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The Influence of Arms

Explaining the Durability of India–Russia Alignment

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The US–India relationship—described as “a defining partnership for the 21st century”—has seen a dramatic rise over the past two decades.¹ Seeing India as a “natural ally” with “shared values,” the United States undertook great efforts, beginning in 2005, “to help India to become a major world power in the 21st century.”² To that end, Washington has sought to boost New Delhi’s standing in the global order and international institutions, bolster India’s arms capabilities and technology base, and enable interoperability for military operations. Today, India has been designated a “major defense partner” on par with NATO allies, apex national security officials underscore how “vital” and “critical” India is to US strategy, and US officials contend India has a “pre-eminent role in the Administration’s Indo-Pacific vision.”³ Despite the American embrace, India also professes a great friendship and unprecedented “strategic partnership” with Russia, a country explicitly regarded by the United States as a hostile revisionist adversary and long-term strategic competitor.⁴

India has embraced Russia in a “special and privileged strategic partnership” that features regular dialogues between the heads of state as well as ministries, substantial advanced arms sales, and intergovernmental commissions to cooperate in trade, energy, science, technology, and culture. India has also joined Russia in new institutions and “minilaterals” (for example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation [SCO]; the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa [BRICS] grouping; and Russia–India–China [RIC] trilateral meeting), demurred from opposing Russia’s revisionist assault on the global order (from Crimea/Ukraine, to democratic election interference, to the Skripal chemical weapons attack), and extolled the partners’ shared “civilizational values,” pledging “new heights of cooperation through trust and friendship.”⁵

Strategic promiscuity aside, that a democratic, rule-bound, status-quo country like India would so strongly identify with an autocratic, rule-breaking, revisionist country like Russia is certainly “anomalous” and has baffled and frustrated American analysts and policy makers.⁶ Moreover, these seemingly dissonant leanings—

between the chief proponent of the rules-based international order and one of its principal antagonists—present a fundamental puzzle and question for policy makers. Given different interests, institutions, and ideas about global order, *what has kept India and Russia bound together and why?* This line of inquiry should be of interest to US policy makers seeking to make sense of Russia’s enduring appeal as well as expanding the strategic relationship with India.

This article seeks to offer a set of historic, political, ideational, and material factors driving the India–Russia relationship forward that require scrutiny. In short, we find that while the residue of Cold War collaboration, contemporary geopolitical alignments, and ideological convergence on a polycentric global order all contribute, the material arms relationship provides the strongest and most durable driver of the relationship. The breadth of Russian-origin platforms in the Indian military—which our analysis suggests composes 85 percent of major Indian weapons systems rather than the 60 percent figure often cited⁷—have created a “lock-in” effect, while the depth of relative support to India’s technology base and strategic systems have engendered a relatively high degree of indebtedness and trust in key strategic circles. Yet the quantity and sensitivity of Russian contributions to the Indian arsenal—features that could reinforce and sustain the relationship much to the chagrin of US policy makers—have largely been underappreciated.⁸ At the same time, we find scant evidence that India’s extended arms collaboration and geopolitical relationship with Russia have led to a diffusion of strategic thinking that has directly or indirectly shaped military doctrine.

Following this introduction, this article proceeds to detail the path dependency from the pair’s historic Cold War ties. Section three examines broad contemporary strategic alignment maintained due to geopolitical configurations and mutual political support for balancing threats. Section four assesses overlapping ideas and strategic worldviews regarding the international order. Section five hones in on the material bonds that we judge to be the leading driver that has carried the relationship during and after the Cold War: direct arms and technology transfers. Even if the India–Russia relationship is comparatively narrow without significant economic and people-to-people ties, this final component of the relationship, in particular, has preserved a high and unique degree of trust between India and Russia, which ensures the relationship will remain strong for decades. Following this, section six considers whether certain material arms transfers and technology sharing have had a distinct feedback effect on strategic concepts or doctrines, which could potentially render India unconsciously even more aligned to Russia. Finally, we conclude with implications for India’s future relations with Russia and the United States.

Cold War Inheritance

India initially moved toward the Soviet Union owing to a set of security, economic, and political motives, but this relationship has continued to inform India's preferences and incentives, while shaping future relations with great powers long after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although India was a self-professed nonaligned power, by the second half of the Cold War it had clearly gravitated toward the USSR through significant purchases of Soviet defense equipment, the signing of the 1971 treaty, dense scientific cooperation, and *de facto* endorsement of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Origins

There are several reasons why India first gravitated toward the USSR. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's anticolonial sentiments set the country on a path to autonomy and self-reliance, but Defence Minister Krishna Menon's socialist leanings drew India closer to the Soviet Union. India's nonalignment approach initially sought to counterbalance its legacy defense and bureaucratic ties to the British and the West by actively strengthening its defense relations with the USSR.⁹

More significant though was the US–Pakistan alliance. While Nehru was fundamentally skeptical of the United States and did not want to be drawn into the Cold War by siding with either the United States or the Soviet Union,¹⁰ US alignment with Pakistan forced India's hand. US partnership with Pakistan, first through the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and then the Baghdad Pact in the 1950s, naturally prompted India to lean toward the USSR to balance Pakistan.¹¹

New Delhi and Moscow also supported each other internationally beginning in the 1950s, with the Soviets quickly adopting the Indian position on Kashmir (and casting vetoes in the United Nations Security Council to back them) and calling for negotiations over Sino-Indian border disputes rather than backing the Chinese. The Soviets were motivated to keep India out of the Western bloc and to check China's expansion.¹² Moscow also sought to bolster India internally through substantial economic aid beginning in 1955 totaling 1 billion USD in long-term credit over a decade, including support for heavy industrial projects, and pressing the Communist Party of India to move from militarized opposition to peaceful opposition within the Indian parliamentary democracy.¹³ India, for its part, voted against the UN General Assembly resolution that called for Soviet troops to withdraw from Hungary and tacitly supported their invasion of Czechoslovakia.¹⁴

Furthermore, arms sales added a new dimension to the relationship. As the Sino-Soviet relationship began to fray and India grew more capable of managing

the internal communist threat to its security in the 1950s, New Delhi began to look to Soviet military technology to balance China, and more importantly Pakistan. After India began its defense cooperation with the USSR with engine acquisitions, one of the first major arms agreements it made was of its first supersonic jet fighter, the MiG-21, in 1962, which opened the gate to large-scale defense cooperation, production, and arguably dependence (to be discussed later).

Tilt

India more explicitly tilted toward the Soviets in the second half of the Cold War, particularly during and after the events of 1971. Though a treaty had been offered as early as 1969, India's impending clash with Pakistan moved it to formalize the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1971 under Indira Gandhi, who was also more ideologically aligned with the Soviets than the Americans.¹⁵ This tightening of relations was largely due to India's wartime experience. After the United States ended all arms sales to India and Pakistan during the 1965 and 1971 wars, India came to perceive the Soviets as more reliable. However, India did not want to be perceived as a Soviet ally; so, New Delhi limited the scope of the Friendship Treaty and excluded any mutual defense clause.¹⁶ The two sides also signed the treaty for different reasons: the Soviets desired India's support against China, and, although India also sought to deter China, New Delhi believed that the treaty implied Soviet support for its position on East Pakistan.¹⁷ Additionally, even while the Soviets feared Pakistan's dismemberment, this treaty gave Gandhi the confidence to intervene in the Bangladesh War of Independence against West Pakistani forces, as she perceived the treaty as a deterrent to Chinese or US intervention on behalf of Pakistan.¹⁸

Perceptions of Russian reliability and American perfidy can be distilled in a single US-Soviet engagement during the 1971 conflict. While the details remain sketchy and disputed, several accounts suggest the Indian leadership was convinced that Russian naval intervention in December 1971 directly helped deter US military action against India in support of Pakistan.¹⁹ When the US dispatched warships—including the USS *Enterprise* aircraft carrier to the Indian Ocean—to deter India from destroying Pakistan, several accounts suggest around 16 Soviet vessels were believed to have entered the region and begun trailing US ships as others positioned themselves to intercept with antiship missiles backed by nuclear submarines, forcing a US departure.²⁰

New Delhi's tilt to the Soviets only sharpened after Moscow refrained from condemning India's 1974 nuclear test and even agreed to ship heavy water for India's nuclear reactors after the United States and Canada suspended shipment.²¹

The Soviets also backed India's military involvement in Sri Lanka in the 1980s, while India backed the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.

It might be said the USSR perhaps overinvested in India—even in its waning days arguably “prepared to pay more than it received”—as it harbored visions for Delhi at the center of a Soviet-led security system in Asia.²² The Soviets made assurances without requests for reciprocity. During a visit to New Delhi soon after the Sino-Soviet border clashes in 1969, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin promised India that “if your great country is threatened at its borders, then we will be there to help you.”²³ Nevertheless, despite the tremendous strategic altruism Moscow showed New Delhi, believing India to be its “bridgehead in Asia,” this never materialized even as India continued to view itself as “indispensable” to Moscow, and not a client state.²⁴

In total, a slight ideological preference for the Soviet Union, Washington's support for Pakistan, Moscow's crisis-time political and military support for India, but most importantly, a robust and generous arms sales program that facilitated an enduring military-technical relationship (detailed later) coalesced to form the logic behind the Indo-Soviet relationship, which has, in many ways, carried over into the present day.

Path Dependence from Cold War

The Indo-Russian relationship has persisted in the post-Cold War period due, in large part, to path dependence. There is accumulated familiarity, goodwill, and seemingly emotional residue among senior Indian diplomats and bureaucrats due to the various elements of Soviet support for India detailed above.²⁵ Even as a dissolving Soviet Union created uncertainty for many of its partners, including India, the Soviet state, and later Russian scientists, continued to provide India with advanced nuclear and space technology.

Additionally, path dependence suggests the relationship has achieved some lock-in effects for several potential reasons: high fixed costs sunk into the venture render reversal or switching quite difficult (and the risk that much of India's existing stock of materiel could be compromised if Russia denied spare parts, ammunition, or servicing support); the accumulation of learning by organizations, operators, and maintainers of Russian systems; and, potentially, the network effects between operational, procurement, financing, and political organizations like the military services, the Ministries of Defence and External Affairs, and political leadership.²⁶

In short, the historic experiences of alignment, fulfillment of commitments, and the joint weathering of major crises undoubtedly all strongly influence India's decision to keep Russia as a close partner. However, as we will explore later in this

article, the accumulated stock of materiel from the Cold War created specific lock-in effects that ensured a robust defense sales relationship with Russia even after the end of the Cold War.²⁷

Contemporary Geopolitical Alignments

The Cold War is over, but even if ideological ties no longer bind as they once did, India and Russia still share broad political and strategic convergences on several key issues in Asia. These priorities include mutual silence, if not political support, in conflicts with key adversaries as well as stability in Eurasia through a balance of power with China that entails engagement and hedging rather than direct confrontation. However, friction emerges regarding either state's relationships with the United States, China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Mutual Backing

Historically India and the USSR embraced what one scholar describes as a “reciprocity of silence.”²⁸ During the Cold War, through forbearance, silence, and abstentions, India effectively backed Soviet invasions in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, while the Soviets supported India in its wars with Pakistan, its military operations in Goa, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, and its position on Kashmir at the UN.²⁹ The Russian “all-weather friend” stood by New Delhi even after India's nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998. More recently, Russia became the first member of the United Nations Security Council to endorse India's position on Kashmir after New Delhi abrogated the autonomy provisions of the state in 2019, imprisoned political leaders, and reinstated central control.³⁰ In return, India has defended or remained silent on Russian actions in the Syrian conflict, its seizure of Crimea and destabilization of Ukraine, political interference in democratic elections, and its position on chemical weapons use.³¹

The summer 2020 Sino-Indian border crisis in eastern Ladakh further illuminated India's dependence on Russia. Early in the crisis, Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh discounted pandemic lockdowns to travel to Moscow, confer with Russian defense officials, secure emergency supplies of spare parts and equipment, purchase new fighter aircraft, and seek expedited transfer of arms purchases. India may have also sought Russia's help as a potential crisis manager helping to defuse the border clashes in India's favor as they were credited with doing during the 2017 Doklam standoff.³²

Priority of China Threat

Russia and India possess a shared concern over China and mutual interests in contending with Beijing's rise but also identify higher priorities, less confrontational approaches, and opportunities for cooperation with China. While neither state has sought to overtly hard balance China, India has hedged between slowly building some internal capabilities, rhetorically supporting US regional strategy, and challenging Chinese initiatives, while carefully trying not to draw China's ire. In comparison, Russia appears to have bandwagoned for now, strengthening its military and economic ties to China. Many attest that in private though, Russia remains profoundly apprehensive of Beijing due to population asymmetries, China's encroachment into Central Asia, and its bypassing of Russia to get to Europe.³³

First, Russia and India do not view their eastern borders with China as their primary threat. At present, Russia still perceives US–NATO presence to its West as its main threat. Despite some shifts underway since the Sino-Indian clashes in Ladakh in summer 2020, Indian force posture, deployments, and current Indian doctrine suggest it sees Pakistan as the more immediate threat.³⁴ These legacy concerns dominate both states' conventional force planning and short- to medium-term focus. While both are suspicious of China and its intentions, they appear to prefer free-riding or buck-passing by letting Western states, particularly the United States, deal with China.³⁵ India's and Russia's borders with China are also lengthy, a geographic vulnerability that may partially account for their desire to keep tensions low.

India's and Russia's theories of how China should be managed also differ from the prevailing thoughts of the United States and some of its allies, like Australia and Japan, who have chosen to counter China through hard balancing: military build-ups and deepening alliance relationships to push back against Chinese influence and economic power.³⁶ Conversely, Russia and India have preferred a more diplomatic, multilateral "tethering" strategy with China, focused on mutual benefit.³⁷ This has come in the form of substantive political investments in some multilateral alignments including China, such as the RIC trilateral,³⁸ BRICS, and SCO.

Despite some apprehension, Russia and India have pursued deeper economic cooperation with China while minimizing confrontation.³⁹ For example, after the 2017 Doklam border dispute, Prime Minister Narendra Modi went to great lengths to curb friction points, meet President Xi Jinping in a bilateral Wuhan summit to discuss pragmatic economic and information-sharing arrangements.⁴⁰ Russia's embrace of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is well known, but India has criticized China's BRI out of concern for sovereignty, transparency, and sustainability.⁴¹ Nevertheless, India has sought to work around this to enhance China–India trade

and investment, though the events of 2020 have also put this in flux.⁴² India maintains large financial stakes in the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and since 2014, has received at least 10 billion USD in Chinese investments, with planned investments totaling 26 billion USD.⁴³

Despite different threat prioritization, tethering, and economic cooperation, India and Russia seek to hedge their bets with China, sometimes in tandem. Moscow nurtures a relationship with both Asian powers, even as Russia helps India acquire defense technology to compete with China and pursues a rapprochement with Japan.⁴⁴ Indian relations boost Russia's political and economic status for potentially many reasons: a "preclusion" strategy with Russia to prevent a deep alliance with China; a rising-power strategy to distribute the costs of balancing while minimizing opposing coalitions; or an extractive strategy to "enhance its bargaining power with the US."⁴⁵ While India is more open about supporting the US Indo-Pacific strategy and hedging China, Russia may be assisting it by aiding India's military modernization.

Geopolitical Friction

Of course, contemporary geopolitical conditions also bring innumerable frictions. Both India and Russia have partnered with each other's rivals and adversaries. This section explores how these partnerships have created a divergence in the Indo-Russian relationship that both sides have attempted to compartmentalize to maintain their partnership.

India-US Relations. For Russia, India's closer partnership with the United States has become a source of unease. Along with harmonizing its Indo-Pacific strategy with the United States—which Russia has been critical of—India has recently upgraded the Quad dialogue to the ministerial level and pledged to purchase more US weapons systems.⁴⁶ India has managed to straddle both relationships with noncommittal hedging, but Washington entrenched a harder position on revisionist competitors in the 2018 *National Defense Strategy (NDS)*, which may box New Delhi into zero-sum choices. An India hewing closer to US positions on international order could alienate Moscow.

Russia-China Relations. The Sino-Russian defense relationship has deepened in recent years in the form of joint exercises, high technology sharing and codevelopment, cyber security, and space ventures.⁴⁷ Russia's relationship with China has progressed and could generate two vulnerabilities for India, as the latter continues to rely on Russian arms. First, if there was another border conflict with China (or even with Pakistan), Beijing's asymmetric leverage on Moscow may press Russia to slow or arrest the supply of spare parts and ammunition.⁴⁸ Second, in peacetime, China's acquisition and knowledge of advanced Russian systems can

allow it to identify and exploit weaknesses in India's defenses. India cannot easily mitigate these risks because sudden procurement shifts may cause Russia to deny India critical spares or maintenance before India can sufficiently diversify.⁴⁹

Russia–Pakistan Relations. Russia's relationship with Pakistan has been quite possibly a greater source of frustration for India than the Russia–China entente because India sees Pakistan as a direct near-term threat.⁵⁰ Despite periodic attempts at warming in the 1960s, Russia–Pakistan relations turned hostile in the 1980s after the latter sponsored Afghan mujahideen against Soviet forces, a relationship that persisted in the post–Cold War era.⁵¹ Today, though, Moscow has been slowly improving relations—with sales of attack helicopters to Pakistan and three military exercises—as Russia positions itself for a post-US withdrawal Afghanistan.⁵² While some analysts dismiss a Russian pivot as mostly symbolic, in part to enable collaboration on Afghanistan and because Pakistan simply cannot afford substantial amounts of Russian equipment at commercial prices, others fear it is a warning to India about diversification.⁵³

Afghanistan End Game. A final realm of India–Russia friction appears in their divergent approaches toward the Afghanistan conflict. While India has long opposed a political reconciliation between the Taliban and the government, Russia's theory of regional stability has led it to support the Taliban in recent years. While India perceives the Taliban as a Pakistani proxy and a potential host to regional anti-India militant groups, Moscow sees the Taliban as a potential bulwark against the transnational terror groups—like the Islamic State (ISIS)—that Russia most fears.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Moscow's and New Delhi's views may converge during the peace process, since they share an interest in limiting the degree of Taliban influence in a future power-sharing government. Of particular interest is whether Russia permits India to reactivate and scale up its military and intelligence presence at Ayni Air Base in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, where India previously had been able to conduct logistics and supply operations in the 1990s.⁵⁵

Views of International Order

Despite the tensions outlined above, in many ways, India and Russia share a strategic approach to world order.⁵⁶ India and Russia share several similar theories of how the international system should be organized—particularly their embrace of “polycentrism,” which encompasses both spheres of influence and multipolarity.⁵⁷ However, they hold divergent views on the international rules-based order.

Spheres of Influence

Moscow and New Delhi are strong proponents of spheres of influence, with Russia arguing that it should have unrivaled influence over parts of the former Soviet Union and those states in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and India asserting that its cultural ties in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) constitute a sphere of influence.⁵⁸ (To be sure, some contend the United States also engages in this thinking with the de facto extension of its historic Monroe Doctrine to Latin America).⁵⁹ Therefore, both states believe that their role as the regionally dominant power bestows upon them the right to exert influence over smaller states, preventing them from forming alliances with outside powers. Polycentrism for Russia extends beyond security interests to the protection of political, economic, and cultural spaces impervious to Western liberal ideas.⁶⁰ India has embraced Western values for decades, but a potential sociopolitical transformation underway may give rise to a similar nationalist defensiveness and antipathy toward Western liberalism.⁶¹

While Russia is undoubtedly suspicious of US engagement in its sphere of influence or “areas of privileged interest,” it is often not appreciated that New Delhi too jealously guards India’s own sphere of influence and has historically “firmly stood against US presence in the region.”⁶² In the 1980s, India got entangled in a civil war in Sri Lanka to preclude US regional involvement and then collaborated with Moscow to designate the Indian Ocean a “zone of peace” to eject US forces from the island base of Diego Garcia.⁶³ Until late 2020, India had not only vetoed a plan for US basing rights in the Maldives but also pursued a diplomatic strategy that has complicated current US basing in Diego Garcia.⁶⁴

While India supports the US vision for a rules-based order throughout the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi still desires that its Western partners “treat South Asia and the adjoining Indian Ocean waters as the ‘traditional sphere of Indian influence.’”⁶⁵ India’s desire for “political hegemony” in the IOR, and in particular India’s views on legal jurisdiction, freedom of navigation, and foreign military surveying within its exclusive economic zone, conflict with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.⁶⁶ While some claim India has sought to cooperate and not dominate regional states, others contend that the resentment toward India from its neighbors stems from its heavy-handedness, and lack of economic heft to underwrite regional integration.⁶⁷

Multipolarity

In a joint press conference following a 2018 summit with Pres. Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Modi stated, “Russia and India agree on multipolarity and multilateralism in the world.”⁶⁸ Although India has aligned with the United States

against China, New Delhi does not wish to be steered into a bipolar world order where it plays a subordinate role. However, Washington seems poised to replicate its Cold War alliance strategy that embraces a bipolar distribution of power, with a US-guided, but looser, “networked security architecture” in place of a “hub and spokes” system.⁶⁹ The residue of India’s Cold War nonalignment posture, though, predisposes New Delhi to oppose great-power competitions, jealously guard its strategic autonomy, and balk at serving as a vessel for another state’s strategic priorities. India’s theory then is not to coalesce under a single Western bloc but to support geopolitical pluralism through multialignment with regional powers like Russia, the European Union, Japan, the United States, and even Iran.⁷⁰ However, Russia and India do differ on which state is the target of the multipolar reordering: Russia wants an end to US hegemony, while India wants to preempt Chinese hegemony in Asia.⁷¹

Rules-Based International Order

While India’s and Russia’s views of spheres of influence and multipolarity generally converge, their view of the status-quo global order diverges. New Delhi recognizes the immense benefits India has accrued from the status-quo order and, therefore, has some investment in maintaining it. In a noteworthy speech at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, Prime Minister Modi articulated India’s support for a rules-based order built on international law, a respect for sovereignty, and equal access to the commons.⁷² In harmony with the US Indo-Pacific strategy, India has prioritized protection of the free flow of trade throughout the region and supported the US-backed status quo. Simultaneously, India’s support for this order comes with qualifications, as it has left the door open to be “inclusive” of China and Russia playing a constructive role in the region.⁷³

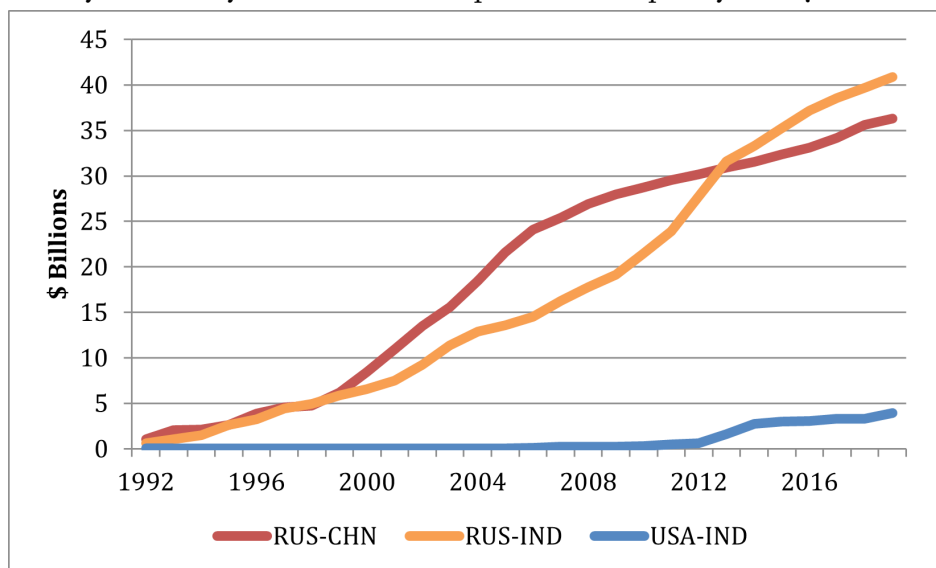
In contrast, Russia has explicitly broken with parts of this order. Moscow perceives foreign intervention (particularly in the former Soviet republics), democracy promotion, and the free flow of information as threats to Russia’s regime and international interests.⁷⁴ Moscow has developed a raiding or “brigandry” strategy as an asymmetrical response to Russia’s power imbalance with NATO. Such indirect coercion, disruption, and cost imposition—characterized by many as “hybrid,” “gray zone,” and “information warfare”—seek to compel Washington to compromise on a new power condominium for Moscow.⁷⁵

Though New Delhi and Moscow share a belief in polycentrism, consisting of multipolarity and spheres of influence, and India may be sympathetic to Russia’s critiques of the international order (consistent with India’s critiques of Western moralist intervention), India likely does not endorse Russia’s brigandry strategy, which Islamabad may draw inspiration from for Pakistan’s own disruptive playbook

within South Asia.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, New Delhi's willingness to accept or even defend Russia's methods stands in conspicuous contrast to India's rhetorical defense of the rules-based international order. One cannot dismiss that Indian interests may be advanced if reckless Russian brigandry effectively accelerates a transition to polycentrism.

Enduring Arms Relationship

While the geopolitical and ideational agreements certainly enhance the strength of the India–Russia partnership, the true core of the relationship is the abiding arms relationship, which has persisted since the Cold War and evolved from arms sales and technology transfer to the lease of a nuclear submarine and technical advising on the development of an indigenous Indian ballistic missile submarine (nuclear-powered) (SSBN). The depth of this relationship may not have been fully appreciated or at least may have been discounted. It is estimated that the Soviet Union supplied India with 35 billion USD in equipment between 1960 and 1990, most without immediate payment, and that too to be paid in Indian rupees at concessionary interest rates.⁷⁷ Former deputy chairman of India's Planning Commission, PN Haskar, remarked that this Soviet/Russian support helped to bolster "India's dignity, India's sovereignty and India's independence."⁷⁸ Indo-Soviet defense ties began in the 1960s and have persisted ever since, maturing from a buyer-seller dynamic to codevelopment of weapon systems.



(Source: Arms Transfers Dataset, Stockholm International Peace Institute)

Figure 1. Cumulative value of arms transfers by seller-buyer between 1992-2019.

Despite Indian frustrations with issues of quality, spares, and maintenance costs of Soviet-origin systems, Russian officials estimate New Delhi has purchased a hefty 70 billion USD worth of arms from Moscow since 1991, including third- and fourth-generation fighter aircrafts, transport helicopters, aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, frigates, cruise missiles, air defenses.⁷⁹ Today, India has absorbed a third of Russian arms exports over the past decade, far exceeding China's arms purchases from Russia, and the vast majority of India's contemporary armed forces systems originate from Russia.⁸⁰ While the United States touts as the cornerstone of its relationship with India the fact that arms sales have grown from nothing to between 16–18 billion USD over 15 years, New Delhi signed 15 billion USD in new arms contracts with Moscow in the span of a year between 2018 and 2019.⁸¹ Though SIPRI data differs from other sources due to accounting procedures, anchoring years, and exchange rates, the data in figure 1 suggests that while Indian arms purchases from the US grew from zero in 2005 to 4 billion USD over 15 years, in that same period, cumulative Indian arms purchases from Russia grew by seven times that figure.

Cold War Acquisitions

New Delhi's procurement of the MiG-21 in the early 1960s provided the first big boost for Indo-Soviet defense ties. India's relationship with the Soviets served to not only secure its immediate security needs but also to facilitate technological transfers in service of long-term goals like defense production indigenization and industrial development.

Reliable, cost-effective supplier. Before the MiG-21, India's fighter squadrons consisted entirely of British and French aircraft. India chose to purchase the MiG-21 rather than the alternative American or British offers because of the MiG's superior speed, cost, and ease of operation and maintenance as well as the supplier's efficient, centralized decision making and absence of any conflicting defense relationship with Pakistan. On top of this, the Soviets offered assistance in the manufacture of the MiG-21 in India and integration of India into the supply chain for airframes, engines, and component parts.⁸²

Furthermore, around the same time, the Indians were unable to acquire US naval equipment or receive approval to borrow three British destroyers. These failures led Indian officials to question whether the West was a reliable source for arms. India then moved to procuring submarines, frigates, bombers, attack and transport helicopters, air defense systems, and tanks from the Soviets. Geopolitical factors such as the Sino-Soviet split and the Sino-US détente also pushed New Delhi and Moscow to develop more significant military-industrial ties. Ultimately, India's preference for Soviet-origin weapons was nurtured over the years

and came down to “the perceived low risk of embargoes or of denial of technologies and spare parts, together with easy credit and barter arrangements, low price and competitive performance.”⁸³

The terms of the Soviet arms trade to India were eminently favorable, often referred to as “friendship prices.” The Soviets offered advanced systems at low prices, allowing India to stagger payment over an extended period and purchase in rupees. Alternatively, Western governments often required upfront payment before delivery and rarely allowed sales in local currency.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the pricing was set at the same time as the Soviet political leadership approved the sale, not separately by the private firm delivering the system. While European arms makers operated similarly, American firms did not, creating an additional complicating factor.⁸⁵

The persistence of the Indo-Soviet relationship has been attributed to the pragmatic transactionalism of both countries. The Soviets were attracted to India because of its large defense market, even though they were dissatisfied with the payment system, at times. By the end of the Cold War, the Indian military consisted of an estimated 70-percent Soviet-origin equipment, but our data suggests this has actually grown over the past three decades.⁸⁶

Indigenization. In addition to immediate security needs, the Indians also selected the MiG-21 in the hopes that it would result in the transfer of technology and capacities to stimulate indigenous defense production of advanced weapons systems. Indigenization served two purposes: first, it would ensure military self-sufficiency and greater autonomy from major powers; second, there was the potential for economic spillover effects into the commercial domain.

The extent of Soviet assistance and licensing of arms production to India was substantial—India received more assistance with its production than any other developing country that purchased Soviet arms. This included assistance with the construction of factories to assemble licensed MiG-21 and MiG-23/27 fighters as well as to repair T-72 tanks.⁸⁷ More significantly, after the Soviets denied China licensing production, they granted this opportunity to India (though the USSR did offer significant technological transfers to China in the 1950s).⁸⁸

Finally, India’s desire for technology transfers to help speed the pace of indigenization was aimed not only at defense production but also at industrialization more broadly. New Delhi, much like Japan and Israel, sought to diffuse the technical learning and human capital India built up in the military-industrial complex into the commercial sector, with the goal of boosting technological innovation.⁸⁹ Though this has had mixed success—in part because of India’s lack of absorptive capacity, including the requisite technological and industrial base and tacit organizational knowledge—this motive still animates Indian procurement decision making.⁹⁰

Contemporary Arms Trade

The breakup of the Soviet Union sent New Delhi scrambling for sustainment lines and alternative sources of spare parts and defense equipment, but India persisted with Russian arms procurement post 1991 for several reasons. The biggest reason was path dependence of accumulated stock, platform familiarity by operators, training, and organization around acquisition flows. India, essentially, remains reliant on Russia to keep its military functioning, which makes a deliberate split, either political or on arms sales, near impossible without rendering India deeply vulnerable. Furthermore, India still considered Russian weapons cost-efficient, even though friendship prices evaporated in the post-Cold War period and, perhaps, because the full lifecycle costs, inclusive of servicing and maintenance, were not immediately apparent.⁹¹ Additionally, as India diversified sourcing from other Western suppliers like Israel, France, and later the United States, its bargaining power vis-à-vis Russia grew.⁹² Due to Moscow's economic need for foreign exchange through defense exports, Russia was more open to India's demand for licensed production or joint development on some technologically advanced systems, like cruise missiles, nuclear submarines, fighter aircraft, nuclear energy, and surface ships (including an aircraft carrier). India is unlikely to find another state as willing as Russia is to develop high-level collaboration on advanced strategic systems. This only strengthens India's resolve to continue the relationship, as it will likely bear fruit well into the future.

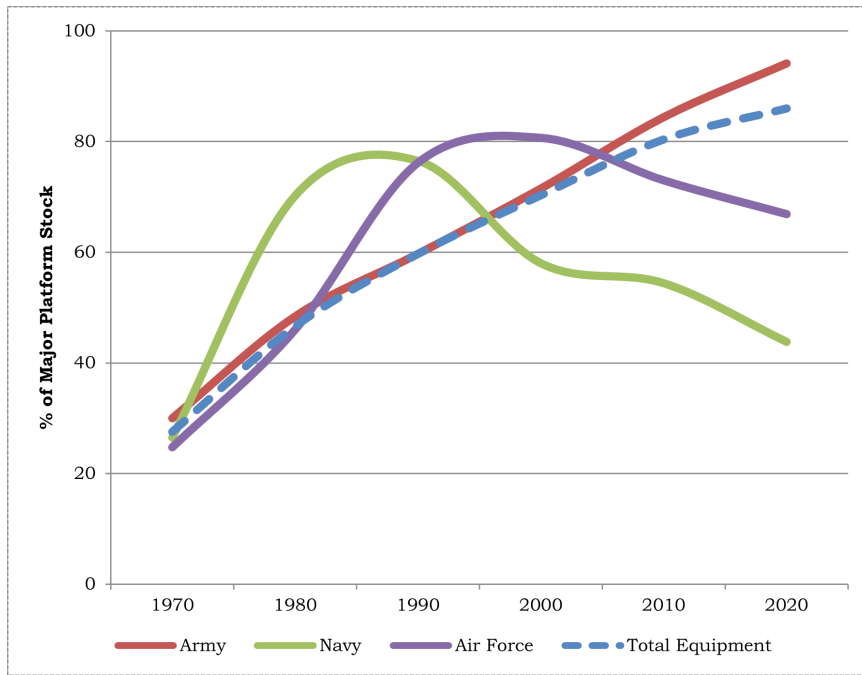
Missiles. The joint development of the BrahMos cruise missile system is considered the most substantive case of Indo-Russian defense collaboration. In 1998, India's Defense and Research Development Organization (DRDO) and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya created joint venture BrahMos Aerospace to develop a supersonic cruise missile system. Russia developed the missile's engine and seeker, while India worked on the guidance control system, airframe, and on-board electronics.⁹³ For India, the advantage of joint development with Russia on BrahMos was access to technology related to canisterization of missiles, which enabled DRDO to indigenously develop it for India's Agni-I missile.⁹⁴ The degree of "joint" development should not be overstated, however, since the BrahMos propulsion technology, arguably the most sophisticated part of the missile, is based almost entirely on Russia's Yakhont SS-N-26 antiship cruise missile.⁹⁵

Naval Equipment. The Soviet Union loaned India one of its Charlie-class nuclear-powered submarines (SSN) for a period of three years between 1988 and 1991, the first time any country had ever done so for another.⁹⁶ New Delhi and Moscow built on this cooperation, with Russia leasing another nuclear-powered attack submarine, the K-152 *Nerpa*, to India for a period of 10 years in

2012, and a third SSN will be leased in 2025.⁹⁷ India also purchased Russian Talwar-class frigates, which came into service in 2003–04.⁹⁸ India purchased another three in 2013 and has contemplated purchasing more.⁹⁹ Russia also sold India an aircraft carrier, designated INS *Vikramaditya*, which, though marred by cost overruns and delays, was offered at a marginally concessionary rate to replace India's retiring British-origin carrier.¹⁰⁰ The most significant example of a collaborative project has been Russian assistance in the development of India's SSBN, the INS *Arihant*.¹⁰¹

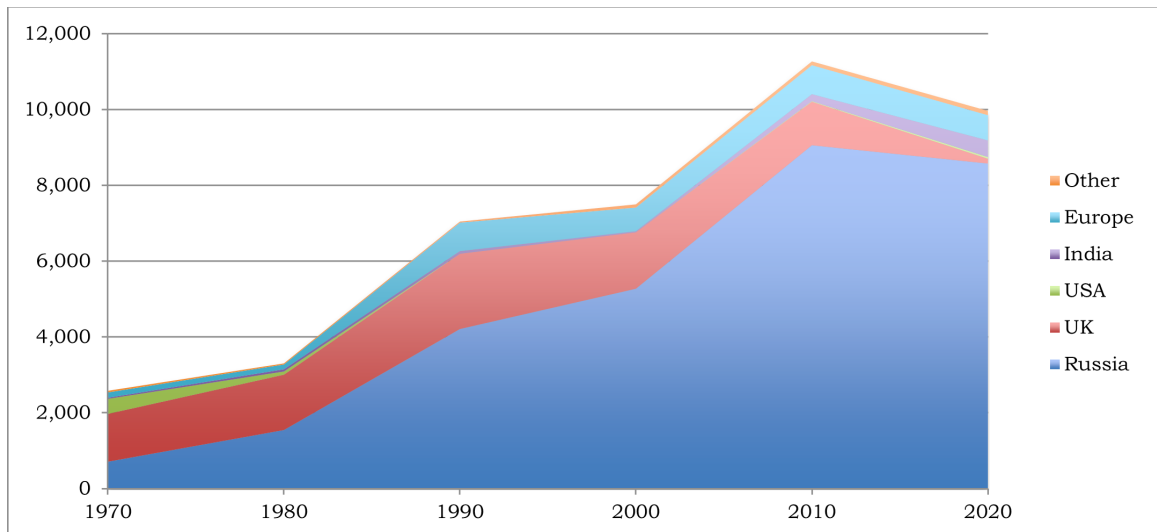
Fighter Aircraft. An agreement between New Delhi and Moscow for India's Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to manufacture the Su-30MKI under a "deep license" production was seen as a significant development because India would be able to indigenously manufacture all the components of the multirole fighter aircraft, including the engine.¹⁰² Russia's Su-30MKI, with Israeli and French avionics, ultimately became the Indian Air Force's frontline aircraft.¹⁰³ Indian analysts routinely bemoan the fact that licensed production did not result in complete transfer of technology, but this may be more a function of the deficiencies within India's indigenous state-owned defense enterprises (defense public-sector undertakings).

When India and Russia began discussions on the fifth-generation fighter aircraft (FGFA) in the early 2000s, the Russians had already developed a prototype for it, the Su-57. New Delhi was concerned that India would not receive significant access to technology or know-how, since most of the design and development of the aircraft had already been completed.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, a joint development agreement was finally signed between Russia's Sukhoi and India's HAL in 2007,¹⁰⁵ and Sukhoi's director announced that they would "share the funding, engineering, and intellectual property in a 50-50 proportion."¹⁰⁶ However, the project encountered stumbling blocks when Sukhoi balked at giving HAL a large work share due to India's lack of experience, and New Delhi worried India would not be able to reap indigenization benefits for its investment.¹⁰⁷ Delays and cost overruns on the Russian side also continued to plague the project. After 11 years of negotiations, India withdrew from joint development of the FGFA in 2018, but the Russians reoffered the agreement in 2019 under better relations and potentially better technology-transfer terms, which India has not ruled out.¹⁰⁸ Russia's consideration of sharing the source codes for a FGFA likely outstrips anything on offer from other partners.¹⁰⁹



(Source: *The Military Balance, IISS*)

Figure 2. Major Indian military equipment of Russian origin (% per decade)



(Source: *The Military Balance, IISS*)

Figure 3. Cumulative major Indian military equipment pieces (by national origin/decade)

Nuclear Energy Cooperation. Russia has been India's most important nuclear energy partner for the past few decades. Russia has completed construction on four nuclear reactors, with two more under construction and as many as six planned.¹¹⁰ Russian assistance to India's civilian nuclear program, in the form of enriched uranium fuel supply, became increasingly important after some Western partners, like the United States, ended cooperation after India's 1974 nuclear test. Russia continued construction on two nuclear reactors, even after India's 1998 nuclear tests and international pressure to end nuclear cooperation with India. Additionally, analysts assume that the India–Russia nuclear cooperation agreement, which is not public, “allows India to reprocess the spent fuel from Russian reactors” and, very likely, any other spent Russian fuel used in non-Russian-origin reactors.¹¹¹

Arms Procurement Frictions

Despite their deep arms relationship, there have been several points of friction between New Delhi and Moscow over these procurements. The first issue has been quality. Russian systems were never the highest quality but were considered optimal at comparable levels of Western quality, with 30–35-percent lower cost, robust performance, and simplicity of maintenance.¹¹² India encountered several problems, though, including substandard systems or contractual obligations not being met. For instance, in 2012, India's defense ministry reported that more than half the 872 MIGs procured from USSR/Russia had crashed, the source of the aircraft's “flying coffin” nickname.¹¹³ The recently procured Su-30MKI has also been plagued by engine-related issues and display systems problems that may have contributed to five aircraft crashes between 2012 and 2017.¹¹⁴ However, some contend the problem has to do with systems integration, because the DRDO has sought to experiment with “Frankenstein” platforms by adding in French and Israeli avionics onto a Russian fighter.¹¹⁵

In addition, when it comes to supply of spare parts, Indian officials have privately complained about delays, price revisions, cost overruns, and demands for advance payments or new or long-term contracts, some even designed to leverage India's dependence on Russia.¹¹⁶ However, this may begin to be redressed with a recent agreement that would allow India to manufacture spare parts and components domestically.¹¹⁷

Finally, even as Russian codevelopment and technology transfers are routinely heralded and are the standard by which all other arms agreements are implicitly evaluated against, India remains perennially dissatisfied with the limits of technology transfers and access.¹¹⁸ For instance, while the Soviet Union/Russia's lease of a nuclear submarine to India from 1988–1991 and 2012–present demonstrates a unique willingness to share technology, accompanying restrictions hampered

India's ability to train personnel and to learn from Soviet technology. During the first lease, Soviet personnel continued to man the SSN's reactor and refused to provide access to any Indian personnel.¹¹⁹ Further, the Soviets provided little technical data on the SSN.¹²⁰ Additionally, some Indian Ministry of Defence officials have, in hindsight, called the Su-30MKI program a "mistake," alleging that licensed production without technology transfer or access had not brought the expected benefit of advancing an indigenous capability to manufacture a fighter aircraft and move toward research-and-development self-reliance.¹²¹

Ultimately, a competitive marketplace has compelled Russia to grow more open to technology transfers; but Moscow—given its experience with Chinese replication or reverse engineering—will likely remain hesitant to allow technology transfers that eventually undercut Russia's own defense exports.¹²² Upon close review, Indian expectations appear somewhat unreasonable and the magnitude of Soviet/Russian support for India's arsenal appears unusually generous.

Russian Contributions to India's Strategic Deterrent

Russian support for Indian defense technology and indigenization—while never fully satiating India's desires—cannot be understated. In the 1970s, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev purportedly considered transferring nuclear weapons technology but was disabused of that after advisors recalled the missteps with China and Cuba.¹²³ But short of direct transfer, what is often unappreciated is Russia's enormous contribution to India's nuclear deterrent. While reports of Russian contributions to Indian submarine-launched, intermediate-range and intercontinental ballistic missile capabilities have been unconfirmed, there is a consensus that decades of Soviet and Russian support proved critical to the recent fielding of India's indigenous SSBN, the INS *Arihant*.¹²⁴ Dozens of Russian engineers and advisors were dispatched to support India's Department of Atomic Energy and DRDO and assist with designs, precision equipment, and reactor miniaturization technology to fit it aboard a submarine.¹²⁵ Ashok Parthasarathi, a former science and technology advisor to the Indian prime minister, writes that the *Arihant* "would have just been impossible to realise without the Soviet Union/Russia's massive allround consultancy."¹²⁶

Furthermore, Russian space cooperation robustly boosted India's newest breakthrough strategic developments—such as enhanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and improved navigational satellite systems.¹²⁷ This support dates back to the 1972 agreement the Soviets made to aid the Indian Space Research Organisation in the development of remote-sensing capabilities.¹²⁸ In 2004, Russian and Indian space agencies signed an agreement to partner on reestablishing and revitalizing the Russian Global

Navigational Satellite System (GLONASS) to avoid reliance on US GPS.¹²⁹ Under this initiative, India was given preferential access to GLONASS for precision signals for enhanced missile targeting.¹³⁰

In particular, what has shaped India's perception of Russian reliability is that even in the face of US pressure, Moscow has strived to fulfill Russia's commitments to India for strategic capability transfers. The United States successfully pressured Russian president Boris Yeltsin to terminate the lease of a nuclear submarine to India and the transfer of missile engine technology for an Indian space launch vehicle.¹³¹ Nevertheless, Russian scientists maneuvered around the Yeltsin government to provide the technology to India, and the nuclear submarine lease was resurrected in the early 2000s.¹³² After India's 1998 nuclear tests, Russia also continued to move forward on a deal to construct two light water 1,000MW nuclear reactors and may have continued to provide enrichment and uranium fuel for the submarine reactor.¹³³

In short, Russian arms sales, information sharing, collaboration, technology transfers, and hands-on technical guidance, often in the face of heavy US pressure, have made tremendous contributions to India's strategic deterrent. Despite frustrations over quality, spare parts, and costs, India continued to extract value from Moscow's arms technology, such that after the Cold War, even as India liberalized and warmed to the West, New Delhi expanded India's arsenal of Russian systems. These arms transfers proved essential not only in modernizing the Indian military but also advancing its strategic arsenal, ranging from fissile material production and reactor designs to delivery systems, and, ultimately, space and ISR assets for targeting. The support on these strategic systems, in particular, has also ensured Indian goodwill toward Russia and highlighted the special nature of the relationship. India will be unwilling to turn down this support if Russia continues to offer it, likely guaranteeing a future close-knit relationship.

Arms for Influence?

We now turn the puzzle on its head and consider why Russia transferred this level of military technology to India and what it received (or expected) in return. States sell arms technology not only for security and economic motives but also to achieve *influence*. Certainly in the case of the Soviet Union's arms transfers to India, the calculated altruism of Soviet "largesse," extended credit lines, and technology transfers appears to be driven by far more political and commercial motives.¹³⁴ Arms sales can enhance a seller's security by bolstering a partner's security, stabilizing a regional balance of power, and gaining access to valuable geography or intelligence facilities. Such sales can also accrue economic benefits, like commercial profit, employment, foreign exchange, or lowering the per-unit costs of

production. However, arms sales are also thought of as vehicles to generate influence and leverage in a target country—to both spark and/or nurture a relationship. Historically, these sales have been used to gain access to elites, to leverage their decision making, and even to shape strategic thinking.¹³⁵

This begs the causal direction question between arms transfers and strategic concepts: does strategy determine arms acquisition, or do arms shape and structure strategic preferences? Undoubtedly, there is some inevitable degree of endogeneity in this relationship. Still, we evaluate below whether New Delhi's relationship with the Soviet/Russian strategic establishment and induction of arms has shaped India's operational concepts in ways that might meaningfully endure and inform its strategic approach to New Delhi today. We investigate this question by first considering the theoretical mechanisms of influence, their presence or absence in the Soviet-Indian and Russia-Indian strategic relationships, and finally conducting plausibility probes in two "most likely" cases of India's SSBN program and its T-72 tank acquisition.

Influence Mechanisms

If arms relationships are expected to generate influence on the target states, influence avenues may take two principal forms: direct and indirect. Direct pathways form intentional efforts to shape the future direction of foreign strategic thought, military planning, and related force acquisitions in accordance with Russian interests. Success in this objective would be manifested by evidence of a target state visibly emulating Soviet/Russian doctrine, operational art, and tactical approaches.

There are three potential pathways for this direct form of influence to be exercised. The first route is through the organization of high-level political and military dialogues with the target state. The second pathway, building upon the first, is through the conduct of joint military exercises potentially abetted by colocation or joint basing. The third pathway is through military education and training programs.¹³⁶

The second approach that states can take to influence foreign strategic thought and planning is indirect in nature. Whereas the above direct pathways can actively shape foreign military planning, the effect of indirect influences is largely limited to constraining or enabling trends in indigenous strategic thought, planning, and force acquisition in the target state. The first of two principal avenues of indirect influence is ideational diffusion. This transmission mechanism operates through independent studies—and interpretations—by the target state of the military thought and practice of the would-be influencer state. To maximize the success of this pathway, states must cultivate an aura of cutting-edge sophistication in operational art and technology.¹³⁷ The second indirect avenue is through sales of

military technology to the target state, or technology codevelopment. These policies can lead to the target state's dependence upon the influencer state for upgrades, servicing, and maintenance.¹³⁸

Direct mechanisms. The existence of direct mechanisms of transmission were highly limited during the Soviet–Indian strategic relationship, with this condition continuing through today. While the Soviet Union, and then Russia, had trained more than 10,000 Indian service members as of 2004, this military education was only in terms of instruction on the operation of specific platforms and weapons to be sold to India.¹³⁹ Indians have not attended Soviet and Russian higher staff colleges, where more advanced doctrinal concepts are taught. For instance, while the US Central Intelligence Agency reported that Indian forces were represented at Russian training installations specifically designated for foreigners to study tank and ground warfare operations as well as surface-to-air missile (SAM) and anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) deployment and maintenance, they were conspicuously absent from the prestigious academies, command schools, and general staff colleges.¹⁴⁰ Though some India sources contend no Soviet personnel enrolled in full Indian higher staff college curriculum programs as a rule, other US sources suggest the presence of Soviet Army (and possible intelligence) officers at India's Defence Services Staff College.¹⁴¹

Indian acquisition of Russian equipment often came with training of forces. One US military officer who attended India's command and staff college judged that roughly 50 percent of the Indian Navy students belonged to "the Russia school" because they operated Soviet/Russian equipment and had trained in Russia.¹⁴² However, as highlighted above, this training was much more tactical—in terms of basic technical operation of the platform—than strategic or even operational.¹⁴³ For instance, in October 2005, as New Delhi finalized the terms of lease for India's SSN from Russia, 200–300 Indian naval officers began technical training at a submarine training center at Sosnovy Bor, near St. Petersburg.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, there is little evidence of any joint military exercises between India and the Soviet Union. India–Russia military exercises were relatively infrequent to nonexistent in the 1990s. However, as the United States began to initiate exercises with the Indian military, particularly the Navy, Russia gradually followed suit. These began in earnest when Russia conducted a naval-based Indra exercise with the Indians in 2003, and these eventually grew into bi- and tri-service exercises.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, unlike other states, the Soviets did not have basing access or privileged port facilities in India.¹⁴⁶ Given the limits on high-level exchanges, exercises, basing, and training along with several other features of the relationship, it appears unlikely that any substantial Soviet influence was directly exerted to shape Indian strategy or foreign policy.¹⁴⁷

Indirect Mechanism. There is more evidence for indirect influence upon India, albeit not through India-centered Russian initiatives. Instead, we find that India has developed indigenous operational concepts with its own military experience and perceived lessons from crisis episodes as a primary point of influence. There is a felt need within New Delhi for India's operational art to be seen as cognizant of, and comparable to, similar themes within Soviet strategic planning, which is held by Indian experts to have especial refinement and prestige in global military history. Indian strategists utilize Soviet tactics and operational art to publicly legitimize new Indian indigenous operational concepts, *once these are finalized and announced.* However, this Soviet and Russian practice does not drive original Indian doctrinal conceptual development, with this role instead filled by the lessons of previous Indian conflicts.

This role of indirect influence is now further tested through two plausibility probes in Indian concepts and doctrine in subsurface warfare and ground forces "breakthrough" operations.

Influence over Subsurface Warfare?

Some scholars contend that "Soviet naval thinking also influenced India's strategy," which may stem from the Indian Navy's heavy reliance upon Soviet and Russian platforms, with an estimated 70 percent of the current fleet sourced from Moscow.¹⁴⁸ Further, Russian sales, technology, training, and guidance have technically supported India's strategic deterrent development. If technological capabilities determine strategy and doctrine as some contend, then it stands to reason that Indian doctrine may very well derive from its Russian platforms.¹⁴⁹ Though, at first glance this might appear to be the case, more indirect mechanisms have actually shaped India's doctrine.

In the naval domain, there are also some commonalities between the Soviet/contemporary Russian and contemporary Indian SSBN posturing choices. Moscow's SSBN force has long been organized around a bastion posturing model, in which the submarines stay relatively close to port or are even berthed, in peacetime, and only deployed or assigned more far-reaching patrols in crises.¹⁵⁰ India too appears to be adopting a bastion strategy with its first SSBN, INS *Arihant*, which was officially inducted into the Strategic Forces Command in November 2018, and a second boat, INS *Arighat*, which is currently undergoing more localized sea trials.¹⁵¹ The National Command Authority plans a total SSBN fleet size of at least five boats, and a second SSBN base is currently being built at Rambilli, Andhra Pradesh, on India's east coast, to complement its facility at Vishakapatnam, while a potential third "hardened submarine base" has also been under consideration for the Andaman & Nicobar Islands since 2002.¹⁵²

Despite the Russian loan of Akula-class nuclear-powered submarines to India and quiet assistance in developing the *Arihant*, it is unlikely that these direct interactions have led to Indian emulation of the Russian bastion model. The size of India's eventual SSBN force and number of bases implies that it will eventually move toward a continuous-at-sea-deterrent model. An Indian defense expert has noted that the current paucity of sufficient escort vessels is what mandates India's bastion model, suggesting that this will change as this capability gap is filled.¹⁵³ The commonality, then, between Russian and Indian modes of naval nuclear deterrence is more likely due to the technological novelty of the Indian SSBN force and supporting elements. This leaves the bastion model as India's only viable current option, as opposed to a permanent posture, like the one adopted by Moscow.

Further, while the Soviet and Russian navies have been organized around a submarine-heavy strategy of sea denial to defensively block adversary fleets from certain areas, the Indian Navy has long seen its naval strategy as one of blue-water sea control: an expeditionary fleet capable of establishing new control over contested domains.¹⁵⁴

Influence over Ground Warfare?

New Delhi's ground warfare doctrinal shifts, in conjunction with India's acquisition of the Soviet T-72 tank in the 1970s and 1980s, offer another useful case to explore potential indirect transmission mechanisms of Soviet/Russian strategic influence. Russia and India do share common dilemmas in designing the employment of ground forces. Both states face challenges of planning conventional ground operations against an adversary (NATO and Pakistan, respectively) that has comparatively less strategic depth and explicitly relies upon a first-use policy and battlefield nuclear weapons to compensate.¹⁵⁵

The real landmarks in New Delhi's doctrinal evolution included India's 1971 war, in which it successfully tested new rapid-maneuver operations, and its subsequent 1975–76 Expert Committee ground warfare doctrinal redesign.¹⁵⁶ Following the 1971 war, the Indian military objective was to field fast-moving armor, closely coordinated with airpower, which could either punch through or bypass adversary forces to capture key military-communication hubs in the enemy's interior, thus disrupting organizational cohesion and causing rapid collapse of the enemy lines. Unlike the more attritionist wars of the past, the Army and Prime Minister's Office now envisioned high-tempo maneuver warfare within a curtailed timeframe.¹⁵⁷

Each of the major Indian Army doctrinal reorderings since 1971—the Reorganised Army Plains Infantry Divisions and overarching Sundarji doctrine, the reorganization of some formations into new Integrated Battle Group models in

the 2004 Indian Army doctrine, and the more widespread reshaping of remaining Indian Army formations into Integrated Battle Groups as envisioned in the 2018 Indian Army doctrine—all carry some surface similarities to Soviet land-warfare strategic planning. The Soviet Operational Maneuver Group thinking of the late 1970s and early 1980s envisioned a similar reorganization of ground forces around highly maneuverable independent formations, operating just behind the initial breakthrough forces. However, India's rethinking of its operational art, as anchored in the 1971 experience and 1975–76 Expert Committee, ultimately predates that of the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁸ The references to Soviet—and US—practice among Indian military strategists and strategic analysts are largely by way of *post hoc* analogization. This is intended to persuade holdouts within their own community that these Indian concepts stand alongside those of the Soviet Union and the United States in their levels of sophistication and modernity.¹⁵⁹

The T-72 Tank Selection. In selecting India's next major battle tank model in the 1970s, the Indian choice of the T-72 was far from automatic, and New Delhi had several options available to it. India's indigenous Arjun tank efforts had borne no fruit, refitted older models (like Centurions or T-54s and T-55s) did not match the desired strategy, and other potential options (AMX-40 and Chieftain-800) were still only prototype blueprints that were unproven. Indian Army officials conducted “paper evaluations concerning the firepower and mobility characteristics” of each model.¹⁶⁰ The emphasis on these key attributes, as opposed to armor strength, illuminates how the Indian Army was implementing a preconceived indigenous warfighting model.

The T-72 appeared to Indian evaluators to be modern and proven, featuring active Soviet service for nearly 10 years by 1980, holding the most powerful gun (measured by cannon diameter) among the above contenders, and demonstrating “excellent mobility,” including a 60 km/hr top speed.¹⁶¹ The Indian Army began importing T-72s from 1979, although most of its fleet would be acquired over the period 1982–1986. Instead of emulating the Soviet order of battle assigning T-72s to the secondary follow-on role for rapid maneuver through adversary gaps, India chose to assign the breakthrough and follow-on missions to the T-72 and upgrade them to meet India's predetermined operational requirements more closely.¹⁶²

This stark difference in platform utilization highlights the absence of Soviet ground warfare doctrinal influence being directly or indirectly transmitted to India, through direct training or indirect arms sales. Therefore, the sole indirect mechanism of influence is that of India seeking subsequent analytic validation for operational concepts of indigenous Indian design from studying the practice of perceived cutting-edge global military powers.

In considering the range of influence of Soviet arms sales, it appears that economic motives have primacy. For all its generous terms of arms sales and technology transfers, the Soviets did not appear to gain special access to basing or intelligence facilities, nor create a bridgehead of political influence in Asia. Moscow has also not shaped the doctrinal concepts or strategic thinking of Indian officers, owing to insufficient institutional or social links that might have fostered the “epistemic communities” that diffuse policy ideas.¹⁶³ The indirect influence of the sale of certain weapons platforms on Indian doctrine appears marginal, post hoc, and arguably neither sufficient nor necessary. It remains possible any prospects for Soviet influence were counteracted by the Western military doctrines reflecting the Indian military’s British legacy.¹⁶⁴ Where the Soviets did succeed was in creating path dependence for Indian procurement—perhaps unwittingly—that has continued to pay dividends for contemporary Russian arms sales. A question for future research would be to examine whether Soviet motives were driven by such economic foresight or some theory of regional stability that required a significant boost for India.

Conclusion

In answer to the question we began with, this article argues that history, politics, and ideas all contributed to an enduring and deepening India–Russia partnership but that the material arms relationship has been the leading driver. That arms and technology transfers (specifically strategic technology) form the bedrock of the India–Russia relationship is not meant to dismiss these material ties but to underscore their strength and long-term durability.

First, the partnership’s historical origins in the Cold War and explicit tilt in 1971, during one of India’s most consequential crises, may have produced some reservoir of familiarity and goodwill that reified Russia–India cooperation after the dissolution of the USSR. Second, the geopolitical alignments of past and present have driven India and Russia together, despite some periodic friction. As in the past, both have mutually backed or acquiesced to each other’s aggressive actions in their contested, western borders or spheres of influence. Moreover, they both worry about China’s rise and regional assertiveness but prefer a more careful approach of economic engagement, hedging, and tethering China to themselves. Third, the relationship is undergirded by some significant overlap in ideas of a polycentric global order. Though they diverge on the rules-based order, which India defends and Russia assaults, the Indian strategy of multialignment is still compatible with Russia’s efforts to undermine said order. Furthermore, the recent illiberal turn of the Indian government, including hostility toward civil liberties,

counter-majoritarian institutions, and the free flow of information may presage something greater.¹⁶⁵

The lead driver undoubtedly is the Russia–India arms relationship, the depth of which is not fully appreciated in policy circles. Though American officials are hopeful that the inevitable turnover in India’s strategic personnel will help tilt New Delhi toward Washington, the relative stock of Russian-origin military materiel that exerts a powerful influence on policy will remain largely unchanged.¹⁶⁶ Despite some quibbles, India has been afforded access to advanced technologies at low or deferred prices and the opportunity to capture industrial production and indigenization benefits. No country transfers advanced technology or intellectual property for free, but the Soviets may have practiced “strategic altruism” toward India long before the United States did, offering more in this domain than most major power do for their treaty allies. In particular, Russian contributions to India’s nuclear deterrent rarely get the attention they deserve but may approach the special France–Israel nuclear relationship or even the US–UK relationship over nuclear technology that has run from 1958 to the present.¹⁶⁷

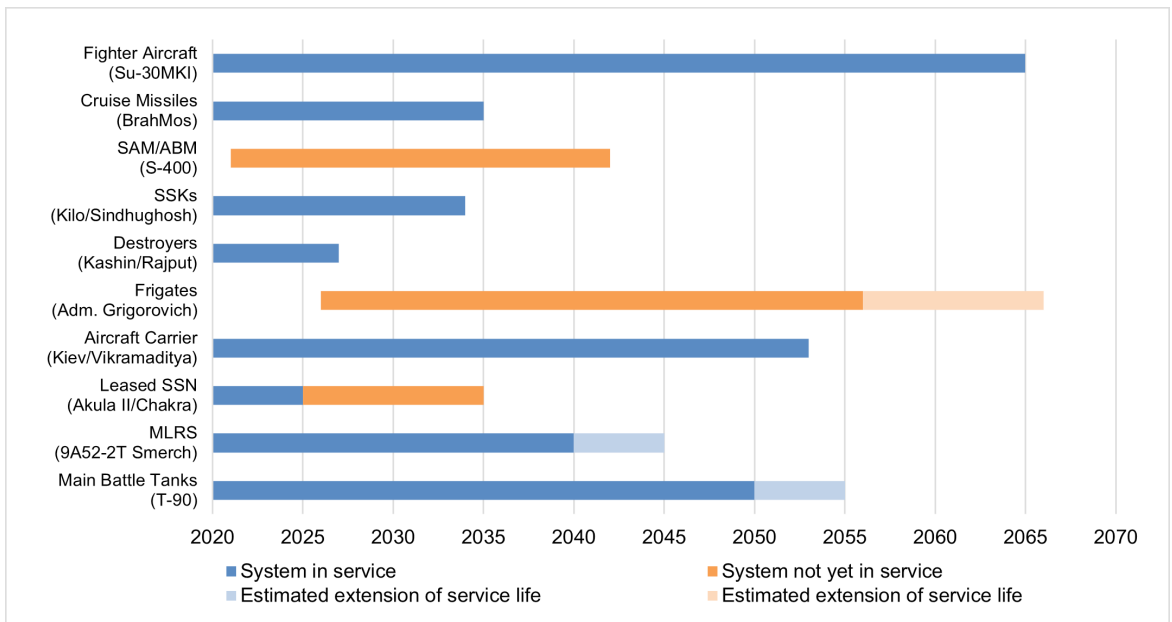


Figure 4. Estimated Service Life of India’s Major Russian Weapons Systems

“India depends on Russia and will continue to do so for *several decades* for its military hardware needs,” notes Dr. Arvind Gupta, who recently served as deputy National Security Advisor in the Modi-led Indian government.¹⁶⁸ Even if India had not recently signed 15 billion USD in defense procurements from Russia that likely lock it in to several decades of dependence for supplies and parts (see fig. 4),

New Delhi would still have strong incentives to lean toward Russia.¹⁶⁹ India's desire to access, codevelop, or lease the technology required to build its own systems still makes Russia an essential partner because of Moscow's *relatively* greater willingness to share the required sensitive technology and more relaxed standards for transfers.¹⁷⁰ By contrast, stringent US guidelines on end-use of systems, classified technology, copyright protections, and operational restrictions pose a significant obstacle to licensing and transfer of defense technology to India. This is especially true when New Delhi demands operational autonomy, seeks to refit purchased systems with materials from other foreign suppliers, and is judged to have unsatisfactory handling of intellectual property rights or classified and sensitive US technology.¹⁷¹

At the same time, we observe some limit to the influence of arms transfers. Even in the most likely cases, we do not find strong evidence of arms technology as a vector for transferring strategic concepts. Though this negative finding may encourage US policy makers who fear India's strategic theories have fallen under the sway of Russian thinking, it also speaks to how difficult it is to shape strategic thinking through arms transfers. The absence of Soviet strategic influence on India may foreshadow the insufficiency and potential limits of US arms transfers to India to shape interoperability and diffuse military strategy. ❀

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Notes

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Russia–Pakistan Strategic Relations

An Emerging Entente Cordiale

FEROZ HASSAN KHAN

Since the famous American raid in 2011 that killed Osama bin Laden and given the US exceptional favor to India's nuclear ambitions, Islamabad has gradually moved away from the United States, deepened Pakistan's relations with China, and sought rapprochement with Russia. While Pakistan's strategic relations with China have been developing for more than five decades, Islamabad's relations with Moscow are new, evolving for less than a decade. Russia has always preferred India to Pakistan and shied away from any proactive role in conflict resolution between India and Pakistan. Additionally, Russia has been unsure of Pakistan's future and its strategic direction. In South Asia, Moscow seems to balance Russia's interests proportionate to the strategic importance and economic advantage that each nation offers. Pakistan is a relatively small power undergoing internal and economic perils. It cannot match India's power potential and offer the same scope of political, strategic, and economic influence that India wields in its relations with major powers. Yet, Pakistan is a very important piece in the emerging geopolitical chessboard in Eurasia. Notwithstanding the handicap of perpetual asymmetry vis-à-vis India, Pakistan leverages its geophysical location, strong military with advancing nuclear capability, and considerable influence in the Islamic world in its conduct of international relations.

In the past, Pakistan and Russia could not develop close ties because neither country fully trusted the other. However, given the mutual benefits to building relations, as discussed in this article, both countries are trying to move forward past lingering mistrust. For instance, Russia is apprehensive of Pakistan's close alliances with the West, which have been established since early Cold War years, and it is now observing the nature of Pakistan's deepening strategic relations with China. Likewise, Islamabad is concerned of Russia's strategic relations with India. Over the past decade, with shifts in the international system (e.g., Russia's resurgence under Pres. Vladimir Putin and the deterioration of US relations with Russia and Pakistan) have provided both countries a Machiavellian common cause by which to reevaluate their mutual relations. Russia is finding new opportunities in South Asia as the United States contemplates withdrawing from Afghanistan and simultaneously confronts Iran. Meanwhile, Islamabad is seeking new allies to compensate for its gradually fraying relations with Washington while Pakistan also faces new tensions with its archrival India, which is led by a revitalized right-wing Hindu

nationalist government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Pakistan is attempting to influence its geo-economic significance, boosted by the fast-developing China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—touted as a flagship of China’s Belt Road Initiative (BRI). Nascent Russia–Pakistan relations are developing under these changing geopolitical circumstances in South Asia.

For more than a decade now, the Pakistan military has been in a constant state of war. Since 2001, the spillover of the Afghan War into Pakistan has given unprecedented rise to homegrown extremism and terrorism, especially in the western provinces and along the tribal borderlands with Afghanistan. The Pakistani military and civilians have suffered immensely as has the country’s economy, which is in dire straits. Though Pakistan has received compensation from the United States for its role in the war in the form of “coalition support funds,” the combination of wear and tear of arms and equipment, depletion of strategic reserves, and general exhaustion from constant combat have adversely affected the Pakistani military combat potential. Beset by these adversities, the realization of Pakistan’s need to modernize its military faces significant challenges. As demands for national security continue to grow, Pakistan’s weak economy, plagued with structural problems, is unable to meet the Pakistani defense requirements. Additionally, Pakistan’s defense needs have increased copiously, especially given its constant compulsion to balance against India, which has much greater resources. During the Cold War, Pakistan sought alliances with major powers to offset its strategic asymmetry with India. Since the 1950s, a military alliance with the United States allowed Islamabad to maintain adequate qualitative and quantitative equilibrium with India for a while, but the gap with India continued to widen. Lately, as Pakistan’s alliance with Western countries erodes, Islamabad has been moving toward Moscow and Beijing to reestablish a strategic balance with India.

Scholars have published little open-source literature regarding Russia’s newfound coziness with Pakistan. Extrapolating from recent media reports, articles, and general discussion in the strategic community in Pakistan, this article examines the trends in this new relationship and assesses possible influence Russia might have in shaping future Pakistani security policy and nuclear doctrines. The first section of this article provides an overview of Russia–Pakistan relations affected by the historical baggage of the Pakistani alliance with the United States and China in the Cold War. The second section examines the evolving rapprochement in the past decade. Russia–Pakistan military relations have been progressing at a time when US–India strategic partnership is growing, and US–Russian relations are deteriorating along with a downslide in US–Pakistan relations.¹ The third section examines possible convergence between Russian and Pakistani security outlooks. I analyze the commonalities in Russian and Pakistani strategic doctrines, including

the rationale in nuclear first use policy, transition from strategic deterrence to battlefield deterrence, and the possible impact/influence of Russia's "escalate to deescalate" concept on Pakistani thinking. The fourth section surveys the divergence in Russian and Pakistani policies and concludes with a prognosis of Russia–Pakistan strategic cooperation.

Russian-Pakistan Relations: An Overview

The partition of the British India into two separate states (India and Pakistan) coincided with the beginning of Cold War. The newly independent nation-states—emerging from colonialism and fracture with structural weaknesses—faced the dilemma of choosing an alliance between the two superpowers (the United States and Soviet Union) in the emerging bipolar international system. India inherited the colonial political structure of the British Raj, and New Delhi preferred strategic autonomy to military alliances; however, it also consciously collaborated with the Soviet Union while officially maintaining a nonaligned policy. As the weaker, more vulnerable, and more economically struggling of the two states, Pakistan joined the US-led military alliances that lasted until the end of the Cold War. Pakistan benefited economically and militarily from alliances with the West but not without paying for its choice. For most of its history, Pakistan suffered from the Soviet Union's retaliation and antagonism for Islamabad's pro-Western choices.

There were three distinct periods during the Cold War wherein Pakistan's proactive role in pursuance of US strategic objectives laid the basis of historical distrust between the Soviet Union and Pakistan. First, Islamabad provided the United States with air bases and intelligence assets on Pakistani soil that facilitated reconnaissance on and monitoring of the Soviet Union in the pre-satellite era. A major example of when the Soviets threatened retaliation was concerning U-2 flights from PAF Camp Badaber, near Peshawar, especially after the infamous Gary Powers incident in May 1960.² As a superpower in the Cold War, the Soviet Union frequently voted against Pakistan's interests in all international forums, and in particular, against Pakistan's position on Kashmir in the United Nations.³

Second, in the 1970s, Pakistan facilitated Pres. Richard Nixon's geopolitical summit that brought rapprochement between China and the United States.⁴ The Soviets retaliated by signing the India–Soviet Mutual Friendship treaty in August 1971, which provided India with political and strategic support during the 1971 Indo–Pakistan War. Pakistan suffered a humiliating surrender in East Pakistan that resulted in the birth of Bangladesh. Pakistani intelligentsia consider the dismemberment of a united Pakistan as the heaviest price Islamabad paid for Pakistan's role in facilitating US–China rapprochement.

Finally, in the 1980s, after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the United States and Pakistan realigned to wage an asymmetric war to defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan. Moscow's involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s contributed to the Soviets' strategic overextension and eventually the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Arguably, US involvement in Afghanistan the 1980s was American payback for the US defeat in Vietnam (a proxy war the Soviets supported against United States) and Pakistan's revenge for its dismemberment at the hands of Soviet-supported India in the 1971 war. In other words, both Pakistan and the Soviet Union played an indirect role in each other's disintegration during the Cold War. This historical baggage casts a shadow, even as Russia and Pakistan are fostering a new relationship.

Post–Cold War Efforts to Restore Relations

In the mid-1990s, Russia and Pakistan attempted to reset their relations with little success. At the time, Pakistan was under US nuclear sanctions under the Pressler amendment to US nonproliferation law, which went into effect in 1990 and banned economic and military assistance to Pakistan unless the president certified annually that Pakistan did not have nuclear devices. At this time, Pakistan desperately needed to modernize its military. Pakistan felt the United States had abandoned it as an ally after using Pakistan for US Cold War objectives. This also meant that Pakistan was left alone to face the fallout of the Afghan War. Also, at that time, Russia was emerging from the throes of the Soviet Union's dissolution and undergoing an economic crisis. Thus, Moscow was eager to sell military weapons and defense equipment. However, Pakistan could not afford the prices Russians were asking and found the credibility of those negotiating on behalf of Russia to be of dubious nature.⁵ Both countries were transitioning in the 1990s into fledgling democracies and experiencing internal instabilities. The rise of Taliban in Afghanistan exacerbated the situation and created a potential threat to Russia's "southern vector." Additionally, Chechen rebels found refuge in the lawless lands spanning from Central Asia to the western borderlands of Pakistan's tribal areas.⁶

After the September 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States and Pakistan renewed their alliance. Under Pres. Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan once again became a central player in a new war in Afghanistan. However, following the December 2001 terror attacks on the Indian parliament in New Delhi, once again Pakistan and India teetered on the brink of war. Like the rest of world, Russia worried about the military standoff between the two nuclear-armed countries. As a result, President Putin offered to mediate between India and Pakistan, which

Pakistan welcomed but India dismissed. New Delhi has come to loathe any outside mediation in the region, which India considers to be its hegemonic space. During the Musharraf era (1999–2008), Russia maintained cordial relations with Pakistan and generally supported the US-led war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

The end of President Musharraf's military rule and Pakistan's return to democracy coincided with the fruition of a US–India nuclear deal legislated under the Hyde Act of 2008. The resulting Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) gave an exception for India to undertake civil nuclear trade after a complex and tedious journey leading to the US legislation. This nuclear exception for India provided Russia with new openings in South Asia, and Moscow took advantage of the new market to sell nuclear power plants to India. With a long history of military cooperation and defense sales to India, Russia was more experienced with the Indian working culture and its rigid bureaucratic system than other countries vying for India's nuclear market. In addition, the nuclear deal allowed India to retain its nuclear weapons program, freed up its domestic uranium capacity for military purposes, and obligated nothing from India regarding nonproliferation treaty goals (to which both India and Pakistan are outliers). In contrast, Pakistan encountered international disapproval over the A. Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network that unraveled in 2004, which has continued until now. Feeling betrayed and alienated by the US legislation and its fallout, the Pakistanis reached out to Russia and China. Predictably, both were eager to exploit the Pakistani estrangement with the United States.

Another source of rift between the United States and Pakistan came with the Obama administration's policy on South Asia (2009–2016), which focused on further deepening and expanding relations with India—dubbed as a “lynchpin” of the US pivot to the Asia-Pacific. Meanwhile, Pakistan's significance was relegated to counterterror cooperation in Afghanistan and concerns on nuclear security issues. From the US standpoint, Pakistan was playing both ends—hunting with the hounds and running with the hare—as Pakistan was receiving coalition support money while simultaneously providing safe haven and facilitation to Afghan Taliban, against whom the US forces were fighting. Furthermore, Islamabad was facilitating China's access to Pakistan's coastline, while the United States was trying to contain China. From the Pakistani standpoint, Washington was seeking Pakistani cooperation and support for the US war in Afghanistan but also dismissing Pakistani sacrifices and the collateral losses it was suffering from the Afghan instability. Worse, from the Pakistani standpoint, the United States was handing over strategic space to India that it was winning with Pakistani strategic partnership, which allowed India to use Afghanistan territory for New Delhi's proxy war against Pakistani interests.

From being the “most allied ally” in the 1960s through the “most sanctioned ally” in the 1990s, the United States and Pakistan drifted apart as their strategic interests were increasingly more often in conflict than in congruity. Russia and China saw the emerging schisms, and both began hedging their bets for an uncertain outcome of US engagement in the region. Russia stepped in Afghanistan quietly and is currently in contact with some factions among the Afghan Taliban to keep Russian interests alive.

Emergence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

While its relations with the United States were gradually eroding, Pakistan began to see the emergence of the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as an opportunity for closer relations with Russia and China through a common platform. In 1996, China took the initiative to create the Shanghai Five, an organization comprised of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (Uzbekistan joined post 9/11) with an initial objective of security and antiterrorism cooperation; this grouping was the forerunner of the SCO. In 2004, the Tashkent Summit created a regional antiterrorism structure in addition to expanding the SCO to promoting further economic development and cooperation against three evils: terrorism, separatism, and extremism. As years passed, the SCO expanded its scope geographically to include other countries—India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan—and extended its mandate to include drugs, weapon smuggling, organized crime, cyberterrorism, terrorist financial flows, transportation, and so forth. Instabilities stemming from Afghanistan have brought Pakistan and India into the forefront. As such, SCO members have concluded that continued war in Afghanistan could lead to wider instability in Central, South, and Southwest Asia. They have also come to realize that military means alone cannot win the war on terrorism without commensurate multilateral, international cooperation on political, economic, and social issues.

India and Pakistan joined the SCO in 2017, and since then there have been four annual meetings at Astana, Kazakhstan (2017); Qingdao, China (2018); Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (2019); and Chelyabinsk, Russia (2020).⁷ For Pakistan, becoming a member of the SCO club was a significant milestone for two main reasons. First, membership allowed Pakistan space to maneuver against India’s blunt diplomacy efforts to isolate Pakistan. For its part, India alleges that Pakistan is the hub of everything the SCO’s core objectives are attempting to eradicate. Mirroring India, Pakistan makes the same allegations about India.⁸ Second, the SCO provides Islamabad a place to prevent India from using the forum against Pakistan’s interests or for it to counter India as need arises.⁹ Russia had reluctantly agreed to the membership of India and Pakistan, sensing the high proclivity of

India and Pakistan to bring their interstate, cross-border issues into the fold of the SCO, which arguably would distract and sap away energies from the group's core objectives and agenda.

Russia's skepticism was well founded. In February 2019, another India–Pakistan crisis in Kashmir occurred. Following a suicide attack in Indian-administered Kashmir against an Indian troop convoy in Pulwama, the Indian and Pakistani air forces exchanged fire. In the pursuant air battle, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) shot down an Indian Air Force (IAF) plane (a Russian made MIG -21) and captured the pilot. The crisis diffused after Pakistan returned the captured pilot as a goodwill gesture. India wanted to bring the Pulwama issue up in the SCO forum, but China and Russia declined and suggested solving the issue bilaterally.¹⁰ As Russia did not press the issue, Pakistan saw this development as a sign of improved Russia–Pakistan relations. Russia, however, voted in the United Nations Security Council in favor of an India-sponsored move to declare the head of Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM)—a Pakistan-based terrorist organization held responsible for the Pulwama attack—as international terrorist. This was Russia's fine balancing role between India and Pakistan.¹¹

Russia–Pakistan Military Relations: 2010–2020

Starting in 2010, relations between Pakistan and Russia improved markedly as illustrated by high-level visits, arms sales, and increased cooperation; at the same time, US–Pakistan relations grew strained. This section outlines key events from 2010 onward. For example, in early 2010, Russia organized a four-nation summit in Moscow on Afghanistan that involved Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. This summit was the first sign of Russia's renewed interest in Afghanistan, and, more significantly for Pakistan, the summit did *not* include India. Furthermore, this was when US–Pakistan relations were undergoing a tense period over Afghanistan. In the following year, several incidents resulted in sudden deterioration of the US–Pakistan alliance, most notably the US raid inside Pakistan that killed Osama bin Laden and an accidental cross-border firing between Pakistan and US forces in November 2011 that resulted in the death of several Pakistani officers and soldiers at a border post with Afghanistan.¹² While relations with the United States were at an all-time low, Pakistan Army Chief General Ashfaq Kayani visited Moscow in 2011 and convinced Russia of Pakistan's new approach and defense needs. Kayani urged Russia to reconsider its policy of proscribing arms sale to Pakistan. The army chief's visit was followed by Pakistan Air Chief Marshal Tahir Rafiq Butt's visit in August 2012 and Russian Air Chief Viktor Bondarev's reciprocal visit to Islamabad in April 2013. It took two years for Moscow to lift the arms embargo on Pakistan, and this did not sit well with India. Until then,

Russia had deferred to India before contemplating any defense sales to Pakistan. The lifting of the embargo was a clear signal to Pakistan and India that a new Russia had emerged, and Moscow was redefining its strategic interests in the changing geopolitics of South Asia.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shigu visited Pakistan in November 2014 and signed a defense cooperation agreement with Islamabad.¹³ A month earlier, Russia and Pakistan conducted their first joint counternarcotics exercise, which was followed by a second one in December 2015. In summer 2015, Pakistan Army Chief Raheel Sharif visited Moscow; three months later, Russia signed a deal for Pakistan to purchase Mi-35M Hind-E assault helicopters. In September 2016, Russia and Pakistan conducted their first major joint military exercise. This was the first public sign of the nature of Russia–Pakistan military relations.¹⁴ In March 2017, a Russian senior military delegation visited Pakistan’s tribal areas bordering Afghanistan and studied Pakistani border management and counter-terror strategy. In August 2017, Pakistan received four more Mi-35M Hind-E helicopters. Following these procurements, Russia and Pakistan began a series of joint military exercises, such as the Arabian Monsoon naval drills in 2014 and 2015. In 2017, the Pakistan Navy spearheaded the Aman naval exercise, which included the participation of 35 countries. In this exercise, for the first time, “Russia’s largest antisubmarine warship *Severomorsk* participated.”¹⁵ In addition, both militaries conducted joint exercises, starting with the Friendship-2017 military exercises—involving about 70 military mountaineers from Pakistan and the Russian mountain infantry division of Southern Military District—held in the mountain range near Nizhny Arkhyz settlement in Karachay-Cherkessia, Russia, in September 2017.¹⁶

In February 2018, Pakistan’s foreign minister visited Moscow and signed several agreements. In April 2018, General Qamar Bajwa, the third consecutive Pakistan army chief, visited Moscow, and the countries formed the Joint Military Commission.¹⁷ In the same month, the national security advisors of both countries held high-level security meetings in Moscow. The Pakistani delegation included defense officials from the Strategic Plans Division—indicating possibilities of discussions involving strategic and nuclear issues.¹⁸ The frequency of exchanges of military delegations between Moscow and Islamabad increased thereafter. For instance, in August 2018, a Pakistani naval delegation led by Vice Admiral Kaleem Shaukat visited Russia and signed a memorandum of understanding on naval cooperation.¹⁹ In September 2018, military contingents from India and Pakistan participated in SCO joint exercises, which, given the ongoing India–Pakistan tension, was a pleasant positive gesture that happened on Russian soil. As relations between Pakistan and Russia were humming along, US

president Donald Trump terminated Pakistan's participation in America's International Military Education Program.²⁰ No sooner than this became public, Pakistan and Russia signed the "Security Training Agreement" to train Pakistani military officers in Russian military institutions for the first time.²¹ While Pakistan and Russia are not publicizing the nature of their cooperation as openly as Islamabad would do in Pakistan's agreements with China, the trajectory is quite clear. Pakistan is keeping its options with Moscow and Beijing open after US military support has dried up under the Trump administration.

Russia and the Belt Road Initiative

While relations between United States and Pakistan were ebbing and flowing, in 2013, China launched its BRI, which included connectivity of the most remote and hitherto inaccessible landlocked areas with major cities, economic hubs, and access to the seas in the Indian Ocean. Beijing reached out to India and its neighbors with economic cooperation and development through the BRI and China's Maritime Silk Road strategy throughout the Indian Ocean region. For these initiatives, Pakistan provides the most critical access through its flagship CPEC project, dubbed as the linchpin to the BRI, as it links landlocked western China and Central Asia to access to the Arabian Sea. At the mouth of Straits of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman on the Pakistani coastline is the port of Gwadar. China is helping build up this port as a potential energy hub that would feed the BRI through CPEC, which includes a complex web of railroad networks and energy projects—a definite game changer in the region. To the west of Gwadar, approximately 90 miles along the same coastline and across the border with Iran, is Chabahar Port, Iran. India is helping to build up Chabahar to compete with Gwadar, which would allow India to bypass Pakistan and to link its strategic trade to Afghanistan via Iran.

These geopolitical maneuverings on the regional chessboard do not go unnoticed in Moscow. Thus far, Russia's interest in China's BRI has been ambiguous. The impact of China's initiative on Russia's near abroad (Central Asia) is plainly clear. However, with the evolution of the SCO, Russia and China have a forum to develop consensus on the future of the region. Russia now faces three complex challenges in its policies toward South Asia. First, New Delhi is gradually shifting away from dependency on Russia in favor of the United States, and India is pursuing military and technology purchases from the United States and Europe. Second, Russia is balancing between its newfound interest in Pakistan and its historical market with India. Moscow can neither afford to alienate India, wherein lies a huge market for defense and nuclear sales, nor can Russia ignore the potential market for military sales in Pakistan. China's lucrative economic packages via

the BRI are creating influence in Russia's backyard and moving with unprecedented speed. The next section examines what possible influence Russia may have given the convergence with Pakistan on several political and strategic matters.

Convergence in Security Outlook

Pakistan and Russia have moved a long way in warming up to each other, and in the past decade or so, they have reduced their trust deficit significantly. As highlighted earlier, there are sufficient grounds for alignments in respective security thinking; yet there are many areas where potential disagreements have existed and may continue to exist for a long time. This section discusses the convergence in the mutual relations between the two countries. There are six major areas where broad convergence between Russian and Pakistani policy interests might have some potential: the future of Afghanistan; strategic balance in South Asia; nuclear doctrinal similarities; integration of conventional and nuclear deterrence; changing character of war—hybrid war and its counter; and Pakistan's quest for NSG membership along with its energy needs.

Future of Afghanistan

The foundation of Russia–Pakistan convergence lies in mutual thinking regarding Afghanistan. The end of 2008 disillusioned both the United States and Pakistan. As explained earlier, as years passed, Washington concluded that Islamabad was unlikely to act in full compliance with the US strategy for Afghanistan. Moreover, the United States alleged that Pakistan has been providing safe havens to Taliban leadership, which was fighting asymmetric war against US forces in Afghanistan. For its part, Pakistan has been convinced that US strategy in Afghanistan was unlikely to succeed and was destabilizing Pakistan. Worse, from a Pakistani standpoint, the United States allowed India to use the strategic space in Afghanistan against Pakistan, space that was won with Pakistani cooperation. The gulf between these differing convictions widened as war in Afghanistan dragged on to become “an endless war.”²²

Russia and Pakistan concluded many years ago that the US war in Afghanistan had reached its limits and it was a matter of time before the United States would seek withdrawal or drawdown significantly from Afghanistan. Pakistan and Russia were hedging their bets as they carried out mutual consultations for the past decade. As the Taliban was gaining influence and control in nearly 70 percent of Afghanistan, Moscow and Islamabad agreed that a negotiated peace process was the only viable option for the future stability of Afghanistan.²³ There seems consensus that the threat from al-Qaeda is significantly reduced, while new

threats from Daesh (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) has emerged. Russia and Pakistan have pledged to jointly tackle this threat under an SCO mandate.

In my assessment, though Russia and Pakistan believe that the continued US presence in Afghanistan is a source of instability, neither desire a complete US withdrawal either. The future government in Kabul relies on the presence of US forces, and Afghan security forces are unlikely to sustain without financial support from the United States. At the time of this writing, the United States has successfully concluded agreement with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar.²⁴ Meanwhile, Russia is now proactively engaged in hosting a parallel peace initiative involving the Afghan Taliban and Afghan opposition. The last two meetings were held in Moscow, one in early February and another in April 2019. It was notable that both US-led and Russian-led processes have excluded the current Kabul government. Islamabad is facilitating both initiatives as well as keeping Pakistan's options open. On its part, Pakistan understands that Russia is back in the new great game. As for Russia, it seems to understand Pakistan's indispensability in any settlement of the Afghan problem.²⁵

Strategic Balance in South Asia: Pakistan Defense Needs

Russia now most likely accepts Pakistan defense needs as legitimate in the interest of the balance of power in the region. Previously, the Russian stance was to favor India as a source of hegemonic stability in South Asia. This pragmatic change came about with probable realization that nuclear-armed Pakistan would resist India's hegemony at all costs and also that China would continue to ensure Pakistan security by bolstering sufficient conventional and nuclear deterrent to balance India. With an arms race in the offing between India and Pakistan, Russia has no desire to be left behind.

In the February 2019 military crisis with India, Pakistan shot down the aging MIG-21, which embarrassed India and underscored the IAF's shortcomings. India claimed Pakistan had used US-supplied F-16 in the encounter and that India had shot down a Pakistani F-16; however, New Delhi never provided proof, which then allowed Pakistan to further ridicule India's false claim and to blame India's belligerence aimed at raising national fervor in the forthcoming elections.²⁶ Indian defense planners are making the case for state-of-the-art defense purchases, and the world market, including its traditional supplier, Russia, is lining up to make business. Meanwhile, Pakistan is already conscious of the impending imbalance between its air force and India's. After losing hope that the United States would aid it, the PAF's historic first choice was to rely on China; however, Pakistan is currently in discussion with Russia for the purchase of state-of-the-art

aircraft to counter India's purchase of the fifth-generation Dassault Rafale multi-role fighter from France.²⁷

Moscow no longer cares whether Pakistan is concerned with Russian military sales to India; nor does it matter if India is unhappy with Russia's military cooperation with Pakistan. A decade ago, India's objection would equate to a veritable veto over Moscow's decision on arms sale to Pakistan; however, Russia's new policy is to treat both countries on merit. Additionally, as equal members of the SCO, Russia expects India and Pakistan to respect the multilateral nature of the organization's charter. Moreover, Russia and Pakistan have conducted several joint military exercises bilaterally as well under the SCO on counterterrorism, counter-narcotics, and settlement of refugees.

Even so, joint military exercises and other forms of military exchanges between Pakistan and Russia are still new at this time. At best, they are leading to better tactical and operational coordination and firmer understanding of each other's concepts and are very symbolic of emerging military relations. It is only a matter of time before Russia and Pakistan have strategic and doctrinal influence on each other's thinking.

Similarities in Nuclear Doctrines

There is considerable ambiguity regarding the interpretation of Russian military doctrine. One view is that its strategy includes decisive nuclear use against superior conventional forces with the objective of limiting escalation or larger-scale conflict. In this view, the Russian concept is designed to “deter large-scale attack against Russia and deescalate limited conflict in case deterrence fails.”²⁸ The notion of “deterrence of limited conflict” implies that by design Russia would keep the precise conditions for battlefield nuclear employment in control to be able to inflict “just the right amount of damage to that attacker that aggression is not worthwhile.”²⁹ Such an explanation reverberates closely with Pakistani rationale of its deterrence strategies, as explained later in this article.

An alternate interpretation is that Russia has not “substantially embraced a broadened coercive role for nuclear weapons,” and some analysts argue that “escalate to deescalate” is not a policy. Russian declaratory nuclear policy is to ensure national survival.³⁰ Austin Long quotes President Putin as stating in 2015, “We proceed from assumptions that nuclear weapons and other nuclear weapons are means to protect our sovereignty and legitimate interests, not the means to behave aggressively or fulfill some non-existent imperial ambitions.”³¹ This interpretation of Russian nuclear policy is even closer to Pakistani thinking. Perhaps no other nuclear-armed state clings to its nuclear capability as sine qua non for its national survival and national sovereignty than does Pakistan.³²

Pakistan has made public criteria for possible nuclear use based on a combination of four conditions: loss of territory, destruction of forces, economic strangulation, and domestic instability. Pakistan has not officially declared a nuclear doctrine as of yet, although its doctrinal position can be extrapolated from statements of officials; national command authority declarations, announcements, and explanations after missile flight-tests; interviews with journalists and scholars; participation of serving officials from Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division (SPD) in seminars; and SPD officials' publications in reputed journals.³³

Thus far, there is no explicit indication that Russia's doctrine has influenced Pakistan, and similarities of the two doctrinal thinking are coincidental. In my assessment, Pakistani nuclear strategy is *sui generis*; it is evolving, adjusting, and reacting to India's doctrinal changes and its strategic weapons developments. As Pakistani and Russian officers experience higher-level military education in their respective military institutions (e.g., national defense universities), there is increasing likelihood of interexchange of doctrinal thinking in the conventional and nuclear domains.

Integration of Conventional and Nuclear Doctrine

Pakistan's security thinking has been primarily influenced by studying Western literature, and its security and nuclear doctrines are reflective of those concepts. As explained in this essay, Russia and Pakistan strategic interactions are still evolving, and the increase in the frequency of exchanges is recent but has deepened at a much faster pace in recent years than previously thought would occur. Russian doctrine may not yet have permeated in Pakistan strategic thinking, but the emergence of strategic congruity between the two is becoming obvious. Given their common alienation from the United States and the closure of training for Pakistani military officers in US military institutions, the potential of Russian indoctrination and its impact on Pakistani doctrinal thinking is quite high. Additionally, there are structural circumstances in Russia that resonate well with Pakistan.

Pakistan's integration of conventional and nuclear doctrine is shaped by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) erstwhile doctrine in Europe during the Cold War. NATO's Fulda Gap vulnerability against conventionally superior Warsaw Pact countries in the 1950s and 1960s is somewhat analogous to the situation that Pakistan faces vis-à-vis India. Strategic circumstances have now reversed in contemporary times. Today, Russia believes a conventional war with NATO is inevitable, given the situation in Ukraine and the Baltic States; the modernization of Russian nuclear forces restores Russian

prestige and compensates for its conventional weaknesses vis-à-vis NATO and possibly China. This logic and operational thinking resonate with Pakistan.

Eight years ago, Pakistan demonstrated the Nasr short-range ballistic missile (with a range of 60 kilometers), which it declared capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Islamabad's explanation for the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) was that Pakistan must demonstrate a "full spectrum nuclear capability" to meet India's conventional threat at tactical, operational, and strategic levels.³⁴ In essence, Pakistan has sought an insurance against surprise attack and a guarantee at the operational level to buy time and prevent India from declaring victory. In Western experience, the downsides of the risks of TNW deployment outweigh the potential deterrent benefits battlefield nuclear weapons could provide. The risks of deterrence failure increase with the potential of preventive strikes from across the border and decreased safety and security coefficients after battlefield deployment. This is more so given the volatile political climate in South Asia and the frequency of military crises. While Pakistan and the United States disagree on the deterrent value of battlefield nuclear weapons, Russia and Pakistan may not find much difference on TNW employment concepts, as explained above.

While the revolution in military affairs (RMA) of the 1980s helped NATO achieve a qualitative technological and conventional military edge that rendered its battlefield nuclear deterrent strategy redundant, Pakistan does not have this luxury. In Pakistan's case, deterring the Indian Army with twenty-first-century armaments—that have both conventional superiority and technological edge in space, surveillance, and intelligence—with advanced conventional capability remains a significant challenge. Pakistan does not have a similar RMA edge comparable to that which NATO had in the 1980s, and Pakistan is unlikely to bridge the technological gap with India any time soon. Therefore, Pakistan considers the risks associated with TNW deployments as inescapable. Nevertheless, Pakistan insists that all its nuclear weapons—including short-range battlefield systems—are not for war fighting but for deterrence and that these weapons will remain in the assertive centralized control of Pakistani National Command Authority in all circumstances.

Changing Character of War: Hybrid Wars

Another area of significant interest to Pakistani military officers is the study of the changed character of warfare. In recent years, the research themes most in vogue among Pakistani think tanks is "fifth-generation" or "hybrid" warfare. Of late, central to Pakistani security narrative is that India is waging a well-conceived and concerted covert war against Pakistan.³⁵ Islamabad staunchly believes India—supported by Western powers—is destabilizing Pakistan using multiple vectors,

including disinformation, insurgency, economic and financial coercion, and diplomatic isolation. The argument is that Pakistan's "full-spectrum deterrence" strategy has succeeded in frustrating India's conventional force strategy, which has now forced New Delhi to resort to hybrid warfare.³⁶

In a December 2018 article on hybrid warfare, former Pakistani Ambassador Munir Akram, a highly respected strategic thinker, referred to the "Gerasimov doctrine," named after the Russian military chief who is attributed with developing the comprehensive approach Russia applied in Ukraine.³⁷ In the article, he notes that Russia used a combination of narrative control, cyberattacks, anonymous militias and irregular forces, clandestine supplies, and diplomatic support, dubbed with various names such as asymmetrical, gray-zone, whole-of-government, and so forth. Such a complex stratagem does not appear to an outright war, but a form of statecraft designed to erode the adversary's national power and will to resist. This new art of war has seemingly impressed Pakistani think tanks as well. Ambassador Akram recognizes that such a new form of warfare is growing increasingly more sophisticated with new technologies, such as autonomous weapons, artificial intelligence, and cybertools—all of which blur the distinction between conventional and hybrid warfare, with grave implications for command-and-control vulnerabilities.³⁸ In sum, if Russia is the architect of hybrid wars, Pakistan is keen to learn and acquire technologies to defend against destabilization and hybrid attacks that might be on the future menu of training in Russian military institutes.

Pakistan's Energy Challenges and Nuclear Supplier Group Membership

For more than a decade now, an energy shortage has been among the most serious problems facing Pakistan. Islamabad is exploring all possible options to increase its energy output, including nuclear-power generation under a 25-year strategic plan to be completed by circa 2040. To achieve this, Pakistan is trying to improve energy supply and transmission and safety standards, and Islamabad is aspiring to freely develop business partnerships to acquire nuclear reactors, nuclear fuel, and technical assistance from multiple global industrial nuclear suppliers.³⁹ To achieve this end, NSG membership and/or a waiver of membership requirements would allow Islamabad to pursue Pakistan's nuclear energy aspirations. More importantly, Islamabad considers NSG membership to be a crucial element of Pakistan becoming part of the mainstream in the nuclear world order, which it believes would confer some sort of legitimacy to its nuclear weapons program, as has been the case with India.

Aware that a nuclear deal of the kind India received is unlikely, Pakistan has applied for NSG membership and is insistent on a criteria-based approach for new membership. On the other hand, India demands a "merit-based" approach to

Pakistani membership, which implies there were no chances for Pakistan's membership given the 15-year-old scar of the A. Q. Khan proliferation scandal. Also, by keeping Pakistan out of contention in export control regimes, New Delhi would reinforce India's policy of isolating Pakistan. In reality, Pakistani ambitions for NSG waiver or simultaneous membership have been scuttled due to deteriorating relations between Islamabad and Washington.⁴⁰

From a Pakistani standpoint, the Washington siding with New Delhi encourages India to undertake an adversarial policy toward Pakistan. Until lately Russia—along with the United Kingdom and France—has also been supporting India's membership to NSG on merit and exceptional basis. Pakistan seems to have only China standing by its side to scuttle India's exclusive entry into NSG.⁴¹ A subtle hint of support of Pakistan's NSG application came when a Russian embassy official in Islamabad reportedly indicated Moscow's backing of the "criteria-based approach for new members of NSG."⁴² It is still unclear whether there is an actual shift in Russia's position on the NSG question, but if true, Russian support of Islamabad's quest for NSG membership would be a huge indicator of the deepening of Russia–Pakistan security relationship and possibility of Russian interest in investing in Pakistan's quest for civil nuclear power.

Diverging Interests

While there may be existing areas of convergence and some potential areas where Russia and Pakistan may come to some sort of understanding, there are several divergences and disagreements that could easily derail the nascent relationship. There are at least five identifiable areas wherein divergences continue to cause concern: Pakistan policy of using jihadi elements as proxy; the fate of Kashmir; Russia's preferred defense relations with India; Pakistan's preferred strategic reliance on China; and Pakistan's continued dependence on the United States.

The fundamental disagreement between Russia and Pakistan is on the status quo in South Asia. As explained before, Russia may have accepted a balance of power model for stability on pragmatic grounds, but the primacy of India and Russia's investment in India is incomparable to what Pakistan can offer. Additionally, these strategic trajectories and power potentials between India and Pakistan will likely widen. If Pakistan hopes for parity in international relations in South Asia, Pakistan's expectations from its partnership with Russia are likely to fall short.

Pakistan's Regional Asymmetric Strategy

Russia vehemently disagrees with Pakistan's asymmetric strategy using jihadi elements as a tool of military strategy—especially in Kashmir and Afghanistan.

Though Pakistan has come a long way in distancing itself from radical organizations and suffered a great deal domestically in loss of life and economic hardship, the perception of hedging with jihadi-based forces as tool for strategy continues to linger. Unlike the United States, Russia has not publicly rebuked Pakistan, but deep down, Russia has critical interests in ensuring the Islamabad follows through on Pakistan's commitments on eliminating and containing violent extremist forces on its soil. As Moscow balances its interests with India and Pakistan, it does not countenance India's bringing the India–Pakistan bilateral issue to the SCO; however, following the Pulwama–Balakot incident in February 2019, Russia did not hesitate in supporting the United Nations Security Council resolution to declare the leadership of the Pakistan-based radical organization JeM as proscribed terrorists, as India demanded.

Russia has no serious issues with India's role in Afghanistan, which is a principal reason for Pakistan to hedge its bets with the Taliban, which caused deterioration of Pakistan's relations with United States. The India factor, combined with Pakistan failure to satisfy Russia—and China—regarding its love-hate nature of relationship with jihadi elements, could well be a major reason for potential setback in Russia–Pakistan relations. Islamabad views stability in Afghanistan as critical to Pakistan's national security. Pakistan desires an internally settled and friendly regime in Kabul that recognizes the international border with Pakistan and does not allow India use of Afghan territory to destabilize Pakistan. In such an environment, India's positive role in Afghanistan would be a welcome change in regional politics. For this to be achieved, multinational consensus on Afghanistan is important. As explained above, Islamabad's support of a Moscow-led process for Afghanistan's future and Pakistan's active participation in the SCO provide good forums to alleviate misunderstandings and assurance of Pakistan's changed policy on asymmetric strategies.

The Fate of Kashmir

Kashmir has been a disputed territory between India and Pakistan since their independence from Britain and has been a *casus belli* for enduring India–Pakistan conflict.⁴³ In my worldwide interaction with scholars and policy makers, including those from Russia, I have assessed that Russia—and the international community—accepts the division of Kashmir as defined by the Line of Actual Control as a *fait accompli* of history. Like all major powers, Russia is unlikely to bring up this issue publicly either with India or with Pakistan in deference to political sensitivities. The logic is plain and clear: there is no military solution to the Kashmir issue. With nuclear weapons and sizable modernized conventional forces on both sides, there is no further possibility of affecting change in the status quo.

The Russian position on the status quo on Kashmir is one issue about which Pakistan—and possibly India—might disagree. This disagreement is also linked to the issue of Pakistan’s moral and political support for the Kashmiri freedom struggle, which India conflates with terrorism. Kashmir is not just critical but also a politically sensitive issue for India and Pakistan. Given the historical, political, and ideological factors, accepting division in Kashmir as final would be very hard for India and Pakistan; however, the sooner a resolution to the conflict is found the better it will be for the future of the region and the world.

Defense Cooperation and Arms Sales to India

Russia is unlikely to downgrade its defense ties with India, even though New Delhi may be currently prioritizing purchases from Western sources. Russia once had a near monopoly with defense sales in India, but that is no longer the case. Even so, Pakistan will always be concerned about potential Russian arms sales to India.

Lately, Pakistan is weary of Russian arms sales (e.g., the S-400) and offers of other state-of-the-art weaponry to India. In the Pakistani assessment, Russia–India joint production of *BrahmaMos* cruise technologies as well as sales of ballistic missile defense technologies will likely tilt the offense–defense balance in favor of India and thus further destabilize the region.

Pakistan’s Strategic Reliance on China

Despite the SCO and a new form of partnership Russia is developing with China, Moscow remains ambivalent about the breadth and depth of emerging Sino–Pakistan relations. Equally, Beijing is also keeping an eye on the contours of Pakistan’s developing relations with Russia. China has been Pakistan’s principal defense supplier, especially when Pakistan came under a US arms embargo and with Russia’s continued refusal to sell weapons to Pakistan in deference to India’s objections. Thus, China has had a near monopoly in the Pakistani defense market. With Russia opening up to Pakistan now, there is competition with China for defense sales to Pakistan. Russian offers for defense and space technology are arguably better but more expensive. There have been cases in the past where, after protracted negotiations with Russian companies, Pakistan accepted China’s bid for relatively less sophisticated technology to the chagrin of Russian defense companies. If Russia concludes that defense sales to Pakistan require Chinese approval, Moscow may be disinclined to continue offering defense trade, which then could become a factor of divergence in defense relations.

Continued Dependence on the United States and Fear of Revived Alliance

Russia is very aware that Pakistan's relations with the United States have frayed many times before and that, with each such rupture in the past, Pakistan drew closer to Russia only to revert back to the US camp as soon as Washington returned with new packages to revive its strategic partnership with Pakistan. In the late 1960s, disappointed with lack of support in the 1965 war and under arms embargo, Soviet–Pakistan relations flourished; however, as soon as Pres. Richard Nixon took office, Pakistan went back into deep alliance with the United States. Again in 1979, after Pakistan, having bid farewell to US anticommunist alliances (e.g., the Central Treaty Organization, originally known as the Baghdad Pact, and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) returned back to alliance against the Soviet Union and waged war. And for the third time, Pakistan did the same in 2001, when it reversed its policy, despite being under nuclear sanctions. Russia could be wary that the current phase of difficult relations may once again be over, either with a new administration in Washington or due to some major geopolitical shock that would again make Pakistan central to Western policy objectives. Russia will likely remain skeptical of Pakistan's commitment of remaining truly nonaligned and committed to common Eurasian vision and agreed strategic cooperation.

Conclusion

Russia–Pakistan relations have grown under the shadow of dramatic shifts in geopolitical competition and deteriorating regional security in South Asia. Pakistan's diminished role as a frontline state in the US war on terror in Afghanistan and India's rise as an Asian power have affected Pakistani threat perceptions and Islamabad's cooperation with the United States. Initially, Pakistan believed its role to be central to the Washington achieving US objectives in Afghanistan, but with time, it became evident that America's larger objectives had little room to accommodate Pakistani strategic interests. Pakistan became convinced that Western powers prefer Indian hegemony as a model of stability rather than a balance of power and resolution of the complex nature of India–Pakistan conflict. With this premise, Islamabad began to hedge Pakistan's bets and reached out to Russia and China. Pakistan's and India's membership in the SCO has allowed Pakistan a forum in which to expand its strategic and economic interests and balance against Indian moves to diplomatically isolate Pakistan.

With increasing geopolitical importance, however, especially after China's BRI featured the CPEC as its flagship project, Pakistan's geophysical location found new geo-economic significance. With the United States imposing sanctions on Russia in the wake of the Crimea and East Ukraine crises, Moscow has reached out to

Beijing and expanded its interests to Southwest and South Asia. Russia is now involved in the delicate balancing of relations with South Asian countries. From the Russian standpoint, the future of Afghanistan has important bearing on Russian security interests in Russia's southern vector. Russia has also found a significant market for defense cooperation and sales in South Asia. Both Islamabad and New Delhi are disappointed with Russian policy, as each sees its relations as a zero-sum game. Russia's sales of the S-400 system to India has concerned Pakistan, and New Delhi is disappointed that India's strategic partner Russia is developing new defense ties with its archrival Pakistan, which India is trying to punish and isolate.

For most of Pakistan's history, Russia and Pakistan have distrusted each other; however, there are four emerging factors driving Russian interests in Pakistan currently: CPEC, the future of Afghanistan, markets for defense, and strategic sales, including space cooperation. Russia's preference is not to lose India, and Russia will do its utmost to compete with the United States and Europe for India's markets. India's major defense systems are based on Russian technology, and Russia has significant investment in the Indian nuclear industry—thanks to India's membership in three of the export control regimes. Pakistan does not offer that kind of market, and Islamabad continues to pay the price resulting from the aftermath of A. Q. Khan network scandal. Though India does not hold veto over Russia's decision on defense cooperation with Pakistan as it once had, there are many hurdles, such as Chinese monopoly, high costs, and a financial crunch, affecting Russia's military sales to Pakistan. Finally, Russia's progressively neutral position on South Asian bilateral issues is indicative that Russia has greatly expansive strategic interests in South Asia, which while they are still primarily with India are not exclusive to India anymore. ❀

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Notes

1. At the time of this writing, there are signs of improvement in US-Pakistan relations, following Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan meeting with Pres. Donald Trump and his delegation visit to Washington, DC, in July 2019. Additionally, there are recent reports of positive progress and constructive Pakistani role in the ongoing negotiations to end war in Afghanistan.

2. In May 1960, Soviet air defenses shot down a U-2 piloted by Gary Powers while on a photographic aerial reconnaissance deep in Soviet territory. Powers was subsequently captured by the Soviets and sentenced for spying. He was released in 1962 in exchange for a Soviet spy, Rudolf Abel, captured by the United States.

3. For a brief period in the late 1960s, Islamabad's attempt to repair relations with Moscow failed to flourish after Pres. Richard Nixon reset US relations with Pakistan, which had lost its warmth during the Johnson administration. After the 1965 India-Pakistan War, the Soviet Union mediated peace talks between India and Pakistan at a summit at Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in January 1966.

4. Pakistan facilitated Henry Kissinger's famous secret nocturnal visit to Beijing from Islamabad in summer 1971.

5. Oddly, several Russian delegates negotiating defense deals in Islamabad would never follow up and simply disappeared. Additionally, many of them were removed or transferred to other posts.

6. Igor Torbakov, "The 'Southern Vector': Russia's Strategic Interests in Central and South Asia," in *Does South Asia Exist?: Prospects for Regional Integration*, ed. Rafiq Dossani, Daniel C. Sneider, and Vikram Sood (Stanford, CA: Walter H Shorenstein Asia Pacific Research Center, 2010), 275-93.

7. Riaz Khokar, "Pakistan and India's Membership in SCO: Implications for Bilateral Cooperation," *CISS Insight* 6, no. 2 (Winter 2018): 23-40.

8. India alleges that Pakistan is fomenting state sponsored "terrorism" in the region, abetting Kashmir "separatism." Equally, Pakistan alleges India is fomenting Baluchistan "separatists" from Afghanistan and that New Delhi has a rightwing Hindu government fueling extremist ideology. China has always been concerned of India's role in supporting Tibetan unrest and separatism since the late 1950s when the Dalai Lama found asylum in India.

9. India is already member of the G-20 and Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) forums, in which Pakistan has no say. In 2017, at the BRICS summit in Xiamen, China, India utilized the platform to make declarations concerning terrorism implicating Pakistan. "BRICS Declaration Condemns Pakistan-based Terror Groups: Full Text on What It Said about Terrorism," *Financial Express*, 4 September 2017, <https://www.financialexpress.com/>.

10. "Resolve Post-Pulwama Differences Bilaterally, China led SCO tells India- Pakistan," *Hindustan Times*, 21 March 2019, <https://www.msn.com/>.

11. Swati Gupta, "Modi Claims Political Win after UN lists Masood Azhar as Terrorist," *CNN*, 2 May 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

12. Pakistan stopped all ground lines of communications through its territory for eight months before it was restored. "Pakistan Reopens NATO Supply Routes to Afghanistan," *CNN*, 3 July 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

13. Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan-Russia Sign Landmark Defense Cooperation Agreement," *Dawn*, 21 November 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/>.

14. The exercise was scheduled in northern areas of Pakistan (once part of the Princely State of Jammu & Kashmir before Partition). India objected to the location. In the meantime, a major militant attack occurred in Uri in Indian-administered Kashmir, which brought renewed tension between India and Pakistan. The venue subsequently was changed, but the exercise went ahead.

15. Muhammad Nawaz Khan, “Pakistan-Russia Relations Redux: From Estrangement to Pragmatism,” *IPRI Journal* 19 (Winter 2019), 72.

16. Khan, “Pakistan–Russia Relations Redux,” 72.

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39. China is the only country that is currently constructing nuclear power plants or has plans for future expansion in Pakistan—and even these plans may be curtailed by financial limitations, domestic capacity, and existing international sanctions. Consequently, Pakistan is severely limited in its technological choices and its safety and regulatory planning, and it remains economically restricted, with China as its sole nuclear supplier. Although Pakistan can meet most if not all NSG criteria for membership, it faces a difficult political struggle to attain membership or even an NSG waiver.

40. From the US standpoint, for Pakistan to be considered for NSG, Islamabad must take several steps, including tamping down the trajectory of its nuclear weapons program affecting strategic stability, improving safety and security criteria, and satisfying the international community by taking steps to mitigate the negative impact of Pakistan's reputation.

41. India is already member of the other three export control regimes: Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR); Australia Group (AG); and Wassenaar Arrangement (WA)

42. Khan, "Pakistan-Russia Relations Redux," 73.

43. Kashmir has been undergoing a separatist insurgency for the past 30 years, which spikes sporadically. The latest surge began in summer of 2016, after Indian security forces killed a fire-brand Kashmiri leader, Burhan Wani. Since then, the Kashmir Valley is in the grip of violence, and the more brutally the security forces suppress, the more the Kashmiri insurgency expands.

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Russian Influence on India's Military Doctrines

Dr. VIPIN NARANG

Despite a growing relationship since 2000 between the United States and India and various designations that each is a “strategic partner” or “major defense partner,” India’s three conventional services and increasingly its nuclear program—as it moves to sea—are largely dependent on another country for mainline military equipment, India’s historical friend: Russia.¹ Since the 1970s, each of the conventional services has had a strong defense procurement relationship with Russia, who tends to worry less than the United States about transferring sensitive technologies.

Currently, each of the services operates frontline equipment that is Russian—the Army with T-90 tanks, the Air Force with both MiGs and Su-30MKIs, and the Navy with a suite of nuclear-powered submarines (SSBN) and aircraft carriers that are either Russian or whose reactors were designed with Russian assistance. This creates a dependence on Russia for spare parts, maintenance, and training that outstrips any dependency India has for military equipment or operations. In peacetime, India’s force posture readiness is critically dependent on maintenance and spare parts from Russia. In a protracted conflict, moreover, Russia could cripple India’s military services by withholding replacements and spares. This means India cannot realistically unwind its relationship with Moscow for at least decades, while these platforms continue to serve as the backbone of Indian military power.

In terms of doctrine and strategy, although it may be difficult to trace direct influence and lineage between Russia and India, there are several pieces in India’s conventional and nuclear strategy that at least mirror Russia’s behavior. On the conventional side, the core formation in the quick-strike concept known as “Cold Start” or “proactive strategy options” was modeled on the Russian formation known as the “operational maneuver group” (OMG). The idea was to have a formation that could be rapidly assembled from tank and armored divisions that could break through reinforced defenses—NATO for Russia, and Pakistan’s I and II Corps in the plains and desert sectors for India.

On the nuclear side, India is currently seized with the same dilemma the Soviet Union was during the Cold War: both NATO and Pakistan threaten battlefield nuclear weapons against conventional thrusts (India, at least, presumably would be retaliating following a Pakistan-backed provocation). While both states refined

their conventional concept of operations, there may have also been corresponding adjustments to their nuclear strategies. It was long believed that, in response to NATO threats to use nuclear weapons first on the battlefield, the Soviet Union had strong preemptive counterforce elements in its strategy to try to at least disarm the United States of its strategic nuclear weapons for damage limitation. It is increasingly evident that at least some serious Indian officials are interested in developing the same sort of option: preemptive counterforce against Pakistan's strategic nuclear forces, both for damage limitation and to reopen India's conventional superiority. It is no surprise perhaps, then, that India chose to go ahead with acquiring Russia's S-400 missile and air defense system, despite the threat of Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) sanctions from the United States: the S-400 is key to India's damage limitation strategy, capable of potentially intercepting residual ballistic and cruise missiles that a counterforce strike might miss.

Furthermore, as India goes to sea, with SSBNs whose reactors are of Russian design provenance and built with substantial Russian help, it is entirely likely that India will mirror the Soviet/Russian deployment pattern of a "bastion model" rather than running a continuous deterrent patrol, both for survivability if Indian commanders are worried about loud acoustic signatures and for assertive command-and-control (C2) reasons. India may choose to keep its SSBNs close to—or in—port during peacetime but then flush them out during a crisis or conflict. This would certainly follow what many observers believed Soviet strategy was and offers an alternative to the US/French/UK continuous deterrent patrol model. Whether this model is consciously chosen because it is "Russian" as opposed to larger structural reasons—for example, loud SSBNs, a desire to maintain assertive control for as long as possible, or such—at the very least, the Soviets provided a template for India to follow, in addition to providing the very reactors they are using in the SSBNs.

This article details the various ways in which India has been influenced either directly or indirectly by Soviet or Russian doctrine. Directly, the most obvious influence is the sheer number and importance of the mainline military platforms each Indian service uses from Russia. Indirectly, a variety of mirrored doctrinal elements in India's conventional and nuclear strategy may suggest that, in addition to acquiring Russian platforms, India may look to Russia in how to employ and deploy those platforms—even against a very different kind of adversary: Pakistan. Given the long-term dependence India has had, and continues to have, on Russia for military hardware, it is reasonable to assume that direct influence will continue and will shape India's doctrinal choices if even in the background.

Conventional Dependencies

Since the 1970s, after America's perceived tilt toward Pakistan during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War, India remained "non-aligned" only in name, shifting its military acquisition and defense portfolio almost entirely to Soviet platforms (with the odd French and British platform mixed in, which sometimes only served to complicate training and maintenance). As it currently stands, India's Army operates a fleet of T-90 and T-72 Russian tanks. It currently has 1,650 T-90s and almost 2,500 T-72s in its inventory, and roughly 3,000 Russian BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles. This forms the backbone of India's armored punch against Pakistan. India is, in fact, one of the world's largest operators of T-series tanks. Whatever New Delhi's foreign policy preferences, India is critically—perhaps dangerously—dependent on Russia for its land-power projection.

More interestingly are the joint ventures that India and Russia have undertaken in missile development. The BrahMos occupies pride of place in this program—the name is an amalgamation of the Brahmaputra River in India and Moskva River in Russia, signifying the joining of the two nations in the development of the missile. Moreover, it is an incredibly fast, accurate conventional but also nuclear-capable supersonic missile that was originally and suspiciously listed at 390-kilometer range, presumably to circumvent the restrictions of the Missile Technology Control Regime. However, the missile's estimated range is closer to 600-kilometers for the initial version and 800-kilometers for future variants.² A hypersonic variant is speculated to have speeds up to Mach 7 or 8, which would make it one of the world's fastest missiles—and perhaps one of the most accurate—making the conventional version and a potential nuclear variant excellent counterforce weapons (against conventional and nuclear targets).

The picture for the Indian Air Force (IAF) is perhaps even worse. The backbone of the IAF is still an aging fleet of MiGs, and the Indian MiG-21 is ignominiously described as a "flying coffin," as it is being operated well beyond its service life. Yet, India continues to operate almost 250 MiG-21s, and 150 or so MiG-27 and 29s. Though it has almost a hundred British Jaguars as well, the core of India's heavy attack aircraft is a fleet of Su-30MKIs, roughly 230 of them. For nuclear delivery, India has relied on non-Russian platforms, such as the Mirage 2000 and Jaguars, for a variety of presumably wiring and nuclear-related reasons. The life of the Mirage 2000 has been extended for another decade, and India is currently searching for a long-term replacement for nuclear delivery, such as the French Rafale—which is currently the subject of political controversy over the final purchase price and order. It is possible that India wires the Su-30MKI for nuclear delivery as well, especially as it is equipped with an air-launched version

of the BrahMos, which is theoretically nuclear-capable. The overwhelming majority of the IAF's attack and fighter aircraft are thus Russian. Although there are a smattering of French and British platforms mixed in, and American transport aircraft, the IAF's combat power is again critically dependent on Russia.

The Navy is perhaps the service least dependent on Russia, with one critical exception: naval nuclear reactors for submarines and aircraft carriers (the *Vikramaditya*, for example, is the erstwhile *Admiral Gorshkov* and underwent significant refitting in Russian docks). However, India has several nuclear-powered Akula attack submarines, such as the INS *Chakra*, as well as its entire envisioned SSBN fleet, all of which are powered by Russian-provenance nuclear reactors. India operates a fleet of eight Kilo-class diesel-electric attack submarines, five Kashin-class destroyers, and six Russian guided-missile frigates as well. Although India's indigenous shipbuilding capacity exceeds its ability to produce equipment for the Army and IAF, the dependence on Russia for the core of its surface and subsurface fleet is unmistakable.

Is this dependency purely transactional, or does India import operational concepts from Russia as well? It is difficult to sometimes trace operational concepts that are staples of all militaries—like naval blockades—to a particular doctrine or inspiration, particularly given the vast differences in the adversaries India and Russia face, but there is some evidence that some Indian doctrinal concepts have Russian inspiration. Most notably, when India was searching for conventional answers to Pakistan's threat to use battlefield nuclear weapons after a terrorist attack, it became quickly apparent that India's mainstay conventional doctrine, the Sundarji Doctrine, was a nonstarter against a nuclear Pakistan. The Sundarji Doctrine leveraged India's quantitative and maneuver advantage by developing a massive Strike Corps formation concept that could threaten Pakistan's existence as a state. The northern two strike corps, I and II Corps, would engage Pakistani fortifications and defensive formations in the plains sector, while the so-called deep-thrust corps, XXI Corps, would attack Pakistan in the desert, where there was ample space for concentrating mass and maneuvering—thus, threatening to bisect the state. The development of battlefield nuclear weapons, notably the Nasr system, neutralized the Strike Corps concept because their menace was credible enough for Pakistan to threaten first use on XXI Corps as it approached vital points in the desert, since the unit would be on sparsely populated Pakistani territory.

The shortcomings of the Sundarji Doctrine were exposed in the so-called Twin Peaks crisis of 2001–2002, a 10-month military standoff sparked by the Jaish-e-Mohammed attack on India's Parliament on 13 December 2001. For the first time in its history, the Indian government, led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party, ordered the mobilization of all three strike

corps for retaliation against Pakistan. After a month-long mobilization, roughly 800,000 forces had reached their assembly points, poised for a ground assault against Pakistan. Pakistan explicitly threatened nuclear use either on India or its forces if India were to send those forces across the international border. Faced with the dilemma that any retaliation by the strike corps sufficient to punish Pakistan for its provocation, by definition, risked tripping Islamabad's nuclear red lines, Vajpayee stayed his hand and—after 10 months—called the strike corps back to their peacetime cantonments in India's interior.

For its part, the Army believed that the month-long mobilization deflated the momentum and will to retaliate against Pakistan and gave Islamabad ample time to orchestrate international opinion on its behalf that put pressure on Vajpayee's government to not retaliate. Thus began the search for a conventional retaliatory concept that could mobilize quicker and had objectives that could stay below Pakistan's nuclear thresholds. This is how the concept of Cold Start emerged—the search for the ability to initiate a ground offensive from a “cold start,” employ multiple shallow thrusts that could attrite the Pakistan Army in limited ways, and possibly seize small slices of territory as bargaining chips. The idea was to break up the massive strike corps into smaller formations, preposition some of the armored offensive units closer to the border, and keep the reserves as surge forces. This way, the Army could commence offensives without requiring the entire strike corps to mobilize—which takes weeks.

In developing the experimental concept, India mirrored the Soviet Union's Operational Maneuver Groups (OMG) and looked to develop similar Integrated Battle Groups (IBG). Walter Ladwig writes:

Cold Start seeks to leverage India's modest superiority in conventional forces to respond to Pakistan's continued provocation. This doctrine requires reorganizing the Indian Army's offensive power away from the three large strike corps into eight smaller division-sized “integrated battle groups” (IBGs) that combine mechanized infantry, artillery, and armor in a manner reminiscent of the Soviet Union's operational maneuver groups. The eight battle groups would be prepared to launch multiple strikes into Pakistan along different axes of advance. It is envisioned that the operations of the IBGs would be integrated with close air support from the Indian Air Force and naval aviation assets to provide highly mobile support. As one retired Indian general described, India is seeking to “mass fire-power rather than forces.” At the same time, the holding corps (redesignated “pivot corps”), which would be bolstered by additional armor and artillery, would concurrently man defensive positions and undertake limited offensive operations as necessary.³

India never could quite get the full concept of IBGs to work—one concern was how vulnerable they were to Pakistani preemption, not to mention the difficulty of acquiring the real estate to preposition so many formations close to the international border. However, some elements remain, as the Pivot Corps concept does imbue India with some limited offensive firepower that looks akin to the OMGs. This seems to have been intentional modeling, as the Soviet Union was seized with a similar strategic problem as India: how do you leverage advantages in firepower and quantity against an adversary that threatens to use nuclear weapons first on concentrated conventional forces? So, although India could never model it directly, and is still experimenting with refinements to its conventional strategy, there is a direct lineage to the Soviet concept in Cold Start.

Nuclear Strategy

India released its official nuclear doctrine in 2003. It is composed of three pillars: minimum deterrence, no first use (NFU), and massive retaliation. None of these have obvious Soviet influence, as the Soviet strategy looks very different than India's, which is often characterized as assured retaliation. Additionally, it is reported that the drafters of India's nuclear doctrine—or at least the early 1999 unofficial draft of it—looked to the United States for doctrinal guidance on tenets such as the nuclear triad and calculated ambiguity on responding to chemical and biological attacks. Nevertheless, there are some interesting similarities, whether explicit and intentional or not.

First, on NFU, New Delhi's pledge in the 1999 *Draft Nuclear Doctrine* was that India would “not be the first to initiate” nuclear use, which leaves open the possibility that it will use first if it detects the adversary preparing for use. That is, India did leave open the possibility of preemption—something Indian officials have persistently showed an interest in despite affirming an absolute NFU stance in the official 2003 doctrine. This is similar to Russian president Vladimir Putin's recent pledge, for example: “Only when we become convinced that there is an incoming attack on the territory of Russia, and that happens within seconds, only after that we would launch a retaliatory strike.”⁴ Vajpayee in 2000 had stated similarly that: “we are being threatened [by Pakistan] with a nuclear attack. Do they understand what it means? If they think we would wait for them to drop a bomb and face destruction, they are mistaken.”⁵ A parade of officials, including former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon, have expressed the notion that preemption would be consistent with NFU if India detected imminent nuclear use by an adversary. This is not that far afield from what Soviet or Russian doctrine was believed to be with respect to at least strategic nuclear use (Russia leaves open the possibility of first use of theater nuclear weapons if conventional

forces are, for example, threatening the Russian homeland). Indian officials have consistently eroded the absoluteness of its NFU policy for one scenario in particular: preemptive nuclear use in the face of imminent adversary battlefield or strategic nuclear use. There is no explicit evidence that Indian officials are deliberately echoing or mirroring Soviet/Russian doctrine, but they share a strategic predicament that pushes them toward considering preemptive counterforce options. While preemptive counterforce was much more explicit in Soviet strategy, the growing authoritative voices in India expressing interest in it—from Menon, to a handful of former Strategic Forces Commanders—is hard to ignore.⁶

Related to counterforce is the missile defense piece of damage limitation strategies: the ability to intercept residuals that a counterforce strike misses. Here, India has tried to develop native layered missile defenses, including the Prithvi Air Defense system and Advanced Air Defense system. However, Pakistan's emphasis on cruise missiles and India's recognition of the limitations of its native defenses led New Delhi to pursue terminal and area defense systems from abroad. Thwarted by technology transfer issues with the Israeli Arrow system (based on the US Patriot system) and with no alternatives, India sought Russia's capable S-400 system, which possesses a performance envelope that is quite good for India. It is capable of intercepting short- and medium-range ballistic missile targets—exactly the ranges of Pakistani strategic nuclear weapons—and has a limited capability to intercept cruise missiles, in addition to its air defense capabilities. The S-400 was such a high priority for India that it was willing to risk US-levied CAATSA sanctions to continue with the purchase of four batteries from Russia. The S-400 adds a critical missile defense capability that makes a preemptive counterforce option more credible, since it provides a limited ability to intercept residuals, reducing the pressure on intelligence to find and destroy all of Pakistan's strategic nuclear forces. This is a case where Russia may directly influence Indian thinking.

The other obvious area where India and Russia share nuclear technology, and perhaps doctrine, is at sea. As noted above, India's SSBNs are all powered by Russian nuclear reactors. There was substantial Russian assistance in the development and construction of the *Arihant's* reactor and for subsequent SSBN reactors, such as the *Aridhaman's*. Has that assistance influenced India's concept for how it might deploy its SSBN fleet? Again, there is no conclusive evidence one way or another. However, given New Delhi's commitment to assertive control of nuclear weapons, it seems more likely that India will adopt a bastion model for its SSBN deployments, rather than a continuous deterrent patrol as the United States, Britain, and France have done. The insistence on assertive control is conceivably shared with the Russians, and perhaps even for similar reasons—a political distrust of the

military. However, it is also the case that India's first-generation SSBNs will be so noisy that exposing them in the increasingly crowded Indian Ocean waters would make them vulnerable to tracking by adversary antisubmarine warfare. Also, India is still a generation away from having enough SSBNs to support a continuous deterrent patrol model. So, at least for the foreseeable future, India has no choice but to adopt a bastion model and keep the SSBNs either in port or in the sanctuary of territorial waters during peacetime and then flush them out during a crisis or conflict. India's C2 system might be stressed as the SSBNs were flushed out, and it would not be surprising—though I have no evidence—that India's naval officers and national security elite, who are equally comfortable with the Russians and Americans, might seek tips from Russia about how to construct and manage India's C2 for the SSBN leg for a bastion model.

These are the two main features shared by India and Russia, but there is inconclusive evidence of whether, and how, Russia may have influenced India's nuclear strategy. Additionally, there are many ways in which the two are dissimilar. For one, India does not envision nuclear first use on the battlefield—it is not even seemingly interested in developing or fielding battlefield systems, as Russia does in great numbers. Second, in terms of its broader nuclear posture, India has a much more limited arsenal and does not necessarily seem interested in growing it to the proportions that Russia has. New Delhi is willing to trade quantity for quality, technology and accuracy for numbers. Although the trajectories of the arsenals are quite different, there are some areas—at sea and with preemptive counterforce—where the two do share some characteristics.

Conclusion

Russia and India have a complicated relationship—one that has endured for decades, even as India has tried to widen its portfolio of defense and strategic partnerships. However, the sheer legacy of Russian military equipment in the Indian inventory, across all the services and including nuclear systems, in addition to acquisitions of *future* systems and *codevelopment* of others, makes Russia an indispensable partner for India, much perhaps to Washington's chagrin. India cannot unwind this relationship without gutting its conventional and sea-based nuclear forces. And it is best to assume New Delhi will not undertake such drastic measures. India has become savvier about acquisition strategy, trying to get other bidders against the Russians to keep price gouging down, but in some areas—heavy attack aircraft, nuclear-powered submarines, and armored punch—India has no options.

It is, however, difficult to discern explicit Russian influence on Indian conventional or nuclear doctrine. This is not surprising given the widely different structural

conditions each country faces. However, there are areas where there are similarities, notably the Cold Start doctrine, which has clear inspiration from Soviet doctrine. Additionally, on SSBN deployment patterns, the test for Russian influence will be as India acquires enough SSBNs to theoretically be capable of running a continuous deterrent patrol. If, after inducting four or five SSBNs, India persists with a bastion model of operations, this would be strong evidence in favor of Russian influence on India. Given the technological, training, and operational relationship between the two nations as well, it would not be surprising if there is significant informal influence between the militaries and scientists on conventional and nuclear operations and strategies. This is certainly far more likely than US influence—perhaps the Indian Navy notwithstanding. ✪

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Notes

1. See: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 2020* (London: IISS, February 2020).
2. Missile Defense Project, "BrahMos," *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 15 June 2018, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/>.
3. Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars?: The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/2008), 164–65, <https://www.jstor.org/>.
4. Vladimir Isachenkov, "Putin: Russia 'ahead of competition' with latest weapons," *VOA*, 18 October 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/>.
5. Quoted in: Sarabjit Pandher, "Talks Only on Return of PoK, Says Vajpayee," *The Hindu*, 7 February 2000, <https://www.thehindu.com/>.
6. See: Christopher O. Clary and Vipin Narang, "India's Counterforce Temptations: Strategic Dilemmas, Doctrine, and Capabilities," *International Security* 43, no. 3 (Winter 2018/19): 7–52

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***Russia's New Ground Forces: Capabilities, Limitations and Implications for International Security* by Igor Sutyagin with Justin Bronk. Royal United Services Institute, 2017, 139 pp.**

Images of Russia's land army invariably bring to mind hordes of unsophisticated but rugged tanks and determined infantry sweeping across the plains of Eastern Europe. Yet, as Igor Sutyagin and Justin Bronk demonstrate in *Russia's New Ground Forces*, this characterization is no longer true for the modern Russian military. Instead, Russia's ground forces are carefully designed to achieve specific strategic goals while maximizing the defense of Russian territory.

Sutyagin and Bronk each bring their unique experiences in the area of Russian military development and strategic goals. Sutyagin, a former researcher for the Institute for US and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, spent 11 years in a Russian prison camp for allegedly selling secrets to the British government. He was freed in the same spy swap that sent Sergei Skripal to England and Anna Chapman back to Russia. Bronk—whose personal history is perhaps less dramatic than Sutyagin's—has nonetheless written prolifically on the Russian military, especially its technological and organizational aspects.

This experience is demonstrated in the timely details of Sutyagin and Bronk's work. There are many works describing how, seemingly, the backward and disarmed Russian state suddenly achieved military successes across the globe. Bettina Renz, for example, offers an excellent reference in *Russia's Military Revival*. Sutyagin and Bronk focus on Russia's strategic and political goals and how the organization and arming of Russian ground forces help to achieve them. It is almost trite to point out that Russia's fundamentally defensive and paranoid worldview drives its leaders' assessment of the country's security situation, as has been the case since at least 1945. As Sutyagin and Bronk demonstrate, while Russia certainly feels uneasy about a burgeoning Chinese population on its border, the West remains Russia's greatest perceived threat. Therefore, Russia has chosen a force structure and disposition directly intended to influence Western decision-making and to defend against a potential attack on Russia's European core. This focus has meant creating a smaller, better equipped, and more offensively oriented force.

Sutyagin and Bronk organize their work into three parts, flowing from a description of Russia's strategic and political goals to the geographic distribution of Russian military formations. All three parts first outline the strategic problem Russian leaders need to solve and then how they attempt to do so by reorganizing, redistributing, or reequipping their forces. The first chapter portrays how Russia uses its military to achieve its foreign policy. The second details the post-2008 reforms of Russian land forces. The third chapter demonstrates the geographic distribution and purpose of major Russian organizations. The book ends with a brief set of conclusions, summed up by the saying, "If you want peace too much—you will inevitably get war."

The true genius of Russia's New Ground Forces is its emphasis on force readiness and sustainability. Sutyagin and Bronk do not rehash well-known Russian beliefs or extensively describe the updated order of battle. They resist the temptation to exhaustively detail the new weapons Russian forces are fielding. Instead, they prove true the saying that "professionals talk about logistics." While the book addresses ideology, strategy, and equipment, it also examines how Russian leadership can generate, position, and sustain ground forces.

The most thorough and, arguably, important element of this book is the detailed description of ground force units. The bulk of the second and third chapters comprises a listing of the major field units as well as their primary equipment, subordination, and operational task. Rather than using simple tables, though, the authors present this data in a highly readable format organized around their assessments of each unit's capabilities. Here is where Sutyagin and Bronk discuss current problems afflicting Russia's ground forces: the inability to maintain qualified recruits, acquire advanced electronics, or sustain their level of spending. They show that while Russia's forces are undeniably more capable now than 10 years ago, they are far from unstoppable.

Most remarkable about Sutyagin and Bronk's work, it is sourced exclusively by research in publicly available sources. The authors clearly read Russian professional journals as well as news sources to come to their conclusions. Further, they delineate the limits of their knowledge, indicating when they were unable to discover the unit designator or true strength of an organization. This work should be an exemplar for Air Force personnel attempting to more fully use publicly available information.

Russia's New Ground Forces is an excellent resource for analysts or military personnel responsible for operations in the European Command area of responsibility. It gives a clear overview of Russia's current ground capabilities and how Russia intends to use its forces to achieve its strategic goals. This book is perhaps especially important for Airmen who might not be familiar with Russian ground forces. It is a brisk read whose crisp, well-written pages will only serve to make American defense professionals more successful.

Maj J. Alexander Ippoliti, ANG

***China and India: Asia's Emergent Great Powers* by Chris Ogden. Polity Press, 2017, 224 pp.**

China and India presents an in-depth analysis of two Asian powers whose prominence in the global order is evident. Although much has been written about the regional and international implications of emergent powers, the discourse is largely limited to one or two key dynamics of bilateral relations and their implications. An expert on Asian security, Chris Ogden assesses these two emergent great powers using four prisms: interconnections, perceptions, evolution, and commonality (pp. 11–12). Ogden's analysis includes important implications of the rise of these two Asian giants. The study is "multi-dimensional, multi-relational and interlinked" (p. 10).

The book begins by appraising the status of the two countries as emergent great powers by focusing on their material capabilities, structural centrality, values, and identity as key factors. The first chapter analyzes the main domestic political determinants of both countries. Interestingly, the focus remains on the idea of political legitimacy despite the difference in the form of government. The role of nationalism in the evolution of foreign policy principles is highlighted in conjunction with the role of history and ideology (p. 28). The second chapter addresses strategic cultures and identities wherein history, culture, geography, and self-perception play an important role. While China has a Grand Strategy, most scholars argue that India lacks one. Ogden identifies adaptive strategic thinking in India that fills the void in the absence of a singular Grand Strategy (p. 54). The third chapter analyzes the two countries' military capability, including nuclear prowess, to demonstrate their clear qualification as great powers. China and India have the world's largest and third-largest standing armies, respectively (p. 64). India is the world's second-largest arms importer while China is the fifth-largest exporter of arms. In terms of nuclear capability, it was after India's defeat at the hands of the Chinese in 1962 that the need for a nuclear option emerged (p. 71). The variable of nationalism seems to link the two countries in this pursuit.

The fourth chapter focuses on economic drivers and is filled with statistics that convey two things: China is far ahead of India in terms of economy, and the Indian economy is fast liberalizing to catch up with international capitalism (p. 99). Ogden indicates that the material superiority of China places it on a higher pedestal vis-à-vis India. The fifth chapter focuses on "peripheral relations which seek to convey . . . how the elites of India and China 'conceptualize their states regionally'" (p. 101). India's relations with Pakistan and China's historical tension with Japan form the core of the discussion about how the strategic priorities of the two countries have been evolving. The sixth chapter assesses the multilateral interactions at the global and regional levels. Ogden claims that the rise of India and China has major implications for world order (p. 142). However,

China's inclination to use its economic clout tends to overshadow India's aspirations regionally and globally. The final chapter brings in a discussion of the United States and its undoubted hegemony. Indo-US relations and Sino-US relations have "oscillated between negativity and positivity" (p. 164). However, in the present global context, Sino-US relations appear to have taken a further downturn with President Donald Trump calling out China in harsher terms. Indo-US relations, on the other hand, seem to be following a more positive trajectory partly due to supposedly good personal relations between Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The conclusion evaluates the four prisms previously mentioned. It focuses on the great power ambition of both countries and outlines how the same is evident in the domestic, regional, and global arenas. The discussion shifts again in terms of measuring capabilities. Also included are seven tables highlighting the GDP, population, and military expenditures of India and China relative to other great powers.

Written in 2017, the book lacks some contemporary relevance owing to changes in the policy of China under Xi Jinping since 2018 and the changed power dynamic in India after Modi won the second term in 2019 with a historic mandate. The book set out to support the premise of China and India as two emergent great powers. The variables chosen by Ogden more or less cover all aspects that would be relevant in the domestic, bilateral, regional, multilateral, and international dimensions. There are, however, major indicators that deny India such a status. For instance, India's economic weakness is touched on but not fully explored. A focus on its per capita income and ranking in the global hunger index would defeat the theoretical premise of the book. Furthermore, for India, the regional architecture of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation appears nothing more than a defunct assemblage of mutually suspicious leaders meeting to fulfill formalities. There are major differences between India and China. While both countries are marred by ethnic conflicts, as a one-party state China can maintain its authoritarian legitimacy. India, on the other hand, faces multiple ethnic sub-nationalist challenges—a response to which jeopardizes the balance between rule of law and security. Furthermore, the Indian government faces major criticism whenever it shows highhandedness. The recent abrogation of a constitutional article that provided special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir is a case in point.

That being said, and even if India were not to become a great power in coming decades, the book offers a comprehensive assessment of two Asian giants whose relevance in regional and global politics cannot be ignored due to their sheer size and potential alone. The author presents great power concepts and theories and makes them easy to grasp by using relevant examples. Scholars of international politics will find *China and India* of particular interest.

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