

India–Russia Strategic Partnership in a Changing Global Order: Consolidating Continuity, Expanding Horizons

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ABSTRACT

This article assesses the evolution, resilience, and future trajectory of the India–Russia strategic partnership within a rapidly changing global order. Marking 25 years since the institutionalization of their strategic relationship, the analysis underscores how enduring political trust, deep cultural affinities, and pragmatic diplomacy have enabled both countries to sustain cooperation across geopolitical upheavals and shifting alliance structures. The piece highlights the outcomes of the recent 23rd Annual India–Russia Summit, which reaffirmed continuity in core strategic domains while expanding cooperation into economic diversification, advanced technologies, connectivity projects, and multilateral engagement. Emphasis is placed on a jointly agreed economic roadmap through 2030 aimed at doubling bilateral trade, broadening energy collaboration beyond hydrocarbons, and promoting joint infrastructure and manufacturing initiatives. Beyond traditional defense and security cooperation, emerging areas such as digital security, critical minerals, and innovation ecosystems feature prominently, reflecting a transition toward mutually beneficial, forward-looking engagement. The article situates the partnership as a stabilizing force in a multipolar world, advancing shared priorities in international governance, peace, and sustainable development, while maintaining strategic autonomy amid global uncertainties.

Keywords: India-Russia Relations, Geopolitics, Strategic Partnership, Global Order

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The contemporary global geopolitical landscape is marked by profound uncertainty, structural realignments, and the gradual transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world order. Amidst this flux, long-standing strategic partnerships are being reassessed, recalibrated, and, in some cases, reaffirmed. The 23rd India–Russia Annual Summit, convened at a critical juncture of global transformation, stands as a significant moment in this regard. It not only reaffirmed the resilience of India–Russia relations but also highlighted their capacity to adapt to evolving global realities without compromising core national interests. This year’s summit was particularly symbolic as it marked 25 years of the institutionalized India–Russia Strategic Partnership, a relationship that has successfully navigated Cold War legacies, post-Soviet transitions, and contemporary geopolitical

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complexities. The meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin underscored that India and Russia continue to view each other as trusted partners, grounded in mutual respect, long-term cooperation, and the primacy of sovereign national interests.

Strategic Continuity in an Era of Global Volatility

Despite increasing global polarization, sanctions regimes, and shifting alliance structures, the India–Russia partnership has demonstrated remarkable continuity. Three broad strategic trends emerged from the summit deliberations and joint statements.

First, the partnership has retained its strategic depth and political trust despite external pressures. India’s independent foreign policy, rooted in strategic autonomy, has allowed it to engage Russia pragmatically while simultaneously expanding partnerships with other major powers.

Second, both countries are consciously expanding the functional scope of cooperation by integrating emerging sectors, new connectivity corridors, and non-traditional areas into the bilateral agenda.

Third, India and Russia are enhancing coordination within multilateral forums to shape a more representative, equitable, and multipolar international system, especially during a period of structural transition in global governance.

Economic Cooperation and the Roadmap to 2030

A major outcome of the summit was the adoption of a Roadmap for Economic Cooperation up to 2030, reflecting shared ambitions to diversify bilateral trade and investment. The roadmap emphasizes increasing trade volumes, expanding Indian exports, and deepening cooperation in advanced technologies, digital platforms, critical minerals, and manufacturing.

Both sides reiterated their commitment to addressing long-standing trade barriers, including tariff and non-tariff obstacles, logistics inefficiencies, insurance and payment challenges, and regulatory bottlenecks. The emphasis on settlement mechanisms using national currencies reflects India’s broader objective of de-risking external trade and strengthening financial sovereignty.

Efforts to advance negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union were also highlighted. These initiatives are crucial for achieving the revised target of USD 100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030, aligning with India’s vision of becoming a leading global manufacturing and trading economy.

Energy Cooperation as a Strategic Pillar

Energy cooperation continues to be the central pillar of India–Russia relations. The summit discussions covered hydrocarbons, petrochemicals, upstream technologies, LNG and LPG infrastructure, coal gasification, and renewable energy transitions.

Beyond existing projects, both sides acknowledged the need to address operational challenges faced by investors and to accelerate progress on new initiatives, including additional nuclear power plant sites in India beyond the Kudankulam project. Cooperation in the nuclear fuel cycle and

localization of equipment manufacturing was given priority, in alignment with India’s long-term target of expanding nuclear capacity to 100 GW by 2047, a key component of India’s clean energy transition.

This collaboration reinforces India’s commitment to energy security, technological self-reliance, and climate-resilient growth.

Connectivity, Transport, and New Economic Corridors

Renewed momentum was observed in cooperation on connectivity and transport corridors. Both countries agreed to expedite work on the International North–South Transport Corridor, the Chennai–Vladivostok maritime route, and the Northern Sea Route.

Russia’s Far East and Arctic regions were identified as emerging zones of opportunity in energy, mining, human resource development, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and maritime logistics. These initiatives align with India’s broader strategy of diversifying supply chains, accessing new markets, and strengthening maritime connectivity in the Indo-Pacific and Eurasian regions.

Defence and Security Cooperation Beyond Tradition

The summit reaffirmed the enduring strength of defence and security cooperation, a cornerstone of the bilateral relationship. Both sides committed to deepening joint development, co-production, and technology transfer, moving beyond a buyer–seller dynamic.

Regular defence dialogues, joint military exercises, and localization of Russian-origin spare parts and components in India were emphasized as contributors to Atmanirbhar Bharat. Notably, defence cooperation has expanded into digital security, information protection, critical infrastructure resilience, and responsible use of emerging technologies, reflecting contemporary security challenges.

Science, Technology, and Innovation Partnerships

The science and technology agenda has expanded significantly, with both countries expressing interest in collaboration on critical minerals, circular economy technologies, and innovation ecosystems. Joint research initiatives, startup capacity building, and MSME collaboration were highlighted as tools for addressing societal and developmental challenges.

Educational cooperation has also gained renewed attention, with commitments to enhance student mobility, strengthen institutional linkages between universities, and provide greater support to Indian students in Russia. This aligns with India’s emphasis on knowledge diplomacy and human capital development.

Cultural, Tourism, and People-to-People Ties

The opening of new Indian consulates in Yekaterinburg and Kazan has provided institutional strength to cultural exchange, tourism, and people-to-people contact. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to festivals, cultural platforms, film collaboration, and academic dialogue.

Efforts to simplify visa procedures and promote tourism reflect a growing recognition of the human dimension of strategic partnerships, reinforcing cultural proximity and societal understanding.

Multilateral Coordination and Global Governance Reform

India and Russia continue to coordinate closely in multilateral forums. Both reiterated the need for reform of the United Nations Security Council, with Russia once again expressing support for India's permanent membership.

Cooperation within G20, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation remains central to strengthening multipolarity and advancing the concerns of the Global South. Russia acknowledged India's leadership during its G20 presidency, while India expressed confidence in Russia's constructive role within multilateral institutions.

Positions on Global Security Challenges

The leaders exchanged views on major international issues. On the Ukraine conflict, India reiterated its commitment to peace, dialogue, and diplomacy. Both sides strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms, calling for collective action against terrorist financing, radical networks, and misuse of digital platforms.

Discussions also covered Afghanistan, West Asia, and the Iranian nuclear issue, with emphasis on stability, humanitarian assistance, and counter-terrorism cooperation.

Climate Action and Sustainable Development

Climate cooperation emerged as an important dimension, with both countries emphasizing low-carbon development, technology sharing, and progress under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. Russia's decision to join international climate initiatives and its potential engagement in global solar and environmental alliances were seen as positive signals for deeper cooperation in environmental governance.

Conclusion

Taken together, the 23rd India–Russia Annual Summit presented one of the most comprehensive and forward-looking joint agendas in recent years. India and Russia are not merely preserving a historical partnership; they are actively redefining it to suit a rapidly transforming world.

The relationship has expanded beyond traditional domains of defence, nuclear energy, and hydrocarbons into critical minerals, digital security, innovation ecosystems, Arctic governance, and alternative connectivity corridors. Most importantly, both countries view their partnership as a stabilizing force within an increasingly multipolar global system.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi aptly noted, India–Russia relations are not based solely on strategic interests but are strengthened by cultural closeness and deep people-to-people ties. Supported by new institutional frameworks, expanded economic roadmaps, and a shared understanding of global challenges, the partnership is poised to enter a new phase of pragmatic, stable, and mutually beneficial cooperation.

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