

Indo- Russian Political Ties: New Framework and Similarities

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ABSTRACT: India Russia relations have been smooth since India emerged as an independent nation in 1947. While before 1990s these relation were governed by the broader framework of cold war revelry and its related dynamics but since the demise of USSR in 1991 , these relations have been governed by different factors. The areas seeing the convergence of interests are; terrorism, multi-polarism, democracy and economic imperatives.¹ However the old parameters of assessing these relations when the Soviet Union existence as a super power has vanished are no more relevant. The indo Russian relations, therefore should be critically examined in the context of globalization of politics and economy. We must analyze, how these relations can play an important role in shaping bilateral and multilateral relations in this region in the context of basic changes which have taken place in the international environment.

KEY LINE: India and Russia have similar national interests and good will for common footing to face national and international problems.

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I INTRODUCTION

From the perception of India for whom the first and far most concern is India's dignity and sovereignty, its integrity and above all its independence alone can be the driving force in its international policy and its relations with other countries big or small. India have learnt from its national movement, from the main architects of this movement; Gandhi ji and Jawahar Lal Nehru in particular, to judge the world reality around it with a close mind. It is, therefore, important to examine the essential contents of changes of the present century and thereof the evolution of India's relations with other countries with Russia in particular our traditional friend. Nevertheless, from the perception of an Indian for whom the first and far most concern in India's dignity and sovereignty, its integrity and above all its independence alone can be the driving force in its international policy and its relation with other countries big or small. The Indians have learnt from our national movement , from the main architects of this movement. Gandhi ji and Jawahar Lal Nehru in particular, to judge the world reality around us with a close mind. It is. therefore, important to examine the essential contents of changes of the present century and thereof the evolution of India's relations with other countries with Russia in particular, our traditional friend².

II RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following research methods have been adopted while writing this little research attempt

- Descriptive method with analysis of information collection.
- Comparison of national interest of both countries with the little focus on Indo-US ties and interests.
- Historical method for review of past history.
- Information collection from various national dailies as well and it's interpretation.

III HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

It is quite clear that both India and Russia are multi cultural, multi –ethnic and multi –religious societies. India has the highest Muslim population in the world next only to Indonesia . India ,China and commonwealth of Independent states (CIS) each have 12 % of population which believes in Islam, again all these countries with massive human and natural resources , are stepping out of the feudal order to a modern nation state , though they are at different stages of development. Particularly India and Russian have common characteristics and common problems. It is therefore, not enough to understand that India, China and Russia should work for “triangular defence co-operation”, as has been suggested by the Russian leader **Ivan P. Rybkin** in 1994 . However , it has to be frankly admitted that crediability gap exists between New Delhi and Moscow, after 1991 at least in three areas .These were: one; shift in Russia's policy about arms supply to Pakistan , two; fall in volume of trade between Russia and India ; and three problem of India 's debt to Russia amounting to about 2 billion. No doubt, both the countries tried their best to solve these problems on the basis of balance of interests. Besides, the most important aspect of re-structuring Indo Russian relations was that new instruments

and forums were created to update these ties. Both India and Russia followed a path of mixed economy with main focus on elevation of the standard of living of the people. In this process they evolved an alternative path of development .They adopted the policies of liberalization and globalization of economy.³

IV PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTIES

However, a period of uncertainties immediately after attaining independent statehood , New Russia followed a pro-western and Pro-US policy. Moscow hoped to bring about targeted economic transformation from a centrally controlled command economy to a free market economy integrated with the rest of the world and political transformation from a totalitarian state to a liberal democracy essentially with the help of Western political and financial support. India and the other Eastern countries were given a rather low place in the Russian order of priorities at that time. Unlike the Former Soviet Union that established a strategic and economically developing country just after the demise of the former Soviet Union. It was a period of uncertainty in Indo Russian relations. In fact, low priority accorded to India in Russian policy was reciprocated by India also. India tried to adjust with the post Soviet world reality. In a reversal of cold war roles, Washington was making good relation with New Delhi. It seemed that two different schools of thought existed in Russia at that time regarding the policy towards India. One opinion favoured that the traditional “special” relationship with India should be retained .The other opinion favoured that the epoch of “special” relations with India should be ended. Really there occurred some coolness in Indo –Russian relations after the demise of USSR.

It must be kept in view that Russia for the first time was passing through a pluralistic, even though somewhat chaotic phase after the demise of the Former Soviet Union .Even the government in Moscow was not speaking with one voice and different organs headed towards different directions. In general the top echelons of the foreign ministry appeared to the public eye to be far more accommodative of American views and precisely for that reason many others in the administrative and legislative structure were critical. Even Russian stand on Kashmir have also changed.

The first couple of years of India’s relation with post Soviet Russia was marked by a good deal of uncertainty, inconsistency, lack of clarity and even unreliabilities from India’s point of view.

V ECONOMIC INTERESTS AS BASE OF MUTUAL TIES.

Learning a lesson from the uncertainties of the new era, India took early steps to protect it’s own interest particularly the “economic interest” .The two track approach that India adopted was on the one hand re-orientation of its economic and military relations with Russia and on the other hand searching alternatives in the west. However, the aims of the new Russia’s foreign policy were becoming clearer. Russia started giving all the indications of its ability and intentions of redefining its foreign policy goals, priorities and international role. With India, the objective and character of its relations were defined with a measure of clarity. The national goals of two countries were looked upon in the light of new international realities. Therefore, the two countries have once again begun to rediscover the mutual importance but with a qualitative difference, which determined by the realities of the post cold war era.

No doubt, Russia had been trying to defines its goals, priorities and international role in accordance with its post Soviet domestic compulsion and needs. The new approach has made Russia to look upon the erstwhile adversaries like the United States, Western Europe, China and Japan as friends and partners. The compulsion of enhancing economic cooperation with former friends were considered too great to be ignored while the basic aim being to attract much needed economic aid and advanced technology.⁶ In this regard earlier in February 1992, a political commentator Ovchinnikov, in a article published in Pravada in Russia had warned that it should not ignore tried and trusted friends like India while seeking new alliances and friendship with western powers. He wanted that India must not give the impression that it had been relegated to secondary positions .Therefore, both the countries understood each other and after the end of cold war, the long term relations of India and Russia had become as identical as were Indo –Soviet relations.⁷

In this way the coolness of Indo Russia relations just after the demise of the USSR , did not long last and the visit if Russian President Boris Yeltsin to India in 1993 helped to remove the doubts that had been arisen in Indo Russian relations. This trend was not only picked up but has been steadily carried forwarded by Mr. Vladimir V.Putin. No doubt, the contribution of Mr. Putin in strengthening Indo -Russian all-round cooperation is unique. The strategic dialogue between the two countries has been institutionalized and annual summit level meeting have been taking place since the year 2000. Cooperation in vital sectors like energy, including nuclear and defence cooperation have been picking up.

VI NEW FRAMEWORK FOR RELATIONSHIP

Vladmir Putin’s first visit to India as President of Russian Federation in October 2000 and his second visit in 2002, the framework for Indo Russian relationship was firmly set. This was a framework of another special relationship of “strategic –partnership”, expending cooperation and multiplying contracts in various

fields some of them of critical importance to India. No doubt, this special relationship was not outcome of any cold war considerations and not directed against any third country. This special relationship was a reflection on the changed and changing international situations and their mutual domestic needs and requirements. It was also intended to provide greater balance and stability to the Asia –Pacific region.

Mr. Putin's domestic standing has been enhanced by his international stature because, He has forged a special relationship with U.S President George W.Bush and built strong ties with European leaders. Mr.Putin has established strong ties with Asian countries, particularly with Indian Republic.⁸ This was clear during Putin's India visits. During his first visit, Mr.Putin declared that he was the best friend of India in the international community and within Russia too. Besides during his visit, in a joint statement issued at the end of the visit, the two sides made particular mention of religious and international terrorism trading out of Afghanistan and it's impact on regional stability and internal security of India and Russia. They called upon the international community to impose additional sanctions against the Taliban Government unless they cease support to international terrorism, drug trafficking and conform to international norms of human rights. Besides, India extended support to the steps taken by Russia to protect it's territorial integrity and the constitutional order in Chechenya and Russia in turn, backed Indian efforts of restore peace and security in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.⁹

President Putin particularly changed one thing for India. He breached the international unclear blockade against India. Russia signed an agreement regarding nuclear energy for power and India's isolation in this regard had virtually ended. Putin went one step further and visited Tarapur Nuclear plant. The Russian president certainly did not change his standpoint on the issue of nuclear weapons and Putin still wanted India to sign CTBT. Yet he significantly added that this should be based on India's own strategic vision, national interests and need of the people.

VII DEFENCE PRESPECTIVE

The another contribution of Russian president to Indo Russian relation was defence component. No doubt, Indo Russian "Strategic Partnership" is a great contribution of Mr.Putin to Indo Russian relations. Regarding Putin's second visit in December, 2002 Indian Prime minister A.B.Vajpayee reported to the two Houses of Indian Parliament that President Putin's visit has consolidated the strategic partnership between the two countries. The Delhi declaration had reaffirmed that neither country would take any action which might threaten or impair the security of each other. Both countries would be guided by these principles in their security and defence policies and military technical operation with third country. Therefore, the wide ranging defence cooperation between India and Russia transcended a buyer seller relationship and included joint research, development and production of high tech weapons. That's why India and Russia have worked on the co-production of particular Brahmos missile system for it's induction in the armed force of both countries. Again during His third visit to India in December 2004 Russian President Putin declared that he was happy that he strategic relationship between the two countries were not influenced by the political circumstances of domestic as well as international environment . During this visit Mr. Putin declared Russia wants India to enter the United National Security Council in the permanent category with veto power.¹¹ This was the powerful diplomatic support of Mr. Putin to India with the international point of view . Besides, Russian President reaffirmed all the commitment during his India visit on the eve of Indian Republic Day in January 2007. But on this auspicious occasion both sides declared that our two countries will fight terrorism collectively on the national as well as on International level. Doubtlessly terrorism is such a common factor which have disturbed the domestic situation of both the countries since many decades.

VIII PROBLEM OF TERRORISM : A SIMILARITY

India and Russia both multiethnic and pluralist societies, have sought to forge common stand on terrorism as both are victims of this international evil. The issue have gained wider momentum after the 9/11 tragedy and it has broken national boundaries and got internationalized. The global powers such as the US showed increasing concern on terrorism and its menace world wide. As a result Kashmir and Chechenya problems were seen in a new and broader context.

Nevertheless, Kashmir and Chechenya being the worst victims of terrorism are especial forms of attention to research scholars and political scientists .Pakistan's role in promoting and partronizing terrorism has become a matter of common concern because while India's situated in direct vicinity of Pakistan, Russian is not far from Pakistan. Pakistan 's Inter Services Intelligences (ISI) has well developed instruments in making instability and disorder in the region. ISI is giving training to the terrorist to create havoc in India and it also train terrorists for world wide activities of terrorism.¹²

Just as in Kashmir, Pakistan mechanism in Chechenya is also guided by religious fundamentalism and terrorist outlook. Engaged in war of total scission form Moscow, Chechens have been receiving various kind of help and assistance from Pakistan.

Taking all these factor into account, Indian expert of international relations Mr. J.N.dixit commented that “Terrorism lies the most significant of the emerging New Delhi-Moscow perceptual convergence”,¹³ Just like the statement of Mr.J.N.Dixit Russian President Valadmir Putin successfully utilized 9/11 incident to Russian advantages . He linked the incident with the terror situation in Chechnya ; “ We face a common foe” Again describing the dual policy of USA , Mr.Putin declared that before this incident there was a big difference in the American policy towards Chechnya before and after the incident 9/11. Before the incident the US was harsh in criticizing the human right violations in Chechnya and the mid-level Bush administrative officials were in contact with the representative of the Chechen separatist group in hopes of understanding their approach to a political settlement to the conflict.

The heightened situation of international terrorism provided the base for Russia and India to set up a joint working Group (JWG) on counter –terrorism during the visit to President Putin to India in December, 2002. The aim of JWG was to put an “end to this common threat through preventive and deterrant measure nationally and bilaterally.¹⁴ Again Prime Minister Vajpay’s visit to Moscow in November 2002, further confirmed the Russian support to India’s position on cross border terrorism. The joint statement issued at the end of the visit urged Pakistan to implement in full its assurance to prevent infiltration of the terrorist across the line of control and to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan controlled territory as a prerequisite for a purposeful dialogue between the two countries .¹⁵ Hence in this background it is expected that both the countries would continue to adopt common positions on issue like terrorism , whether it is terrorism in Kashmir in Chechnya.

Now one may argue that both the countries are multiethnic and pluralistic in nature; therefore any threat to this common fabric is an obvious concern for both. Secondly, terrorism whether in Kashmir or Chechnya or in any other area, has become negative in both the areas of Kashmir and Chechnya, especially regarding measures to curb terrorism. Though, Pakistan remains under international scrutiny to dismantle and discourage militant outfits, as in the past nothing certain can be said under the circumstances. Thirdly, terrorism has become an international problem only after the attack on U.S.A, though countries like India and Russia suffered so much for many years. Dualism in defining terrorism has proved costly. Therefore, such concerns are not linked with Kashmir and Chechnya alone. Lastly, while India has remained by and large successful in checking the communal harms of terrorism, Russia has recently witnessing clashes between to major religious activities communities belonging to orthodox Church and Islam. The threat of Inter religious activities and violence might cause serious instability in the Russian society and pose severe tension to the Russian leadership. But the contribution of Mr. Valdmir Putin in combating terrorism is far better. Moreover, just after the huge terrorist attacks in Bomaby(Hotel Taj , Obeyroi and Nariman House) in nov. 2008, Russian president Mr. Putin assured India to give full support to fight terrorism from Pak-side.¹⁶ Both India and Russia has joined hands to face this huge problem not only in their own territories but also on international level.

Putin is also the first Russian president who openly interacted with the captain of Indian trade and industry. This again signified the post cold war realities where economy effects the world more than politics. Against this backdrop , no one can ignore the fact that the quality of Indo-Russian ties would depend to a large extent on the economic content. The bonds between New Delhi and Moscow regarding economic circumstances , military relations , terrorist concerns in their territories and also other domestic as well as international problem are based on mutuality of the national interests of both the countries .There is nothing disputing the strength and stability of the relationship , forged by two sides after the demise of the Soviet Union .Tested many times in the last 10 years , these ties withstood the pressure generated by international developments and respective domestic change in the two countries. In this regard Russian President Putin’s and Dimtri Medvedev’s visit to India have contributed more and the three guiding factor have been pragmatism, mutuality of interest and common concerns.¹⁷

On various and regional and global issue, India and Russia find themselves on the same side. Both have made their position clear against what they see as unilateral tendencies in the US foreign policy and would like to see the UNO as the proper forum for dealing with issues of international peace and security. Their geo-political and security interests in the central Asian Region are also similar due to religious extremism , terrorism , drug trafficking , smuggling in small arms etc. These problems have always threatened both India and Russia equally. Thus Indo –Russian political ties seems to be more progressive on the basis of shared long term national and geo-political interests of the two countries and a common stand on key global and regional problems.

IX PUTINS’S PRESPECTIVE

So far as, there is context of Putin’s Russia and India , we may argue that India was a dream land for Mr. V.V Putin like majority of Russians. He was deeply attractive towards India’s civilization , history , art and culture etc. from his boyhood and youth. Addressing the members of the India Parliament during his first visit to India, he said,”This is my first visit to India .I am deeply touched by the friendliness and cordiality of Indians.

Indo-Russian relations have never been victims of political fluctuation. They are stable, firm and time tested. Our people have immense positive experience of friendship.¹⁸ Furthermore, responding to India today's query, President Putin in this connection said, "We have a Russian saying; one old friend is better than two new ones." As a result of the summits that President Putin held with Indian leaders, Indo Russian ties have touched the top level of cooperation.

X A LITTLE FOCUS ON MODI-PUTIN MEETINGS

Again analysing India-Russia ties during Narendra Modi's Era, it can be argued that just after starting of Modi's period, Russian President Putin again visited India on 15th December, 2014 and it was a visit for maximizing the political ties of both countries. Putin visited India during such period when Russia's economic troubles, symbolized by a falling rouble and oil prices in the face of tough western economic sanctions imposed in protest against Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in March 2014. At that time if Russia was facing economic decline, India by contrast, Russia's partner in BRICS was widely perceived as a likely rising power under Modi. Russia wants BRICS to work against American world domination. But Modi on another hand, established good ties with US also. But it does not mean India favours American hegemony, but that it has much to gain economically, militarily and diplomatically by keeping on good terms with the U.S.¹⁹

Again P.M Narendra Modi visited Russia on Dec.14, 2015 and established Indo-Russian ties with new perspectives. Both nations decided to expand cooperation in various sectors as they signed 16 pacts, including one on joint manufacture of 226 military helicopters and another on construction of 12 atomic plants with the involvements of local companies in India. Both leaders, Putin and Modi underlined the need for the world to unite against terrorist groups and target countries. Besides, Putin conveyed Russia's "strong support" to India's bid for permanent membership of the U.N Security Council.²⁰

Conclusively, during Modi's short starting period, both countries again showed firm determination for similar national interest and good willing for common footing to face national and international problems.

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