

## The BRICS Factor: India and Russia's Shared Adventure Towards a Multipolar World

Dr. Parijat Bhattacharjee<sup>1</sup>

Russia's special military operation in Ukraine has sent ripples down faulty lines of international diplomacy, compelling countries to recalibrate their foreign policy strategies. For India and Russia, two old allies, the war puts their bilateral relations at a juncture of challenges and opportunities. It is at this juncture that BRICS assumes even more critical importance as a platform for continuing and expanding the partnership between India and Russia. BRICS came into being in 2006 and has since been a strong platform to advocate for multilateral cooperation among major emerging economies. In the future, this organization can provide Russia with an economic and diplomatic lifeline, while offering India a platform to pursue its foreign policy objectives of strategic autonomy. This paper will analyze how BRICS will influence the future trajectory of India-Russia relations.

Fundamentally, India and Russia share a multi-decade-long partnership based on mutual trust and shared geopolitical interests. The two nations have been cooperating in defence, energy, space, and technology, right from the Soviet era to the present day. Russia continues to be among the largest defense suppliers of India, whereas at multilateral platforms like United Nations, the two countries have been in close alignment. But the Ukraine Crisis has certainly tested the mettle of this resilience. India has remained neutral about the conflict, using diplomacy and dialogue to resolve issues, but it had to watch its traditional partnerships with Russia grow more isolated from the West. This did not deter both India and Russia from continuing their bilateral trade. Russia continues to be a key partner in India's energy security strategy.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has placed India in an extremely delicate diplomatic situation. A member of the Quad, besides the U.S., Japan, and Australia, and a strategic partner of the United States, India will need to balance its relations with Russia in navigating its bigger foreign policy objectives. It is here that the whole neutrality of India regarding the war-as evinced by the country's repeated abstentions at the UN over resolutions censuring Russia-carry signs of a carefully contrived behaviour. Such a stance by India not giving in to the demand to join in the Western sanctions against Russia and her decision to increase oil imports from Russia speak of a pragmatic approach in the promotion of her core interests, not least securing supplies of cheaper energy in an inflation-hit world. The conflict in Ukraine is the reason why economic isolation from the West affects Russia, making the latter's relations with countries like India all the more significant. It is for this reason that BRICS assumes importance as a platform for Russia to continue its engagement with major economies outside the Western fold.

BRICS provides a very useful platform for continuing economic collaboration between India and Russia. Financial tools like the BRICS New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement can ease the impact of the Western sanctions on Russia and provide new avenues for investment in infrastructure, energy, and technology in both countries. The BRICS NDB has already financed numerous infrastructure projects in member countries, including India. For Russia, access to NDB funding becomes increasingly vital as its access to Western capital markets remains limited. In addition, BRICS initiatives on trade facilitation, including the possibility of local currency trading, could further deepen economic ties between India and Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Amity University Haryana

Energy remains a cornerstone of the relationship between India and Russia, and BRICS provides a base to further advance this partnership. India has a fast-growing economy with huge energy needs, while Russia is a key supplier, with rich resources of oil and natural gas. Since the Ukraine crisis, India has significantly increased its imports of Russian crude at advantageous prices. The BRICS grouping can facilitate more cooperation on energy through joint ventures, research on sustainable energy, and partnerships in nuclear energy. With changing global energy markets, the BRICS serves as a counterbalance to Western-dominated energy organizations; hence, it is proper to offer India and Russia a means to engage in long-term energy security matters.

Although differences might persist between India and Russia over the perception of various geopolitical issues, BRICS gives a common platform for addressing global challenges. Both countries stand for multilateralism and a multipolar world order, which also acts as a counterbalance to Western hegemony. By the BRICS grouping, it would be easier for India and Russia to become part of the struggle for reforms in the global governance structures, for instance, the push towards increasing representation by emerging economies in institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. BRICS summits also provide platforms where countries engage in dialogue on topical international issues, enabling them to maintain a high level of diplomatic interaction against the existing pressures.

The key challenge to India-Russia relations after the Ukraine crisis gets over would be how to manage the delicate balancing act of growing strategic partnerships that India has forged with Western nations and India's long-standing relations with Russia. This is, as India becomes increasingly integrated into the Western economic and security structures, especially through the Quad and other initiatives, the need to be resilient vis-à-vis relations with Russia would obtain as an essential factor. Besides that, the China-Russia dynamic in BRICS also presents certain challenges for India: with Russia becoming increasingly dependent on China due to Western sanctions, India's strategic competition with China would have the potential to complicate within BRICS.

Still, there are strong opportunities for growth in Indo-Russian relations in the post-Ukraine crisis phase, despite such obstacles. The BRICS framework provides both nations with a wider platform to deepen economic ties, especially in areas covering energy, trade, and infrastructure. Also, the commitment to a multipolar world order corresponds with the long-term strategic interests of both countries.

BRICS would, therefore, be a crucial determinant of the future course of India-Russia relations in the post-Ukraine crisis scenario. While the Ukraine crisis has opened new challenges between both countries, BRICS presents continued economic engagement, energy security, and diplomatic engagement. In the progress and development of India's relations with both Russia and the West, BRICS acts as a balancing factor for the continuity of a strong India-Russia partnership in these turbulent times.

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