as China is a member in these forums, Moscow can use its influence to ensure both Beijing and Delhi continue to engage with each other to maintain peace at their disputed border.

Defence cooperation:

- Russia is the key and principal supplier of arms and armaments to the Indian armed forces accounting for over 60% of weapons.
- India's Sukhoi Su-30 fighter aircraft, T-90 tanks, the Talwar and the Krivak class stealth frigates and recently inducted the S-400 Triumf missile systems, are key weapons in the armoury of the Indian armed forces.
- The BrahMos missile system was a successful collaboration of joint research, development, and production.

Divergence in relationship:

- Changes in interests and capabilities being fuelled by geopolitical differences are widening the divergence between India and Russia.
- India's growing strategic partnerships with the US and Europe have begun to end India's prolonged alienation from the West.

- Meanwhile, India's own relative weight in the international system continues to increase and give greater breadth and depth to India's foreign policy.
- However, Delhi has successfully managed the past flux in the great power politics and it is even better positioned today to deal with potential changes among the great powers, thanks to the size of the Indian economy and a more broad-based foreign policy.

Bilateral trade:

- India-Russia trade was valued at the U.S.\$10.11 billion in 2019–20, but is not a true reflection of the potential that can be harnessed.
- Russia and India have now set a target of reaching \$30bn in bilateral trade by the end of 2025.
- Both countries also look to diversify their portfolio and go beyond energy and minerals.
- Education, cyber security, agriculture, railways, pharmaceuticals, and clean energy are some of the other areas they are likely to focus on.
- India's decision to give a \$1bn line of credit to businesses to invest in Russia's Far East region will also help boost trade between the countries.

Stability and diversity

- The inaugural '**2+2' dialogue** between the Foreign and Defence Ministers of the two countries promises to provide new vitality to the special and privileged strategic partnership.
- The uniqueness of this approach not only ensures result-oriented cooperation but also deliberates upon regional and global matters of mutual concerns and interests.
- At a time when global politics is in a state of flux, it becomes more important to have compatibility with geopolitical and geoeconomic realities along with the trust of the leadership.
- Therefore, this evolving political framework provides the necessary agility to the relationship in fine-tuning their differences and deepening their bonds.

Way forward:

- Defence, trade and investment, energy, and science and technology may be part of the agenda, but India and Russia need to work together in a trilateral manner or using other flexible frameworks, particularly in Southeast Asia and Central Asia.
- Their growing collaboration can be a force of stability and will bring more diversity to the region while strengthening multilateralism.
- The two countries also need to look at peoples' power — youth exchanges as well as deeper links in various fields including sport, culture, spiritual and religious studies.
- Buddhism can also be an area where both countries can expand their interaction, where peace and sustainability can act as a balm in this turbulent world.