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India's Balancing Act: Navigating Relations With The USA And Russia Amid Global Crises And Geopolitical Shifts

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Abstract

India's foreign policy has entered a challenging phase of strategic recalibration as global power dynamics evolve. The country must strike a difficult balance between its long-standing defence and energy relations with Russia and its growing technological, economic, and security ties with the US. This paper critically investigates how India has manoeuvred its diplomatic stance to assure military readiness, economic growth, and regional stability in the context of the Ukraine conflict, rising US-China tensions, and global trade realignments. The study examines India's strategic autonomy, defence modernisation, and involvement in multilateral forums using a qualitative analysis of secondary sources, revealing that India's decisions are primarily motivated by pragmatic national interests.

Keywords

India-US Relations, India-Russia Relations, Strategic Autonomy, Defense Diplomacy, Ukraine War, U.S.-China Rivalry, Indo-Pacific, Geopolitics

Chapter 1. Introduction

During changing global power balances, regional security threats, and economic imperatives, foreign policy in India underwent tremendous transformation. Therefore, India has to walk a tightrope between its long-standing relationship with Russia and rapidly expanding strategic engagement with the United States as a rising state. Traditionally, Russia has been India's principal defense supplier and energy partner, while the United States is now the most critical ally in defense modernization, technology collaboration, and Indo-Pacific security. In the face of global crises like the conflict in Ukraine, firmer US-China tensions, and varying trade alignments, India has supported its strategic autonomy amid seeking maximum diplomatic and economic gains. The study focuses on how India conducts its relationship with both the global powers, ensuring military readiness, economic development, and regional stability while holding on to a multipolar world order.

1.1 Research Methodology

This study takes a qualitative and analytical method, based mostly on secondary sources, to examine India's geopolitical balancing act with the U.S. and Russia. It is based on an exhaustive analysis of government publications, policy documents, trade agreements, and frameworks for defence cooperation, as well as official statements from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the U.S. Department of State, and the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Furthermore, insights from academic research, think tank publications, and expert analysis give critical context for comprehending India's changing foreign policy decisions. The study looks into India's responses to major global crises such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Indo-Pacific security developments, and Western sanctions against Russia. This analysis evaluates how India preserves strategic autonomy while protecting economic and security objectives. By examining shifting global alliances and geopolitical problems, this study demonstrates India's pragmatic approach to diplomacy, which ensures balanced relations with both Washington and Moscow.

Chapter 2 : Evolution of India's Relations with the USA and Russia

2.1 Cold War Dynamics (1947-1991)

During this period, India's non-aligned policy was a key factor in shaping its foreign relations and was part of India's wider effort to ensure that it remained a strategically autonomous power while the balance of power between the great powers was being shaped.

The Indo-US relations during Cold War were complex as India followed the policy of Non-Alignment during the period. Although India had democratic values in common with the US, India did not participate formally in the Western bloc, and had an early relationship with China and a later relationship with Soviet Union which led to fluctuations in the bilateral relations. During the Cold War, cooperation, conflict and strategic realignments were the hallmark of Indo-US relations as were major global events like the Indo-China War, the Indo-Pakistan conflicts and the Nuclear arms race.

2.1.1 Early Relations and Non-Alignment (1947-1962)

India gained independence in 1947, while a bipolar world was taking shape dominated by the US and Soviet Union. The newly formed Indian government under Nehru pursued a policy known as Non-Alignment which stressed passive co-existence, non-meddling, and self-sufficiency. This was formalized with the founding of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in 1961 which India spearheaded.

India's neutral stance was disappointing for the US who was eager to win India over as a strategic ally in crushing communism. Washington viewed India rejecting an alliance as a wasted chance in slowing down Soviet expansion. On the other hand, India was looking to brand herself as a champion of the Global South by promoting decolonization and conflict resolution without violence. Nehru's government gave strong support to the cause of both Asian and African countries fighting for independence from colonial rule consolidating its independent foreign policy.

When India's Prime Minister Nehru visited the U.S. in October in 1949, he met President Harry S. Truman. This trip fueled diplomacy and fostered understanding between the two nations. While the visit was warm in reception, the relations soured due to India's refusal to accept Soviet alliances such as NATO and SEATO, as well as India's maintaining neutrality during the Korean War (1950-1953). Akhand opposed Washington's military interference and sought a peaceful resolution through the United Nations which India supported.

As the years advanced, while their political issues remained intact, the economic and cultural relation between them constantly enhanced. For the betterment of India's industrial and agricultural operations, the American TCM funded it largely. Their grant also served as a foundation to The Indo-American Technical Cooperation Agreement where Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur became a hallmark in 1962, illustrating America's backing towards India's technological and scientific growth. Moreover, cultural programs thrived, most prominent of them was the trip of Martin Luther King Jr. With King's journey igniting the non-violent philosophy of Gandhi, it underlined the notion that both.

During the Sino-Indian War of 1962, when China undertook a military campaign in the disputed Himalayan region, India's foreign relations suffered a major setback. Cheng He's aggression was met with military support from the United States, which the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sought despite having previously pushed for the strengthening of Sino-Indian relations. Under President John F. Kennedy, Washington's emergency military aid, which included the provision of Arms and Airlift-ship, was extended to India. Apart

from publicly backing territories India claimed, this marked a temporary strengthening of Indo-US strategic relations.

Like any supposition, this brief period of alignment was short-lived. The relationship began to deteriorate after the US started aiding Pakistan, a member of several military alliances supported by Washington and a key ally during cold war. The military assistance provided to Pakistan during the wars between India and Pakistan further soured relations with India. On the other hand, India was no longer considered to be a primary ally and more economically and militarily supported Soviets. Regardless of these shifts, the policies adopted by India's Foreign Minister showcased the country's steadfast commitment to Non-alignment. The vision of Nehru based on a multi-centric world order was centered on the principles of peaceful co-existence and interdependence.

2.1.2 Tensions and the Shift Toward the Soviet Union (1963-1971)

As the United States intensified its military partnership with Pakistan, India's principal foe, relations with India soured during the mid 1960's. The 1965 Indo-Pakistani War marked a notable turning point in history. India started to doubt the reliability of Washington as a strategic ally because even though America had previously assisted India during their war with China, after a period of time, America started giving military support to Pakistan. This caused India to draw closer to the Soviet Union, resulting in India signing important arms pacts with Moscow such as the 1964 MiG-21 fighter jet agreement that initiated Soviet Union-India missile industry cooperation.

Even amidst the geopolitical tension, America was keen on aiding India's Green Revolution in 1965 by providing aid in the form of technology and introducing high yield wheat to combat the food shortage issue. The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War was another event that created a rift in the relationship between America and India. The conflict originated from the Pakistani military's repression of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) on March 25, 1971, which caused a significant humanitarian disaster with close to ten million people fleeing to India. Under the leadership of Nixon and secretary of state Henry Kissinger, America opted to support Pakistan despite evidence of human rights violations, with the belief that they would play an important role in aiding America during Nixon's visit to China in 1972.

In contrast, India openly backed the Bangladeshi independence movement and provided extensive diplomatic, military, and humanitarian support. Recognizing the possibility of a larger regional conflict, India signed The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation on August 9, 1971. This 20-year agreement ensured Soviet political and military backing, effectively deterring potential Chinese or American intervention during India's military operations in East Pakistan. Following India's decisive victory in the India-Pakistan War of December 1971 and the creation of Bangladesh, Indo-U.S. relations reached a historic low, with Washington viewing India as firmly aligned with the Soviet Union.

2.1.3 Estrangement and Nuclear Disagreements (1972-1991)

The Indo-U.S. relationship was further complicated by India's nuclear ambitions. In May 1974, India conducted its first nuclear test, Smiling Buddha, becoming the first country outside the Permanent Five (P5) of the United Nations Security Council to develop nuclear capabilities. This was perceived as a direct challenge to U.S.-led nuclear non-proliferation efforts, prompting Washington to lead the formation of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 1975 to restrict nuclear exports. The U.S. further escalated its non-proliferation efforts by passing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act in 1978 under the Carter administration, requiring non-NPT signatories like India to allow international inspections of nuclear facilities. India's refusal resulted in the U.S. cutting off nuclear assistance, including fuel supplies for the Tarapur Atomic Power Station.

During this time, political tensions grew. In 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed a state of emergency, temporarily suspending civil liberties and drawing censure from the United States. Despite tense diplomatic relations, considerable collaboration persisted, particularly in agriculture, with US assistance during the Green Revolution. Despite nuclear disagreements, attempts were made to repair ties. In July 1982, Indira Gandhi met with President Ronald Reagan to settle a dispute over uranium fuel shipments to India's nuclear facilities. However, tensions heightened with Operation Blue Star in 1984, when India's military assault at the Golden Temple garnered criticism from some members of the American Sikh community.

The assassination of Indira Gandhi in October 1984 further impacted Indo-U.S. perceptions, though President Reagan extended condolences and expressed support for India's stability. Additionally, the Bhopal Gas Tragedy in December 1984, caused by a leak at a U.S.-owned Union Carbide plant, damaged American corporate credibility in India. Amid these tensions, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi initiated a period of economic reforms and technological collaboration, leading to a slight improvement in relations. His 1985 visit to Washington resulted in agreements on scientific and technological cooperation, including the India-U.S. Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement in 1987.

However, throughout the 1980s, India continued to rely heavily on the Soviet Union for defense and economic support, further straining its ties with Washington. By 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union signalled a fundamental shift in world geopolitics. Facing economic constraints and a weakened strategic cooperation with Moscow, India began reassessing its foreign policy. This phase of upheaval prepared the scene for a steady improvement in Indo-U.S. relations in the post-Cold War era.

2.2 Post-Cold War Realignments (1991-2000)

The result of the Cold War in 1991 dramatically altered the global geopolitical scene, causing a shift in India's relations with both the United States and Russia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, India lost its most trusted ally and economic partner, forcing it to rethink its foreign strategy. At the same time, the United States, as the world's lone superpower, aspired to broaden its influence in Asia and reconsider its relationship with India. This decade saw a movement in Indo-US relations from alienation to engagement, while Indo-Russian relationships saw a pragmatic realignment in response to the emerging global order. Economic considerations, security objectives, and geopolitical concerns about China all had a significant impact on India's relations with both countries this decade.

2.2. Indo-U.S. Relations (1991-2000)

The 1990s marked a significant shift in Indo-U.S. relations, as Washington sought to develop an inclusive economic, military, and political partnership with India. The 1991 economic reforms, spearheaded by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, played a pivotal role in transforming India's economy from a state-controlled system to a market-driven model. This shift created new opportunities for trade and investment, attracting American businesses and increasing U.S. engagement with India. Throughout the decade, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) continued its development assistance to India, supporting sectors such as healthcare, education, and agricultural development.

Additionally, the establishment of The Indo-U.S. Joint Business Council in 1994 further enhanced economic ties, fostering bilateral trade and investment partnerships. Economic cooperation was not the only factor driving this engagement. the Indian Ocean region became a geopolitical focal point, with both India and the U.S. recognizing the need for stability and power balance in Asia. Washington's Asia-Pacific strategy was aimed at countering China's expanding influence, which led to closer engagement with India. In response, China pursued its "String of Pearls" strategy, strengthening its naval presence in the Indian Ocean, which raised concerns in both Washington and New Delhi. This shifting balance of power in the region pushed India and the U.S. toward greater strategic collaboration, particularly in the areas of maritime security and defense cooperation. Initiatives like the Agreed Minute on Defense Relations signed in 1995 and joint military exercises such as Exercise Malabar underscored growing defense collaboration.

the U.S. sought to enhance military ties with India by conducting joint exercises and expanding defense cooperation. This was strategically driven, aimed at containing China's rise and preventing a potential China-India-Russia alliance that could challenge American dominance. India's rising economic power and nuclear capabilities further increased its value As a counterweight to China in Asia. However, despite these positive developments, nuclear policy differences posed A major challenge to Indo-U.S. relations.

In May 1998, India conducted a series of underground nuclear tests in Pokhran-II, surprising U.S. intelligence agencies and triggering international condemnation. In response, President Bill Clinton imposed economic sanctions on India under the Glenn Amendment, cutting off military and technological cooperation. the Nuclear tests also raised concerns about a potential arms race between India and Pakistan, further straining diplomatic

ties. However, bilateral relations gradually improved through diplomatic efforts, particularly discussions between Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. The Singh-Talbott Talks consisted of 14 rounds of dialogue from 1998 to 2000, helping ease tensions and rebuild trust. By 1999, the U.S. Congress lifted some sanctions on India, paving the way for the restoration of diplomatic and strategic cooperation.

A major turning point in Indo-U.S. relations came during the 1999 Kargil War, when Pakistani forces infiltrated Indian-administered Kashmir, leading to a military confrontation along the Line of Control (LoC). The U.S. played a critical diplomatic role, with President Clinton directly intervening to pressure Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to withdraw troops. Clinton's firm stance against Pakistani aggression was seen by India as a major shift in Washington's South Asia policy, signaling a growing alignment with India over Pakistan. This moment reinforced India's strategic value for the U.S. and deepened diplomatic trust between the two nations.

In March 2000, President Clinton visited India, marking the first U.S. presidential visit since 1978. The visit symbolized a new era in Indo-U.S. relations, emphasizing economic cooperation, counterterrorism efforts, and technological partnerships. One of the key outcomes of the visit was the establishment of The Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum, which cemented bilateral cooperation in research, defense technology, and space exploration. Additionally, agreements on clean energy cooperation and agricultural research were signed, further enhancing the strategic partnership. Clinton's visit also reflected Washington's shifting regional policy, moving away from its Cold War alliance with Pakistan to prioritize India as a key strategic and economic partner. The U.S.-India Commercial Dialogue launched in 2000 further expanded economic ties by promoting bilateral trade and investments.

The 1990s thus laid the foundation for the deepening of Indo-U.S. relations in the 21st century, transforming their economic, defense, and geopolitical engagement. While challenges over nuclear policy and regional security persisted, the Kargil crisis resolution, Clinton's landmark visit, and growing economic collaboration demonstrated that India was emerging as a critical U.S. partner in the evolving global order.

2.2.2 Indo-Russian Relations (1991-2000)

While Indo-U.S. relations were improving, India's ties with Russia underwent a pragmatic realignment. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Russia, under President Boris Yeltsin, initially sought closer ties with the U.S. and the West. However, recognizing the enduring strategic importance of its relationship with India, Russia pursued a "pragmatic renewal" of bilateral ties. In 1993, Yeltsin visited India, and both countries signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, replacing the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation. Unlike the previous treaty, the security clause was removed, reflecting the new geopolitical realities. Another major agreement during this visit was the resolution of India's outstanding debts to Russia, which included an agreement on Ruble-Rupee exchange rates.

Despite U.S. objections, Russia confirmed its commitment to supplying India with cryogenic rocket engines in 1994, strengthening military-Technical Cooperation. Additionally, the two countries collaborated on major defense projects, including the joint development of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, which became a landmark achievement in bilateral defense ties. Russia remained India's most reliable military supplier, offering state-of-the-art weapons and technology transfers, unlike India's engagements with the West, which often came with political conditions.

Politically, Russia consistently supported India's position on the Kashmir issue, standing firmly against internationalizing the conflict. This diplomatic alignment was evident in Russia's stance at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), where it often backed India. Furthermore, in 1998, Russia advocated for restraint and dialogue following India's nuclear tests, displaying a balanced approach compared to the sanctions imposed by the West.

Economic cooperation, however, remained a weak link in Indo-Russian relations during this period. Both nations faced economic challenges, with Russia grappling with post-Soviet economic turmoil and India adapting to its liberalization process. Bilateral trade, though significant, lagged behind India's growing trade

with the U.S. and China. Nevertheless, emerging opportunities in energy cooperation emerged, particularly in nuclear power. In 1998, Russia agreed to construct two nuclear reactors in Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu, despite U.S. objections. This agreement highlighted Russia's commitment to supporting India's energy needs and technological advancement.

The strengthening of Indo-Russian ties culminated in 2000 with the establishment of the Annual Summit Mechanism during Vladimir Putin's visit to India. This institutionalized regular dialogue at the highest levels and marked a renewed commitment to the strategic partnership. As one of India's most consistent allies, Russia continued to play a vital role in

Defense cooperation, energy security, and diplomatic support, reinforcing its role as a key pillar in India's foreign policy.

3. India's defense ties with the U.S. and Russia

India's defence policy has been heavily impacted by its long-standing connections with Russia and its emerging strategic engagement with the United States. As a nation that values strategic autonomy, India has carefully managed its military partnerships to protect its national security interests while avoiding over-reliance on any single global power. Russia has historically served as India's principal defence supplier, providing crucial military equipment and technologies for decades. However, as India's global position developed and its security worries in the Indo-Pacific grew, so did its defence interaction with the United States. This balancing act has enabled India to modernise its military capabilities while preserving its long-standing alliance with Moscow. At the same time, global geopolitical upheavals, like as the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, escalating tensions between the United States and China, and the strengthening Indo-Pacific security framework, have positioned India at the centre of a complicated military realignment.

3.1 India-Russia Military & Defense Cooperation

Despite shifting global alliances, India-Russia defence cooperation has remained strong. Joint ventures, such as the BrahMos missile, and licensed production of military equipment are examples of this collaboration.

India's military cooperation with Russia began during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union became India's principal arms supplier, sending MiG-21 fighter jets, T-series tanks, submarines, and advanced missile systems. This partnership served as the foundation for India's defence infrastructure. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia continued to be India's largest defence partner, accounting for more than 62% of overall arms imports between 2008 and 2023. Key supplies included Su-30MKI fighter jets, T-90 tanks, the S-400 missile defence system, and the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, which was created in a joint venture between the two countries. Additionally, continuing projects such as the licensed production of T-90 tanks and Su-30 MKI aircraft have strengthened defence relations.

However, this long-standing military cooperation has faced growing problems. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has seriously impacted India's military supply chain, delaying the delivery of important defence systems such as the S-400 air defence system and the 11356R frigates, which are now due in 2026. Furthermore, Western sanctions against Russia have hindered financial operations, prompting India to consider alternatives such as the rupee-ruble trade system. In response to these uncertainties, India has increased attempts to localise the manufacturing of Russian-origin defence equipment, with the goal of reducing reliance on direct imports. The Indo-Russia Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL) joint venture, created in 2019, produces around 770,000 AK-203 rifles in Amethi under the "Make in India" initiative, with manufacturing set to continue until 2032. Similar efforts have been attempted to domestically produce T-90 tanks, MiG-29 engines, and BrahMos missile components.

While Russia remains an important defence ally, military-to-military cooperation between the two countries has declined. Notably, high-level defence engagements have decreased, and the INDRA joint military exercises, which bring together the three branches of the armed services, have been postponed for both 2022 and 2023. In contrast to its growing defence connections with the United States under agreements such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of deal (LEMOA), India has yet to sign a similar Logistics Exchange deal with Russia,

signalling a gradual shift in military priorities. However, India has continued to take part in Russian-hosted drills such as the International Army Games (August 2022) and Exercise Vostok (September 2022). Additional interactions include the planned Avia Indra exercise in 2023, which highlights sustained, if cautious, military collaboration. In recent years, Russia has also reiterated its commitment to India's defence modernisation by continuing to supply MiG-29K aircraft, Kamov-31 helicopters, and upgrading existing MiG-29s. Furthermore, ongoing conversations about the prospective cooperative development of a Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) and sophisticated submarines demonstrate the long-term strategic nature of the defence alliance. While the obstacles posed by geopolitical developments and sanctions exist, India's concentration on self-reliance in defence manufacture, paired with its long-standing cooperation with Russia, highlights a pragmatic and adaptive military relationship.

3.2 India – USA Military & Defense Relation

During the Cold War, India's defence cooperation with the United States was limited due to Washington's close relationship with Pakistan and concerns over India's nuclear program. However, the post-Cold War period was a watershed moment, with both countries increasing strategic cooperation. The 2001 Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) established the groundwork for collaboration in high-tech trade, missile defence, and intelligence sharing, which was reinforced by the 2005 Civil Nuclear Agreement. The signing of four core military agreements to improve interoperability and intelligence sharing marked a significant step forward in Indo-US defence cooperation. The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) of 2002 guaranteed secure information interactions. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), signed in 2016, allows reciprocal access to military bases. The 2018 Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) improved secure communication, while the 2020 Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) allowed for real-time geographic intelligence exchange.

Defence trade increased dramatically, with India purchasing over \$20 billion in US defence equipment since 2008, including C-130J Super Hercules and C-17 Globemaster III transport aircraft, Apache and Chinook helicopters, and P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol planes. In 2023, General Electric agreed to co-produce F414 jet engines in India, hence aiding indigenous fighter jet programs. Furthermore, India approved the purchase of 31 MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones for \$4 billion, which will improve maritime surveillance in the Indo-Pacific area.

Interoperability has been improved by bilateral drills like Vajra Prahar and Yudh Abhyas and joint military exercises like Exercise Malabar, which was expanded to include Australia and Japan as part of the Quad. Founded in 2012, the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) encourages defence technology co-development and co-production. Strategic cooperation and technology transfer were further enhanced in 2016 with India's designation as a major defence partner (MDP). India's ambitions to diversify its military procurement have been bolstered by its expanding defence ties with the United States. According to a March 2024 analysis by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India became the world's largest weaponry importer with a 9.8% share, a 4.7% increase from 2014–18 to 2019–23. Although there are still issues, especially with regard to strategic autonomy, the growing Indo-US defence alliance highlights their mutual dedication to regional security and stability.

3.3 India's Defense Partnerships with the U.S. and Russia

India's defence modernisation plan strikes a delicate balance between deepening defence cooperation with the United States and maintaining its long-standing alliance with Russia. Russia continues to be a dependable source of cutting-edge military equipment, such as T-90 tanks, Su-30MKI fighter jets, and the jointly produced BrahMos missile. Russia continues to supply vital defence technology in spite of recent difficulties, such as delays in the delivery of S-400 missile defence systems brought on by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and Western sanctions. At the same time, India and the United States developed a closer partnership, especially following the 2005 Civil Nuclear Agreement and the 2001 Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP). The signing of four foundational agreements GSOMIA (2002), LEMOA (2016), COMCASA (2018), and BECA (2020) that improved military interoperability, secure communications, and information sharing further cemented this partnership.

India's growing relationship with the United States has allowed it to diversify its defence suppliers and lessen its need on any one nation, even though Russia is still a major defence partner. This strategic diversification is reflected in notable acquisitions like as the Apache and Chinook helicopters, the P-8I Poseidon maritime aircraft, and the recent agreement to co-produce F414 jet engines in India. This strategic diversification is seen in India. India's operational compatibility with the United States and its allies is further strengthened by its involvement in joint military drills like Exercise Malabar. India has strengthened its strategic autonomy and ensured access to cutting-edge defence technologies while retaining its capacity to negotiate shifting geopolitical dynamics by preserving strong defence ties with both the United States and Russia. This dual engagement demonstrates India's commitment to a multipolar world order while also pursuing long-term national security goals.

4. India Economic ties with USA & Russia

India's economic contacts with the United States and Russia are two distinct yet equally important aspects of its foreign policy and trade strategy. The United States is India's largest commercial partner, a crucial investor, and a major export destination, whereas Russia is critical to India's energy security, defence purchases, and strategic investments. The economic ties between India and these two global giants have changed dramatically over the last few decades, owing to geopolitical upheavals, trade policies, and evolving global economic landscapes. Despite facing commercial challenges such as US tariffs and Russia's geopolitical isolation as a result of Western sanctions, India has been able to maintain and increase trade links with both countries, demonstrating its commitment to a diverse and resilient economic strategy.

4.1 India-U.S. Economic Relations

The United States has emerged as India's top economic partner, with bilateral commerce in products and services expected to reach a record \$191 billion by 2022. The trade relationship is distinguished by India's trade surplus, which makes the United States one of only a few nations where India exports more than it imports. Engineering goods, electronics, medicinal products, petroleum, gems and jewellery, and light crude oil are among India's most important exports to the United States. In 2021, bilateral trade in products and services between the United States and India was valued at \$157 billion, a figure that has increased dramatically in previous years. Economic collaborations such as The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and I2U2, which focus on boosting trade collaboration in energy, technology, and supply chain resilience, have enhanced India-US trade relations even further. The signing of the Investment Incentive Agreement (IIA) in 2022 by India's Ministry of Finance and the United States' International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) has facilitated equity investment, co-insurance, grants, feasibility studies, and technical assistance, thereby increasing bilateral investment. As of March 2023, DFC's India portfolio was worth \$3.1 billion over 100+ projects, indicating high investor confidence in India's expanding economy.

Investment flows between the two countries have been robust. the U.S. was the third-largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India in 2022-23, with inflows of \$6.04 billion, accounting for nearly 9% of total FDI equity inflows. Conversely, Indian companies have made significant investments in the U.S., with 163 Indian firms investing over \$40 billion and creating over 425,000 American jobs as of April 2023. Additionally, nearly 200,000 Indian students studying in the U.S. contribute \$7.7 billion annually to the American economy, further strengthening economic ties.

Despite their thriving trading relationship, India and the United States have experienced trade conflicts. The suspension of India's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) status in 2019 ended duty-free benefits for various Indian exports, affecting small and medium-sized businesses. The United States has also levied tariffs on Indian imports through different trade processes, notably Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which authorises punitive penalties against countries that participate in unfair trade practices. Furthermore, under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, the United States has put tariffs on steel, aluminium, and other key imports from India, citing national security reasons. Further tariff increases on Indian items, such as vehicles, agricultural products, semiconductors, and pharmaceuticals, are predicted in the coming years, which could strain trade relations.

Nonetheless, both countries are working to resolve trade concerns through diplomatic channels. The settlement of market access restrictions in 2022, expanded partnerships in STEM sectors through the Quad initiative, and a growing emphasis on technological innovation centres all indicate a commitment to deepening economic participation. India's expanding prominence in semiconductor manufacturing, renewable energy, and digital trade has attracted US investment, solidifying India's position as a crucial partner in the changing global economic order.

4.2 India-Russia Economic Relations

India and Russia have had strong economic links since the Soviet era, with trade and investment partnerships growing dramatically in recent years. Despite geopolitical disturbances such as the Russia-Ukraine war and Western sanctions on Moscow, bilateral trade between India and Russia reached a record \$65.7 billion in fiscal year 2023-24, a 33% increase over the previous year. This amount is 5.5 times larger than pre-pandemic trade levels, indicating India's increased economic engagement with Russia, particularly in the energy sector.

India's exports to Russia in FY 2023-24 totalled \$4.26 billion, including medicines, organic chemicals, electrical machinery, mechanical appliances, and iron and steel. Meanwhile, Russia's imports totalled \$61.44 billion, with the majority of that amount coming from oil and petroleum products, fertilisers, mineral resources, precious stones and metals, and vegetable oils. This significant trade deficit underlines India's growing reliance on Russian energy imports, particularly discounted crude oil purchases, which have increased since the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia.

Bilateral trade in services has remained constant, with a total value of \$1.02 billion in 2021, primarily benefiting Russia. In August 2024, India's exports to Russia were valued at \$505 million, while imports were \$3.58 billion, resulting in a \$3.07 billion trade imbalance. However, compared to the same period in 2023, Indian exports to Russia increased by 42.7%, while imports fell by 39.9%, demonstrating India's attempts to grow exports and lessen reliance on Russian imports outside of the energy sector.

Despite these economic gains, India's trade relations with Russia risk long-term uncertainty as a result of Russia's increasing economic reliance on China and the impact of Western sanctions. Payment procedures have gotten more complex, resulting in higher rupee-ruble trade settlements and a larger reliance on third-country financial intermediaries. Furthermore, Russia's emphasis on developing trade with China and other Eurasian partners may have an impact on India's long-term strategic trade standing with Moscow.

4.3 India's economic Balancing Strategy

India's economic partnerships with the United States and Russia demonstrate its pragmatic approach to global commerce and investment. While the United States is India's most important commercial partner, providing investment opportunities, technological transfers, and market access, Russia plays an important role in energy security, defence procurement, and industrial partnership. Given the obstacles created by US trade barriers and Russia's geopolitical weaknesses, India must carefully manage its economic interests with both countries while maintaining a diverse trade policy. As India maintains its course. As a growing global economic power, its ability to balance trade relations with the United States and Russia will be critical. By leveraging strategic investments, increasing local production under "Atmanirbhar Bharat," and developing collaborations in technology, energy, and defence.

5. Technology and Innovation: India's Strategic Collaborations with the U.S. and Russia

India's technological partnerships with the United States and Russia have been essential to its growth in a variety of fields, including artificial intelligence (AI), space exploration, semiconductors, nuclear energy, and defence technology. While the United States has emerged as a vital partner in cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and space exploration, Russia remains a critical ally in nuclear energy development and defence technology transfer. These agreements underscore India's multi-alignment strategy, which combines the resources of both global powers to boost its scientific and economic capacities while retaining strategic autonomy.

5.1 U.S.-India Technological Collaboration

The Indo-US technical collaboration has grown dramatically, owing to cooperative research projects, private sector investments, and strategic agreements in AI, semiconductors, and space exploration. The United States-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (CET) (2023) has increased cooperation in AI-driven defence applications, autonomous systems, and cybersecurity solutions, in line with India's Digital India objective. The Indo-US AI Task Force promotes scientific cooperation in machine learning, big data, and quantum computing. Semiconductors have emerged as a crucial area of collaboration, with the Semiconductor Supply Chain and Innovation Partnership (2023) seeking to lessen India's reliance on Chinese producers. The United States has offered financial and technological support for India's semiconductor manufacturing units (fabs) under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) program, with Micron Technology and Applied Materials investing in India's chip ecosystem.

NASA and ISRO work together on important space exploration initiatives. The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission (2024) will be the most advanced Earth observation satellite, with improved climate monitoring and catastrophe response. India is also anticipated to participate in NASA's Artemis program, with Indian astronauts receiving training at NASA facilities for future space missions, including India's Gaganyaan program. The liberalisation of India's space industry has piqued the interest of US businesses such as Blue Origin and SpaceX, paving the way for partnerships in satellite launches, space tourism, and reusable launch vehicles. This developing technical cooperation supports India's position as a major global player in AI, semiconductors, and space exploration.

5.2 Russia - India Technological Collaboration

While India's technology partnership with the United States is centred on developing industries, Russia remains India's primary partner in nuclear energy and advanced defence technology. The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP), India's largest nuclear facility, was built with Russian technology and is currently expanding with VVER-1000 reactors. In 2018, India and Russia inked an agreement to build six more reactors, boosting collaboration in fast breeder reactor technologies, compact modular reactors, and advanced nuclear fuel cycles, hence aiding India's net-zero carbon targets. Russia continues to supply India with enriched uranium fuel, safeguarding the country's long-term nuclear energy security.

Russia has promoted defence technology through manufacture, joint partnerships, and technology transfers. The BrahMos missile program, a joint Indo-Russian venture, developed supersonic cruise missiles that are being supplied to third countries. Discussions on hypersonic missile development are enhancing India's deterrence capability. In terms of naval improvements, Russia has provided India's flagship aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya, as well as leased nuclear-powered submarines, boosting India's maritime attack capabilities. Collaborations in stealth submarine technology, sonar systems, and underwater armament continue to strengthen India's naval capabilities. Space technology includes the Soviet-era Intercosmos program and support for India's Gaganyaan mission. The Roscosmos-ISRO collaboration has been centred on satellite navigation, planetary exploration, and moon missions, with Russia providing essential components for Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan. Future collaboration in nuclear propulsion for deep-space missions and robotic lunar landers would strengthen India's space exploration presence.

5.3 India's Strategic Technology Balancing Act

India's efforts to balance technological collaboration with Russia and the United States show a desire to maintain strategic autonomy while obtaining access to sophisticated defence technologies. India's technological and innovation partnerships with the United States and Russia are part of a planned diversification strategy. The United States gives India with access to cutting-edge AI, semiconductor, and space technology, which are critical to its long-term digital and industrial goals. Meanwhile, Russia continues to be a trusted partner in nuclear energy and superior defence technology, safeguarding India's energy security and military modernisation.

As global technological competitions heat up, India's ability to handle relationships with both superpowers while encouraging domestic innovation will be essential to its status as a leading global technology hub. By

effectively using these collaborations, India can strengthen its scientific, defence, and industrial capabilities, securing its position as a key actor in the shifting global technology scene.

6. India's Balancing Act in Major Global Crises

India's foreign policy has been defined by its ability to negotiate complicated global crises while remaining strategically autonomous. As a developing force, India has confronted a number of geopolitical flashpoints, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the competition between the United States and China, the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, and rising Middle Eastern tensions. These developments have put India's diplomatic agility, economic resilience, and security strategy to the test. Despite rising pressure from global powers, India has carefully calibrated its relationships with the United States, Russia, and other major countries to ensure that its national interests are prioritised.

6.1 The Russia-Ukraine War: India's Strategic Neutrality

The Russia-Ukraine war, which began in February 2022, has been a defining geopolitical crisis, placing India in a diplomatic conundrum between its ancient relations with Russia and its increasing strategic partnership with the United States. India has maintained a policy of strategic neutrality, balancing its economic, defence, and diplomatic interests while urging for discussion and peaceful resolution. At the United Nations, it has repeatedly abstained from UN resolutions denouncing Russia, emphasising sovereignty, territorial integrity, and diplomacy rather than outright criticising Moscow. Despite Western sanctions, India has expanded its imports of inexpensive Russian crude oil, ensuring energy economic resiliency as world prices rise. In 2023, bilateral trade surpassed \$65 billion, owing primarily to oil imports. While benefiting economically, India has skilfully managed financial constraints, employing alternate payment methods such as the rupee-ruble trade to avoid breaking sanctions.

While maintaining strong connections with Russia, India has increased collaboration with the United States and its Western allies, particularly in defence, technology, and commercial partnerships. The war has improved India-US relations through increased military drills, technological transfers, and semiconductor partnerships, allowing India to diversify supply chains and minimise reliance on China. By engaging both Russia and the West, India has reinforced its strategic autonomy and emerged as a significant global advocate for multipolarity and non-alignment.

6.2 U.S.-China Rivalry and The Indo-Pacific Strategy

India has established itself as a major actor in the Indo-Pacific, striking a balance between engagement with China and Russia and security alliances with the United States in the face of the growing U.S.-China competition. In order to thwart Beijing's aggression after the 2020 battles in the Galwan Valley, India has bolstered its military presence along the LAC, limited Chinese investment, and improved border infrastructure. In order to improve regional security, India has strengthened its partnership with the United States, Japan, and Australia in the marine sector by taking part in Malabar naval drills. In order to secure its own strategic autonomy and oppose China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it has also strengthened defence links with ASEAN, France, and the United Kingdom. India maintains relations with Russia, guaranteeing defence cooperation and energy trade without offending Moscow, even as it supports the United States in Indo-Pacific security.

6.3 The Taliban's Return to Power:

When the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021, the geopolitics of South Asia changed, and India had to modify its approach and find a balance between its relations with the US and Russia. India initially withdrew its soldiers after spending billions on Afghanistan's development, but then it made sense and kept up diplomatic relations and humanitarian aid to Taliban leaders without legally acknowledging them. In response to security concerns about Pakistan's influence and terrorist groups like ISIS-K and Al-Qaeda, India has strengthened regional security ties with Russia, Iran, and Central Asian nations in an effort to keep Afghanistan from becoming a terrorist hotspot. Russia's historic role in Afghanistan provides India more clout, even if the United States remains India's most significant counterterrorism ally.

By maintaining talks with the Taliban, expanding regional partnerships, and assuring US-Russia collaboration on Afghan stability, India has successfully preserved its strategic interests while managing the difficulties of a fast changing security scene.

6.4 Middle East Conflicts

India depends on the region for its oil and gas needs, and it has important allies like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran. However, India's Chabahar Port project, which avoids Pakistan and is a vital trade route to Central Asia, has become more difficult as a result of U.S. sanctions on Iran. Even though India supports Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy, it maintains defence and energy cooperation with Iran, which is associated with Russia, underscoring its independence. India balances its stance in the midst of Middle Eastern problems by maintaining close defence and technological relations with Israel and advocating for a two-state solution for Palestine. In an increasingly divided world, India maintains its global balancing approach by avoiding strict alliances, creating alternate trade channels, and guaranteeing regional security cooperation while navigating geopolitical conflicts and safeguarding national interests.

6.5 India's Pragmatic Foreign Policy in a Multipolar World

During major global crises, India has played the role of a balancer. This shows, more than anything else, the desire of the country to remain strategically autonomous and to be diplomatically pragmatic. India has typically maintained a foreign policy in relation to global forces that puts national interest above other considerations, regardless of whether one talks about the Russia-Ukraine conflict, US-China competition, the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, or the wars in the Middle East. From forging robust ties with Russia and the United States to counter Chinese expansionism and ensuring stability in its extended neighborhood, India has established itself as an important player in what is becoming a multipolar world.

How effectively India handles these crises without compromising its sovereignty or strategic interests would assume utmost significance in the present world order, which is becoming increasingly conflict-intensive. By using existing diplomatic, military, and economic relationships, India is poised to carve out a niche for itself as an independent power capable of redirecting global events, while at the same time ensuring its long-term security and economic prosperity.

7.Recent Developments and Future Prospects

As India negotiates a geopolitical environment that is ever more complicated, its foreign policy has changed dramatically. India has been compelled to strike a delicate balance between its longstanding allies and newfound allies due to the escalating strategic rivalry between the United States and Russia, the rise of China as a global power, and regional conflicts. India has maintained its strategic independence while advancing its national interests by deftly utilising its ties with both the United States and Russia. India's capacity to adjust to changes in the world while maintaining long-term security, technological, and economic priorities is demonstrated by recent events such as Aero India 2025, the 23rd India-Russia Bilateral Summit, and the start of the U.S.-India COMPACT program. Engagements strengthen India's standing as a major world power by demonstrating its emphasis on energy security, defence modernisation, economic resilience, and regional stability.

7.1 Strengthening Defense and technological ties with the U.S.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official working visit to Washington in February 2025 was a significant milestone for the U.S.-India alliance, as it kicked off the U.S.-India Compact (Catalysing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce & Technology) for the 21st Century. This initiative focuses on joint military production, advancing defense technology, and deepening economic ties. It built on Modi's earlier visit in June 2023, which led to the creation of the U.S.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), aimed at enhancing collaboration in areas like semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and defense innovation.

India's involvement in Aero India 2025, marking the United States' 15th appearance at the event, has further solidified this defense partnership. The participation of major American defense companies such as Lockheed

Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, and General Electric underscores Washington's commitment to strengthening India's defense sector. A standout development is the agreement with General Electric to co-produce F414 jet engines in India, a significant move towards achieving self-reliance in fighter jet technology. Additionally, India's acquisition of MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones has bolstered its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, enhancing maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region.

Beyond defense procurement, the launch of INDUS-X in 2023, a bilateral defense technology accelerator, has fostered collaborative research in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and space technologies. Moreover, India's participation in the U.S.-led Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) in 2022, along with increased naval engagements, highlights a growing focus on maritime security and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The defense and technology collaboration between India and the U.S. has expanded significantly, reflecting shared security interests, defense modernization, and strategic alignment in the region.

7.2 Deepening Traditional ties with Russia Amidst Global Rebalancing

Despite its growing strategic ties with the United States, India remains strongly rooted with Russia, deepening its defence, energy, and commerce links. The next 23rd India-Russia Bilateral Summit in New Delhi (2025) will strengthen defence cooperation, localised arms manufacture, and strategic energy initiatives. As Western sanctions limit Russia's international trade, India has strengthened rupee-ruble trading arrangements to assure the continuation of bilateral economic activities. Energy security remains at the heart of India-Russia relations. In 2023-24, two-way trade hit an all-time high of \$65.7 billion, driven mostly by India's increasing imports of Russian discounted crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG). Indian investments in Arctic energy endeavours, as well as the extension of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, demonstrate the need of long-term energy collaboration.

Defence cooperation with Russia is hampered by sanctions imposed on Russia's defence sector, which have caused delays in the delivery of the S-400 air defence system and the construction of the navy ship. India responded by prioritising domestic manufacture through the establishment of the AK-203 rifle co-production partnership and the BrahMos cruise missile cooperation. Though Russia continues to be India's primary armament supplier, the country has broadened its defence collaboration with France (Rafale fighter jets), Israel (anti-aircraft defences), and the United States (naval aircraft and UAVs).

7.3 Future Prospects: India's Role in a Multipolar World

In the future, India will be an important player in shaping a multipolar world order, balancing its relations with the U.S., Russia, the European Union, and rising powers in Africa and Latin America. Its foreign policy is becoming more focused on strategic autonomy, economic growth, and technological leadership so that India will continue to be an important global decision-maker.

One of India's key priorities is to increase its leadership in global governance forums. Its 2023 G20 presidency proved it could act as a bridge between developed and developing countries, especially on topics such as climate action, international debt restructuring, and supply chain resilience. India has also been active in BRICS expansion, deepening relationships with Brazil, South Africa, and the Gulf states to foster alternative economic models and cut dependence on Western financial institutions.

Economically, India is aligning itself As a manufacturing hub of the world, seeking to cut reliance on China-centric supply chains and expand trade with the U.S., European Union, and Southeast Asia. Its efforts to promote semiconductor production, renewable energy, and digital infrastructure reflect its desire to spearhead the next wave of industrial and technological change. At the same time, its Indo-Pacific strategy is also changing, with increased engagement in maritime security initiatives, regional connectivity projects, and defense cooperation with ASEAN countries.

Defense modernization will continue to be a high priority, with growing focus on domestic production and advanced technology partnerships. India is most likely to deepen joint ventures in military equipment, missile defense technologies, and space exploration with the U.S. and Russia in order to ensure a diversified and balanced security strategy.

Diplomatically, India will keep asserting itself As a neutral but powerful actor in international conflicts, espousing peaceful resolution while protecting its economic and security interests. An advocate of multipolarity, India will see that it is not pulled into hard alliances but continues to engage with all the major powers on equal terms, asserting its role As a force for stability in international relations

8.Conclusion

India's foreign policy has also seen a dramatic change with the changing global power balance, economic reorientation, and changing security challenges. With the world moving towards multipolarity, India has risen as A major player, maintaining a delicate balance in its ties with the U.S. and Russia while not compromising on its strategic independence. Through this study, India's balancing act in defense, economy, technology, and diplomacy has been examined, and its prowess in negotiating with both global powers without complete alignment has been showcased.

The core component of India's approach has been its defense and security partnership with both Washington and Moscow. The U.S. is now a key partner in defense technology, bilateral military exercises, and Indo-Pacific security, while Russia continues to be India's leading arms supplier and a long-term strategic partner. Despite geopolitical tensions, sanctions, and the Ukraine conflict, India has continued arms and energy trade with Russia while diversifying its military procurement from France, Israel, and the U.S. to ensure self-reliance and military preparedness.

On the economic front, India's trade and investment partnerships with the U.S. and Russia reflect its commitment to economic pragmatism. With the bilateral trade amounting to more than \$191 billion in 2022, the U.S. is now India's largest trading partner in the fields of IT, semiconductors, and digital technologies. At the same time, Russia has emerged as India's major energy partner, exporting record amounts of crude oil, nuclear energy cooperation, and Arctic infrastructure investments. India's capacity to capitalize on both economic relationships has improved its energy security, technological developments, and manufacturing potential, assuring sustainable growth.

India's reaction to geopolitical crises further attests to its neutrality and orientation towards multipolarity. While it has kept its economic relationship with Russia intact during the Ukraine conflict, it has also enhanced security collaboration with QUAD (U.S., Japan, Australia) and ASEAN to balance out Chinese assertiveness in The Indo-Pacific. This twin strategy has made India A leader of the Global South, championing fair global governance.

In the future, India will have both opportunities and challenges to maintain its strategic equilibrium. While U.S.-China tensions grow and Russia entrenches an alliance with Beijing, India must navigate fluctuating alliances without increasing defense dependence on Russia or over-relying on the U.S. Strengthen indigenous defense manufacturing, technology development, and multilateral cooperation within G20, BRICS+, and SCO will be critical in crafting its worldwide influence. India's foreign policy strategic vision hinges on a multipolar world where it engages all the great powers strategically without exclusive alignment with any grouping. With the utilization of its economic heft, technological prowess, and diplomatic engagement, India will emerge A force for stability in world affairs. Its capacity to adjust, bargain, and advance its interests will decide the extent to which it sustains strategic autonomy and improves its global position in the next few decades.

As an emerging world power, India's balancing act between Russia and the U.S. has consolidated its diplomatic maturity, influencing international politics and advancing world stability, cooperation, and 21st-century governance.

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