

India - Russia Defence Ties: RSTV- Big Picture

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What's in the News?

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited Moscow while on a three-day tour at the invitation of the Russian Ministry of Defence to attend the 75th Anniversary of the Victory Day Parade.
- This was the first foreign visit from India by an official delegation after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh expressed his satisfaction over the successfully ongoing military contracts between the two sides and positive responses from Russia on all proposals made by India.
- As Russia has been one of India's key suppliers of arms and ammunition, India is also assured of timely delivery of the S-400 missile defence systems from Russia.
- The only grey area is a long-standing grievance of the Indian armed forces that the supply of critical spares and equipment from Russia takes a long time, affecting the maintenance of military systems procured from there.

Why is India - Russia Relationship Special and Privileged?

- The Indo-Russian strategic partnership is based on 6 major areas: politics, defence, civil nuclear energy, anti-terrorism, trade and space.
- India and Russia share many common international forums like [BRICS](#), SCO, RIC.
- Russia strongly supports India receiving a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, besides supporting India's bid to join the [NSG \(Nuclear Suppliers Group\)](#).
- The Indo-Russian Intergovernmental Commission (IRIGC) is one of the largest governmental mechanisms that India has ever shared with any nation. Most of the departments from the Government of India attend it.
- In 2019, the total bilateral trade between the two countries from January-September stood at USD 7.55 billion. It includes highly diversified segments such as machinery, electronics, aerospace, automobile, pharmaceuticals, fertilisers, industrial metals, petroleum products, etc.
- The [Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant](#) in Tamil Nadu is an example of Indo-Russia nuclear cooperation. By 2030, at least 15 - 16 more such reactors have been planned.
- In 2012, Gazprom Group and India's GAIL agreed to LNG shipments to India, of 2.5 million tons a year for a period of 20 years. Indian oil companies have invested in Russia's oil sector. A notable example is ONGC-Videsh that has major stakes in oil fields in Sakhalin.
- Long-Term Programme of Co-operation (ILTP) between India and Russia in the field of science & technology. Research is ongoing in semiconductor products, supercomputers, poly-vaccines, laser science and technology, seismology, Ayurveda, etc.
- Historic mutual trust has existed between the two nations. For Russia, defence security and dual-use technology exports to India are free from security concerns like intellectual property thefts or misuse.

Why are Relations with Russia so Critical for India?

- Strategic autonomy in world affairs. Given the dominant role of Russia in the Eurasian region, India needs strong economic and technological cooperation with Russia.
- Independence of action - Despite its strong bonds with the US, India cannot afford to move away from Russia, given its diverse bilateral ties with Russia.

- Although currently, India is importing defence supplies from many other nations like the US, France and Israel, as per the data provided by SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), in the last 5 years, India's arms imports from Russia have been 58% of the total Indian arms imports.
- During the Eastern Economic Forum meet, 2019, a roadmap for cooperation in hydrocarbons from 2019—2024 was created. During the Summit, both sides expected bilateral cooperation in this sector to touch new heights in the next five years. Indian companies have already invested about 15 billion dollars in the Russian hydrocarbon market.
- Coordinated space program between the 2 countries; co-development of aircraft like the Sukhoi Superjet 100, MS-21, FGFA, MTA and Kamov Ka-226. Besides, Indian astronauts are receiving high-end training in Russia.
- Indo-Russia Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL) - rifle-manufacturing facility in Korwa, Amethi district in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The factory manufactures the AK-203 variant of the Kalashnikov family of rifles.

Areas of Concern

- India has been concerned about the high costs of specialised defense supplies from Russia such as BM 21 Grad 122 mm MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket System), Kalashnikov rifles and BM-30 Smerch rocket launch system. In fact, in 2012 *Gorshkov* was the single most expensive military platform to be bought by India from Russia at Rs. 3,000 crores, after strong price negotiations.
- The high costs often result from commercial considerations so as to find better profit from arms sale in foreign markets.
- According to Russia, the delays in military spare equipment is usually a result of long processes between the weapon system producer and Rosoboronexport (the only state intermediary agency for Russia's exports/imports of defense-related and dual use products).
- Low defense equipment supply and maintenance capability in Russia. The Russian Government is now seeking to open service centres overseas to speed up repair and spare part manufacturing.
- However, the Indian army usually needs to use the defense equipment in rugged mountains, high altitudes and snow. This causes operational wear and tear and thus needs an adequate supply of spare parts or regular overhauling. Besides, the demand for advanced/sophisticated equipment is rising as the replacement/repair of defence equipment has to be done on the field itself by the soldiers.
- India's purchase of 72,400 SiG Sauer assault rifles from the US in February 2019 had drawn suspicion and criticism from Russian gun manufacturer Kalashnikov Group.
- Amid the existing strain between the US and Russia, the latter is developing even stronger strategic ties with China. The increasingly bitter relations between the US and China also make Russia-China relations stronger. This puts India in a strategically challenging position due to its alliance with the US.
- Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) sanctions by the US on Russia and its danger on India - Russia defense ties.

Also read: [CAATSA: Waiver For India? - RSTV: The Big Picture](#)

Steps by Russia to Protect Domestic Interests viz a viz China

- Russia is inclined to cooperate with China as they are neighbours with common economic interests and are united against alleged US hegemony.
- However, Russia has not been taking any Chinese loans as in Russia the public debt is very low. China thus cannot influence the Russian economy through debt mechanisms.
- Russia is committed to its strategic autonomy and independent foreign policy when it comes to dealing with India irrespective of China - India tensions.

Way Forward to Solve the Delay in Military Supplies

- Defense experts in India have suggested a direct dealing with weapons manufacturing companies in Russia, rather than negotiating through the middleman Rosoboronexport.
- Encouraging Russian manufacturers to invest in India for setting up of components manufacturing factories within India itself.
- This ability to make defense components domestically with Russian collaboration will also cut down customs issues and export control norms, which are strict in Russia. Thus from the biggest consumer, India can move forward to become the biggest producer.

In Which Domains can India - Russia Relations be Further Strengthened?

- According to Russian defence experts, more sophisticated military exercises are needed to be conducted between India and Russia, in pace with the ones which have been organised in the previous years between Russia and China.
- More military exchanges, military personnel interactions and training programmes are required to better understand one another's capabilities.
- Through frequent high and lower levels of military interactions, Russia can better understand India's defence equipment needs and they can accordingly modify the equipment.