

The University of World Economy and Diplomacy

**Institute for Advanced
International Studies**

Commentary

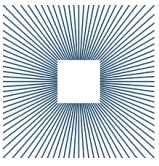
India's Diplomatic Maneuver: Modi's Russia Visit Amid Shifting Global Dynamics

Author:

Ibragimov Jaloliddin

Junior Research Fellow

Centre for Afghanistan and South Asian Studies



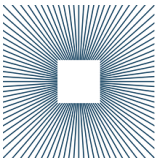
Narendra Modi, India's newly re-elected Prime Minister, strategically selected Moscow as the destination for his inaugural international visit, marking a significant diplomatic gesture. This visit is his first to Moscow since 2019, occurs against a backdrop of increasing bilateral cooperation despite the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the numerous sanctions imposed on Russia. Over the past five years India and Russia have strengthened their ties, with trade reaching approximately \$65 billion in 2023, a substantial increase from \$13.5 billion at the end of 2021. [3] [4]

The timing of Modi's visit has drawn scrutiny, particularly as it coincided with a tragic bombing in Kyiv that claimed the lives of 41 civilians. Western media outlets have emphasized that Prime Minister Modi's silence regarding this incident, raising questions about his alignment with Russia. Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky expressed disappointment over Modi's visit, labeling it a setback for peace efforts. In contrast, both Indian and Russian Foreign Ministries characterized the visit as successful and indicating a consensus on various issues discussed during the talks[1] [2].

Signal to the West

India's relationship with the United States remains pivotal, especially as it positions itself as a key partner in South Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. The US-India partnership is bolstered by four foundational defense agreements, and trade between the two nations amounted to \$191.8 billion in 2022. Additionally, Pakistan's increasing alignment with China has prompted the US to deepen its cooperation with India, further solidifying this strategic alliance.

Despite India's close ties with the U.S., it has maintained its longstanding relationship with Russia, which dates back to its independence. Following the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022, there were expectations that India would distance itself from Russia to preserve its partnership with the US. However, the opposite has occurred, as evidenced by the significant increase in trade



between the two countries. By choosing Moscow for his first official visit in his third term, Prime Minister Modi underscores India's commitment to a multi-vector foreign policy that balances its relationships with both Russia and the West.

Containing the Dragon

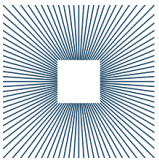
India's strategic interests also involve countering China's growing influence in the region. The increasing cooperation between China and Russia raises concerns for India, particularly given the historical border conflicts with China. The 2020 clash, which resulted in casualties on both sides, demonstrates the ongoing tensions. Modi's visit to Russia may serve as a message to China, signaling India's intent to prevent Russia from becoming overly reliant on Chinese influence.

Growing Influence in the Region

The geopolitical landscape in South Asia is becoming increasingly complex, with rising tensions over Kashmir and numerous separatist movements within India. Modi's government has prioritized military readiness, exemplified by the 2018 agreement for the supply of S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems worth over \$5.4 billion from Russia.^[6] India has been a buyer of Russian weapons and technology since the Soviet era. This acquisition is part of India's broader strategy to enhance its military capabilities amid regional uncertainties.

Foreign Economic Issues

Foreign trade between India and Russia has grown significantly since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. However, India seeks to the economic imbalance, as a substantial portion of trade turnover currently favors Russia. Currently, 90% of the trade turnover comes from Russia. As the world's fifth-largest economy, India aims to promote its own goods in the partnership. Initiatives like the "North-South" corridor and investments in the Iranian port of Chabahar demonstrate India's strategic approach to enhancing its economic ties while navigating the complexities of international sanctions.



Against the backdrop of China's promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, India is advancing the North-South corridor and its investments in the Chabahar port, which has also been exempted from US sanctions. This development confirms India's strategic approach[7].

During his visit, Modi also explored opportunities for nuclear cooperation with Rosatom, highlighting India's interest in expanding its energy partnerships. The invitation to the upcoming BRICS summit in Kazan in October 2024 will provide India a platform to further discuss trade proposals and strengthen its position within the multipolar world order.

Conclusion

The relationship between India and Russia remains a crucial element in the global geopolitical landscape, advocating for a multipolar world. The successful outcome of Modi's visit suggests that India will continue to navigate its foreign policy with a balanced approach, maintaining strong ties with both Russia and the United States while addressing its regional challenges.