

Indo-Soviet (Russian) Strategic Relationship

Abstract

India's attraction towards Soviet Union was started even before Indian independence. Indian leaders in freedom struggle were greatly influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1917. Both countries shared a great deal of ideological affinity in the international arena. Both countries reiterated their support to each other at the higher and political levels. Relations with Russia are of vital importance to India. These relations are based on mutual understanding, trust and support of the people of both countries. This paper examines the Indo-Soviet (Russian) relations since independence to present scenario of Islamic-Fundamentalism.

Keywords: Bourgeoisie, Fundamentalism, Imbroglio, Arena.

Introduction

India got independence in 1947. Even before independence Indian leaders were of the opinion that socialist model better suited than capitalist model to India. Since independence India has followed the policy of peace and Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). During the period of Joseph Stalin, India's relations were not very warm, Joseph Stalin was a strong critic of Indian leaders of freedom struggle and he saw India's independence as a sham and he considered Indian leaders like Gandhi ji and Pt. Nehru as counter revolutionary forces and he said both leaders are the agents of bourgeoisie and counter revolutionary force.

In such an environment warm relations between two countries were not possible. Stalin was suspicious about the Indian fight for independence and he saw it as a bourgeoisie conspiracy. During our freedom struggle it is not accident that the soviet periodicals either refused to print information on the situation in India or described its Liberation as nothing other than a "Political Force".¹

The Kremlin was convinced that in August, 1947, the changes in India affected only the upper echelons of power and it was just the replacement of the administration of the viceroy by the bourgeoisie govt. of Nehru and the Mountbatten had simply occupies the seat of Governor General in one of the new dominions.

After independence, in 1949 Chief Architect of Indian Foreign Policy Pt. Nehru made a fruitless visit to USA and in this visit U.S. govt refused to provide food aid to India. Then Indian govt also requested the similar demand to USSR. In 1951 a contract between USSR and India was signed and by this contract Soviet Union decided to supply 1,00,000 tonnes of wheat to India in exchange for Indian exports of traditional commodities. After this contract India decided to participate in an International Economic Conference in Moscow and at the same time Moscow also decided to take part in industrial Exhibition in Bombay. At the same time Moscow offered Delhi Capital equipments.

During the last days of Stalin's regime, he arranged reception for our great philosopher Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (Indian Ambassador to USSR) on March 5, 1952 and his successor KPS Menon on February 18, 1953 and this was the real beginning of warm relationship between two countries. In the last years of Stalin, he received only two foreign ambassadors and two of them were the Indian Ambassadors. The golden era of strategic partnership had been started between two countries. After the death of Stalin in 1953, Indo-Soviet relations started improve rapidly.

Post Stalin Era

Indian Prime Minister Pt. Nehru adopted the policy of NAM (Non-Alignment Movement) and to take active part in Commonwealth of Nations. But in 1954 U.S. govt decided to provide arms and supply of sophisticated weapons to Pakistan. After the death of Stalin, in the regime of Nikita Khrushchev, Ideological prejudices against India started melting away. Khrushchev govt. recognised the importance of India as one of the largest country with great potential in Asia. Soviet Union and India shared common views on nuclear disarmament, anti colonialism, anti-racism and

Rajiv Kumar Sharma

Assistant Professor,
Deptt. of Political Science,
A.S. College,
Khanna

the rights of the Palestinians. This was the period when there was a huge jump in the level of military and economic cooperation between two countries. Five Year Plans (model) were taken from USSR by India. This was the period when India's dependence on USSR reached as high as 70 to 80 percent. In 1980's Soviet Union emerged as the biggest trade partner of India.

In August, 1971 Soviet Union and Indian govt signed a 'Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation'. This treaty was signed for 20 years with an automatic extension of 5 years with each subsequent period. This was the period when tension between India and Pakistan was at the highest level. This was the time when the National Movement in East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) erupted. The relations between India and Pakistan were at miserable state. During this time Soviet Foreign Minister paid visit to India. During the Indo-Pak War of 1971 'Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation' became an important safeguard for India's security, sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this war Soviet Union stood by India.

In the international arena both countries shared great ideological affinity. In spite of this ideological affinity India retained its independence of action and judgement on international issues and remained true to its non-aligned principles. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi rejected the Brezhnev's doctrine on Asian Security arrangement twice under the Soviet leadership. Even India criticised Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979.

In 1980's Soviet Union had leased a nuclear powered sub-marine to India.

In 1980's President Gorbachev joined the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in giving a call for moving towards 'A Nuclear Weapon-free and non-violent world'.

This was the golden period of Indo-Soviet relations and both countries signed a number of treaties or agreements.

The most tragic part was that this golden era of Indo-Soviet relationship was far too short-lived. The Gorbachev regime collapsed in 1991 and with this, came the end of Soviet Union. ²

In 1990s, in spite of pressure from Clinton administration, Russia delivered Cryogenic engines to ISRO as per the original schedule. After Pokhran II (Nuclear Tests) Russia refused to participate in sanctions against India and continued uninterrupted supply of military equipments to India. With the supply of Cryogenic engines to the ISRO by Russian govt, it became helpful for India's progress towards self reliance in launching space craft in 1990 and 1991. Soviet Union faced deep crisis at different levels and due to this ultimately USSR was collapsed in 1991. The infrastructure that supported trade, scientific, economic and technical cooperation was destroyed and Russian govt. found it difficult to adjust her relations with India.

Boris Yeltsin, New Russian President tried to maintain same relations with India but that could not happen because they were concerned with the economic and social problems and Russian relations with India were neglected. During this period of crisis U.S. govt. kept away from Russia and USA

Multinational Companies made hardly any investment in Russia.

Russian economy shown rapid economic growth under Putin's regime. The size of economy increased from \$200 Billion in 1998 to \$ 1.4 Trillion in 2008.

In 2007, foreign investment crossed \$ 100 Trillion during the decade before 2008, per capita income increased by 20 percent and some 30 million persons were lifted out of poverty. ³

Strong Defence and Diplomatic Ties

Russia is India's most important and reliable defence partner and is the only country in the world which India has an Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation at the ministerial level. Both countries exchange views on strategic and bi-lateral issues on the sidelines of the gatherings of heads of state/govt. of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), BRICS and the IRC. The Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation chaired by the Defence Ministers of two countries. There are also joint fora of the space, energy, nuclear science and petroleum agencies of the two countries to discuss scientific collaboration on different projects. In 1998 Russia signed a 10 years agreement with India on Military and Technological Cooperation. Russia also reiterated its decision to supply two nuclear reactors for Kudankulam. Russian govt. continued uninterrupted supply of equipment and spare parts of Indian Armed Forces even during the period of disruption, disorder and chaos in Soviet Union.

In the Vladimir Putin, Vajpayee Joint Statement of October, 2000, the Russian Govt. reiterated that it supports India as a strong and appropriate candidate of the expanded security council.

Putin in a speech made by him in Mumbai on October 5, 2000 while addressing to the gathering of nuclear scientists, he asserted that he would like to see India to participate in the CTBT Club but at the same time recognised that India's decision should be based on its strategic vision, national interest and needs of the people. During this visit both sides stressed the need for full implementation in good faith of existing bi-lateral and multi-lateral arms control treaties, including the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty.

On the issue of terrorism, the Russian stand is very clear and closer to Indian stand. Both countries are the victims of terrorism. The common position of both countries on terrorism was reflected in the joint statement of October, 2000 in the following words:

"They condemn terrorism and extremism in all its forms, irrespective of political, philosophical, ideological, religious, ethnic, racial or any other consideration that may be invoked to justify them, the two sides condemn that aid, abet and directly support cross border and international terrorism."

Russia and India signed an agreement on strategic partnership in 2000. During Putin's visit of 2007, Article 12 of the joint statement at conclusion of official visit to India is devoted to military, technical cooperation between India and Russia.

Since re-election of Putin in 2012, he attempted to reclaim the political, economic and geo-strategic space it lost as the Cold War ended in 1990 and USSR collapsed.

Indo-Russian Relations during Modi's Era

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the 6th BRICS Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil in July, 2014. Modi asserted that Indian relations with Russia will continue to enjoy the priority that they always had in India's foreign policy.

Modi remarked:

"Even a child in India, if asked to say who is India's best friend, will reply it is Russia, because Russia has been with India in times of crisis."⁴

Russian Vice Premier Dmitry Rogozin paid a one day visit to India on Dec. 8, 2015. He said "Russian was looking to India to fill the vacuum. He further said

"India-Russia relations now needed to move beyond the military arena".

"Previously it could be seen that we were focussed on military-technological cooperation. It is no longer so, we need India as a major trade and economic partner in the first place in conditions when we can no longer maintain economic inter-action with partners like Turkey because they have indeed been treacherous and cunning and have committed something which is going to throw our relations far back"⁵

In recent times Russia has been reeling under sanctions imposed by western countries in the wake of Ukrainian crisis. The recent shooting down of a Russian fighter plane by Turkey has further strained ties in the region with Russia now looking to expand trade ties with other countries especially with India.

Recently Putin boldly intervened in the Syrian imbroglio. Where United States and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) showed hesitation to confront militant groups fighting against the Assad regime.

On his two day visit to Russia on 23rd and 24th December, 2015 Modi said Russia offered support to India when very few nations were willing to

hold our hand. Modi praised Putin's leadership and he said, "Trust is a very big strength, confidence too, secondly it is openness, there are those who think something but say something. This I have not experienced with President Putin. What he thinks he says in clear words."⁶

Both countries shared concern over the issue of terrorism, two sides pressed for just fight against the terrorism. 16 pacts were signed including one Joint manufacturing of Military Helicopters, construction of 12 atomic plants with involvement of local companies in India, technological cooperation in railway sector.

Conclusion

Recent visit of Narendra Modi shows clear signals of strong Indo-Russian relations and both countries commitment to fight against terrorism.

"Without selectively and double standards"

And Putin's statement regarding India's claim for permanent seat in U.N. Security Council in the following words--

"Strong support to India's bid for permanent membership of the U.N. Security Council".

Of course, India's relations with Russia are stronger in 21st century as were in the 20th century. Now India and Russia are in a position to play an important role in the international arena. No nation of this world can ignore neither Russia nor India in the era of globalisation and Islamic fundamentalism.

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