CONCLUSION
It is over ten years since the Soviet Union broke up and it can be said with reasonable certainty that Russia is gradually emerging as a stable country under the leadership of President Putin. Its economy is showing a modest growth rate and the reform process, though slow and erratic, continues. In the field of foreign policy Russia’s objective is to integrate into the world economy and have meaningful relations with all the powers.

The first President, Boris Yeltsin who was elected as the President of the Russian Federation few months before the disintegration of Soviet Union was interested in developing market economy and democratization of the polity on Western lines after the break up in 1991. There were severe internal debates in Russia on the kind of foreign policy and to its geo-political orientation. One school of thought believed that the destiny of Russia lay with the West and developed nations and so it has to tie up with Western countries while the other group favoured a Eurasian approach. Their main thrust was that a greater part of Russia lay in Asia. President Yeltsin in the initial post Soviet period was influenced by the ideology of westernisers and as a result, India did not figure in the priorities of Russian foreign policy. India was considered as a Third World country. Moreover, India owed much debt to former Soviet Union. With China the emphasis was to continue the normalization process began by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s.

Major shift in Russian policy towards India occurred in 1993 when President Yeltsin visited India and signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Later major defence deals were signed which bolstered up Indo-Russian ties. With China also major agreements were signed in 1996 and 1997. The external developments
were against the interest of Russia forcing Russia to choose a more active Asian policy. From then on, the relations with India and China assumed importance. Between 1996 and 2000 there were some similarities in Russia’s approach towards India as well as China. The need to oppose a unipolar world was the main plank which brought Russia closer to India and China.

Most Joint Declarations and Joint Statements signed between Russia and China contained opposition to US policies, especially NATO expansion and continuation of ABM treaty. The period following 9/11 marked a divergence in Russia’s approach towards India on the one hand and China on the other. The external factors that brought Russia and China into a common strategic understanding, though still in existence, they are not putting a common front intensely as they did earlier. The divergence in Russian perception of China as well as threat perceptions prompted Russia to take a more cautious approach to China.

It is the domestic necessity of both the countries in having peace with each other and strategic context where Russia and China is placed in the post 1991 period that facilitated greater interaction between them. After some speculation that NATO will transform into a political organization, it is now certain with the inclusion of Baltic States and four other East European States in March 2004 that it will remain as a military organization with increased scope of areas of operation. Till 9/11 Russia and China vehemently opposed such moves. Russia and China are also not satisfied with the presence of US forces in Central Asia. Although Russia and China considers the stationing of NATO troops close to their borders and US military bases in Central Asia as threats to their security they are downplaying the issue.
They are not putting a coordinated opposition to such developments, which they did earlier. The strategic interests of Russia and China are different. For China it is Taiwan and so they compromise everything for the time being for that. However, US policy on Taiwan could only be said after the US presidential elections.

The strategic context where India is placed is such that of an unsettled border with Pakistan and China. Pakistan was declared as a Major non-NATO ally by United States in 2004. China is having extensive trade relations with US and is supporting Pakistan and transfers nuclear related technology, which in turn transfers, such technology to other countries. China has made aggressive presence in Central Asia by promoting Shangai Cooperation Organization. India’s presence in the region has been minimal. Russia remains as a reliable strategic partner for India considering the security needs of India. Russia sees India as a long term partner though the currently level of trade is less, and weapon sale is the only major area of cooperation.

What makes Russia’s strategic cooperation with India fundamentally different from that of China is the existence of mutual trust between the countries and the absence of any kind of threat perception. India was and continues to be perceived as a friendly country. There is continuity in Russia’s relations with India, although the operational context of the relationship has changed. In the 1970s and 1980s Russia and India had problems with China and also both the countries wanted to balance US interference in South Asia. The USSR was sensitive to India’s defence needs. Over the 1990s Russia has given more weight in its Asia strategy to China and Japan. However Russia’s security commitments to India in the form of
arms transfer remained high, they depend less on each other compared to the Soviet period. This change in approach is more evident from the Indian side as it would like to diversify its sources of arms procurement. Nevertheless Russia continues to be the main supplier of weapons to India and the latter has the latest in Russian inventory. Moreover there is a shared view over developments in the common neighbourhood that is Central Asia. Both Russia and India desire that the Central Asian region remains stable and peaceful. Their perceptions about the sources of tensions, terrorism, religious extremism etc. are near similar.

India knows that an autonomous defence capability, operational nuclear weapon program etc., are essential to establish a strategic position in relation to China and to maintain superiority over Pakistan. India is pursuing this strategy without affecting its ties with Russia. The question is how Russia adapts to India’s efforts to consolidate as a major power in the region? Considering Russia’s long-term involvement with India and agreements for long-term military technical cooperation means that Russia will continue its relations simultaneously with other Asian powers. Unlike China, India and Russia have never been adversaries and there is nothing that can worsen the relation in future.

The fundamental difference is also visible; Russia is following a more cautious approach to China. It realized that in spite of partnership, China behaves in market spirit when it comes to the purchase of civilian aircrafts or giving large-scale contracts.

Russia shares one of the longest boundaries with China. But it does not have any border with India. Having such long boundary can be a potential source of
conflict with China. The Russians have not fully forgotten the past history of border conflicts. One of the widely accepted assumptions is that China has had border conflicts with practically all its immediate neighbours. However, the border issue has been settled except for two tracts of territory, which will maintain status-quo i.e. currently under Russian Jurisdiction.

Russia considers India as a time-tested friend with whom there is a lot of commonality on issues of vital importance such as religious extremism, separatism and aggressive nationalism, these sources of tension are found in India’s and Russia’s common neighbourhood in the Central Asian region. The Russian perception of China is mixed. While some section of Russian elite advocates closer ties with China, there is also a dominant opinion that advocates a cautious approach to China. In their view China is likely to emerge as a rival in future.

Russia’s trade with both India and China are below potential levels. While Russia has opened its economy, the companies across the world are marketing their products in Russia to establish brand name. However India is lagging behind in this respect. While Russia’s trade with china has reached $14 billion in 2003 its trade with India remains the same $1 billion.

While making a comparison between India and China in respect of its strategic cooperation with Russia, It is seen that defence is the major area followed by trade. Both India and China is buying weapons worth more than $1 billion every year from Russia. Russia also gives license to produce weapons to both countries in a commercial basis. In that context the military technical cooperation with India is comparatively more comprehensive than with China. For both the countries, Russian
supplies had been essential for modernization of their respective forces as supplies from other countries were marginal during the period. Viewed from the perspective of strategic environment, Russia’s understanding of Indian concerns is greater than that of China. For the present some of these concerns appear similar, but in the long run the shared view of the strategic environment would be deeper between India and Russia. As mentioned Russia perceives India as a friendly country and there is no Russian opinion which considers India as a threat to Russia. However, Russian arms transfers to China has resulted in its military enhancement. These arms transfers undoubtedly had an adversarial impact on India’s security concerns.

Now the question is whether India or China gets the best weapons? Only a specialist can say this as deals are finalized after long negotiations regarding price as well as specifications. Moreover, threats perceived by India and China are different. For example, China is currently engaged in developing medium range and long-range cruise missiles based on technology brought from Russia in 1996. Along with the Sukhoi’s, submarines and destroyers China brought from Russia, this can provide air and naval blockade over Taiwan. This can damage Taiwan’s economy and is considered as a better option than using force. India and China make requests for different specifications to be made even on the same item of purchase. Access to such information is extremely difficult, hence one relies on reports published now and then. Reports suggest that Russia is not hesitant to supply its latest weapons to India. China gets such weapons only after hard negotiation. Reports also suggest that Russia will include India in developing fifth generation fighter planes. India is considered as an ideal partner. The opening up of service Centres in India for the
servicing of Russian weapons sold in region, the success in joint production of Brahmos cruise missile and the various licenses for weapons production is an indication of taking defence cooperation between the two countries to higher levels. In final it can be said that Russia and India are becoming real partners.