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## INFLUENCE OF THE USA ON INDIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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**Abstract.** This study analyses the influence of the USA on the development of contemporary Indian-Russian relations in the current geopolitical and geo-economic situation. Russia's Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine in February 2022 led to a series of unprecedented Western sanctions against Russia. In addition, the United States aimed to isolate Russia politically and economically from traditional partners. Therefore, this research, which analyses Russia's relationship with a special and privileged strategic partner like India, is considered relevant. The work is based on the principles of historicism and objectivity. The methodological basis for writing the article was the IR theory of neorealism and the systems theory. The source base of the research, in addition to publications in periodicals, consists of official documents guiding the foreign policies of India, Russia and the USA. As part of the study, the authors analyse the nature of relations between the two countries and determine the role of the USA in their development and transformation. Even though the "Collective West" has been putting pressure on India to join the sanctions, the Indian government continues to be dictated by its national interests, mainly the need to provide its citizens with affordable energy resources. Despite India and Russia's official statements and growing trade relations due to the import of cheap oil, the authors conclude that the USA continues to play an important role in their interaction. This is mainly due to the USA's influence on the Indian elite and diaspora, as well as other geopolitical factors, including the expansion of BRICS and the military-strategic partnership with India. I.V. Rogachev developed the research concept and established its theoretical and methodological foundations. J.V. Bhagwat analysed the policies of India, Russia and the USA in various areas and formulated the conclusions.

**Key words:** Russia, India, USA, cooperation, BRICS.

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## ВЛИЯНИЕ США НА СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ РОССИЙСКО-ИНДИЙСКИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ

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**Аннотация.** В этом исследовании анализируется влияние США на развитие современных российско-индийских отношений. Вынужденная специальная военная операция (СВО) в феврале 2022 г. привела к серии

западных санкций в отношении России. Представленная работа основана на принципах историзма и объективности. Методологической основой для написания статьи послужили модели неореализма и конструктивизма. Источниковую базу исследования, помимо публикаций в периодических изданиях, составляют официальные документы, регламентирующие внешнеполитическую деятельность Индии, России и США. В рамках исследования авторы анализируют общий характер отношений между двумя странами, а также определяют место и роль США в их развитии и трансформации. Несмотря на то что «коллективный Запад» оказывает давление на Индию с целью присоединения к рестрикциям, индийское правительство продолжает отстаивать свои национальные интересы, продиктованные, главным образом, необходимостью обеспечить своих граждан доступными энергетическими ресурсами. Авторы приходят к заключению, что, несмотря на официальные заявления Индии и России и растущие торговые отношения из-за импорта дешевой нефти, США продолжают играть важную роль во взаимодействии двух государств, преимущественно через влияние индийской элиты, диаспор и усиливающегося геополитического фактора, включая расширение БРИКС и военно-стратегическое партнерство. И.В. Рогачев разработал концепцию исследования и разработал его теоретические и методологические основы. Дж.В. Бхагват проанализировал политику Индии, России и США в различных областях и сформулировал окончательные выводы.

**Ключевые слова:** Россия, Индия, США, сотрудничество, БРИКС.

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**Introduction.** India is striving to maintain a balanced approach in its relations with both Russia and the United States. This is evident from the statements made during the visits of key politicians and diplomats, including the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of India. Historically, the Soviet Union has used its veto power in the UN Security Council five times to support India's stance. As President Vladimir Putin noted, India does not require external support today, and it is challenging outside forces aiming to exert influence over the country. In another interview, the Russian president emphasized, "Such games do not occur with India. I can assure you of that. There is a strong, nationally focused leadership in the country. Russia can rely on the fact that India will not make decisions that contradict its national interests" [6].

This article aims to analyze the impact of the United States on the evolution of Indian-Russian relations. Russia's Special Military Operation (SMO) in February 2022 resulted in unprecedented waves of sanctions being imposed on Russia by the West. Despite intense pressure from the 'Collective West' to align with these sanctions, India steadfastly chose to prioritize and protect its national interests. Through this research, the authors provide an analysis of the intricate dynamics between India and Russia while also highlighting the pivotal role of the United States in shaping these crucial bilateral ties.

**Methods and materials.** The foreign policy of India is increasingly becoming a focal point for researchers, who recognize its progressive evolution and the active pursuit of dialogue with diverse nations [32; 36]. Nonetheless, several Russian scholars have identified a critical issue: there remains a significant 'gap' in comprehending the underlying motivations that drive India's foreign policy decisions [1–5; 9]. Extensive research has delved into the opportunities and challenges associated with mutually beneficial trade and economic relations [7]. Furthermore, specific bilateral and multilateral topics have been investigated, particularly military-political interactions in the Indo-Pacific region, where Indian and Russian interests frequently diverge [5; 8; 14]. Researchers also examine the potential for collaboration between India and Russia alongside other major powers like China, highlighting substantial geostrategic obstacles [5; 8; 12; 14; 40]. Importantly, current studies often neglect to consider the substantial influence of the United States on the Indian elite, which plays a crucial role in shaping India's foreign policy. Discussions surrounding Indian-Russian relations rarely incorporate issues such as trade imbalances and the deterioration of military-technical cooperation. This study aims to fill these gaps and assess the significant impact of the United States on the trajectory of Indian-Russian relations,

especially as the world is undergoing a transition towards a multipolar order.

This research is anchored in the frameworks of neorealism and the systems method. Neorealism sheds light on India's strategic pursuit of a multi-vector foreign policy, which is vital for bolstering national security and cultivating essential relationships with key global powers. Meanwhile, the systems method highlights the dynamic interactions among Indian governmental bodies, the think tanks, the diaspora, and the media, all of which play crucial roles in shaping India's foreign policy trajectory.

**Analysis.** *Indian-Russian relations.* The situation surrounding the SMO has critically tested the India-Russia relationship. In the face of intense political pressure from the West, India has strategically sought to preserve profitable trade with Russia while also nurturing relationships with vital partners like the United States and the EU. When the West imposed sanctions on Russian oil and gas exports, India, alongside China and Turkey, positioned itself as a key importer. By September 2022, Russia had become India's largest oil supplier, leading New Delhi to become the second-largest consumer of Russian hydrocarbons, following China.

However, from November 2023 to March 2024, various challenges contributed to a decline in bilateral trade relations. The non-convertibility of the Indian rupee, shrinking discounts on Russian oil, and heightened US scrutiny of oil prices significantly affected trade dynamics. Despite the gravity of the situation, official responses were minimal. The Indian Oil and Gas Minister acknowledged the reduction in Russian oil imports due to pricing challenges. This scenario triggered logistical setbacks, with tankers experiencing multi-week delays off India's coast, ultimately necessitating their redirection to China. This redirection can be attributed to diplomatic pressure from the United States on the Indian government. Moreover, media reports surfaced regarding delays in the supply of defense equipment, indicating further implications. A detailed analysis of these developments will follow in the next section.

Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Russia from December 24 to 29, 2023, was a pivotal step in revitalizing Indian-Russian relations. This engagement aimed to fortify India's strategic autonomy amidst a rapidly evolving global landscape. It resonated with Prime Minister Modi's

assertion, "We must recognize that we are in an era of multilateralism," highlighting the necessity for India to assert its presence and influence on the world stage [17].

The meeting between President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar was viewed by experts as particularly significant because Putin typically reserves such interactions for heads of state. Adding to this importance, in February 2024, an unexpected hour-long discussion occurred between President Putin and Indian National Security Adviser A. Doval, just one week after Doval's meeting with the US National Security Adviser in Washington. This encounter suggests India's emerging role as a potential mediator between the West and Russia, further underscoring the unique position New Delhi enjoys among nations that Russia regards as friendly.

It is essential to recognize that Russian indologists often miss a key element influencing India's foreign policy: the powerful role of the Indian elite, who are significantly shaped by Western mainstream media. This influence trickles down to Indian mass media, creating a reflective landscape. For instance, channels like NTV and News18 are owned by the companies Adani and Reliance, respectively, which actively fund the ruling party through substantial election campaign contributions. Moreover, think tanks financed by these same corporations, such as the prominent Observer Research Foundation (ORF) – which notably opened a branch in the USA – play a critical role in shaping public discourse. During the reign of the current ruling party, some of these think tanks, such as the ORF and the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), have also started receiving funding from the Government of India. The current National Security Advisor was the first director of the VIF in 2009 and is still listed as one of its members in its annual report. The interplay of media, corporate influence, and think tanks indirectly affects the policy decisions of the Government of India, making it imperative to understand these connections.

A compelling example of this argument comes from the lecture given by former Indian Ambassador to Russia (2018–2021), D.B. Venkatesh Verma, and now Distinguished Fellow at the think tank Vivekananda International Foundation at the prestigious Center for International Politics, Organization, and Disarmament at the School of International Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University

in New Delhi in December 2023. Verma asserted, “In operational terms, Russia’s ambition for a swift and decisive strike on Kyiv during the early months of the war was a remarkable miscalculation. By winter 2022, the conflict had reached an impasse, as none of the six dimensions of strategy – operational, logistical, technological, social, socio-cultural, or geopolitical – could deliver a decisive victory for either side. Russia was too weak to triumph, and Ukraine was too resilient to be defeated” [41]. Verma further emphasized, citing Kautilya’s “Arthashastra,” that in the pursuit of national interests, India must not compromise its strategic autonomy, especially in the face of China’s rising influence.

Another notable example is the statement made by A. Chauhan, the current Chief of the Indian Defense Staff, in October 2023. He asserted, “The geopolitical landscape is evolving. Russia’s relevance on the world stage is likely to decline in the near future, even though it is a nuclear power. The Wagner uprising signals significant internal vulnerabilities and foreshadows challenges ahead for Russia” [31]. Such remarks encapsulate the prevailing mindset influenced by the Western mainstream media among India’s foreign policy and military experts [14], who tend to overlook Russia’s perspective and the broader transition towards a multipolar world order.

*Factors affecting Indian-Russian relations – Indian-US relations.* In the twenty-first century, the relationship between India and the United States has evolved dramatically, presenting significant

opportunities for both nations. Trade between them has surged, with the US now being India’s sole major trading partner with which it enjoys a trade surplus. This growing economic collaboration highlights the potential for even deeper ties. However, the US’s reluctance to share “sensitive” technologies with India remains a concern. The ambitious goals set by the 2008 “Indian-US Civil Nuclear Cooperation” Agreement – aiming for “20,000 MW by 2020” – and the 2012 “Defense Technology and Trade Initiative,” including the development of a jet engine for a combat aircraft, have not yet been accomplished. The political leadership in both countries aims to overcome these challenges, which is crucial for fostering a more robust partnership.

In recent years, Indian-US relations have notably strengthened, marking a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape. Experts like M.K. Bhadrakumar, a former diplomat, author of the “Indian Punchline” blog and columnist for the “Deccan Herald,” alongside national security expert Bharat Karnad, have noted that this has led to a decline in Indian-Russian cooperation. However, it is essential to recognize that there are still hurdles to overcome in the Indian-US partnership. A key challenge remains India’s decision to abstain from joining the anti-Russian sanctions, which complicates this relationship.

According to the S&P Global Commodity Insights report, Russia emerged as the leading supplier of crude oil to India in 2023, accounting for over 30% of its total imports (Fig. 1) [46].

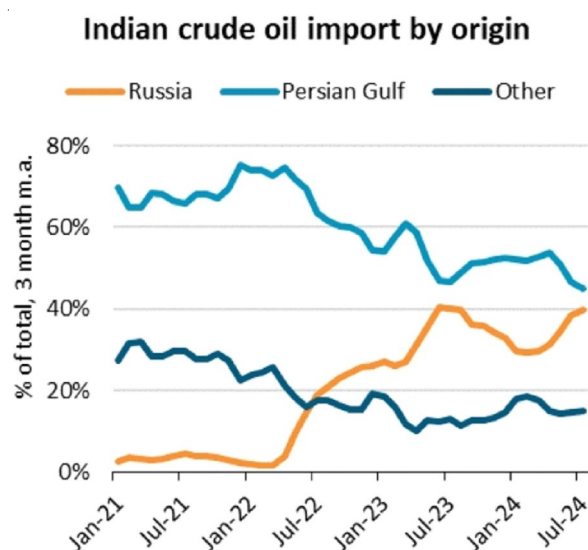


Fig. 1. Share of various regions in India’s oil imports

Note. Source: BIMCO [37].

This trend continued into 2024, despite the ongoing crisis in the Red Sea, which raised transportation costs. Prior to the Ukraine crisis, Russian oil made up only 2% of India’s total oil imports, with Iraq being the primary exporter, followed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates [46]. The United States ranked as the fifth-largest supplier. In 2023, imports from the United States dropped by 79.87% [29]. However, in 2024, oil imports from the United States increased as challenges arose with Russian tanker shipments. Consequently, the tightening of sanctions is intended not only to reduce the revenue Russia earns from oil sales but also to boost oil exports from the United States.

Despite the ongoing trade tensions, Geoffrey R. Pyatt, the Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources, stated, “India played a key role in stabilizing the global energy market, which has been unstable due to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war” [10]. Additionally, India’s total spending on oil imports in 2023 decreased by 24% to \$11.57 billion, thanks to Russian oil imports and falling crude oil prices [18; 20]. This reduction positively impacted the Indian economy, particularly benefiting the refining industry, which saw an increase in exports, especially to the European Union. It is important to note that the current government of India benefited from containing inflation, a highly sensitive political issue in the country. This achievement helped the Bharatiya Janata Party secure victory in the 2024 elections. For Russia, this provided vital budgetary support and alleviated the impact of Western

sanctions. Consequently, this played a significant role in the recovery of the Russian economy, which experienced a growth of 3.6% in 2023 after a decline of 2.1% in 2022.

The issue of paying for oil in rupees (a non-convertible currency instead of yuans or dirhams) was clearly unacceptable for the Russian government. The fact that the payment mechanism was not regulated by the Indian government with alacrity indicates the influence of the United States, since Indian banks do not want to be cut off from the international payment system SWIFT [18]. Unfortunately, New Delhi’s unwillingness to pay in yuans or dirhams, or the introduction of a ten percent surcharge for converting rupees into foreign currency, ignores the fact that the Indian economy has directly benefited from oil trade with Russia and acquired precious foreign currency for exporting petroleum products to the EU.

In October 2023, the US announced the second phase of its price control measures. As a result, from November 2023 to February 2024, India declined to accept many tankers from Russia, which were subsequently redirected to China. According to Bloomberg, Indian companies refused to accept tankers owned by Sovcomflot due to US sanctions [38] (Fig. 2). A representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India stated, “Oil on the international market, wherever it is available, at the cost of the cheapest prices. We must ensure our energy security, and this is of paramount importance” [29].

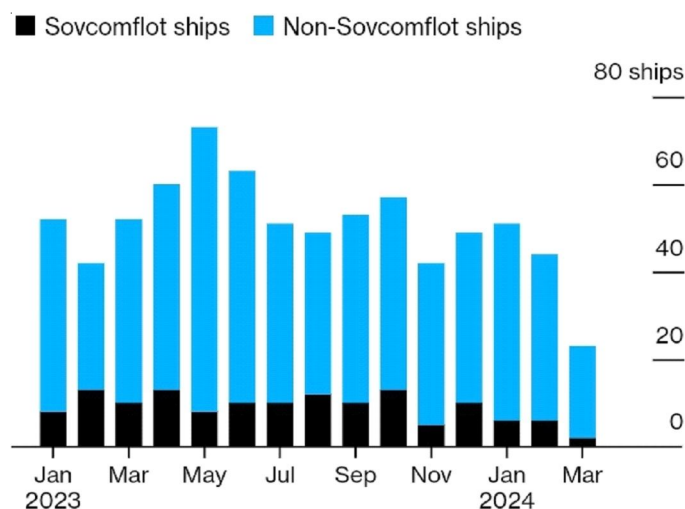


Fig. 2. Urals Crude Shipments to India

Note. Source: Bloomberg [38]. Approximately 15% of Urals crude oil is delivered by Sovcomflot tankers.

After 2021, bilateral trade between India and Russia has grown significantly from a negligible level to \$65 billion by 2023. However, trade imbalances between the two countries are a source of concern and tension in relations. This is especially important because, unlike Russia, India has a positive trade balance with the United States. According to official Indian data for 2022–2023, the US accounted for 17.7% of Indian exports (US \$78.54 billion), while Russia accounted for only 0.69% (US \$3.14 billion). Even China's share is higher – 3.39% (US \$15.3 billion) [20]. It should be borne in mind that mutual trade with the United States is an important factor in the formulation and implementation of Indian foreign and trade policies.

Each country is called upon to pursue a balanced policy in its own interests. However, in this instance, the strategy was fundamentally flawed, as it was based on the assumption that Russia was destined to lose the conflict in Ukraine, a notion commonly echoed in the mainstream Western media. Officials in Washington were content with India's lack of alignment with the Eurasian Free Trade Zone and perceived that India was distancing itself from Russia. Indian think tanks, such as the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and Carnegie India, which have strong ties to Western think tanks, support this approach. They contend that India has benefited from Western business investments and anticipates receiving US support in the event of a potential conflict with China [19; 23; 35].

It is crucial to recognize the growing impact of an unofficial boycott against Russian academic institutions, think tanks, and academic exchanges by some organizations in India, largely driven by the influence of the United States and other Western countries. In 2023, Russian scholars from St. Petersburg State University were invited to the prestigious Raisina discussion forum focused on the Arctic, only to be unjustly denied participation upon their arrival in India. This forum, organized by the Observer Research Foundation – backed by the Reliance Group, a significant supporter of the ruling party in India – highlights this trend.

Moreover, the Ministry of Earth Sciences and the National Center for Polar and Oceanic Research have inexplicably failed to finalize an Arctic research agreement with Russia, despite the expectations set by the 2017 St. Petersburg Declaration between the two countries. The joint

declaration following the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Russia in July 2024 again mentioned Arctic research. In stark contrast, during the same period, the ministry actively pursued cooperation in the Arctic with other nations, including Norway, the United States, and Canada, leading to several successful joint research projects. Russian policymakers must take notice of these developments.

The period of rapprochement between the United States and India was disrupted in November 2023 by the “Pannun case,” which brought to light details regarding the alleged murder of Khalistan terrorist Nijar by Indian operatives on June 18, 2023 [25; 26; 28; 30]. Additionally, several other issues have emerged that have impacted Indian-US relations. Firstly, it has become evident that countries in the Global South are distancing themselves from the United States and gravitating towards a new geopolitical alliance represented by China and Russia. This situation puts India in a challenging position, as it aspires to lead the Global South. Secondly, the Western narrative surrounding the conflict in Ukraine has started to weaken, with signs of conflict fatigue appearing in both Europe and the United States. Finally, and perhaps most critically, the United States has been working to restore relations with China, which have significantly deteriorated in recent times.

US-China relations have improved since the San Francisco summit in November 2023. It is important to note that this shift has had collateral damage for New Delhi, diminishing India's value to Washington as a “counterweight” to China. Additionally, Bharat Karnad, a prominent Indian security expert, has pointed out that the United States is unlikely to offer significant support to India, apart from providing satellite intelligence [24].

Russia's role in easing tensions following the meeting of the defense ministers from India, China, and Russia in Moscow on September 4, 2020, unsurprisingly did not receive much attention from the Indian media, which is largely influenced by a Western narrative [21]. Many Indian experts believe that Russia would not support India in the event of a military conflict with China [19; 23]. This perspective stems from the increasing trade and economic indicators as well as the strengthening of the strategic partnership between Russia and China. As a result, most Indian experts recommend that the country actively engage in

QUAD and the US-sponsored 'Indo-Pacific' forums to counter China's influence [12; 14; 15; 23].

Concerns have been expressed about American intelligence penetrating India's communications network and that this poses a significant threat to its national security [25; 26]. Despite these issues, the US remains confident that the "Pannun case" will not adversely affect bilateral relations [25; 26; 28; 30]. The White House acknowledges India's commitment to addressing challenges through diplomacy, while New Delhi trusts that Washington will exercise caution regarding its approach to China, given their mutual strategic concerns.

Inexplicably, increasing the number of H-1B visas for skilled Indian professionals and simplifying their extensions is a critical priority for India's foreign policy. This approach undermines the nation's interests by exacerbating the "brain drain." Notably, the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) community in the US, though backed by Prime Minister Modi, was vocal in demanding action related to India's Pannun affair [25; 26]. This situation accentuates an important observation that NRIs function as instruments of the American foreign policy agenda, further complicating the relationship between the two nations.

The Kremlin promptly addressed the rising tension in Indian-US relations at a crucial moment. Russia quickly expressed its approval of the Modi government's policies. In December 2023, President Vladimir Putin stated, "India is not intimidated or coerced into taking any actions, steps, or decisions that would go against its national interests and the welfare of the Indian people" [33].

The United States has implemented several measures to limit India's strategic autonomy. For instance, the US opposed India's purchase of S-400 air defense systems from Russia. This opposition is reflected in the application of the US law "On Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions" (CAATSA), which aims to impose sanctions on countries that acquire defense equipment from Russia [43].

However, in 2022, the US Congress granted relief to assist India in deterring aggressors like China. This proposal was introduced by a member of Congress of Indian origin [44]. In May 2022, the India-US Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) was signed, aimed at strengthening and expanding the strategic

technological partnership and military-industrial cooperation between the two countries [45]. This initiative can be interpreted as a US effort to distance India from its traditional ally, Russia, in the defense and space sectors [27].

Following the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Russia in July 2024, State Department spokesman Michael Miller stated, "We have made our concerns about their relations with Russia very clear to India" [47]. This was soon followed by a blunt statement from US Ambassador to India, E. Garcetti: "I know India likes its strategic autonomy, but in times of conflict, there is no such thing as strategic autonomy." This remark reflects the US government's dissatisfaction with India's continuing special strategic partnership with Russia [15]. The significance of Indian-Russian relations in shaping US foreign policy is further confirmed by a publication from the US Congressional Research Service on this issue [42].

While some may perceive challenges in Indian-US relations, this should not be mistaken for a decline. New Delhi is poised to revitalize its efforts to strengthen ties as soon as the next US administration assumes power. For Indian elites, the United States remains a pivotal trade partner, essential not only as a counterbalance to China but also due to deep personal connections – many have close relatives living in the US, and there is also the impact of the vibrant Indian diaspora. This critical influence is often overlooked by Russian analysts examining Indian-Russian relations.

*The BRICS factor:* A key question regarding Russia's presidency of BRICS is whether India will participate in the development of payment mechanisms aimed at challenging the dominance of the dollar and the US-led international financial and trade system. India is cautious about jeopardizing its main interests with the United States. Before the BRICS summit in 2023, the Indian government expressed its opposition to the introduction of a single BRICS currency [13]. This Russian initiative seeks to counter the global dominance of the United States and has the backing of China and Brazil. In contrast, South Africa and India have reacted negatively to this proposal.

The cooperation format among Russia, India, and China (RIC) has been affected by China's border dispute with India [16]. India rejected a Chinese proposal to rename approximately thirty localities in its northeastern state of Arunachal

Pradesh. The United States affirmed its recognition of Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory and expressed strong opposition to any unilateral attempts by China to claim it through invasion or encroachment [35]. Russia did not comment on this situation, but it could play a significant role in encouraging China to uphold the status quo in line with the 1993 agreement between China and India. A comparable issue arose in 2023 when Russia rejected Beijing's claims over the entire Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island [23].

*Indian-Russian defense cooperation.*

The evolution of Indian-Russian defense cooperation has always been rooted in the historical contributions of the Soviet Union, which provided the majority of military equipment to the Indian armed forces after India's efforts to acquire them from the USA and the UK failed in the 1950s and 1960s due to India spearheading the non-aligned movement. Prior to the Ukrainian crisis, it was thought that reducing defense ties would inevitably lead to a significant decline in Indian-Russian relations. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this critical partnership faced setbacks because key projects, like the Krivak-class frigates, Admiral Gorshkov aircraft carrier, and SSN INS Chakra, encountered delays that strained the relationship. Reports from the Indian media highlight that military-technical cooperation has been marred by cost overruns related to the aircraft carrier Vikramaditya, which India accepted with reservations, and inadequate technical support for the nuclear submarine. India also declined a Russian offer to participate in the investigation of an explosion that resulted in the unprecedented loss of the Sinhurakshaka diesel submarine during peacetime, which also indicated deterioration in military cooperation.

The Indian government has shown patience regarding its military ties with Russia. However, the Indian military leadership has publicly expressed that Russia is an unreliable partner, especially given the current geopolitical context. For instance, in October 2023, the head of the Indian Air Force stated that, due to the SMO, it has become impossible to procure anything from Russia because of issues with spare parts. He voiced concerns about the incomplete delivery of the S-400 missile systems [31]. In March 2024, six months later, Rosoboronexport announced that the remaining two systems would not be delivered until the third quarter of 2026, despite the initial

delivery date for five systems being set for early 2024 [22]. Additionally, in October 2023, General M. Pande, the Chief of Staff of the Indian Army, noted that the conflict has affected the availability of some spare parts and weapons for India [31].

It is important to note that Russia's share in global arms exports has decreased by 31% for the period 2018–2022 (see Fig. 3). Between 2018 and 2022, India's share of Russian arms exports was 31%. Furthermore, Russian arms exports to India dropped by 37% compared to the period from 2013 to 2017. This decline, which occurred even before considering the Special Military Operation (SMO), suggests that the Indian government and military leadership were already dissatisfied with the quality and reliability of Russian weapon supplies and sought to diversify imports [39].

India is reportedly in discussions with France about the construction of nuclear attack submarines [11]. Simultaneously, the United States is urging India to reduce its arms purchases from Russia as a gesture of rapprochement with the West and to enhance interoperability with American weapons systems. The US has implemented an effective training program aimed at influencing Indian military leadership. Despite this, opportunities for cooperation between India and Russia, such as in submarine construction, still exist [34]. During the Soviet era, Indian military personnel participated in various professional educational programs in the USSR, which was a dependable supplier of weapons that met most of India's needs. However, the collapse of the Soviet military-industrial complex severely impacted this cooperation. The United States seized this opportunity and quickly became a major supplier of weapons to India, starting from practically zero.

The effectiveness of Russian weapons in the war in Ukraine, along with the modernization of the Russian defense industry, could provide Russia with a significant advantage in regaining its status as India's top partner in military technology. However, persistent delays in delivering military equipment remain an issue. The actual supply and quality of weapons already contracted will serve as a strong indicator of Delhi's evolving perspective on the India-Russia-USA geopolitical triangle. To address these challenges and strengthen commitment to collaborative defense initiatives, it is crucial to restore and enhance Indian-Russian defense cooperation.



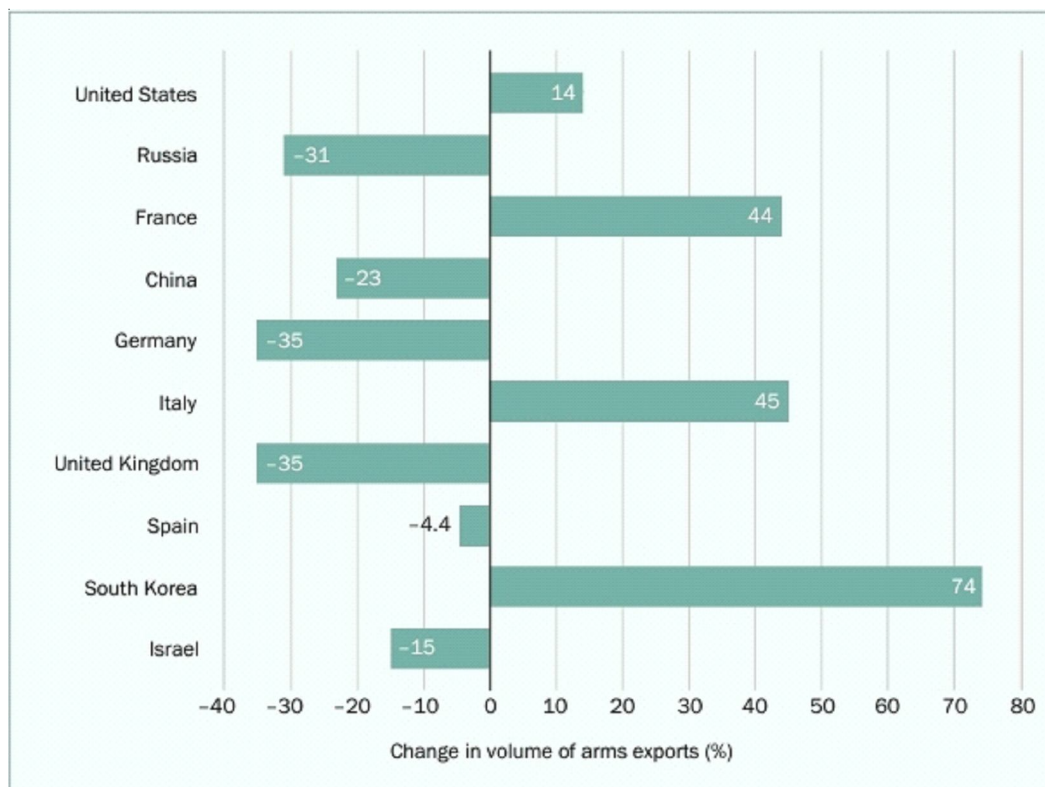


Fig. 3. Changes in the volume of major arms exports from 2013 to 2017 by the 10 largest exporters in 2018–2022  
 Source. SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, March 2023 [39].

**Results.** The governments of Narasimha Rao (1991–1995), A. B. Vajpayee (1998–2004), and Manmohan Singh (2004–2014) believed that India could benefit strategically and economically by developing ties with the United States rather than continuing on the path until the end of the Cold War. This approach has continued under the Modi government since 2014. As a result, India has pursued its strategic interests independently, rather than aligning as a strategic partner with either the United States or Russia. However, the Indian government tends to respond to official US complaints and threats of punitive measures, especially if Delhi does not comply with US directives. One notable example is India’s participation in the US trade embargo on Iran. This tendency is often set aside only when concerns directly impact India’s economy (oil imports from Russia) that impact preservation of political power, due to its possible impact on election results. Analysis of Indian media and perspectives from experts in various think tanks – particularly former diplomats and military personnel – suggests that they strongly

recommend the Indian government engage with US initiatives like the QUAD and Indo-Pacific forums. This represents an important “soft power” factor that Russian foreign policy experts should consider.

Russia’s advantage in the Special Military Operation (SMO) has increased the geostrategic significance of India’s relationship with Russia, especially following Russia’s break with the West. The visits by the Indian Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Modi to Russia in 2023 and 2024 indicate that the Indian government is adopting a more balanced approach to its relations with both the United States and Russia. Notwithstanding the historic visit by an Indian prime minister to Ukraine in August 2024, along with India’s participation in the Ukrainian peace summit in Switzerland in June 2024, India’s multivector diplomacy is underscored. These latter developments reinforce the analysis presented in this article regarding the role of the USA. Overall, despite the challenges, India and Russia have continued to expand their cooperation, driven by mutual geopolitical and economic interests.

Some issues remain unresolved, including the need for a stable payment mechanism, addressing trade imbalances, ensuring timely delivery of military equipment, and providing adequate technical support. From the Russian perspective, given the Western influence on Indian military leadership, it may be prudent to limit the transfer of “sensitive” military technologies to India. Additionally, Russia may consider imposing restrictions on the use of Russian military equipment by the Indian armed forces during exercises with NATO and QUAD countries.

**Conclusion.** Contemporary bilateral relations between India and Russia are complex, with the influence of the United States playing a significant role. India’s foreign policy is primarily guided by its national interests, and historical factors, such as the successful Indo-Soviet relations of the past, have a limited impact on its current interactions with Russia. Despite India’s projection of strategic autonomy, it is evident that the United States currently influences India’s foreign policy through various forms of coercive and soft power. Several challenges are currently straining bilateral relations, including India’s skewed trade imbalance with Russia and issues related to the timely delivery of Russian military equipment. To prevent a further shift in India’s policy toward the United States and the West, Russia will need to address these challenges. Additionally, Russia could play a positive role in resolving the China-India border dispute, which may strengthen BRICS and revitalize the RIC cooperation framework.

As Russia develops its cooperation with India, Russian policymakers should recognize that India is increasingly assertive in pursuing its transactional multi-vector foreign policy. India’s current approach places greater emphasis on national interests, unlike the past, where ideology and morality were prominent under leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

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