



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Title:	INDO-RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND THE UNITED STATES: DIVERGENCE OF APPROACH
Chairperson:	Capt. HPS Sodhi, Senior Fellow, CAPS
Speaker:	Ms. Chandra Rekha, Associate Fellow, CAPS
Discussant:	Dr Swati Arun, Associate Fellow, CAPS
Rapporteur:	Ms. Manisha Chaurasiya, Research Associate, CAPS
Date:	24 September 2015

The history of Cold War international relations brought some unique bilateral relationships among states to the fore. The relationship between Russia and the USA displayed the heights of power struggle and animosity. In contrast, the Russia and India relationship exhibited mutual trust and understanding. The end of the bipolarity however transformed these relationships to quite an extent. On the same lines was the theme of the weekly Fellow's Seminar which under took a historical analysis of the triangular relationship between India-Russia-USA to better understand the contemporary Indo-Russian bilateral relationship along with the irritants within. The political relations, partnerships and defence trade dimensions were central in the presentation.

More than two decades have passed since the end of bipolarity. The world has witnessed a transformed global picture and serious alterations in the inter-relations of all three countries. The ties of trade in contemporary times are no longer reflected or dependent on political loyalties and historical legacies. The Indian strategic partnership and swelling defence trade with USA has touched \$10 billion a year. The recent deals of C-130 J and C-17 Globemaster-III are witness to the same. The Indo-Russian ties are no

longer the same as Indo-Soviet ones. The Russian supplies of Su-35 and MI-35 to China and Pakistan respectively, are witness of the change. New Delhi has found new partners, so has Moscow. The wave of 21st century has altered the India-Russia-USA inter relationship and its biggest result has been the Indo-US Strategic Partnership. The contemporary trends suggest that India has diversified its defence trade and built a few new strategic partnerships with states other than Russia. USA has occupied a never before salient position, both in Indian political circles, and in defence acquisitions. Moscow too has approached new partners and avenues for defence supplies and trade.

USA and Russia

A brief history of US-Russia bilateral relationship helps understand the current picture of complicated bilateral connections and divergent world views. Though the end of the Cold War removed vital ideological attributes from the equation yet the bitterness remained. The Russians expected US assistance in its bail out problem, which never came. Russia believes that USA lacked efforts and interest to help Russia stand on its feet again after the blow of disintegration. Even in Putin Russia nuances like NATO's eastward expansion, radars in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Turkey, the West's overall tinkering in the Russian sphere of influence continues. With recent influential and powerful entry of Russia, both in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, it is rapidly achieving strategic autonomy through oil gains, economically favourable conditions and military modernization. Challenges on its horizon are rise of Islamic fundamentalism, climate change affecting Arctic resource dynamics and countering NATO influence. Russia has been active in its search for new partners and has found China and even Pakistan as defence markets for its goods.

India: Is It Partnering Russia or USA?

In contemporary times, India's overall attraction, defence trade and partnerships in a variety of areas with USA have been at a record rise. At the same time India's association with Russia in terms of defence purchases and trade partnership has declined to an extent. Immediately after the Cold War, Russia witnessed a declined influence in world affairs. The USA on the other hand defined the new world order.

India-USA bilateral ties have strengthened in the recent decades. The historical relationship among the two had been strained in the past but both were never enemies. Points of disagreement were certainly there, like the US prolonged overall support to its ally Pakistan and the Indian nuclear tests (Pokharan-II). But the potential growth of India as a strategic asset and partner in South Asia drove the chariot of contemporary Indo-USA relations. Trade happens to be a central feature of this partnership. The Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Cooperation in 2005 further strengthened the bond as India shed away its nuclear isolation and found a respectable position for itself as a nuclear power in the world.

The history of Russian engagement with India is often equated to an all-weather friendship. India has enjoyed Russian unstinting support and defence supplies for years. Both states have had zero exploitation of political vulnerabilities of each other. India did not condemn Russia in Afghanistan in 1979, Georgia in 2008 and in the Ukraine Crisis in 2014. After the Pokharan-II tests USA's display of displeasure was through a series of sanctions on India but Russia was a motivating factor as it abstained from any such act. Presently, for technology transfers, nuclear supplies and joint R&D like the BrahMos programme, India and Russia are quite proximate. Around 60% of Indian defence equipment is still Russian and the ties among India and Russia are, and have been certainly reliable.

Overall, there seems no major bone of contention between India and Russia and no harm in the combination of India and USA either. In the present century, if India has diversified its defence purchases and alignment, so has Russia by exploring new markets for both its oil and defence equipment. Though the element of Indian uneasiness has been there on the recent Russian supplies to China and Pakistan- as the acquisition of identical defence capability with that of India is assumed to be potentially counter-productive to its security- Russian interest and intent in reaching out to Pakistan are a combination of economic and political factors. It wants Pakistani support in combating Islamic fundamental terrorism. Pakistani interest in showing its contemporary tilt towards Russia has the inherent politics of showing off and pulling more concessions from USA.

International relations in the 21st century display maximum state of flux. The need therein is of 'strategic partnership with all' instead of sticking to one strategic partner. New Delhi and also Moscow in that sense are on a path to further their respective national interests by reaching new avenues. The world too has become more mature and acceptable to distinguish between economic compulsions and political inclination of states.

