

India & the Global Centres of Power — Part I

Day 45. The United States and Russia — two relationships, one balancing act, and the Indo-Pacific frame that links both. *Revise → write a little → don't break the chain.*

Exam load on this unit (UPSC 2016–2024): **3 × 10-markers · 5 × 15-markers · 3 × 20-markers.**

“engaging with the USA, managing China, cultivating relations with Europe, reassuring Russia, and bringing the Japanese into active participation.” — S. Jaishankar

PART A

The Changing Global Order

1 Five Relationships That Carry Disproportionate Weight

India's external strategy is built around five: the **United States, Russia, Japan, Europe, China**. Each was shaped by a distinct Cold War experience; each has been reworked since 1991.

- **Two constants** → the search for **strategic autonomy**, and the search for capital, technology and security partners to sustain domestic transformation.
- **Two variables** → the structure of the international system, and India's own domestic capacity.
- **Where the bargaining happens** → not the bilaterals alone but the triangles: India–US–China, India–Russia–US, India–China–Russia.

Centres of power

Those states and groupings whose capabilities allow them to set rules, supply security or capital, and shape outcomes beyond their own region. The set is no longer confined to the West.

2 Features of the Present Order

Feature	Content
Multipolarity	No single superpower shapes the system. The US remains central, but China's economic expansion, Russia's assertive foreign policy, and the growing strategic footprint of India, Brazil and Turkey have diversified the centres of power.
Economic shifts	Emerging economies have altered the global economic balance. BRICS presses for reform in the World Bank and the IMF.
Geopolitical realignments	NATO and the EU under re-evaluation; new alignments in Asia and the Indo-Pacific, the Quad the clearest instance. In West Asia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel recalibrated after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Syrian conflict.
Crisis and conflict	The Ukraine war (2022) revived Cold War-era tensions, deepened NATO's role in Eastern Europe, and pushed Russia to reassert influence in Central Asia and West Asia.
Technology and environment	Competition over 5G, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, chiefly US–China; climate negotiations generate both cooperation and friction, with India and China asserting themselves.

3 India's Place in the Emerging Order

- **Devin T. Hagerty** → world politics is in transition from bipolarity to a new, as yet indeterminate order; the **'unipolar moment'** is giving way. Two futures: a **new bipolarity** (US and China atop the great-power hierarchy), or a **re-emergence of multipolarity** — historically the most common configuration — with BRICS states along with Germany, Japan and Turkey as potential poles.
- States vary on a continuum from **status quo** to **revisionist**. China's place on it is among the liveliest debates in international affairs; its projection of a **'peaceful rise'** expresses the aspiration to become a world power without threatening the US-led order, and to appear a responsible 'stakeholder'.
- **Robert Gilpin** → as new states climb the great-power hierarchy they eventually try to alter existing rules and norms — rules created by other, now declining, great powers for their own purposes. Aspiring great powers try to reshape prevailing norms to suit their interests, which can spark instability.

Scholar readings of the five relationships

Scholar	On	Reading
Brahma Chellaney	United States	Grown from strategic partnership to a comprehensive global partnership — defence, trade, technology.
Harsh V. Pant	China	Deep economic ties coexist with geopolitical tension along the border; India balances economic engagement with cautious defence posturing.
Shashi Tharoor	European Union	A critical partner in global governance reform, climate change and terrorism.
Sreeram Chaulia	Russia	Defence technology and energy keep the relationship substantial despite shifting global alignments.
Sachin Chaturvedi	Emerging economies	The IBSA Dialogue Forum illustrates India's strategy of building collective influence among developing countries for a more inclusive global order.

4 Levels of Analysis — the Working Frame

Kenneth Waltz's three levels of analysis — individual, domestic (state), systemic — runs through this chapter, following **Devin T. Hagerty** (United States), **Vidya Nadkarni** (Russia) and **Manjeet S. Pardesi** (Japan, China).

Three levels — use them to structure any bilateral answer

Individual

Dominance of a single decision-maker — Nehru's near-total control of external affairs is the clearest Indian case

Domestic (State)

Economic model, parliamentary and media pressure, entrenched constituencies, business lobbies

Systemic

Bipolarity, alliance formations, balance of power, the rise of China

PART B

India & the United States

5 Nature of the Relationship

The organising insight

Devin T. Hagerty: India wants to be treated like an ally of the United States without actually being an ally of the United States. It seeks the advantages and security of aligning with the world's dominant power but wishes to avoid the complications such an alliance could bring, particularly concerning China. Indian strategic elites do not explicitly articulate this.

- Ashley J. Tellis** → despite shared affinities of constitutional democracy, liberal politics and civic nationalism, the two have not enjoyed consistently warm relations since formal ties began. During the Second World War, Roosevelt reached out to the Indian nationalist movement to convey American support for independence; India's leadership hoped for a productive relationship after *swaraj*. Expectations were not met — not primarily through direct conflict, but owing to **divergent worldviews, disparities in national priorities, and imbalances in power capabilities**, pronounced until the Cold War ended. Neither country proved critical to the vital interests of the other, though the power gap meant New Delhi would always depend more on Washington than the reverse.
- David M. Malone** → the history is as complex as it is varied, distinguished by a largely unsuccessful search for common ground. Like the proverbial blind men and the elephant, both nations spent five decades construing the relationship in ways that mystified and displeased the other. Leaders on both sides called this era **'the fifty wasted years'** or **'the lost half-century'**. Nehru, on his 1949 visit, called India and the USA **'natural allies'** — a sentiment later repeated by PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Three phases, three labels — the standard scholarly shorthand

Estranged → Entente → Engaged

Estranged Democracies

Dennis Kux
much of the Cold War

Entente Phase

Devin T. Hagerty
after the 2005–08 civil-nuclear breakthrough

Engaged Democracies

David M. Malone
present — China's rise, Russia's resurgence, West Asian volatility, India's post-1991 liberalisation

During PM Modi's 2023 visit, US President **Joe Biden** called the partnership among the **"most consequential in the world"**.

- The relationship moved from bilateral engagement to a **Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership** without any mutual defence obligation. India's opposition to US positions on Russia, Iran and Syria, where they clash with Indian interests or regional peace, shows the partnership operates without subordination.
- Alliance would impose restrictions on India's freedom of manoeuvre and contradict its long-standing non-aligned position; India demands equality, mutual respect and independent decision-making. Deep in capability, shallow in obligation — and both sides currently prefer it that way.

6 India's Interests in the United States

Domain	Content
Strategic	A free, open and rules-bound Indo-Pacific; the Quad; rapid growth in arms sales, co-development and technology sharing. Broad convergence between India's Act East and the USA's rebalancing to Asia .
Geopolitical	India's ambition to be a regional hegemon and 'net security provider' ; China's rise challenges this, creating convergence. US support for reform of global governance institutions and for a permanent UNSC seat.
Economic	Large trade and investment potential; commerce serves not only monetary gain but a mutually consonant geo-strategic agenda. India's economic rise benefits the USA; American technological strength helps India.
Science, technology, space	Space, defence, medicine, agriculture, health.
Climate & disaster management	Mitigation and adaptation, renewable energy.
Higher education	University collaboration, Fulbright-Nehru fellowships, student exchange, to tap the fourth industrial revolution.

7 Relations during the Cold War

- Ashley J. Tellis** → structural realities placed Washington and New Delhi in **antinomic positions**. The U.S. was the global hegemon and protagonist of capitalism; India a weak polity facing structural challenges at home and abroad, an aspiring 'great power' needing a peaceful environment for development.
- Devin T. Hagerty** → India was a **discontented middle power** with the grand strategy of **non-alignment**. New Delhi saw US-Soviet competition in the subcontinent as challenging its pre-eminence as the 'natural' successor to the British Raj and its rightful role as postcolonial South Asia's security manager. India's developmental

burden and its status as a civilizational-state marked by *Kantian pacifism* pushed it to seek the advantages of alignment with stronger powers while avoiding the restrictive commitments that come with it.

- **Nehru's formulation:** non-alignment ensured the freedom to choose 'when the choices come to it'. **Appadorai** → Nehru held that non-alignment did not preclude preferential partnerships; India could be closer to some countries than others, provided it did not get stuck in ideological blocs.

The alliance architecture that damaged ties

Pact	Members & purpose
Baghdad Pact (1955)	Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan , Iran — to prevent communist incursions and secure peace in West Asia; renamed CENTO in 1959 after Iraq withdrew.
SEATO (Sept 1954)	United States, France, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan — to prevent communism from gaining ground.

Ashley J. Tellis → the non-alignment associational model made sense from India's viewpoint but could not persuade the United States at the peak of Cold War rivalry. Washington wanted India inside the capitalist alliance; India's frequent criticism of the U.S. on international issues made harmony untenable. US admission of Pakistan into anti-Soviet alliances imposed heightened defence burdens on New Delhi when it could least afford them. **US support for Pakistan and rapprochement with China** became the most acute irritant, and a principal reason ties never reached the epitome of friendship.

Other Cold War irritants

- India saw the U.S. as the '**heir**' to **British imperialism** rather than a champion of post-colonial states — a perception strongest under the Eisenhower administration.
- **Nehru's socialist outlook** — attraction to the Soviet planned command economy, dislike of the capitalist model he associated with colonialism.
- **Pokhran-I (1974)** — the first nuclear explosion outside the NPT framework, souring ties for over thirty years.

Aneek Chatterjee → the U.S., despite sharing liberal democracy with India, followed a different discourse of pulls and pressures during the Cold War, driven by national interest. It had no hesitation in aligning with Pakistan, ruled for long spells by military dictatorships, and later with communist China. From **Jawaharlal Nehru** to **Chandra Shekhar**, no Indian Prime Minister of the Cold War era succeeded in building intimate relations with the United States. Major areas of difference — US zeal to contain communism; India's rejection of bloc-building; American branding of India as a Soviet supporter and Indian perception of American hegemony; US funding of Pakistan; the non-proliferation regime, which India condemned as unfair and unequal; and the mismatch between Indian socialism and the American market economy.

8 Relations after the End of the Cold War

- India had to reorient foreign policy away from Nehruvian roots toward a posture compatible with the Western world order. The disintegration of the USSR removed the security umbrella; the balance of payments crisis and domestic upheaval made restructuring unavoidable.
- **Devin T. Hagerty** → the upward trajectory began when **Rajiv Gandhi** explored new cooperation with the United States in late 1984. With the global revolution in information technology, India needed electronics, computer software and telecommunications — areas where America vastly outperformed the Soviet Union. Washington had its own reasons: the Reagan administration was eager to drive wedges between Moscow and its allies.
- India dovetailed its reform agenda with the Clinton administration's grand strategy of '**engagement and enlargement**', helped by the political clout of a growing and prosperous Indo-American community.
- **Devin T. Hagerty** → military collaboration began with the 1995 '**Agreed Minute on Defence Relations**'; between 1995 and 1998 came joint naval exercises, an air force pilot exchange programme and cooperative military training. US IMET funding for India doubled over the same years.
- **Aneek Chatterjee** → "opposing foreign policy objectives and national interest continued to keep the two democracies apart even after the end of the Cold War". The 1998 tests and India's refusal to sign the NPT and CTBT allowed the U.S. to stay away; human rights became a disturbing area during the Rao period.
- **De-hyphenation** of India and Pakistan was the decisive shift — drivers included the Kargil misadventure of 1999, the military coup, Pakistan's patronage of the Taliban, and evidence of nuclear leakage to North Korea. Clinton's 2000 visit signalled a regional orientation away from the Cold War alliance with Pakistan.

9 Relations in the Twenty-First Century

- After 9/11, India offered air bases, refuelling and maintenance support, overflight rights, intelligence cooperation and port facilities. Washington hesitated because it needed Pakistan for **Operation Enduring Freedom**, but the offer showed Cold War habits of mind were fading. **Ashley J. Tellis** → since the early twenty-first century, security relations have matured beyond the inhibitions of the Cold War.
- **NSSP (2004)** eased restrictions on India's access to US technology in four areas — dual-use items, civilian nuclear applications, civilian space cooperation, ballistic missile defence.
- The **2005 ten-year security agreement** covered planned collaboration in multilateral operations, expansion of two-way defence trade, technology transfer and co-production, and missile defence. Purchases followed — USS Trenton, six C-130J Hercules, P-8I Poseidon. The crowning achievement was the **civil nuclear deal** and the **NSG waiver**, making it legal for American firms to supply nuclear technology, fuel, reactors and equipment — India the only country outside the NPT with nuclear capabilities permitted to participate in nuclear commerce, with at least eight facilities kept outside safeguards for military purposes.

'It is now official. It is the policy of the United States to help India to become a major world power in the 21st century.' — **David Mulford, 2005**

Entente, not alliance — Devin T. Hagerty

By 2009 relations had blossomed into an **entente**. Compared to alliances, ententes are relatively informal, frequently not articulated in treaties, and leave partners greater flexibility about support in specific instances of threat or aggression.

- **Harsh V. Pant** → a unique constellation of factors changed the relationship — *systemic* (end of the Cold War, unipolarity, the rise of China); *domestic* (opening of the Indian economy, structural adjustment); *political* (change of government, with the BJP's pro-West approach and slighter commitment to non-alignment).
- **Devin T. Hagerty** on the second level → after **Obama** took office in 2008 there was a strong perception in India that he might be less committed to the entente than President Bush — Democratic presidents historically pressed harder on Kashmir and proliferation, Republicans were more pragmatic. Obama's early Asia policy prioritised US-China relations, and in South Asia, Pakistan, owing to the Afghan war.
- **Devin T. Hagerty** → '**strategic autonomy**' remains a key determinant. India has appreciated since 1962 the necessity of powerful friends against China, yet colonial history instils caution about alliances that might jeopardise hard-won sovereignty. By default New Delhi engages in what may be characterised as '**neo-nonalignment**'

— a grand strategy of exclusion.

- **C. Raja Mohan** → after the 2010 review of Afghan policy, the U.S. shifted focus back to India, reaffirming the Bush commitment to support India's ascent to great-power status and recognising India as a central player in the future administration of Asia.

Rebalance to Asia

- Not a foreign policy or military doctrine but a **grand-strategic concept**, identifying broad US strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific and guiding diplomatic, economic and defence priorities.
- Not fundamentally new — a restoration of the high priority accorded to the Asia-Pacific since 1941, when the U.S. maintained **forward engagement** through the Second World War and the Cold War.
- Announced in 2011 as a **hedging strategy** driven by China's growing power, rhetorical arrogance during the US financial crisis, and assertion of claims in the South China Sea.
- **Hillary Clinton** in New Delhi urged her hosts '**not just to look East, but to engage East and act East as well**'.
- **Leon Panetta** → defence trade should move beyond the buyer-seller relationship to substantial co-production and eventually high-technology joint research and development.

10 Relations in the Modi Years

Kashish Parpiani and Harsh V. Pant

Under PM Narendra Modi, India has moved from its historical fixation with '**strategic autonomy**' — a ghost of its non-aligned past — to '**strategic alignment**'. Autonomy has been redefined "as an objective that is attainable through strengthened partnerships instead of avoiding partnerships." The shift reflects pragmatism and realism based on 'enlightened self-interest'. India therefore has no hesitation in finding common ground with China to defend globalisation against America First protectionism, while embracing the United States on other issues.

The doctrinal move that most IS-markers now turn on

STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

autonomy by avoiding partnerships — the non-aligned inheritance



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

autonomy through strengthened partnerships — 'enlightened self-interest'

Nehru · Appadorai · neo-nonalignment (Hagerty)

Parpiani · Harsh V. Pant · Gautam Chikermane

- Growing convergence on a "**free and open**" Indo-Pacific, with consensus in India's strategic community that the U.S. is India's "most important partner". The alignment also has realpolitik relevance: even amid relative economic decline, the United States is positioned to dominate militarily.
- **2014** — Modi's vision statement, '*chalein saath saath, forward together we go*'.
- **Jan 2015** — Obama's visit adopts the **Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region**, the first joint articulation of regional challenges.
- **2016** — address to Congress; relations have overcome the "*hesitations of history*".
- **2017** — Modi's visit covers Afghanistan, North Korea, West Asia, Pakistan, the Indo-Pacific, export control regimes, the UNSC, cyberspace, reaffirmation of **Major Defence Partner** status, and US observer membership of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium.
- **Biden years** — Biden opposed sanctions after 1998, urged their removal in 2001, and helped seal the nuclear deal in 2008. As President he upgraded the Quad to summit level and launched I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE, United States). A framework on critical and emerging technologies followed the July 2022 joint statement.
- **2022** — the U.S. **National Defense Strategy** recognises the importance of partnership with India. India does not join US condemnation or sanctions on Russia; the U.S. shows understanding of India's compulsions and expresses interest in being 'partner of choice' in virtually any field.
- **Feb 2023** — Air India-Boeing deal for over 200 American-made aircraft. **Sept 2023** — the U.S. response to the Canadian allegations against India is restrained despite Canada being a critical ally. **Oct 2023 onward** — the Israel-Hamas conflict may delay the proposed Middle East-India transport corridor and I2U2 initiatives.
- **Nov 2023 2+2** — countering China through military and non-military tools; strengthening India's military; reducing technological dependence on China; trade, clean energy, higher education and health; the long-run viability of India's Russia ties.
- **Gautam Chikermane** → Modi inherited a US\$2 trillion economy and strategic goodwill from nuclear cooperation, and used both. This convergence of size, strategy and policy has been timely for the U.S. as it seeks a partner of trust, disengages from Pakistan and de-risks from China.

II Trump 2.0 — Tariffs, Repair and the Hemispheric Turn

Within months of 2025 Washington placed a cumulative **50 per cent** tariff on Indian goods, part of it a penalty for buying Russian oil, and claimed a mediating role in the India-Pakistan clash of May 2025. The question that runs through the episode: a passing crisis that multi-alignment could absorb, or a strain on strategic autonomy itself?

Tariff escalation and India's restraint

Date	Measure
2 Apr 2025	Executive Order 14257 set a baseline 10% reciprocal tariff; steel and aluminium duties rose to 50% .
Aug 2025	A 25% reciprocal tariff on Indian goods took effect.
6 Aug 2025	EO 14329 added a 25% penalty over Russian oil (effective 27 August), reaching the 50% cumulative rate. It was the first US " secondary tariff " — penalising one country for its trade with another.
Legal basis — the penalty invoked IEEPA and a "national emergency" first declared in EO 14066 (2022). EO 14329 found India "directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil."	
India's rebuttal — the MEA (6 August 2025) called the tariffs " unfair, unjustified and unreasonable " and framed oil imports as energy security for 1.4 billion people. India did not retaliate , and issued no further statement after the second tariff round.	

The February 2026 settlement — contested and unfinished

- **2 Feb 2026** — Trump and Modi announced a framework for an **Interim Agreement**; the reciprocal rate was cut to **18%** from the 50% peak, and India signalled intent to buy **\$500 billion** of US goods over five years. An executive order of 6 February 2026 removed the Russian-oil penalty, effective 7 February.
- The **Joint Statement** carried **no explicit Indian commitment on Russian oil**, even as Washington claimed one.
- **20 Feb 2026** — the **US Supreme Court struck down the IEEPA “reciprocal” tariff authority**. On 24 February the US imposed a temporary **10% blanket tariff** on all partners for 150 days, expiring 24 July 2026. As of mid-2026 the interim pact remained unsigned. Modi and Trump met at the **G7 in France on 17 June 2026**, their first meeting in over a year.

The hemispheric turn — NSS 2025

- The **National Security Strategy** (December 2025) named the **Western Hemisphere** the top priority and America’s “**strategic rear**”, reviving the **Monroe Doctrine** through a “**Trump Corollary**”; US actions over Venezuela and Greenland followed.
- India was named **four times** — against seven in 2022 and eight in 2017 — described as a Quad partner for balancing China. The **2026 National Defense Strategy** made **no mention of India or the Quad**.
- **India’s diversification** — a trade agreement with the United Kingdom (July 2025); an FTA with the European Union announced (January 2026) alongside a security and defence partnership with the EU; Modi at the SCO summit (September 2025); Putin in Delhi (December 2025); and a renewed **ten-year India–US defence framework** (October 2025).

The argument — autonomy eroded or vindicated?

Scholar	Reading
Shoumitro Chatterjee	The episode proves that India’s post-2017 inward turn had raised the cost of relying on the home market.
Konark Bhandari	India’s response was tactical altruism — offering concessions without demanding an immediate return.
Elizabeth Threlkeld, Daniel Markey and Akriti Vasudeva Kalyankar	The long standoff let China, Russia, Pakistan and Europe each gain ground.
Harsh V. Pant and Vivek Mishra	India absorbed the pressure, kept growing, and reached what they call greater parity .
Chietigj Bajpae	Equidistance can read as disengagement, leaving India short of strategic indispensability ; the prescription is a more proactive, less passive autonomy.
Milan Vaishnav and co-authors	Tactical adjustment rather than strategic rupture — the volatility of Trump 2.0 confirmed the value of spreading India’s bets.
Nivedita Kapoor	Trump 2.0 strengthened rather than weakened the logic of the India–Russia partnership.
Sujan R. Chinoy	A break with the post-1945 UN order and a return to sovereignty-first Westphalian thinking, capped by US primacy; India’s four mentions signal a transactional tone, not a real fall in importance.
Rajeesh Kumar	Tracks the hemispheric rise across the 2017, 2022 and 2025 strategies to the rank of America’s strategic rear.
Rachel Rizzo and Vivek Mishra	Burden-shifting — the strategy expects partners to carry regional security themselves, placing new weight on India in the Indo-Pacific while also opening space for a larger Indian role.
Tanvi Madan	Trump’s appetite for a deal with Beijing revived New Delhi’s fear of a US–China condominium ; Trump 2.0 did not change the structural logic of India’s China policy, but complicated the ground on which it runs.

“India’s response to Trump 2.0 has been characterized less by strategic rupture than by tactical adjustment.” — **Milan Vaishnav (ed.)**, **Carnegie Endowment**

“The key lesson for India from the recent downturn in relations with the United States is that it needs to develop a more proactive rather than passive approach towards its strategic autonomy.” — **Chietigj Bajpae**

12 Areas of Cooperation

Economic

- The U.S. is India’s top trading partner at **\$130bn** in goods; India is Washington’s eighth largest partner. Exports to the U.S. rose **2.81%** to USD 78.31 billion in 2022-23 against USD 76.18 billion in 2021-22; imports grew about **16%** to USD 50.24 billion.
- In 2020-21 the U.S. was India’s largest export destination and second-largest trading partner. India holds a **trade surplus** with the United States, a distinction held by few countries, and is the sixth-largest supplier of services imports, near 5% of US services imports.
- Bilateral goods and services trade grew more than 10% per annum over two years to **USD 142 billion in 2018**. US direct investment about **USD 44.5 billion**; Indian FDI in the U.S. about **USD 18 billion**.
- Trade surplus of **\$28 billion** in 2022-23; a declared trade target of **\$500 billion**; agreement on a transitional approach to the **Equalization Levy**.

Political, geopolitical and multilateral

- Close cooperation in the UN, G-20, ASEAN Regional Forum, IMF, World Bank and WTO; US support for a permanent UNSC seat and for NSG membership.
- **QUAD** with Australia and Japan; India among twelve countries in **IPEF**, joining the Overarching Agreement and Pillars 3 (Clean Economy) and 4 (Fair Economy) in 2024.
- Hotline between the PMO and the White House (2015). India a member of **IORA**, the U.S. a dialogue partner. The U.S. joined the **International Solar Alliance** in 2021 and India’s **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative**.
- **Blue Dot Network** certification of sustainable, transparent infrastructure as an alternative to the BRI; **Minerals Security Partnership** for critical mineral supply chains.
- Joint condemnation of cross-border terrorism, with calls for Pakistan to act against groups on its territory.

Defence and security

- **Defence Policy Group (1995)** upgraded to the **New Defence Framework Agreement (2005)**; a 10-year framework signed 2005 and renewed 2015; Joint Declaration on Defence Cooperation 2013.
- **Major Defence Partner** designation (2016); **STA-1** status (2018), India the third Asian country to receive licence-free access to space and defence technology; support for entry into the **MTCR (2016)**, **Wassenaar Arrangement (2017)** and **Australia Group (2018)**.
- **Exercises** — Yudh Abhyas, Vajra Prahar, Red Flag, Cope India, Tarkash, Tiger Triumph, Blue Flag; **Malabar** with the navies since 1992, Japan a permanent participant from 2015; multilateral RIMPAC. India conducts more bilateral exercises with the U.S. than with any other country. The U.S. renamed its Pacific Command **USINDOPACOM**.
- **Acquisitions** — aggregate defence acquisition crossed US\$ 16 billion; defence trade climbed from under USD 1 billion in 2008 to over **USD 25 billion by mid-2025**, including C-17s, C-130Js, Apaches and Chinooks; the US\$ 3bn **MQ-9B Predator** deal (2023), to be assembled in India under 'Make in India'.
- **DTTI (2012)** for co-development and co-production; negotiations begun on a **Reciprocal Defence Procurement** agreement and a **Security of Supply** arrangement.
- India joined the US-led **Combined Maritime Forces** as an associate partner (2023); launched **INDUS-X** (2023) linking defence start-ups; and began the **Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)** (2023) covering AI, quantum, space, telecom and semiconductors.
- The Indian Navy and US Naval Forces Central Command are deepening maritime cooperation in the **Western Indian Ocean**, where Chinese presence at **Gwadar** and **Djibouti** concerns India. **Cybersecurity** — the India-U.S. Cyber Framework (2016); Cyber Security Dialogue and Joint Working Group on ICT.

Science, technology and space

- **IUSSTF** (2000); India-US Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement (2005); Indo-U.S. Science & Technology Joint Commission.
- India contributed **\$250 million** to the **Thirty-Meter Telescope Project** in Hawaii; **IndiGO** with the U.S. LIGO Laboratory.
- **Micron Technology** to invest up to **\$825m** in a semiconductor assembly and test facility; **Lam Research** to train 60,000 Indian engineers.
- **Space** — first U.S.-manufactured sounding rocket launched from Thumba in 1963; the first four INSAT satellites built by U.S. industry; two NASA instruments on *Chandrayaan-1*; Joint Working Group on Civil Space Cooperation; Mars Orbiter Mission collaboration; **NISAR**; Raytheon's role in **GAGAN**; India's signing of the **Artemis Accords**.
- Joint production of **F414 jet engines** by General Electric in India; AI-enabled cancer and diabetes research with the U.S. National Cancer Institute.

Energy, climate, civil nuclear

- **U.S.-India Energy Dialogue** (2005) with six working groups; the **Strategic Energy Partnership** (2018) and the Natural Gas Task Force (2018). India began importing US crude in 2017 and LNG in 2018; crude and LNG imports valued at about **USD 6.7 billion**.
- The 40-year ban on American oil exports lifted in December 2015; India's first cargo of 1.6 million barrels arrived in 2017. Reliance, Essar and GAIL invested about **USD 5 billion** in US shale assets.
- **PACE** and the **Joint Clean Energy Research and Development Center**; Climate Change Working Group; Joint Working Group on Hydrofluorocarbon; **U.S.-India Partnership for Climate Resilience**; **U.S.-India Climate Fellowship Program**; both members of the ISA.
- **Civil nuclear** — agreement signed October 2008; a Civil Nuclear Energy Working Group on R&D has met ten times; **Westinghouse** in discussion with NPCIL for six AP-1000 reactors at **Kovvada**. Implementation had stalled in the Indian Parliament over **nuclear liability**: the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 was incompatible with global practice, which directs liability to plant operators rather than suppliers. The impasse was resolved only in **January 2015**, when Obama and Modi announced that all remaining issues stood settled — domestic legislative politics delaying a systemic-level bargain by half a decade.

Higher education and people-to-people

- IIT Kanpur established with nine American universities and USAID (1962); **Fulbright-Nehru** fellowships with joint funding since 2008, nearly 200 awards annually — the largest US Fulbright Scholar Program in the world.
- About **130,000** Indian students pursuing advanced degrees; more than **200,000** across courses. Higher Education Dialogue; community colleges for skill development; Technology Enabled Learning and MOOCs; **GIAN**, hosting up to 1000 American academics a year.
- Negotiations for a **Cultural Property Agreement** to prevent trafficking of cultural artefacts.

UPSC 2018 · 15m Discuss the role of Indian diaspora in promoting Indo-US relations.

13 The Four Foundational Agreements

The ladder of interoperability — eighteen years, four agreements



Agreement	What it does
GSOMIA 2002	Prescribed security standards and protocols for safeguarding information shared by the Pentagon with India's defence ministry and by US defence firms with Indian DPSUs. It did not cover Indian private companies.
LEMOA 2016	Allows both to replenish from each other's designated military facilities: food, water, billet, transportation, petroleum, oil, lubricants, clothing, medical services, spare parts, repair and maintenance, and training services.
COMCASA 2018	Originally CISMOA, renamed to make it India-specific. Secure military communication; raises the ability to communicate safely with US-made equipment used by foreign militaries such as Japan and Australia. Data acquired cannot be transferred without India's consent.
BECA 2020	Between the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and India's Ministry of Defence. Sharing of geomagnetic and gravity data, maps, nautical and aeronautical charts, and imagery; high-quality GPS for navigation and precision targeting, with safeguards on classified satellite and sensor data.

UPSC 2022 · 10m Explain the significance of Basic Exchange and Co-operation Agreement (BECA) for Indo-US strategic relations.

“BECA is expected to elevate the India-US strategic/defence partnership to an unprecedented mega level. It is one of the agreements that the US usually signs with its closest partners as it allows the interoperability of armed forces and the exchange of classified sensitive information.” — **Harris Bilal Malik**

- **Timing** → signed at the third 2+2 Dialogue with Mike Pompeo and Mark Esper, a week before the US election — an unambiguous political signal that the defence partnership had come of age (**Rakesh Sood**).
- **Limits** → **Manoj Sinha**: the U.S. is not obliged to provide geospatial data in every circumstance and is unlikely to assist in any venture relating to Pakistan; obligingness on China may not survive a change of administration. **Abhijnan Rej**: significant obstacles remain to seamless interoperability; India's appetite for Russian weapon systems is a sticking point from Washington's perspective.
- **Assessment** → BECA raises capability and interoperability without creating an alliance obligation — which suits India's preference for entente over alliance.

UPSC 2020 · ISm Discuss the significance of Indo-US strategic partnership and its implications for India's security and national defence.

14 Areas of Concern and Contestation

Lingering trust issues

Devlin T. Hagerty → Indian strategic elites remain sceptical of US bona fides. Even while acknowledging US support for India's great-power aspirations and its UNSC bid, the perception of Washington as a historically unpredictable partner cannot be entirely dispelled —

Episode	What happened
1965	Shortly after establishing a military supply line to India after the 1962 Chinese invasion, the U.S. imposed an arms transfer embargo on both India and Pakistan when the 1965 war broke out.
1971	The U.S. supported Pakistan diplomatically and militarily and sent the USS Enterprise into the Indian Ocean.
1978	Washington cancelled fuel supply contracts for Tarapur , scuttling a promising friendship with the Carter administration.
1998	Clinton cancelled military supply licences after India's nuclear tests.

Indian scientists and technocrats who rose during years of technology denial advise vigilance against dependence on Washington for sophisticated weaponry and nuclear fuel. The **Khobragade affair** showed residual mutual tone-deafness: Washington and New Delhi have not mastered the language of partners who expect occasional conflicts within a permanently stable relationship.

Trade and economic frictions

- **Alyssa Ayres** → bilateral trade deficits, previously not a top US concern, became a major focus under the Trump administration. In 2019, India, with a goods deficit of **\$23.3 billion**, was the eleventh largest for the U.S.
- 2018 tariffs of **25%** on steel and **10%** on aluminium; India's refusal to remove 20% tariffs on ICT products delayed the trade deal; challenges at the WTO on both sides; US complaints about customs clearance procedures.
- **GSP withdrawal** covering around 2,000 items worth **\$6.3 billion**; India retaliated with tariffs on 28 US products.
- **Data localisation** — the RBI circular mandating in-country storage of payment data with unrestricted central bank access, aimed at MasterCard, Visa, American Express, PayPal, Facebook and Google. India opted out of the **Osaka Track** on the digital economy, fearing erosion of consensus-based decision-making and of policy flexibility for digital industrialisation.
- **Services** — Indian competitiveness against US market-access barriers such as limits on foreign ownership and local presence requirements; from India's side, temporary visa policy and worker visa fees; India seeks a **totalization agreement**.
- **Agriculture** — long-standing and among the hardest to resolve. The U.S. exported around \$1.5 billion of agricultural products to India in 2018 and imported \$2.7 billion. US dairy exports are obstructed by India's requirement that dairy products come from cows fed a vegetarian diet throughout life.
- **Investment and IPR** — the **USTR** objects to 'Make in India' and *Atmanirbhar Bharat*; US experts cite a restrictive FDI regime, opaque sectoral policy, high tariffs, limited state-level decision-making authority and exit barriers. India remains on the **Priority Watch List**; both are outside CPTPP and RCEP.
- **Immigration and visas** — during the Trump years immigration became a political lightning rod, with an across-the-board decline in international student enrolment. Indians were **17.9%** of foreign students in 2017-18, second only to Chinese nationals, contributing **US\$7.5 billion**. India is the largest user of **H-1B** visas (67.4% of FY14 issuances) and among the largest users of **L1** (28.2%). Denials rose under "Buy American and Hire American", with lower issuance of H-4 visas. Visa appointment waits average about **472 days** for business or tourist categories.

Defence and technology hurdles

- Breakthrough on **end-use monitoring** (July 2009) opened Indian modernisation programmes to US firms; most Indian defence organisations were removed from the 'Entity List' in 2011; DTTI followed in 2012.
- Setbacks: India rejected Boeing and Lockheed-Martin fighters in favour of the French **Dassault Rafale**; US firms complained of slow, delay-prone Indian assessment; Ambassador **Timothy J. Roemer** complained about the absence of a 'two-way street'.
- **Samir Lalwani** → "Indian participants tended to view American concerns as cover for a narrow, self-interested effort to boost US arms sales without regard for optimal Indian defense-planning."
- Interoperability concerns arising from Russian platforms; American fear that plugging a Russian air defence system into an Indian network carrying US hardware would let Moscow identify features of US platforms.
- **Manoj Sinha** → the U.S. is under no obligation to supply technology under **GSOMIA**; at the end of the day the U.S. is the giver and India the receiver.

Other concerns

- **RS Yadav**, in *India's Foreign Policy: Post-Cold War Years*, flags the S-400 purchase and CAATSA, mutual WTO non-compliance charges, and Indian price restrictions on imported medical devices, alongside the IPR regime as a trade restriction.
- **Ashok Malik** identifies further roadblocks: protectionism in the U.S.; divergent readings of Iran and West Asia, where India treats Iran as the link to Central Asia and Afghanistan while the U.S. treats it as a destabilising influence; the recurring American temptation of a compact with China, seen in Clinton's post-Pokhran remarks, Obama's G2 talk and Trump's early overtures; and American obsession with Russia at a time when India's economic engagement with Moscow is limited.
- **M. K. Narayanan** → the China-Russia-Pakistan nexus and a hardline Iran under **Ebrahim Raisi** all worked to India's disadvantage. Concerns voiced by some US

15 India, the United States and China

- **David M. Malone** → a growing India, a declining Pakistan and an increasingly powerful China combined to motivate the entente. One feature of the new American South Asia policy was the conceptual decoupling of India and Pakistan; **China**, not Pakistan, gradually emerged as the third party in the relationship.

'when the first and second-ranked powers fight, the first often ardently courts the third.' — **Ashutosh Varshney, on 'a new triangle'**

- **Shared concerns** — China's rapid growth, heavy investment in **military capabilities**, and progress in **artificial intelligence** and **5G telecommunications**.
- **Condoleezza Rice**, well before the rebalance, argued the U.S. should pay closer attention to India as 'an element in China's calculation'. The Bush administration recalibrated South Asia policy, counting India among the 'major powers' with Russia and China, and grooming India to support the U.S. against a rising China, in censuring Iran, and as a partner in controlling the Indian Ocean.
- **Hillary Clinton** in Hanoi (July 2010) → "the United States has a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea."
- **Technology hedging** — both banned **Huawei**, a company with suspected links to the PLA, protecting domestic 5G capability; Western companies moved out of China toward other Asian countries including India; the U.S. tightened market access for China after realising that increased trade had strengthened Beijing's hand, an area where India had already banned Chinese companies and apps.
- **Partnership for Quality Infrastructure** in the Indo-Pacific. America's **national security strategy** under Biden reaffirmed China as its greatest threat.
- **Shivshankar Menon** → there has been a conviction that a true India-US strategic partnership serves India's national interests in the changed geopolitical situation; though neither states it explicitly, China's ascent has been a significant motivating factor.
- **Doctrinal overlap** — India's **Act East** and **SAGAR** against America's **ARIA** and **FOIP**; a declassified **2018 US Indo-Pacific strategy paper** called for India to become "a net security provider".
- **Harsh V. Pant** → India is "key to US efforts to preserve a stable balance in the Indo-Pacific", yet may keep the "principled distance" that safeguards strategic autonomy. Limits of 'natural' convergence: India's ties with Russia and Iran, the S-400 and CAATSA, trade and visa frictions, and Indian insistence on strategic autonomy.
- Residual worry in India that Washington does not share its concern over Chinese irredentism in the Himalayas and splits attention toward Russia.

UPSC 2016 · 15m Comment on India's growing relationship with USA in the background of constrained relations between India and China.

UPSC 2017 · 20m The natural behaviour of India and the United States is likely to serve each other's interests. Hence, a deliberate strategy of dovetailing their efforts will obviously benefit both. Elaborate.

16 India, Russia and the United States

- With Western sanctions on Russia, Sino-Russian relations have moved from **enmity** to **détente** and now **entente**.
- **Manoj Joshi** → India does not, and cannot, view deepening Sino-Russian relations as a zero-sum game. It engages both bilaterally and through the **RIC** grouping, the SCO and BRICS. Owing to the power imbalance, Russia frequently views India as a mechanism for balancing China.
- Sanctions after the annexation of Crimea (2014) and the invasion of Ukraine (2022) pushed Russia toward Chinese trade and investment. Russian investment in China is about **\$1 billion**; Chinese investment in Russia is about ten times greater. China has extended economic influence westward into the Central Asian states through the SCO and the Belt and Road Initiative.
- **Manoj Joshi** → Russia created the **Eurasian Economic Union** as a defensive perimeter against Chinese pressure in the former Soviet space, yet China's economic weight gives Beijing the upper hand in any EEU-China relationship.
- The civil nuclear deal made China uneasy; New Delhi has built substantial military ties with Washington while stopping short of alliance or full endorsement of American Indo-Pacific formulations.
- The Ukraine crisis places New Delhi in an awkward midpoint between Russia, a longstanding politico-military legacy partner, and the West, a growing partner in a multipolar context. It has revived debate about what non-alignment, repackaged as 'strategic autonomy', really means.
- **Dual pressure** — from Russia as traditional ally and from the U.S. as Quad partner. India's economic interests lie largely with the U.S. and Europe; sentiment cannot substitute for interest calculation.

17 India, the United States and Afghanistan

- **Devin T. Hagerty** → the withdrawal of US and NATO forces was the most important regional security issue preoccupying Indian strategic elites, with potential follow-on effects on the north-western subcontinent. India feared that, as after the 1989 Soviet withdrawal, the vacuum would produce the Taliban and terrorism — fears borne out in 2021.
- **M. K. Narayanan** → Biden's decision to fix a withdrawal date regardless of conditions inside Afghanistan facilitated the Taliban takeover. The "horses for courses" mantra in US foreign policy significantly affects India's strategic and security interests; the hasty withdrawal raised doubts about American credibility.
- **Brahma Chellaney** → the exit told American allies that they count on US support when they most need it at their peril; the withdrawal compromised India's security.
- The **Af-Pak** framing re-hyphenated the subcontinent at a time when India valued de-hyphenation, and rested on American dependence on Pakistan for Operation Enduring Freedom. India's response was to invest heavily in Afghan reconstruction and to seek land access to Central Asia through Iran and Afghanistan. India and Russia had earlier converged in supporting the **Northern Alliance**, which became the core of the US-backed resistance forces.
- **Consequences for India** — a strategic setback and a near-term triumph for the Taliban's chief backer, Pakistan; damage to India's heavy investments; and jeopardy to the long-standing goal of land access to Central Asia through a port and railway line via Iran and Afghanistan.

18 Views of Scholars — the United States

Scholar	Position
Tanvi Madan	While convergence is improving, differences over India's stance on Russia, economic policies and human rights continue to pose challenges to fully realising the partnership's potential.
Varun Sivaram	Divergent approaches to climate change commitments and responsibilities add another layer of friction.
Mukesh Aghi	The removal of GSP benefits and high visa rejection rates are significant concerns, impacting economic and people-to-people

	linkages.
Aparna Pande	"Shared democratic values and converging strategic interests will continue to bind India and US together as partners despite some friction points in the relationship."
Arvind Panagariya	"Realizing the full potential of ties will depend on India undertaking structural reforms and the US dispelling concerns over reliability as a long-term partner."
C. Raja Mohan <i>Modi's World</i>	No longer defined solely by American priorities but a mutual partnership built on shared concerns over regional security; the 2005 nuclear initiative laid the groundwork for deeper defence and trade cooperation.
Shivshankar Menon <i>Choices</i>	Tensions persist because of India's pursuit of strategic autonomy and its position on the US military presence in the region; India has used the relationship for its own national interests, particularly in defence and counter-terrorism.
S. Jaishankar <i>The India Way</i>	India is a strategic partner, not a subordinate ally. "The India-US relationship is not about finding common ground on everything, but about aligning strategic interests and advancing shared goals."
Shyam Saran <i>How India Sees the World</i>	India's soft power combined with American technological and military power can create a synergistic partnership. "The India-US partnership has been transformed from a transactional relationship to a more strategic and enduring alliance."
Rakesh Sood	The relationship has moved beyond the nuclear deal and defence to trade, climate change and cyber security.
Sujan R. Chinoy	What facilitated rapid defence development was the Major Defence Partner designation and American willingness to relax high-technology transfer rules through carve-outs such as STA Tier-I.
Yasheng Huang and Tarun Khanna (2003)	"India's homegrown entrepreneurs may give it a long-term advantage over a China hamstrung by inefficient banks and capital markets... it will also show the limits of the FDI-dependent approach China is pursuing."
Harsh V. Pant	India is "key to US efforts to preserve a stable balance in the Indo-Pacific."
Narendra Modi	For the India-US partnership "even the sky is not the limit."

UPSC 2024 · ISM "India and USA have become such strong strategic partners that they need not become formal allies." Comment.

19 Theoretical Perspectives — India-US

Lens	Application
Realism John Mearsheimer	Offensive realism emphasises power and security in shaping alliances. India and the U.S. aligned in response to the growing military threat from China; the Indo-Pacific strategy and defence cooperation illustrate security maximisation. "India and the United States' cooperation is fundamentally driven by the imperative of countering China's rise , a classical example of balance-of-power politics ."
Liberalism	International institutions, trade and cooperation matter — growth in trade and multilateral cooperation on climate change, technology transfer and global governance; participation in the UN and WTO with a focus on global public goods. "The increasing interdependence between India and the U.S. in trade, technology, and climate change represents the core of liberal internationalism ."
Constructivism	Ideas, identity and norms shape behaviour. India historically viewed the U.S. with suspicion over Pakistan; identities changed after the Cold War. "The India-US relationship is not just a function of strategic interests, but also a reflection of a shared democratic identity and mutual perceptions."

20 Policy Suggestions — India-US

- **Devin T. Hagerty** on the **post-2008 malaise**: the 2009 change of administration, Obama's early focus on China and 'Af-Pak', India's reluctance to compromise strategic autonomy, the policy exhaustion of the Manmohan Singh government, the long passage of the nuclear deal from agreement to execution, bureaucratic delays in arms sales, the rejection of American combat aircraft bids, and the Khobragade affair.
- **Hillary Clinton** → less need for dramatic breakthroughs, more need for steady, focused cooperation to address differences and advance shared interests — daily, weekly and monthly collaboration that is not glamorous but strategically important.
- **C. Raja Mohan** → never stop negotiating and keep making deals, small or big; be ready to compromise, since India's opening bid tends to remain its final position while Americans split the difference and move on; strengthen economic capability and end protectionism; diversify trade options, including by finalising the **BTIA** with the EU.
- Create a platform for aspirational bilateral economic conversation — revive the long-delayed **U.S.-India Commercial Dialogue** or the underperforming **U.S.-India CEO Forum**. Reinvigorate engagement between **Parliament and Congress**; regular contact builds personal bonds that survive changes of government.
- The U.S. should announce a formal waiver of potential **CAATSA** sanctions over the S-400 and accommodate India's core policy of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment; India in turn should be cautious about steps that tangibly deepen strategic ties with Russia. Address the **visa appointment backlog**.
- **Teresita Schaffer** and **Howard Schaffer** (*India at a Global High Table*) → current strategic realities create strong imperatives for closer relations, yet India conducts foreign policy in a manner that is **preachy and prickly** — it lacks strategic culture, is known for exceptionalism, and does not always understand its own benefits. There is therefore a limit to which the U.S. can rely on India.

The creative tension at the heart of it

India needs US technology, markets and support to transform itself; the U.S. finds a stronger, more active India useful. India remains an awkward partner because its West Asian interests differ and its stage of development generates economic demands that strain American preferences. For India to function as a "**swing state**" in the Indo-Pacific, friction had to be minimised and the regional arms balance adjusted — and India's purchases of Russian oil mitigated the economic impact of the Ukraine war, while the defiant S-400 deal may have raised India's influence in the global arms market, where it is the largest buyer.

21 Nature of the Relationship

- **David M. Malone** → the Indo-Russian relationship does not extend as far back as those with the colonial powers. The Himalayas and the Hindu Kush insulated India from meaningful early contact. Much of the relevant history is the 'Great Game' of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Russia sought to challenge Britain's supremacy in South Asia, parts of Central Asia and Iran. The Caucasus and Afghanistan, both central to the Great Game, formed a powerful buffer, leaving India well beyond the Soviet sphere. During the Cold War, conflict with China and the unreliability of the United States drew India into a comprehensive relationship with Moscow, culminating in the **1971 treaty of friendship** — yet Delhi worked hard to stay independent and was never included entirely in the Soviet camp.
- **Rajiv Sikri** → Russia has been a steadfast friend and a **very special and privileged partner** for decades — assistance in industrial development, energy, education, space, atomic energy and defence equipment; affordable Soviet credit and rupee trade; political support at decisive moments over Kashmir, Goa, Sikkim and Bangladesh. India continues to procure aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines and weapon systems unavailable elsewhere.
- **Rajan Menon** → American containment extended to Asia after the Korean War, creating overlapping interests between Moscow and New Delhi. Moscow sought a gap in Washington's *cordon sanitaire*, which required ties with non-aligned countries; India, as leader of the non-aligned movement, became a potential partner and a progressive force.
- **Raj Kumar Sharma** → since 1947 India had a large friendly country to its north that dominated the Eurasian landmass and helped it deal with China. That prospect is now under scrutiny, as Russia and China assert a 'no-limit partnership'. During the Cold War, Russia acted as a **balancer** in India-China ties while an internationally beleaguered China accommodated India's concerns. Today China is not hampered by Russian power, and Beijing may not be willing to address New Delhi's concerns — which is why PM Modi has given up past inhibitions toward the United States.
- **Nivedita Kapoor** and **Nandan Unnikrishnan** → ties seem to be stagnating as both countries try to define their roles in a changing world. Despite the 2010 'special and privileged strategic partnership', drift was evident — India-Russia trade was merely **US\$20 billion in 2015** while Russia-China trade had reached **US\$107 billion in 2018**.
- **Srinath Raghavan**, on the regret and nostalgia generated by the 2016 Russia-Pakistan exercises → fellow Indians should clear the cobwebs from their minds. The relationship, undeniably significant, was not without complexities; Moscow's interactions with New Delhi were consistently influenced by its strategic interests. There is no necessity to romanticise the relationship, and **nostalgia alone is not a sustainable basis for policy**.

"Every child in India knows that Russia is our best friend." — **Narendra Modi, on a relationship resting on equality, trust and mutual benefit**

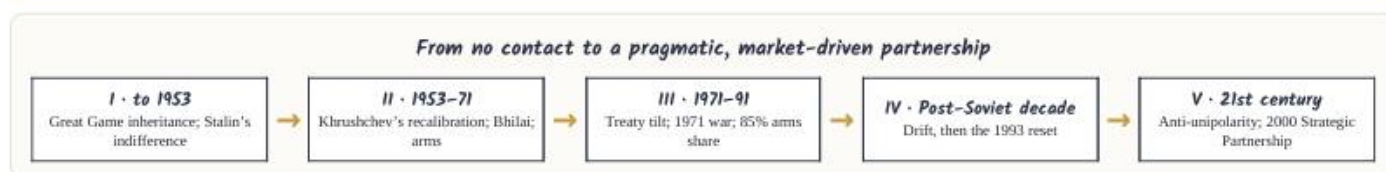
Distinctive features

- Stable without major fluctuations despite changes of government or socio-political system in either country.
- No bilateral disputes, no threat perceptions, positive popular perception on both sides.
- Similar security concerns on terrorism; similar positions on Afghanistan and Syria.
- Russian support for a permanent UNSC seat and NSG membership.

22 India's Interests in Russia

Domain	Content
Defence and security	The USSR and later Russia as the principal source of weaponry and technology transfer over an extended period.
Strategic	Consistent support for a permanent UNSC seat and NSG membership; unequivocal support on Kashmir.
Multipolar order	Both call for a multipolar order centred on the UN and the rule of law; both have high stakes in avoiding US-China bipolarity. At the Sochi Summit both agreed that the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership is an important factor for global peace and stability.
Energy security	Diversification of sources; ONGC has invested nearly \$3 billion in the Sakhalin fields, Rosneft has invested in India, and an Indian consortium has a presence in the Siberian Arctic.
Science and technology	Space, nuclear science, defence technology.
Regional and multilateral	Terrorism, climate change, regional peace and security, BRICS, SCO, multilateralism.

23 The Five Phases — Vidya Nadkarni's Frame



Phase I (up to 1953) — from pre-independence to Stalin

- **Vidya Nadkarni** → until independence, ties between British India and Imperial Russia were shaped by two British preoccupations — securing the Indian colony from southward Russian expansion, and later the rise of Germany, which triggered a British entente with France and Russia.
- Beginnings trace to the early nineteenth century, when the Tsar expanded into Central Asia; the British fought the Afghan wars to create a buffer, producing the **Great Game**. The **Anglo-Russian Convention (1907)** ended it; the **Bolshevik Revolution (1917)** then superimposed **ideological antipathies** on earlier geopolitical competition.
- **Vidya Nadkarni** → early Soviet leaders were not keen on supporting the Indian national movement, judging it bourgeois-led and lacking revolutionary potential; Russia was also preoccupied with internal concerns and Western opposition to Bolshevik rule.

- After independence, Nehru's idealism and disdain for realpolitik coloured policy until the early 1960s — faith in a **new Asian path**, replacing European-style power politics with **peaceful coexistence**, and the search for the **moral high ground**. Even in the tight bipolarity of the 1940s, non-alignment isolated India from the high tables of decision-making: neither Stalin nor Truman would accept it. **Vidya Nadkarni** — the pursuit of autonomy meant India had **no powerful international sponsors** to protect its interests.

Phase II (1953–1971) — beginning of engagement

- Non-alignment and the mixed economy under centralised planning closed doors to full Western engagement. The West refused assistance for a public sector **steel plant at Bhilai**, pushing India toward the aid agreement of 1955.
- Vidya Nadkarni** → unlike Stalin, who viewed India's leaders as capitalist lackeys, **Khrushchev** saw the value of enlisting India as an anti-imperialist ally. This **recalibration of doctrine and policy** toward the Third World opened the door to Soviet economic and military assistance. While elite preference for non-alignment would have predicted divergence, a **key domestic variable** — India's **mixed economy**, closer to the Soviet model — facilitated improved ties. The India-Soviet nexus is, in effect, a legacy of Nehru's early policy choices.
- The USSR offered diplomatic backing on Kashmir and the Sino-Indian boundary. During the **1962 war** however, Moscow reversed its earlier support, parroted the Chinese view that India's border position was a legacy of British imperialism, and counselled a negotiated ceasefire on Chinese terms. Military help came only after the war, but began an arms relationship that replaced Britain as India's primary supplier and helped repel Pakistan in 1965.
- Harsh V. Pant** → the Soviet Union feared that American and British military aid during the 1962 war might tilt New Delhi toward the West, so a renewed push was given after 1962.
- The **Sino-Soviet conflict**, brewing since the late 1950s, broke openly in 1963, drawing India and the USSR closer. The estrangement eventually paved the way for **Sino-American rapprochement** through Kissinger's 1971 trip. Since Pakistan was the indispensable intermediary, India feared a hostile **Washington-Beijing-Islamabad axis**, and Moscow saw the reconciliation as a threat to Soviet interests.

Phase III (1971–1991) — strategic engagement

- Vidya Nadkarni** → these systemic developments led to the twenty-year **Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship** (August 1971), cementing a pronounced tilt. Generous Soviet military aid allowed India to defeat Pakistan in the **1971 war**, dismember the Pakistani state through the creation of Bangladesh, and establish India as the pre-eminent power in South Asia.
- The **Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979)** shook New Delhi as an unwarranted incursion into India's sphere of influence, though India stayed publicly uncritical. By the 1980s, Soviet arms constituted **85 per cent** of India's imports.
- In the mid-1980s, **Rajiv Gandhi** and **Mikhail Gorbachev** both began economic liberalisation, Gorbachev under the banner of **perestroika**. Both leaders were committed to the relationship, yet the cumulative effect of domestic reform in both countries attenuated ties by the end of the decade.

Phase IV — the post-Soviet decade

- Gorbachev's 'new thinking' (1987)** produced a reappraisal of unqualified support for India — even-handedness between India and Pakistan, concern expressed on Kashmir, and a Soviet vote for a Pakistani-sponsored UN resolution on a nuclear-free zone. In 1991 the twentieth anniversary of the Indo-Soviet treaty was not officially acknowledged in either capital.
- Smita Purushottam** → with the end of the Soviet Union and further decline of the Russian economy, ties underwent a reset. Russia focused on nurturing relations with the West and neglected its old relationship with India. The West could not move beyond bipolar mindsets and attributed the double collapse of the USSR to its 'containment' policies. Western structural adjustment and liberalisation contributed to Russia's further decline and relegated it from a geopolitical pole to a mid-level power.
- Vidya Nadkarni** → by early 1993 Russia was disenchanted with the United States and Europe and began to rekindle ties with India. A key reason was the American decision to expand NATO and undertake 'out-of-area' operations in the Balkans, which decisively ended Moscow's '**romance with the West**'. During Yeltsin's 1993 visit both signed the twenty-year Treaty of Indo-Russian Friendship and Cooperation.
- Irritants** — curtailment of **space cooperation** owing to American fears about India's ballistic missile programme, leading to cancellation of cryogenic engine supply, though Moscow honoured existing contracts for seven engines; and application of the full range of safeguards to future **nuclear supply** agreements.
- The **Taliban's seizure of power in 1996** worried both, and India and Russia began supporting the opposition **Northern Alliance**. **Vidya Nadkarni** — convergence in Afghanistan, a shared preference for a polycentric world, and a common disinclination toward violating state sovereignty through humanitarian intervention warmed ties by the late 1990s. Putin steered Russian foreign policy in a pragmatic direction, producing the **strategic partnership agreement of 2000**.

Phase V — the twenty-first century

- Vidya Nadkarni** → the relationship that went haywire in the 1990s was reconstituted on a new footing, with antipathy toward the emerging **unipolar world** and **American unilateralism** as the prime movers. India's preference for a **multipolar order** made convergence possible at the macro level.
- Rajan Menon** and **Eugene Rumer** → the most important driver of realignment was political and economic dynamics in India. Liberalisation, coinciding with global trends, expanded India's economic and political relations with the United States; Clinton's 2000 visit was a milestone.
- At the policy level, India's growing appetite for weapons and Russia's interest in rescuing its cash-strapped defence industry provided a synergy both were eager to exploit. India's growing strength propelled it toward wider strategic engagement with the United States and Japan.
- Smita Purushottam** → Russia's tight embrace of China in the early decades of this century was driven by system-level factors — opposition to unilateralism, NATO expansion, and ballistic missile defences on its doorstep. Russian technological expertise and Chinese finance made them suitable partners. After Crimea and Ukraine the embrace tightened further, against India's interest in Russia as a strong independent pole.

24 Relations in the Modi Years

- Signs of stagnation were already evident in **2014**, when the U.S. displaced Russia as top arms supplier. India's designation as a **Major Defence Partner** (2016) caused consternation in Moscow; India began the 2+2 dialogue (2018) and signed LEMOA (2016) and COMCASA (2018).
- In reaction, Russia overturned decades-old policy and supplied China with the **Sukhoi 35** and **S-400**, conducted **military exercises with Pakistan** (2016), and sold **Mi-35 attack helicopters** to Pakistan (2016).
- The **Sochi informal summit (2018)** and the annual summit that followed produced decisions on S-400 supply, the start of FTA negotiations between the Eurasian Economic Union and India, a single-window service in Russia for Indian companies, **Russia Plus** in India to facilitate Russian investment, the India-Russia Business Summit, the Far East Agency in Mumbai, '**India-Russia Economic Cooperation: The Way Forward**', and LNG supply from Gazprom.
- Rajan Menon** and **Eugene Rumer** → Russia is adjusting its long-standing India-centred South Asia policy in response to New Delhi's closer security ties with Washington, without abandoning India, whose global strategic heft exceeds that of Pakistan.

- **Institutional structure** — the **India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission** rests on two pillars: **IRIGC-TEC**, co-chaired by India's External Affairs Minister and a Russian Deputy Prime Minister, and **IRIGC-MTC**, co-chaired by both Defence Ministers. The **Annual Summit** is the highest institutionalised dialogue mechanism.

25 The 23rd Annual Summit — Putin in New Delhi, December 2025

President Putin's state visit of **4–5 December 2025** was his first to India since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and marked the **25th anniversary** of the October 2000 Declaration on Strategic Partnership. It met under heavy external pressure — a 50 per cent US tariff wall, half of it tied to Russian crude, and US sanctions on Russia's largest oil companies. **16 intergovernmental agreements and 15 MoUs** were signed; the "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" was reaffirmed.

Theme	Outcome
Trade	FY2024–25 trade about USD 68.7 billion ; revised target USD 100 billion by 2030 . Heavily favours Russia — Indian exports only about USD 4.8 billion . Programme 2030 adopted to diversify beyond oil. Putin said almost 96 per cent of bilateral trade is settled in national currencies.
Energy	Russian oil rose from under 1 per cent of India's crude imports to a peak near 36 per cent (FY2024–25); Rosneft and Lukoil together supply about 60 per cent of it. Putin pledged "uninterrupted" supply; imports fell to a 38-month low by December 2025.
US and EU pressure	The 25 + 25 = 50 per cent tariff, the second tranche tied to Russian oil. The US sanctioned Rosneft and Lukoil (announced 22 October, effective 21 November 2025). The EU's 19th sanctions package (October 2025) named several Indian entities.
Defence	SIPRI : Russia's share of India's arms imports fell from 70% (2011–15) to 51% (2016–20) to 40% (2021–25); India remained the world's second-largest arms importer at 8.2 per cent of the global total. No major new arms deal was signed; the Su-57 remained only a proposal. Of the 2018 S-400 deal (about USD 5.4 billion), three systems were delivered and two delayed to 2026.
Other outcomes	Migration and Mobility Agreement for skilled Indian workers, with a parallel anti-irregular-migration pact; a UralChem MoU with RCF, NFL and Indian Potash for a urea joint venture in Russia; nuclear talks on remaining Kudankulam units, a second site and VVER reactors against a target of 100 GW by 2047 ; connectivity through the INSTC , the Chennai–Vladivostok Corridor and the Northern Sea Route .
Multilateral	Russia backed India's UNSC seat and its 2026 BRICS chairship . After the India–US trade framework of 2 February 2026, Trump claimed India would stop buying Russian oil; India did not confirm that claim . The India–EAEU free trade agreement remained under negotiation, unsigned.

Resilience or stagnation — the central debate

- **Alexei Zakharov** → the relationship is **paradoxical**: sustainable through old ties, yet **stagnant** because no new areas have been defined; the record trade is imbalanced and rests almost wholly on oil, and the ties lack novel drivers for the long haul.
- **Pravesh Kumar Gupta** → the same event reads as reassurance — the visit reaffirmed a time-tested partnership built on political trust. The gap is one of emphasis: Zakharov weighs the missing deals, the VIF view weighs durability under pressure.
- **Chietigj Bajpae** → autonomy works only when the major powers get along; as US–Russia ties soured, India's links with Moscow drew fresh scrutiny. His long-run reading is a **managed decline** — short-term handling of US pressure, medium-term defence diversification, long-term deepening of Western ties.
- **C. Raja Mohan** → India asserted autonomy without harming its Western ties; the visit signalled independence to Washington while reassuring a domestic audience. **S. Jaishankar** calls India's approach "**freedom of choice**".
- **Vrinda Sahai** → discounted Russian crude rose from about 2.5 per cent of India's imports before 2022 to roughly 36 per cent by FY2024–25; sanctions and tariffs pushed refiners toward Saudi, Iraqi and American crude. Dropping Russian oil entirely is not practical, so India follows an **economy-first** course — and because trade is so oil-dependent, any fall in crude purchases directly caps the headline trade figure.
- **Restructuring, not reduction** → the S-400 is already embedded in India's air-defence network and a follow-on order worth about **USD 6.1 billion** was later cleared. **Harsh V. Pant** and Zakharov stress that no large new contract was signed and that war and sanctions limit fresh Russian supplies. The result is layered: legacy Russian systems retained, advanced platforms bought from the West, domestic production slowly expanded.
- **The China shadow** → Russia has grown more neutral on the India–Pakistan rivalry and was ambivalent after the **Pahalgam** attack. **Anil Wadhwa** argues Russia's ties with China are tactical and with Pakistan transactional, meant to keep Beijing balanced. Delhi fears that Chinese sway over Moscow could slow spares and technology during a crisis, and that Chinese parts may enter Russian-origin equipment — which is why India stays non-committal on reviving the **RIC** troika.
- **Rahul Pandey** and the VIF hold that trust, high-end technology and shared multipolarity keep the partnership strong. Whether "decline" or "durability" fits better depends on the weight given to oil, China, and the deals that did not happen.

"Russia is ready for uninterrupted shipments of fuel to India." — **Vladimir Putin**, New Delhi, 5 December 2025

"India is not neutral, it stands on the side of peace." — **Narendra Modi**, 5 December 2025

"If the US has the right to buy our fuel, why shouldn't India have the same privilege?" — **Vladimir Putin**

"The long-term direction of travel is towards a 'managed decline' in relations." — **Chietigj Bajpae**, 2 December 2025

"Neither side has any intention to dilute this relationship, and is ready to withstand any external pressure." — **Harsh V. Pant**, 5 December 2025

26 Relations through Levels of Analysis

Vidya Nadkarni on the interplay of individual, state and system levels:

Level	Working
Individual	The relationship bore a strong imprint of decision-making choices in New Delhi. The Nehruvian trinity of socialism, secularism and non-alignment, coloured by idealism, moved India gradually into the Soviet orbit even though Nehru hoped for equidistance. Under Indira Gandhi , realism became a guiding principle; she treated close friendship with the Soviet Union as essential and secured diplomatic, economic and military assistance.
Systemic	The bipolar international structure imposed restrictions that India's early leaders did not anticipate. Structural elements such as the US–Soviet rivalry and the emergence of China as a common adversary gave non-alignment a Soviet colouring and provided the impetus for classic

balancing.

Domestic

Dual impact. Strong pro-Soviet constituencies emerged in the defence and foreign policy communities and later in business, as exporters benefiting from the rupee-rouble arrangement developed a vested interest — producing an all-party consensus on the value of ties with Russia. New constituencies are emerging on the other side: private industry bidding for indigenous weapons programmes, and expanding trade and military links with the United States. They are nascent and lacking influence, but foreshadow a time when domestic factors may weigh more heavily.

Nadkarni's forecast → given the present configuration of elite proclivities, pro-Russia domestic constituencies and the strong defence partnership, the relationship is unlikely to be derailed for at least the next decade or two.

27 Areas of Cooperation

Economic

- State enterprises have long facilitated interaction in each other's territory, building comfort among officials since the Cold War.
- Bilateral trade around **\$8.1 billion**, with Russia only **1%** of India's total trade and India a mere **1.2%** of Russia's; targets of **\$30 billion** in trade and **\$50 billion** in investment by 2025. Trade declined between 2013 and 2016 and recovered from 2017.
- India's total investment in Russia stands at **\$13 billion**; renewed emphasis on hydrocarbons between 2015 and 2017. In later reckoning, trade reached **\$25 billion in 2022** and **US\$ 68.7 billion in FY 2024-25** — about five times the pre-pandemic level — driven chiefly by discounted oil.
- Institutional steps — the **CEO's Forum**, liberalised business travel, Russian interest in dedicated freight corridors, industrial clusters, smart cities and engineering services; Indian interest in Russian coal, fertilizers, hydrocarbons, minerals and rare earths. A special notified zone at the **Bharat Diamond Bourse** was planned.

Political and international

- Convergence on a **multipolar order**, strengthening the UN system, terrorism, and peaceful use of outer space.
- Joint projects in third countries — the **Rooppur nuclear plant** in Bangladesh on a trilateral basis with Rosatom and Bangladesh's Ministry of Science and Technology.
- The **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** with Iran links the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea to Russia; with **Sagarmala** and the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway it can connect Europe and Russia to ASEAN and make India a transit hub.

Energy and nuclear

- India will account for almost **30 per cent** of global energy demand growth and **11 per cent** of global energy use by 2040, making diversification urgent; Russia is a natural candidate.
- ONGC Videsh** has been in Russia since 2001 with a **20 per cent** stake in **Sakhalin-I** and a joint venture in **Sakhalin-III** with Rosneft. East Siberian oil via the Kozmino Bay route is a prospective avenue. The sale of a **98%** stake in Essar Oil to a Rosneft-led consortium was a significant step in deleveraging Indian corporate balance sheets.
- Nuclear** cooperation dates to the 1960s — the 1961 RAPS research and development agreements, the 1976 heavy water contract, nuclear fuel for Tarapur in 1982 and 1988, and reactors and light water for **Kudankulam** after Pokhran-II.
- Strategic Vision** for peaceful uses of atomic energy signed by the Department of Atomic Energy and **Rosatom** (December 2014); Russia proposed involving India in building Russian-designed plants in third countries, joint extraction of natural uranium, fuel production and waste elimination, and offered to build over 20 units, up from twelve. Units 1 and 2 of Kudankulam are operational, with 3 and 4 under construction. Eight years after India legitimised foreign collaboration in civil nuclear energy, Russia remained the **only** foreign nation involved in nuclear power production in India.

Defence and security

- Defence relations began after the Sino-Indian war of 1962 and have moved from a **buyer-seller** framework to **joint research, development and production**.
- More than **70%** of Indian defence equipment is of Russian origin; Cold War purchases through rupee-rouble arrangements saved foreign exchange; technology transfers supported India's domestic industry from the 1980s.
- Flagship projects** — **BrahMos**, **Sukhoi Su-30MKI**, **T-90** tanks, the fifth-generation fighter programme, modernisation of MiG-29s and Kamov-31 helicopters, the Multi Transport Aircraft, Talwar-class frigates under Project 11356, MiG-29K shipborne aircraft, and the aircraft carrier inducted as **INS Vikramaditya** (2013).
- S-400** supply; frigates under Project 1135.6; a joint venture for **Ka-226T** helicopters; **Indo-Russian Rifles Pvt. Ltd.** at Korwa producing **AK-203** rifles under 'Make in India', with 48,000 units delivered by mid-2025.
- Exercises** — the tri-services **INDRA** and the naval **Indra Navy**; frequent exchanges between defence ministers, service chiefs and defence secretaries.

Counter-terrorism, space, science, culture

- Counter-terrorism** — Moscow, in light of its wars in Chechnya, has been sympathetic to India's position; the 1994 **Declaration on the Protection of the Interests of Pluralistic States**; Yeltsin's 1997 assurance; Putin's 2000 commitments and joint support for the Northern Alliance; and the **Moscow Declaration on International Terrorism** (2001).
- Space** — cooperation spans about four decades: satellite launches, **GLONASS**, remote sensing and societal applications. **Aryabhata** launched in 1975 with Soviet help, beginning India's space programme; **Bhaskara-I** launched in 1979 aboard a C-1 Intercosmos vehicle. A 2007 framework agreement; a 2015 MoU on expanded cooperation; an ISRO-ROSCOSMOS MoU on human spaceflight at the 19th Bilateral Summit, with cooperation on **Gaganyaan**, space systems, rocket engines, propellants, spacecraft and launch vehicles.
- Science and technology** — three institutional mechanisms: the Working Group on Science and Technology under IRIGC-TEC, the **Integrated Long-Term Programme**, and the Basic Science Cooperation Programme, with inter-academy exchanges. Initiatives include the India-Russia Bridge to Innovation, telemedicine, the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, GIAN, and the Russia India Network of universities; cooperation under the **Arctic Council** framework with the Russian Scientific Centre at Spitsbergen, Svalbard.
- Cultural** — the **Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre** works with leading Russian institutions; about 20 Russian institutions teach Hindi to around 1500 students; Tamil, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Urdu, Sanskrit and Pali are also taught. JNCC conducts yoga, dance, music and Hindi classes for about 500 students a month; the six-month **"Festival of India in Russia"** (2018-19) across 22 cities featured 34 performances by 10 groups; regular exchanges since 2015 including the Festival of Russian Culture and **"Namaste Russia"**.

UPSC 2021 · 20m

'Relations between India and Russia are rooted in history, mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation.' Discuss.

28 Areas of Concern and Contestation

Defence procurement — the Gorshkov case

- A 2004 contract for **\$1.5 billion** with delivery expected in August 2008; infrastructure problems and underfunding of Russian shipbuilding produced delays and cost overruns; a renegotiated contract in March 2010 reset the cost to **\$2.34 billion**; induction as **INS Vikramaditya** followed only in November 2013.
- Recurring concerns over quality, delivery delays and upgrades; problems with spare parts and maintenance, partly because Indian negotiators failed to build **life-cycle perspectives** into agreements; equipment becoming obsolete after a few years, with production plants shut and spares unavailable. Cost and time overruns pushed India to diversify toward Israel, France and the United States.

Weak economic base

- Commercial ties are not diverse: defence and nuclear energy dominate. Diversification is needed into films, education, research and development, and textiles.
- **Barriers** — geographical distance and absence of direct connectivity, which do not constrain India-Europe or India-China trade; lack of awareness of commercial opportunities; sudden changes in legal and tax regimes, as faced by **Sistema** in India and **ONGC** in Russia; the near-absence of Indian IT firms in Russia and Russian energy firms in India; customs barriers.
- **Comparative scale** — bilateral trade of only **\$11 billion**, with military equipment the most significant element; in 2020 Russian non-weapons exports to India were under **\$6 billion** and Indian exports to Russia under **\$3 billion**, against Russia-China trade of just over **\$100 billion** and US-India trade of **\$120 billion**. Total Russian investment in India from 2000 to 2021 was **\$1.26 billion**, against US FDI estimated at **\$42 billion** — making the \$50 billion target for 2025 unattainable.

Divergent foreign policy priorities

- **Nivedita Kapoor** and **Nandan Unnikrishnan** → the most prominent divergence is Russian displeasure at the ideation of the “**Indo-Pacific**”, which Russia calls an “**artificially imposed construct**” promoted by the U.S., Australia and Japan to contain China — despite PM Modi’s Shangri-La formulation of an Indo-Pacific based on “inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN centrality and unity”. Divergence also persists over Afghanistan.
- Foreign Minister **Sergey Lavrov** has called the QUAD an “**Asian NATO**”. Russian outreach to Pakistan, Iran, North Korea and the Taliban-led Afghanistan complicates India’s security calculus.
- **Alexei Zakharov** → diverging China- and US-related interests are fraying strategic trust. **Srinath Raghavan** → post-Cold War ties became largely **transactional**, centred on arms sales. **Shyam Saran** → they now lack substantive drivers beyond nostalgia.

The India-Russia-US triangle

- Balancing has become harder since the early 2000s. Russia is a time-tested ally; the U.S. has become indispensable for India’s Indo-Pacific interests. Russia’s relative decline and its slide into junior partnership with China complicate India’s vision of the future order.
- The **S-400** deal drew CAATSA warnings and strained ties for a period; India proceeded as a mark of strategic autonomy. Full SCO membership in 2017 generated further suspicion in US circles.
- Russia’s share of India’s arms imports fell from **60 per cent** before the Ukraine war to **45 per cent**. Russia and China jointly rejected a consensus statement on Ukraine during India’s **G20 presidency** — the Sino-Russian “no-limits” partnership making Moscow junior to India’s principal rival.

UPSC 2017 · 15m The recent differences between India and Russia are the result of misconceptions than facts. Elucidate.

UPSC 2023 · 20m Arms trade, economic ties and congruent geo-political interests are no longer the three pillars of India - Russia relationship in the emerging strategic context. Comment.

29 Russia, China and India

- In the early twenty-first century Russia concluded that the West would never let it reclaim superpower status and that Western liberal policies would not work for it, and turned east — to India and especially China.
- **Smita Purushottam** → Russia massively increased military exports to China, supplying **US\$22 billion** worth of armaments between 2000 and 2010; China extended a **US\$25 billion** loan to build a spur from the EPSO II pipeline originally destined exclusively for the Pacific coast.
- **Vidya Nadkarni** → a friendly Russia was essential for China in the first decade of the century as Beijing sought control over Central Asian energy resources, transportation networks including parts of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, and pipelines — reducing dependence on sea-routed supplies and petro-dollars as part of a strategy to edge the dollar out as the dominant reserve currency and establish primacy in the eastern hemisphere.
- Since the second decade, China has overtaken Russia in economic heft and diplomatic reach. In Central Asia, South Asia and Africa, Russia has become the **junior partner**, more so after the SCO, AIIB and the Belt and Road Initiative. Moscow turned to China after estrangement from the West over Ukraine; China is a major consumer of Russian energy; Russia has sought military assistance from China as part of the “**no-limits**” partnership declared by Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin.
- A Sino-Russian bloc presents a strategic dilemma for India, especially with Moscow as the subordinate partner. **India wants Russia to be a leading pole in a multipolar order, not a junior partner to China.**
- **Countervailing logic** → defence ties are unlikely to change much. Russia will not reduce dependence on India, which is its largest testing ground; as China supplies arms to developing nations and undercuts Russian influence, Russia will need India as a springboard to other developing markets despite India’s tilt to the United States.

30 Russia and Pakistan

- The 2016 exercise triggered public regret in India that a longstanding “best friend” was cosying up to the worst neighbour.
- **Srinath Raghavan** → the relationship, while of immense importance to India, was far from a fairy tale; Moscow’s approach was consistently shaped by strategic considerations. The 2016 exercise was not the first instance — during the 1962 war Moscow shared intelligence on India with Beijing.
- **Origins of Russian realism** — the rift with Beijing from 1959, refusal to support China in its territorial disputes with India, and the offer of MiG-21s; then, during 1962, telling the Chinese there was “no place for neutrality” while putting MiG supply on hold and sharing intelligence with Beijing. It was India’s turn toward the United States, with Nehru seeking support from Kennedy, that led Khrushchev to revert to his earlier stance.
- Moscow sought bridges with Pakistan: **Lal Bahadur Shastri** was shocked in May 1965 by Russia’s unwillingness to condemn the Pakistani incursion into the **Rann of Kutch**; at **Tashkent** the Russians leaned on India to revert to the status quo ante. Later the Soviets sought balance in South Asia, believing that India-Pakistan conflict would play to China’s advantage.
- **Post-2014** — the lifting of a self-imposed arms embargo enabling the **Mi-35** sale; **Pavel Felgenhauer** called it an “important, key change in Russian policy in the

region,” while Russian diplomats described the negotiations as part of ongoing cooperation with Pakistan in defence and counterterrorism.

- **Limits** — there is limited enthusiasm in Moscow for a genuine, long-term, broad-based relationship with Pakistan, since strong ties with Europe, Central Asia, China, India and Iran already meet Russia’s needs.

31 India and the Ukraine Conflict

India’s position

- India abstained from voting on the UN General Assembly resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea and opposed Western sanctions; Indian officials declared that Russia had “legitimate interests” in Ukraine. India abstained on **UNSC Resolution 2623** and on successive votes in the General Assembly and Human Rights Council.
- India’s declared positions urged “respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states,” called “for the immediate cessation of violence and hostilities,” regretted “that the path of diplomacy was given up,” urged states to “return to it,” and reiterated that “dialogue is the only answer to settling differences and disputes, however daunting that may appear at this moment.”
- Most Indian strategic elites would admit that diplomatic neutrality signifies what one Indian scholar has called “a subtle pro-Moscow position.” The tightrope walk has been described as “**strategic ambivalence**” — but it reflects a deliberate, if constrained, choice.

Why India took this position

- **Sumit Ganguly** → India’s decision to avoid a clear-cut position stems in considerable part from dependence on Russia across diplomatic, military and energy questions.
- **Primary driver** — **China and Pakistan**. New Delhi believes that preserving friendship with Moscow helps prevent deepening Russian ties with China and limits Russian temptations to build new ties with Pakistan.
- **Historical reinforcement** — Russia as a sturdy friend since 1955, when **Nikita Khrushchev** publicly declared support for Indian claims over Jammu and Kashmir while the West was ambivalent or opposed; **six Soviet vetoes** exercised on India’s behalf. India’s posture is consistent with its earlier forbearance over Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979).
- **Energy** — India is the world’s third-largest oil consumer with limited domestic reserves and high price sensitivity; discounted Russian crude addressed supply disruption and inflation. **Arms** — the arsenal is largely Soviet and Russian, ageing equipment requires modernisation, and hardware upgrades are slow.
- Historical ties and anti-colonial sentiment; Indian media at times portrays the United States as more responsible than Russia for destabilising Ukraine.

Assessments

“As Russia’s war in Ukraine unfolds, India’s national interests have so far dictated a position of formal neutrality.” — **Ashley J. Tellis**

- **C. Raja Mohan** → “India that long relied on Russia to provide a regional balance of power will have to rework its great power sums. This should not be too hard, given India’s improving relations with the US and Europe and its focus on diversifying its defence partnerships.” For Indian diplomacy, 2023 was as much about multilateral diplomacy as about adapting to a potentially historic shift in great power relations, with the endgame of the war the decisive variable.
- **Shyam Saran** → the crisis introduced a new element of discomfort as India seeks to maintain its traditional relationship with Russia without spoiling its growing partnership with the United States, and is uncomfortable with the tightening Russia-China embrace.
- **Stanly Johny** → for the West, an authoritarian Russia’s war on a “democratic” Ukraine is an affront to global democracy. Yet India, South Africa, Israel and Turkey all declined to join, partly because sanctions were unilateral and without UN approval; for them the war is a European problem rooted in the post-Cold War security architecture. The morality case falls flat given the invasion of Iraq (2003), the conversion of a UNSC no-fly zone in Libya into a full-scale intervention (2011), the illegal placement of US troops in Syria, and American recognition of Israel’s annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. **There cannot be two sets of international morality — one for powerful countries and another for developing ones.**
- **Derek Grossman** → “The bottom line is that India, as a great power, is unlikely to uphold the order in quite the same way as the West—if it does so at all. Much of this will depend on future international circumstances and the state of Indian domestic politics.”
- **John Joseph Wilkins** → “India has always had a tradition of balancing world powers, but this year we’ve seen the country’s foreign policy establishment possibly embrace an upgraded form of non-alignment. This has the potential to increase New Delhi’s global influence going forward.”
- **Vaasu Sharma** → “For India, the best-case scenario in the prevailing situation would be the initiation of the reconciliation process between Russia and the West as it is hoped that Russia’s peace with the West will not drive the former towards the Chinese camp...” **Mishra** → “If this initiative for peace is really pushed and Ukraine agrees to come to the negotiation table, the West could ask India to convince Russia to do the same due to India’s G20 role and special relationship with Moscow.”

Impact on India

- **Samar Shrivastava** → higher import bills for energy and fertilizers, adding to global inflation and prompting the RBI to raise rates in tandem with global rates; the net result was higher inflation and lower growth.
- **Dharmashakti Joshi** → “The conflict worsened the growth-inflation mix for India. It pushed up crude prices and caused supply side bottlenecks, thereby putting significant upward pressure on inflation. It also raised the fertiliser bill substantially and threatened to derail the budgetary math.” The fertiliser subsidy bill was expected to rise from **₹1.1 lakh crore** in the Budget to **₹2.3-2.4 lakh crore**. Consumer price inflation, averaging 4.5-5.5 per cent in the preceding fiscal year, was expected to end FY23 at **6.7 per cent**.
- **Offsetting gain** — the West began to view India as a partner against China; multinationals building a **China+1** strategy, most pronounced in pharma and specialty chemicals, with semiconductors and low-end manufacturing likely to follow.
- **India’s diversification agenda** — the National Hydrogen Mission and green hydrogen exports as a route to reducing hydrocarbon dependence; comprehensive FTAs sought with the EU, the United Kingdom and Canada, after deals with Australia and the UAE.

32 Views of Scholars, Theory & Policy — India–Russia

Scholar	Position
Rajiv Sikri	Russia has been a steadfast, very special and privileged partner across industrial development, energy, education, space, atomic energy and defence.
Vidya Nadkarni	The post-Soviet relationship rests on a pragmatic basis and lacks the deep strategic logic that underpinned the Indo-Soviet nexus; arms and commercial trade are market-driven, and defence trade and investment links are marred by disputes and recriminations on both sides.

Nivedita Kapoor and Nandan Unnikrishnan	Stagnation is visible, and divergences over foreign policy priorities will continue.
Smita Purushottam	Russia's turn to China is driven by system-level factors and works against India's preferred order.
Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer	Russia is adjusting its India-centred South Asia policy without abandoning India.
Raj Kumar Sharma	Russia can no longer act as balancer in India-China ties, which has pushed India toward the United States.
Srinath Raghavan	Russian policy has always been based on realism, seen through the prism of competition with the United States and China.
Shyam Saran	The relationship needs substantive drivers beyond nostalgia.
Sreeram Chaulia	Defence technology and energy keep the relationship substantial despite shifting global alignments.

Theoretical perspectives

- **Realism** — India's stance is driven by power dynamics and strategic interests; balancing regional stability and countering common rivals shapes the partnership.
- **Alliance theory** — historical alliances and shared interests in military and defence matters explain continued collaboration.
- **Multipolarity** — used to analyse how India and Russia manage their relationship amid the influence of China and the United States.

Policy suggestions

- **Vidya Nadkarni** → as long as India remains a major importer of Russian arms and remains important to Moscow as a hedge against a revisionist China, Russia is unlikely to jettison the friendship. On the Indian side, elite preference for autonomy, heavy dependence on Russian arms, and Moscow's willingness to enter joint weapons production provide a strong impetus. At the regional level both share an interest in stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Unless the strategic environment changes radically — an overtly revisionist China driving India into an American embrace, a tighter Russia-Pakistan nexus, or a seamless Sino-Russian anti-American condominium — the relationship is unlikely to wither on the vine.
- Boost **bilateral economic ties** beyond buyer-seller: defence, hydrocarbons and nuclear power favour Russia, so IT and ITES, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, where India is strong, should be encouraged; Russian investment should be sought in defence manufacturing for 'Make in India', and in infrastructure and space technology for Smart Cities and Digital India. Negotiations for the **India-Eurasian Economic Union FTA** should be expedited.
- Expedite the **INSTC** and launch the '**Green Corridor**' project for customs facilitation.
- **Nivedita Kapoor** and **Nandan Unnikrishnan** support President Putin's proposal for a "more extensive **Eurasian partnership** involving the EAEU and China, India, Pakistan and Iran". The main challenge is the BRI, which Russia has joined and plans to link to the EAEU; India's INSTC has languished and could be jointly energised.
- India can help address Russia's **demographic problem**, particularly in the Far East, by providing workforce in agriculture and construction without permanent settlement, alongside investment in energy and other projects.
- Cooperate in the UN, BRICS, SCO, G20 and the **East Asia Summit**, while recognising that diverging goals driven by factors beyond the bilateral dimension will continue to pose challenges. Revitalise the earlier agreement on intelligence sharing for a joint counter-terrorism strategy; deepen scientific and technological relations; and use creative means to build the **RIC** platform.
- To stay relevant in the twenty-first century, both must broaden economic cooperation, promote balanced trade, and expand collaboration in **energy transition, digital technologies and the Arctic**.

PART D

The Indo-Pacific & the Asian Balance

33 From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific

Geopolitical imagination

A mental map in which there is no single way of framing the world — and power contests change this mental topography. "Asia-Pacific" and "Indo-Pacific" are two such constructs defining twenty-first century geopolitics; despite overlap and efforts to change the official vernacular, a tension remains between them.

Two constructs, two centres of gravity

ASIA-PACIFIC

1960s origin · institutionalised through APEC in the 1980s · excludes India · ignores the Indian Ocean

Preferred by **Beijing** — it keeps China at the centre



INDO-PACIFIC

Japan-authored, with Australian and American support · joins two oceans into one theatre · brings India in

Dismissed by **Moscow** as an "artificial construct"

- **Asia-Pacific** emerged in the 1960s and was institutionalised through the formation of **APEC** in the 1980s. Two shortcomings: it was not inclusive of important regional countries such as India, and it did not take into account the growing importance of the Indian Ocean for world maritime trade.
- It was **Japan** that saw the need to accommodate both shortcomings and, with support from Australia and the United States, championed the concept of the **Indo-Pacific**. Debate over the shape of the region is far from settled, and with that lies the promise of ongoing rivalry.
- The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the **geopolitical epicentre** of the twenty-first century, shaping global trade, security dynamics and normative contestations over regional order. It encompasses a vast maritime space stretching from the eastern coast of Africa to the western shores of the Americas, hosting nearly **60% of global GDP** and facilitating **two-thirds of global energy flows** and **over 90% of international trade by volume** (**Brewster**, 2021). Its significance lies not only in economic centrality but in the intensifying rivalries that traverse it — between a rising China and a recalibrating United States, and in the strategic responses of middle powers such as Japan, Australia and, increasingly, India.
- The conceptual emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a unified construct represents a shift from the earlier Asia-Pacific paradigm, reflecting the **securitisation of the maritime commons** and the growing salience of the Indian Ocean in global power politics. The region houses **38 states**, about **62% of global GDP** and half of world trade.
- **Authorship** — **Shinzo Abe's** "confluence of the two seas" and "broader Asia" supplied the intellectual frame, drawing on Dara Shikoh. Chokepoints such as **Hormuz**

and **Malacca** carry more than half of maritime oil trade.

- **Strategic content** — joining the Pacific and Indian Oceans into a single theatre is what makes the **Quad**, **FOIP**, **IPEF** and the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy coherent.
- **Indian stake** — it moves India out of the South Asia box and beyond South-East Asia, where the Look East policy had stopped, and supports the ambition of being net security provider. The change of vocabulary is a change of strategy.

India's response to the Indo-Pacific

- **Formulation** — given by PM Modi at **Shangri-La (June 2018)**, resting on “inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN centrality and unity” — deliberately not a containment framework.
- **Institutional participation** — the Quad, upgraded to summit level; **IPEF**, where India joined the Overarching Agreement and Pillars 3 and 4 in 2024; the **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative**, which the United States has joined; and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.
- **Doctrinal instruments** — **Act East**, **SAGAR**, Project Mausam, and the “net security provider” ambition.
- **Bilateral architecture** — the 2015 Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region with the United States; the **Act East Forum** with Japan; the Joint Strategic Vision with France for the Indian Ocean Region (2018).
- **Maritime capability** — Malabar with Japan as a permanent participant since 2015, the Andaman and Nicobar build-up, and associate partnership in the Combined Maritime Forces from 2023.
- **European dimension** — the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy (2021) and the national strategies of France, Germany and the Netherlands have brought Europe back into Asian waters, which New Delhi now welcomes. India has accepted the geography, joined the institutions, and refused the alliance.

UPSC 2024 · 10m Discuss the rationale behind replacing the “Asia-Pacific” strategy with the new term “Indo-Pacific” strategy.

UPSC 2019 · 10m How is India responding to the idea of Indo-Pacific?

34 The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

A mechanism facilitating dialogue between four major democracies of the Indo-Pacific — **Australia, Japan, India, the United States** — on regional security. It believes in openness, freedom of movement and respect for the rules-based international order.



- **Origins** — India, Japan, the United States and Australia formed a tsunami ‘core group’ and began sending relief. Former Foreign Secretary **Shyam Saran** noted that ‘India’s full capabilities came as a surprise to the world’, highlighting India’s strength, leadership abilities and commitment to the Indo-Pacific. The humanitarian mission ended in mid-January 2005, but a new seedling had emerged.
- **Function** — there is a feeling that the Quad is an alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative, or a mechanism aimed at containing China, a defensive mechanism to reduce Chinese influence in Asia. China’s continued militarisation of the South China Sea compels members to intensify defence cooperation, while the BRI encounters growing backlash and observers question its fiscal sustainability. The Trump administration identified China as a “**revisionist**” power in its National Security Strategy, which says China seeks to replace the United States in the Indo-Pacific and reorder the region in its favour. “**Decoupling**” became a new foreign policy buzzword — shorthand for the American commitment, through taxes, tariffs and other punitive measures, to disentangle its companies and their technologies from Chinese supply chains.
- **Value for India (Harsh V. Pant)** — through the Quad, India can counterbalance China’s growing presence, including the BRI’s port facilities in neighbouring countries that give rise to a sense of **encirclement**. With the Quad, India can rise above middle-power status and project influence beyond the Indo-Pacific. Act East and the Extended Neighbourhood policy boost engagement. Bilateral relations with ‘like-minded’ countries can be strengthened through information sharing agreements, arms exchange agreements and defence ties. Economically, the Quad makes India a preferred destination for investment, especially after COVID-19; in the post-pandemic order India is seen as a significant player because of ‘**Vaccine Maitri**’. The Quad has the potential to boost India’s pharmaceutical prowess and assert its leadership through economic cooperation, shared democratic values and strong defence ties.
- **Chinese response** — Beijing equates the Quad with **AUKUS** as cliques strengthening the US Indo-Pacific strategy and threatening the Maritime Silk Road. **Russian response** — **Sergey Lavrov** calls it an “Asian NATO”.
- **Limits** — **Harsh V. Pant** warns that coalition arrangements are not seamless and that India must simultaneously manage BRICS, the Quad and other groupings. The Quad remains deliberately non-aligned, which suits India’s strategic autonomy and Japan’s pacifist constitution — balance without entanglement, its value lying precisely in being a coalition rather than an alliance.

Where the Quad stands now

Strand	Record
Institutional arc	Lapsed after 2008; revived at official level in 2017 ; reached leader level in March 2021 . Leaders’ summits in 2021 (twice), 2022 Tokyo, 2023 Hiroshima, 2024 Wilmington. The India-hosted 2025 leaders’ summit did not convene .
Wilmington Declaration 21 Sept 2024	Fourth in-person leaders’ summit and the most recent leader-level statement to date. Called the Quad “ a force for good ” and opposed changing the status quo “ by force or coercion ”.
Maritime deliverables	Malabar with all four navies (2020); HADR Partnership (2022); Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission and Maritime Legal Dialogue (2024); MAITRI training initiative (2024).
IPMDA	Launched at the 2022 Tokyo Summit; uses commercial satellite radio-frequency data for near-real-time maritime awareness, delivered through the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region, Gurugram ; tracks “ dark shipping ” and illegal fishing.
2026 Foreign Ministers 26 May 2026	11th meeting, New Delhi; Jaishankar hosted Wong, Motegi and Rubio. Launched the IPMSC surveillance initiative, a Critical Minerals Framework and an Indo-Pacific Energy Security statement.
AUKUS and the “Squad”	AUKUS (2021: Australia, UK, US) and the Squad (Australia, Japan, Philippines, US) both exclude India ; their harder maritime focus raises questions about the Quad’s traditional-security role.

Public goods, or a balancing coalition?

- **S. L. Narasimhan** → no member officially calls the Quad a security grouping; its only security-linked work covers cybersecurity and maritime security, both non-traditional. Two views compete on formalising it — a counterbalance to China, or like-minded states serving regional development. The second holds among members, so the Quad stays informal.
- **Sayantan Haldar** → the grouping has a real maritime record that a narrow, militarised lens misjudges; it is “**not a military alliance nor a security bloc**” but a partnership delivering maritime security as a global good.
- **Chietigj Bajpae** → identifies a gradual **de-securitisation** of the Quad in traditional security; as AUKUS and the Squad take on harder maritime tasks, India risks becoming “**a second-tier member**” of the regional security order.
- **The “weak link” charge** → Australia, Japan and the United States are treaty allies, India is not; India has a contested land border with China and has declined freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea. Against that: logistics agreements signed, **BrahMos** sold to the Philippines, and the 2016 South China Sea arbitral award backed.
- **Kelly Grieco** → the limits are structural, not simply a Trump effect — India’s insistence on autonomy caps how far the Quad can align, while Japan and Australia press for a harder security focus; the pledge of 1.2 billion vaccine doses fell short of 800 million. **Akriti Vasudeva Kalyankar** reads the same moment as a “**streamlined and focused**” Quad that may deliver better.

“The Quad has consistently been better at announcing initiatives than delivering results.” — **Kelly Grieco, 27 May 2026**

“We strongly oppose any destabilizing or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion.” — **The Wilmington Declaration, 21 September 2024**

35 India’s Indian Ocean Statecraft — SAGAR to MAHASAGAR

- **SAGAR** (Security and Growth for All in the Region) was launched by PM Modi in **Mauritius in 2015**; it was expanded to **MAHASAGAR**, announced in Mauritius on **12 March 2025**, resting on trade for development, capacity building and mutual security.
- **Pooja Bhatt** → records real gains in maritime awareness, disaster relief and naval diplomacy, but finds the agenda under-institutionalised — “**more of a guiding strategic vision than an operational policy**”.
- **Colombo Security Conclave** — an India-led Indian Ocean group whose five pillars include maritime security, counter-terrorism and disaster relief. It reached **six members** after Seychelles acceded at the 7th NSA meeting, New Delhi, November 2025, chaired by Ajit Doval. **Harsh V. Pant** and **Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy** tie its revival to the China factor and to India’s role as regional “**first responder**”. Both MAHASAGAR and the Conclave present an inclusive alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative.
- **Voice of Global South Summit** — first hosted virtually by India in **January 2023** on the theme “Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose”, with **125 countries** taking part, timed ahead of India’s 2023 G20 presidency. **C. Raja Mohan** reads it as statecraft rather than a revival of non-alignment: Delhi shunned the anti-Western tone of past summits, and the outreach complements rather than works against India’s partnerships with the United States and Europe.

“It shall encompass the ideas of trade for development, capacity building for sustainable growth, and mutual security for a shared future.” — **Narendra Modi on MAHASAGAR, Mauritius, 12 March 2025**

36 The Idea of the Asian Century

- The idea argues that the twenty-first century international order will be defined by **Asia’s pre-eminence**, the way American pre-eminence defined the twentieth century and Europe the nineteenth. It is also seen as Asian countries’ mutual rediscovery through reconnection and reintegration, repairing artificial divisions in Asian social, economic and cultural space created by colonial intervention.
- It appeared in the early 1990s as the world began sensing Asia’s economic resurgence, facilitated by the end of the Cold War. With the growth of Asian economies, mainly China’s, the share of the United States fell, leading to relative decline. After the **2008 global recession**, during which the Chinese economy helped stabilise the world economy, the idea gained further traction, powered by China’s rise and recognition of India’s progress and long-term potential.
- India and China are “**twin engines**” of the Asian Century, in geopolitical and geo-economic terms, by virtue of their geographic, demographic, economic and military profiles. The quality of no two other Asian countries’ bilateral relations will be as critical to its realisation.
- **Challenges come more from within Asia than from outside**. China should realise that most parts of Asia show promise for growth and are interconnected; the Asian Century is not China’s century alone, and its essence lies in **multipolar Asia**. China’s conduct toward its neighbours should be more inspiring and accommodating of their rise. China’s “**Asia for Asians**” slogan has an exclusionary tone. The Asian Century is not about isolating Asia from the wider world, nor is it a formula to project China’s leadership.
- Chinese aggression, particularly in the post-COVID order, has swept away hopes for a peaceful and cooperative Asian order. The two countries imagined as joint leaders have been locked in military conflict at their border. The hostility has spilled beyond the bilateral relationship into South Asia: as South Asian states carve their own path amid the competition, regional dynamics become geopolitical events — the Chinese ship **Yuan Wang 5** docking at Sri Lanka’s **Hambantota** port, described by China as a research vessel while India raised security concerns, presented Sri Lanka with a difficult choice.
- A South Asia already carrying deep fissures along lines of migration, citizenship and religion continues to witness increasing hostility between the two Asian giants, and moves by either or both to woo or antagonise South Asian countries will not augur well for Asia as a whole.
- **Evidence against feasibility** — the border conflict since 2020; the breakdown of the 1988 consensus; **Shashi Tharoor**’s “cold peace” turned colder; a trade deficit of about **US\$ 92 billion in 2024** and Indian dependence on Chinese inputs.
- **Structural obstacle** — **Samir Saran**: China treats multipolarity as good for the world but not for Asia; “One mountain cannot contain two tigers”. **Worldview obstacle** — **Shyam Saran** on the Middle Kingdom complex against the Indian conception of *Bharatvarsha*.
- **Evidence for continued feasibility** — BRICS, the SCO, the AIIB, RIC, BASIC, the COP26 alignment on coal phase-down, and trade that has kept growing despite tensions. The economic case survives; the political case depends on whether Asia’s two largest powers can convert coexistence into cooperation.

37 India and Other Emerging Powers

- India’s interactions with other emerging powers such as Brazil and South Africa reflect a commitment to **South-South cooperation**. **Sachin Chaturvedi** → the **IBSA Dialogue Forum** illustrates India’s strategy of building collective influence among developing countries to advocate a more inclusive global order.

- The **BRICS** countries increasingly assert influence in international finance and economic governance, seeking reform in the **World Bank** and the **IMF**, and have created the **New Development Bank** and the **Contingency Reserve Arrangement**.
- On climate, India works with Brazil, South Africa and China through **BASIC** and with the **Like-Minded Group of Developing Countries**.
- South Africa, like India, abstained at the UN on Ukraine and refused to join sanctions, on the ground that they were unilateral and imposed without UN approval — evidence that the developing-country position on the war was not an Indian peculiarity.
- India's newer trade architecture with emerging and middle powers includes agreements concluded with Australia and the UAE, and negotiations sought with the European Union, the United Kingdom and Canada.
- **IBSA's four objectives** — reform of global governance, pursued alongside BRICS demands for change in the World Bank and the IMF; South-South cooperation, extending the logic India applies in BASIC and the LMDC; coalition-building on trade, pressing developed nations on their Doha Development Agenda commitments; and support for UNSC reform, complementary to India's G4 track with Japan.
- **Value for India** — three large democracies of three different continents, all outside the Western alliance system; a forum where India is not the junior partner, unlike groupings that include China, and one that carries no alliance obligation. **Harsh V. Pant** → India must manage multiple simultaneous arrangements, from BRICS to the Quad, and IBSA is part of that portfolio rather than an alternative to it.

BRICS and the SCO — the 2025 summits

Forum	Outcome
17th BRICS Summit Rio de Janeiro, 6–7 July 2025	Theme “Strengthening Global South Cooperation for a More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance”. Rio Declaration adopted; India confirmed as 2026 chair ; separate leaders’ statements on climate finance and AI governance. Xi Jinping was absent in person — his first BRICS summit as leader to miss; Putin joined only virtually owing to an ICC arrest warrant.
25th SCO Summit Tianjin, 31 Aug–1 Sept 2025	The largest summit in SCO history. Tianjin Declaration adopted, with an SCO Development Strategy to 2035 and a call for a “more just, equitable and representative multipolar world order”. The Declaration condemned the Pahalgam attack; India did not join the paragraph reaffirming the Belt and Road Initiative .
Membership, 2025	Ten active full members — Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, plus Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the UAE (2024) and Indonesia (January 2025). Saudi Arabia, invited in 2023, has neither accepted nor declined. Ten partner countries were created at Kazan 2024.
India's 2026 chairship	Assumed 1 January 2026 — India's fourth turn after 2012, 2016 and 2021. Theme “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability”; the 18th Leaders' Summit is set for New Delhi, 12–13 September 2026 .
India's proposals	At Rio — demand-driven NDB lending, a science and research repository, secure critical-mineral supply chains and responsible AI. At Tianjin — three pillars: Security, Connectivity and Opportunity (S–C–O) .
Financial institutions	New Development Bank (2015): over US\$30 billion disbursed under President Dilma Rousseff, expanding local-currency financing. Contingent Reserve Arrangement (2014): a US\$100 billion pool for balance-of-payments support, never activated .
US pressure	November 2024 and February 2025 — 100% tariffs threatened if BRICS created a common currency or moved to replace the dollar. 6 July 2025 — an additional 10% tariff threatened on any country “aligning” with the “anti-American policies” of BRICS.
Internal strain, 2026	BRICS foreign ministers meeting in New Delhi in May 2026 failed to agree a full joint statement; the split centred on the West Asia crisis, with Iran and the UAE openly at odds.

Expansion, revisionism and the polarity dispute

- **Ashley J. Tellis** → India values the group as a **status stage**, a lever for multipolarity and a route to Global South leadership; India and Brazil actively resist the anti-Western turn that Moscow and Beijing want, and multi-alignment is India's steadiest foundation in a disordered system.
- **Oliver Stuenkel** → membership is insurance against diplomatic isolation and a way to manage the rise of China. **Thais Dória** and **Gustavo de Carvalho** → ten members strain a consensus model designed for five; they count more than **180 cooperation mechanisms**, weak institutional memory and an over-stretched rotating chair, and judge that **consolidation, not further expansion**, should now take priority.
- **Alexander Gabuev** → the Kremlin treats BRICS as the base for a post-American order and a shield against sanctions. **Tong Zhao** → for Beijing it is a bridge to reshape global rules, working beside the BRI and the SCO. **Mihaela Papa** and **Zhen Han** → BRICS restrains US power on some issues while cooperating on others — **anti-hegemonic without seeking a clean break**.
- **Is the order actually multipolar?** **Rajesh Rajagopalan** → the system is **bipolar**: only the US and China hold first-rank power, and reading multipolarity as reality is a costly Indian illusion. **C. Raja Mohan** → the multipolar idea persists in Indian thinking even as a bipolar order forms, while official Delhi adapts nimbly in practice. **Amitav Acharya** → the coming order is **multiplex** — post-Western and decentred, with many actors and no single dominant power, bloc or ideology.
- **Substance or stagecraft?** Papa and Han read the NDB and the CRA as genuine **institutional balancing**, while noting the reserve pool has never been drawn and the bank borrows in dollars. On the SCO, **Sujan R. Chinoy** holds the forum is largely China-driven yet India's presence checks an anti-Western drift; **Jason Wahlang** adds that India's position outside the BRI limits its gains from SCO economic projects.
- **Harsh V. Pant** → enlargement has imported regional rivalries and weakened cohesion, though India's chairship holds the group to a development agenda rather than open fragmentation.

“Connectivity that by-passes sovereignty, ultimately loses both trust and meaning.” — **Narendra Modi**, 25th SCO Summit, Tianjin, 1 September 2025

“The sooner India gives up its fantasies about multipolarity, the better.” — **Rajesh Rajagopalan**

“the myth of multipolarity endures in Indian foreign policy discourse even as a bipolar world takes shape.” — **C. Raja Mohan**

38 The Balancing Vocabulary — how scholars classify India's conduct

Concept	Scholar	Content
Soft balancing	Robert Pape, T.V. Paul ; applied by Ian Hall, Mihaela Papa and Zhen Han	Restraining a state through international institutions, concerted diplomacy via limited informal ententes, and economic measures rather than arms. Hall applies it to India's use of the RIC, BRICS, SCO and IBSA to constrain China; Papa and Han to BRICS as a whole.
Zone balancing	Arzan Tarapore	Building the capacity and resilience of other regional states to limit China's influence, without alliance commitments — no substitute for internal or external balancing.
Limited hard balancing	Jivanta Schottli	Post-Galwan India sustains a measured hard balancing of China as part of its bid to preserve strategic autonomy — distinct from the hedging that characterised the non-aligned era.
Evasive balancing	Rajesh Rajagopalan	Mixing balancing with reassurance satisfies neither China nor India's partners.
Hedging	Cheng-Chwee Kuik ; Rahul Pandey	Insurance-seeking alignment under high uncertainty and high stakes — active neutrality, inclusive diversification and adaptive offsets; Pandey applies it to India's simultaneous engagement with the West, China and Russia.
Offshore balancing	John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt ; traced in the 2025 NSS by Jake Werner	Washington forgoes remaking other societies and concentrates on preserving dominance in the Western Hemisphere while countering potential hegemonies in Europe, Northeast Asia and the Persian Gulf.
Spheres of influence	Stewart Patrick , citing Hal Brands ; Sarang Shidore	The hemispheric turn as a revival of spheres-of-influence logic through an energised Monroe Doctrine; Shidore finds the same logic running implicitly through the NSS.
Institutional balancing	Kai He ; applied by Papa and Han	Setting rules and norms in multilateral institutions to maximise interests and constrain others — the NDB and CRA as exclusive institutional balancing.
Neorealism, relative gains	Ali Emamifar, Bahareh Sazmand and Maziar Mozaffari Falarti	India's move away from a weakened, China-leaning Russia read as relative-gains balancing against China and Pakistan.
Multiplexity	Amitav Acharya	A post-hegemonic order with no globally dominant country, bloc or ideology — neither conventional multipolarity nor US-China bipolarity.

"post-Galwan India has sustained a level of limited hard balancing even as threat perceptions have subsided." — **Jivanta Schottli, Asian Security (2026)**

"India's evasive balancing strategy can neither balance China adequately nor accommodate it sufficiently." — **Rajesh Rajagopalan**

"New Delhi is effectively hedging against the uncertainties of a fragmented global order... without becoming a subordinate ally to any one of them." — **Rahul Pandey, Valdai Discussion Club**

39 Power Quotes

"The India-US relationship is not about finding common ground on everything, but about aligning strategic interests and advancing shared goals." — **S. Jaishankar**

"It is now official. It is the policy of the United States to help India to become a major world power in the 21st century." — **David Mulford, 2005**

"when the first and second-ranked powers fight, the first often ardently courts the third." — **Ashutosh Varshney**

Strategic autonomy redefined "as an objective that is attainable through strengthened partnerships instead of avoiding partnerships." — **Kashish Parpiani and Harsh V. Pant**

"India is a hard-pressed power... There are real limits to what it can deliver, yet these often seem better understood in Delhi than in D.C." — **Paul Staniland**

"Every child in India knows that Russia is our best friend." — **Narendra Modi**

"As Russia's war in Ukraine unfolds, India's national interests have so far dictated a position of formal neutrality." — **Ashley J. Tellis**

"Democracies are supposed to get along, but that has not always been the case for the United States and India." — **Derek Grossman**

Shinzo Abe · Amitav Acharya · Mukesh Aghi · Appadorai · Alyssa Ayres · Chietigj Bajpae · Konark Bhandari · Pooja Bhatt · Joe Biden · Hal Brands · Brewster · Gustavo de Carvalho · Aneek Chatterjee · Shoumitro Chatterjee · Sachin Chaturvedi · Sreeram Chaulia · Brahma Chellaney · Gautam Chikermane · Sujan R. Chinoy · Hillary Clinton · Thaís Dória · Ali Emamifar · Maziar Mozaffari Falarti · Pavel Felgenhauer · Alexander Gabuev · Rajiv Gandhi · Sumit Ganguly · Robert Gilpin · Mikhail Gorbachev · Kelly Grieco · Derek Grossman · Pravesh Kumar Gupta · Devin T. Hagerty · Hagerty · Sayantan Halder · Ian Hall · Zhen Han · Kai He · Yasheng Huang · S. Jaishankar · Stanley Johny · Dharmashakti Joshi · Manoj Joshi · Akriti Vasudeva Kalyankar · Nivedita Kapoor · Tarun Khanna · Nikita Khrushchev · Cheng-Chwee Kuik · Rajeesh Kumar · Samir Lalwani · Sergey Lavrov · Tanvi Madan · Ashok Malik · David M. Malone · Daniel Markey · John Mearsheimer · Rajan Menon · Shivshankar Menon · Mishra · Vivek Mishra · Narendra Modi · C. Raja Mohan · Vidya Nadkarni · S. L. Narasimhan · M. K. Narayanan · Jawaharlal Nehru · Nehru · Arvind Panagariya · Aparna Pande · Rahul Pandey · Leon Panetta · Harsh V. Pant · Mihaela Papa · Robert Pape · Manjeet S. Pardesi · Parpiani · Stewart Patrick · T.V. Paul · Smita Purushottam · Srinath Raghavan · Rajesh Rajagopalan · Abhijnan Rej · Condoleezza Rice · Rachel Rizzo · Timothy J. Roemer · Eugene Rumer · Vrinda Sahai · Samir Saran · Shyam Saran · Bahareh Sazmand · Howard Schaffer · Teresita Schaffer · Jivanta Schottli · Raj Kumar Sharma · Vaasu Sharma · Chandra Shekhar · Sarang Shidore · Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy · Samar Shrivastava · Rajiv Sikri · Manoj Sinha · Varun Sivaram · Rakesh Sood · Oliver Stuenkel · Arzan Tarapore · Ashley J. Tellis · Shashi Tharoor · Elizabeth Threlkeld · Nandan Unnikrishnan · Milan Vaishnav · Anil Wadhwa · Jason Wahlang · Stephen M. Walt · Kenneth Waltz · Jake Werner · John Joseph Wilkins · RS Yadav · Alexei Zakharov · Tong Zhao

41 How UPSC Asks It

Theme	Years & marks
India-US and the China factor; dovetailing of interests	2016 / 15m · 2017 / 20m
Strategic partnership vs formal alliance	2020 / 15m · 2024 / 15m
BECA and the foundational agreements	2022 / 10m
Indian diaspora and Indo-US relations	2018 / 15m
India-Russia: history, trust and cooperation	2021 / 20m
India-Russia: differences and the three pillars	2017 / 15m · 2023 / 20m
Indo-Pacific: the construct and India's response	2019 / 10m · 2024 / 10m

42 Today's Practice

1. "India and USA have become such strong strategic partners that they need not become formal allies." Comment. (UPSC 2024, 15m)
2. Arms trade, economic ties and congruent geo-political interests are no longer the three pillars of India - Russia relationship in the emerging strategic context. Comment. (UPSC 2023, 20m)
3. Discuss the rationale behind replacing the "Asia-Pacific" strategy with the new term "Indo-Pacific" strategy. (UPSC 2024, 10m)

Model answers drop tonight on the Telegram channel — [@psirbyamitpratap](#). Every point above is treated at full length in the **Foundation & OGP** class material; revise it there, then write. **Don't break the chain.**

See you tomorrow with Day 46 — India & the Global Centres of Power, Part 2.