ABSTRACT

India’s friendly stance towards the USSR has greatly been exaggerated, misunderstood and misinterpreted in India and abroad. An examination of the subject appeared necessary in order to explain the nature, extent, direction and implications of India’s relations with the USSR. An attempt has been made here to analyze India’s policy towards the USSR and place it in proper perspective.

The ever growing friendly relations between the two neighbours are the result of many factors such as the complementarily of their national interests and the constantly changing national and international situations. The Soviet Union’s huge size, its vast potentialities and the geo-political situation compelled Indian leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru in particular, to realize, even before India attained independence, the need to develop close and friendly relations with the Soviet Union.

India’s attitude towards the USSR has been derived from its overall foreign policy objectives. In understanding and evaluating this attitude, it is therefore, indispensable to keep in view two important considerations: first, the assumptions, motivations, style, basic goals and the principles of India’s foreign policy which governed her relations with other States in general; second, the specific goals which India sought to achieve in her relations with the USSR. It is the inter-relationship between the general and the particular objectives and the degree of their combination as well as contradiction that give us an idea of the various phases of India’s relations with the USSR. Such an analysis, however, should not be restricted merely to the conceptual level. The interaction of such other factors as intimate geographical, historical and economic ties between the two States, the influence of external factors and the failure or success of Indian diplomacy at the international level should also constitute a part of the analysis.
The news of the Russian Revolution made an impact on India. It became a source of inspiration to the people in their struggle for freedom. They realised that the effects of the October Revolution would not be confined to Russia. Since the revolution was “against imperialism it might somehow help the movement for Indian independence which, with Mahatma Gandhi’s advent on the Indian scene, was taking a new turn.” As pointed out in Montague Chelmsford Report: The Revolution in Russia in its beginning was regarded in India as a triumph over despotism ... it has given an impetus to Indian political aspirations. The Indian press as well as the political leaders generally showed a lively interest in the October Revolution and the new state. It would not be out of place here to refer to the comments in some of the leading newspapers and periodicals, particularly those associated with the nationalist movement.

The impact of the Russian Revolution on Indian nationalist intellectuals was sensitively reflected in the attitude of Jawaharlal Nehru. As a matter of fact, Nehru’s thinking was the most important factor in bringing about a transformation in the Indian nationalist attitude towards the USSR. Nehru held a prominent position in the Indian National Congress. He exhibited lively academic interest in the scientific outlook of Marxism as an interpretation of history. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that his attraction for Marxism was confined to its broad features rather than to its fine points. At no time he could be termed a doctrinaire Marxist. His intellect was too independent to be subjected to the rigid discipline of any dogma. Gandhi’s influence reinforced his dislike for violence.

The shift in Soviet policy came soon after Stalin’s death, almost as soon as Malenkov came to power the Soviet ceased being hostile to India. In a speech to Supreme Soviet on 8 August 1953, Malenkov said: ‘The position of such a considerable state as India is of great importance for strengthening of peace in the East’. Recognizing India’s role in ending the Korean War, he said,
“We hope that relations between India and Soviet Union would continue to develop and strengthen with friendly co-operation as their keynote”.

The USSR proposed India’s name for a Neutral Nation’s Commission to supervise the ceasefire in Indo-China. From 1954 onwards the USSR also worked for the inclusion of India in all international forums on disarmament. For instance, it called in 1954 for the addition of the Communist China, Czechoslovakia and India to the UN’s Disarmament Commission.

The Soviet reappraisal of India’s role in world affairs coincided with the increase in Indo-American differences. Deep, abiding frictions arose between India and the United States on issues such as recognition of Red China, the Japanese Peace Treaty, the Kashmir dispute and the formation of military alliances in South East Asia by the United States of America.

The signing of Pakistan-US military pact in May 1954 marked a watershed in Indo-Soviet relations. India’s reaction to the alliance was sharp. Indian leaders and press bitterly criticized the agreement. Nehru who had tried to prevent the Asian countries from being dragged in the cold war expressed deep concern. According to Indian leaders the US military assistance to Pakistan would change the entire regional balance of power and Pakistan would be inflated out of all proportions to her size.

Nevertheless, despite his outspoken opposition to the US- Pakistan Pact and later on to the SEATO, Nehru did not publicly mention the acclaim his stand was receiving from the Russians. The praise of Communist nations was probably embarrassing to him as it nurtured a belief in the West that India was moving towards an acceptance of the Communist bloc line in world affairs. Nehru wanted a modus vivendi with the Communist world but not at the expense of rapidly worsening relations with the West.
It is worth noting that shortly after the Geneva Conference Indo-Soviet contacts increased markedly. India accepted the Soviet offer of assistance for her Second Five Year Plan. It may be inferred that Nehru attached considerable significance to the Soviet behaviour at Geneva. The atmosphere between New Delhi and Moscow began to clear rapidly after the negotiated settlement on Indo-China at the Geneva Conference.

In September 1954, the Soviet Union made an unexpected and dramatic offer to build a giant steel plant in India to help and to develop its iron and steel industry. Nehru welcomed the Soviet offer and indicated India’s readiness to accept the Soviet aid because Soviet help would “go a long way in the rapid industrialization of our country”. He also regarded the Soviet offer as a welcome alternative source for the supply of capital and machinery and also a bargaining counter to the West. On 2nd February 1955 the USSR and India signed an economic agreement providing the Soviet assistance for the construction of a giant steel mill at Bhilai. The agreement came at a time when a negotiation with Britain for another steel plant was bogged down on technical grounds.

In mid-1959 border clashes took place between India and China. After maintaining a long silence on the Sino-Indian dispute, the Soviet Union came out with a cryptic statement on 8th September, 1959 in the TASS. The USSR had friendly relations with both China and India, built respectively on “fraternal ties” of international socialism and ‘friendly’ collaboration in accordance with the idea of peaceful co-existence. It expressed the hope that India and China with both of whom the Soviet Union enjoyed friendly relations would settle their disputes peaceably. In the following month, the third session of the Supreme Soviet while regretting the incidents between the two states friendly to it called for friendly negotiations for Solving the disputed frontier question. A week later, Khrushchev termed the entire dispute ‘sad’ and
‘stupid’ in as much as the area under contention had no strategic importance, nor was it even inhabitable.

In September 1961, Nehru had paid another visit to Moscow. The Belgrade Conference of non-aligned states had entrusted the task of conveying the concern of non-aligned world to Nkrumah and Nehru, who was, in fact, to visit the USSR on his way back which was fixed earlier. The public enthusiasm for the Indian Prime Minister in Moscow did not match with that of his 1955 visit. It confined chiefly to recalling previous meetings with Nehru. But he preferred to tell Khrushchev that in the world in those days many new important problems have come up and he would be glad to discuss them with Khrushchev. In Moscow Nehru repeatedly stressed India’s past and present opposition to nuclear experiments. He frankly told Khrushchev that the resumption of nuclear testing retarded disarmament talks and aggravated the international situation. In his major speech, Nehru told his audience at the Indo-Soviet friendship rally what had happened at Belgrade and why he came to Moscow which was withheld from them by the Soviet media.

The Soviet support to India’s claims on Goa had been made public from the very outset. During their 1955 visit, the Soviet leaders had expressed the hope that Goa would soon become a part of India. The Soviet President Brezhnev, who was on a state visit to India at the time of Goa operation declared in Bombay that the Soviet Union had complete sympathy for the Indian people’s desire to liberate Goa, Daman and Diu from Portuguese colonialism. On 8 December 1961 the day the world learnt of the liberation Brezhnev assured a civic reception of firm Soviet support for the action. The Soviet Prime Minister Khrushchev sent a telegram to Nehru saying that the resolute action of the Government of India to do away with the outposts of colonialism in its territory was absolutely lawful and justified.” He declared that the Soviet people unanimously approve of these actions. When the
Westerners brought forward a resolution in the Security Council to censure India, the USSR blocked it with a prompt Veto. The Soviet delegate contended that his vote ‘represented a victory for the true principles of UN Charter: “Today saw the expression of the will to defend colonial countries and peoples and their right to life, freedom and independence.”

The Indian Government and public were greatly appreciative of the profound sympathy and understanding of its aspirations by the USSR. The Soviet stand on Goa certainly helped in drawing India closer to the USSR and helped in consolidating the friendly ties.

The death of Nehru in May, 1964 did not adversely affect the growing relationship between India and the Soviet Union. In fact, the relationship was sought to be consolidated by Lal Bahadur Shastri, when as the new Indian Prime Minister, and he paid an official visit to Moscow from 12 to 19 May, 1965. This was the time when the Indo-Pak conflict over the Rain of Kutch was developing. Shastri declared in Moscow that the Indian and Soviet peoples were already “united together by genuine, strong and abiding bonds of friendship” relying “not upon any temporary expedients, but upon the sincere realization that the larger interests of humanity can be served best by promoting and enlarging the area of peace”. His pronouncements as well as the Joint Communique on the Shastri-Kosygin talks underlined that this relationship was not directed against any third country and opposed interference in any country’s internal affairs. These were a direct allusion to Pakistan in the context of the developments in South Asia at that period of time. What is more, the two sides denounced the savage US bombing on North Vietnam and called for its halt forthwith.

After Shastri’s death immediately following the Tashkent accord, Mrs. Indira Gandhi took over the reins of power in India becoming the third Prime Minister of the Republic. Her first official visit to Moscow in that capacity
lasted four days—from 12 to 16 July, 1966. Her speeches in the Soviet capital reflected her devotion to safeguard peace, a legacy of her father—something that has found concrete manifestation in her deeds over the years. The Joint Communique at the end of her talks with the Soviet leaders reaffirmed their common goal of ensuring peace and highlighted the need to renounce the use of force in inter-state relations. It urged an immediate end to the US bombing of North Vietnam and abolition of military alliances. It also emphasized the need for consolidation of peace in Europe, solution of the German problem, elimination of Portuguese colonialism in Africa and apartheid in South Africa and Rhodesia and realization of nuclear disarmament.

The year 1971 added a new dimension to both the political landscape of South Asia and Indo-Soviet relations. The West Pak authorities’ brutal suppression of the East Pakistani people’s aspirations for an independent state was directly responsible for the birth of a new state—the People’s Republic of Bangladesh—in the first half of the year. This coincided with the developing Sino-US alliance punctuated by Kissinger’s secret mission to Beijing via Islamabad and the declaration of US President Richard Nixon’s plea to visit China. As the influx of refugees to India escaping from Yahya Khan’s brutalities continued, war clouds gathered on the horizon with the concretization of the sinister Sino-US-Pak axis to keep India at bay and ensure Islamabad’s domination over Dacca. It was then that in order to defend peace and security in the subcontinent and raise Indo-Soviet ties to a qualitatively higher level that on August 9, 1971, the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation was signed in New Delhi. The treaty provided for immediate Indo-Soviet consultations in the event of an attack or threat of aggression to remove such a threat and ensure peace and security of the countries, while at the same time upholding the Indian policy of non-alignment Soviet regard for which was expressively spelt out.
Within less than a year, there was a change of leadership in India following Mrs. Gandhi’s defeat at the hosting Morarji Desai, who succeeded her as the country’s fourth Prime Minister, was reportedly averse to the Indo Soviet Treaty and initially sought to have it abrogated. This was, however, prevented by others running the Government and Desai, too, realized the importance of maintaining the relationship between the two States in the spirit of the Treaty. His visit to the USSR in October, 1977 found the Soviet leaders including Brezhnev extending a warm welcome and generous hospitality to him as a mark of tribute to India. The visit helped to underscore the continuity of Indo-Soviet relations.

In 1980, Mrs. Gandhi returned to power with a thumping majority and Brezhnev came to India in December of that year. There was much to discuss, for world peace had suffered setbacks with grievous blows dealt on detente by revanchists of the Western military circles. SALT II was in cold storage, the arms race was spiraling, tensions had mounted in South-West Asia with the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan in the after math of Sino-US-Pak plot to overthrow the Kabul Government as a direct interference in Afghan affairs and in South-East Asia with the Chinese attack on Vietnam following the liberation of Kampuchea from Pol Pot’s inhuman yoke. The Iraq-Iran war was continuing and the Arab world stood divided after Egypt’s betrayal at Camp David. Nearer home, Pakistan was being armed to the teeth by’ the US, posing a new threat to India.

The visit of Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi to the Soviet Union from September 20 to 26, 1982, like her earlier ones, was yet another milestone in the further strengthening of Indo-Soviet relations. The talks of the Indian and Soviet leaders showed the close identity of views of the two countries on many international issues, particularly the preservation of peace and avoidance of a nuclear war. They were alarmed over the growth of the arms race, the
emergence of new seat of tension and the proclamation of new military doctrines justifying a nuclear war. The Soviet and Indian people hold that today there is nothing which is more important than the preservation of peace.

The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation mentioned earlier, was renewed in 1991 for a further period of 20 years. This was a proof of sustained ties between the two countries, and, in a way, brought India under the Soviet nuclear umbrella. The Cold War had ended at the end of 1989, but a new environment had been created in the Soviet Union by various reforms initiated by Party General Secretary Gorbachev. Meanwhile, in India the power was transferred from Rajiv Gandhi led Congress Government to a minority Janata Dal Government. After a brief period of lack of warmth, Prime Minister V.P. Singh paid a visit to the USSR in 1990. This renewed the warmth in the bilateral relations. The Soviet position on Kashmir was reiterated. It was decided to renew the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty, and it was decided to continue till 1995 the rupee-rouble trade arrangement. Thus, Indo-Soviet relations showed mature and stable friendship.

During 1990-91, India generally supported the position taken by the Soviet Union in the Gulf crisis. India, like the Soviet Union, had decided to further consolidate relations with the PLO and yet initiated steps to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. A minor irritant was noticed when Chandra Shekhar Government allowed refueling facilities to US war planes flying towards the Gulf during the war.

Despite his best efforts, when Gorbachev failed to achieve the objectives he had view particularly improvement in the economy, settlement of ethnic differences and rehabilitation of the administrative machinery through his two pet concepts glasnost and perestroika, he decided to give a chance to anew move. This he wanted to do through the signing of a Union Republican treaty which he proposed to get signed on 21 August 1991. This treaty sought to
provide for a new decentralized set up in which the republics would be given more autonomy in a loose federation. The glasnost and Perestroika, despite its limitations has great impact on the thinking on foreign affairs. The Soviet decision to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan from 15 February 1989 represented a significant and crucial event in the rapid ideological, foreign and domestic reforms undertaken by Gorbachev. The Soviet withdrawal was important internationally because it bolstered the existing forces for reforms in the Soviet bloc.

The year 1991 saw numerous changes in the erstwhile Soviet Union and, what were known as its satellite states in Eastern Europe. Communism collapsed and democratic governments were installed one after the other in most of the East European countries. In the Soviet Union itself the reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev had tremendous impact on the society and the people aspired for and got full democratic rights. In a country that had totally controlled economy and politics for 70 years, Perestroika and Glasnost gave a new shape to the Soviet economy and politics. But the reforms also led to the end of monopoly of power of the Communist Party and introduction of multi-party democracy. An attempt in August 1991 to overthrow the reformist Gorbachev and restoration of communist power miserably failed. During the period of crisis in the USSR, India made a serious error by commenting that it would deal with the new government in USSR because overthrow of Gorbachev by the hardliners was the internal matter of that country. When the coup failed and Gorbachev came back to power, India faced a very embarrassing situation.

The Soviet Union suddenly disintegrated in December 1991 and the mighty state of USSR was replaced by 15 Republics. Russian Republic as recognized by the international community as the successor state of USSR. At the time of disintegration, a loose union of erstwhile Soviet republics was
created and called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). India has maintained friendly and cooperative relations not only with Russian Federation but also the other Members of CIS.

Thus the 'collapse of the Soviet Union' leaves a vacuum in the international political system. The Soviet Union played an important role against imperialism and Western expansionism. It supported national liberation movements and assisted in the development of several third world countries, which found themselves against the Western bloc of countries.

India decided to upgrade its relations with the three Soviet republics Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine in order to provide direct dialogue with through diplomatic channel. It was felt in India that in view of Gorbachev's greater preoccupations with domestic economic and political issues, he would not be able to give much thought to the third world countries including India. Since the USSR was involved in Afghan crises, its first concern was to end the Mujahideen nuisance which it hoped to do with the active support of Pakistan. Moscow would have to be a little more liberal in extending economic aid to Pakistan and also to adopt a more pro-Pakistani attitude towards Kashmir. This may be at the cost of India but the Soviet Union had to look to its own national interests.

In the non-economic areas also the collapse of the Soviet Union has affected India adversely. Indeed, strategically speaking, the most important implications are in defense and military areas. India, as we know, was buying a very large number of military weapons, equipment and hardware from the Soviet Union. These included Mig fighter aircrafts, battle tanks, submarines etc. During 1986-90, according to one estimate, about 73 percent of the total value of arms imported by the Indian defense forces originated in the Soviet Union. Practical difficulties which confront Indian armed forces since 1991 include, replacement of the spare parts as well as replenishment of the existing
stock. The matter assumed such a seriousness that the Defense Minister of India, Sharad Pawar, had to rush to Russia in Sept. 1992 to bail out the armed forces of its immediate difficulties. At the end of the visit while there was some hope in the improvement of the situation, it was evident that ultimately India will have to explore alternate sources. It was felt that Moscow may not be in a position to meet the Indian demands as paucity of funds may force Russians to close down their units. Besides, many of the Russian scientists and technocrats are reported to have left the country and got jobs in the Western countries where they are promised better salaries and employment opportunities. Whatever, existing military weapons and hardware are in stock in the member states of CIS. They would like to sell them in the Western markets in order to earn foreign exchange. Above all, one significant advantage which accrued to India in procuring armaments and equipment from the Soviet Union i.e., on credit, was most unlikely to be revived.

Although Russia has put forward a proposal of military collaboration with India, but the harsh reality was that Moscow did not feel the strategic need of India in the post Cold War period. As a matter of fact decline in the strategic significance of India to Moscow began with the improvement of relations between the Soviet Union and China. Moreover, when Gorbachev started giving priority to good relations with the West which was to provide loans and technologies, there was a sea change in the geo-strategic perceptions of the Soviet Union. Now when Russia was strategically integrated with Europe and China has ceased to be a socialist rival, need for a strategic consensus with India did not have the same relevance as in the previous two decades. In brief, diplomatically India could not hope to depend on Russia to the same extent as she did on the Soviet Union.
Gradually the obstacles were overcome to an extent, and from 1997 onwards Russia was again on the way towards establishing a special position in the supply of defense-related equipment.

India and Russia decided in March 1997 to continue defense ties into the 21st century and Russia offered a new air defense system and a $10 billion military deal. Significant agreements were reached during Yevgeny Primakov’s visit in December (1999) when cross-century defense relationship was formalized. Described as “cooperation 2010 Document” it envisaged partnership in research, development and joint production of sophisticated equipment besides incorporating other defense areas.

The defense ties expanded phenomenally between 1999-2000. India contracted to purchase, among other items, 40 super class jet fighters, Sukhoi SU-30K, of which the first installment came last year. It may be noted that this was the modern jet fighter that had not even been fully inducted into the Russian air force and that China had been supplied only SU-27. Russia was also set to supply state-of-the-art T-90 battle tanks.

Defense Minister George Fernandez went to Moscow in June 2000 to negotiate new defense deals. He described his discussions with the Russian President and the Russian Defense Minister as “path-breaking” with a $400 million deal for the supply of 100 T-90 main battle tanks (MBT) and for the production of another 200 MBT in India. It was also agreed that Russia would complete delivery of SU-30 MKI fighter jets to India by 2003 as part of an earlier $1.8 billion contract. The fighter jets would also be produced under license in India.

Vladimir Putin’s visit to New Delhi led to an agreement on Indo-Russian cooperation in the peaceful uses of atomic energy. The earlier agreement with the Soviet Union for the supply of giant atomic power plants
with a capacity of 1000 Mw. at Koodankulam, Tamilnadu had been signed in May 1998. It was the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and General Secretary Milkhayl Gorbachev who had initiated the agreement.

Russian President Putin urged India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) during his visit to India. India has in any case stopped further nuclear testing since May 1998. Putin made his plea on the CTBT in a meeting with scientists of the Bhabha Atomic Research Center in Trombay near Mumbai. He did however; appreciate the Indian stand that its natural interests and the needs of its people should also be considered, Yet Putin felt it would be better for India if it were to sign the CTBT.

There is in the present era- division between Moscow and New Delhi on Nuclear non-proliferation and arms control issues. Russia and China are two major powers who are both members of the UN Security Council as also a member of the NPT regime. Their strategic cooperation on military and nuclear issues is necessitated by the need to reduce tensions and concentrate on economic development, Russia would also favour the emergence of a Russia-India-China triangulation of cooperation. The idea has as yet to take shape because neither India nor China would like to be freed from the bilateral arrangement that presently exists with the lone superpower the United States.

Putin’s visit to BARC exemplifies Russia’s evolving position on military-technical cooperation with India. He was the first Russian leader to tour BARC, joining only two other foreign leaders before, Chinese Prime Minister Zhou-en-Lai and British Prime Margaret Thatcher. Putin’s high-powered 70-member delegation, which included Deputy Prime Minister, Ilya Klebanov, Foreign Ministe Igor Ivanov and Defense Minister Igo Sergeyev, attests to the importance the Russians give India in this new phase of their defense industrial strategy. Let us now turn to some aspect of Indo-Russian cooperation in science and technology. New avenues and areas of economic

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scientific and technical cooperation between India and Russia are being explored. A renewed Integrated Long-Term Programme (ILTP) for Indo-Russian cooperation in science and technology for instance is being actively considered.

The ILTP programme, signed by the President of erstwhile Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Moscow in 1987, lasted till the year 2000. It has emerged as the world’s largest technology. This programme is a reflection of the close cooperation in science and technology that has developed between India Russia over the last 13 years. The programme had facilitated exchange visits of over 2,500 scientists and generated about 300 developments projects in India and Russia.

After the terrorist attack on Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001, the Russian Foreign Ministry warned Pakistan, in strict terms, to stop cross-border terrorism and create conducive atmosphere for bilateral dialogue and consultation. To jointly tackle the menace of terrorism, during the visit of Prime Minister Vajpayee to Moscow in November 2001, India and Russia signed the Moscow Declaration. They set up joint working group during the visit of President Putin to India in December 2002. Moscow strongly condemned the terrorist attack that took place on 26 March 2003 in the Nandimarg village of Kashmir, killing more than twenty people. Besides condemning the terrorist attack, the Department of Information and Press of the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed its support to the measures taken by India to stop the activity of terrorist forces.

Taking into account all these positive developments, it would be logical to emphasize the point that terrorism is one of the important contributory factors for perceptual convergence between the two countries. This convergence led Russia and India to support each other on their stands on Kashmir and Chechnya respectively. The Ministry of External Affairs in India
praised the referendum of March 2003 in Chechnya, under the guidance of the Russian government as important for the restoration, normalization, rehabilitation and economic reconstruction of Russian Federation's Chechen republic within the democratic framework. Similarly, the Russian Foreign Ministry release after the general election in Kashmir in October 2002, said that, very fact of holding elections is an evidence of the striving of Delhi and the population of Jammu and Kashmir to restore the normal situation in the state. Despite the attempts of the extremist elements to frighten the population of Kashmir, they could not hinder the voting.

The last quarter of 2003 witnessed some positive developments in economic relations between the two countries. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) opened its office at the Russian Chambers of Commerce and industry in October 2003 to facilitate the process of economic cooperation. During the visit of Prime Minister Vajpayee to Moscow in November 2003, 85 Indian businessmen accompanied him to study the prospects of investment and joint collaborations with Russian companies. Amit Mitra, Secretary General of FICCI (Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry), accompanying the prime minister during the visit, estimated that the bilateral trade might reach $5 billion by 2005. He said: such a breakthrough could be made through close cooperation in oil and gas industry, telecommunications and information technology, metallurgy and energy.

Mani Shankar Aiyar, the then India's Petroleum Minister visited Moscow in October 2005 to discuss India's energy requirements with Russia. He welcomed Gazprom's (Russian firm) interest in the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline (IPI). A 10-member high-level delegation of Gazprom arrived in Islamabad in October 2005 to begin formal discussion on the construction of the $7 billion Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline, and an ambitious project of gas storage in Pakistan. It was the first visit of the Chairman of Gazprom to
Pakistan, the world’s largest gas producing company with over 20 per cent share in global gas production.

During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit in May 2005, both countries decided to set up a Joint Study Group (JSG) on Economic Cooperation to look into the feasibility of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). On the Kudankulam issue, the Prime Minister sought to allay fears of President Putin on the nuclear fuel falling into wrong hands and said a Bill to prevent its misuse would be introduced in the Indian Parliament. The Indian Cabinet had already Okayed the Bill. During Manmohan Singh’s visit to Moscow in December 2005 to attend the sixth bilateral summit, President Putin said, “We have been successfully cooperating in nuclear energy and Kudankulam nuclear power project is an example. We see India taking necessary steps to build relations with the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)”. Prime Minister Singh observed that there was a vast potential for expansion of cooperation in the field of civil nuclear energy given India’s growing energy requirements and the importance of nuclear energy as a clean and viable alternative energy source. Some of the most ‘significant and promising areas’ of cooperation identified during the visit were energy, telecom and transportation.

During Prime Minister Singh’s visit an agreement was signed on technology safeguards while implementing the long-term cooperation in the area of joint development, operation and use of the Russian global navigation satellite system Glonass. G Madhavan Nair, Secretary, Department of Space and A Perminov, Director, Russian Federal Space Agency signed the agreement. This agreement envisages launching of Glonass satellite using GSLV launch vehicle of India. In turn, Russia will provide access to Glonass system signals for Indian use. It also envisages joint development of user equipment for exploitation of Glonass signals for commercial purposes. The
agreement opens the road for the implementation of a 2004 agreement on joint
design and ‘launching of Glonass communication satellites, which will be used
by both countries for civilian and military purposes.

No country can be fully self-reliant in all areas of defence-related
technology. Moreover, the today trend is towards joint development and
production of defence equipment. According to the emerging opinion in the
Indian strategic community the country must be self-reliant in areas where
technology denial regimes are imposed, like nuclear and missile technologies.
India may concentrate on developing and further expanding the areas of her
core competence. In other areas, the country may opt for overseas partners,
including Russia. Joint development and production of new weapon systems
may emerge as a very promising area of continued Indo-Russian cooperation. It
may provide continuity and stability to existing ties. Advanced avionics and
electronic systems developed by Western countries and Israel may also be
incorporated as is already being done. Competition among the suppliers may
indeed be good and has already produced beneficial results. There is a need to
handle the emerging situation with dexterity and savoir by giving attention to
details and nuances. In the pursuit of its enlightened national interests, it is to
be expected that India would seek to leverage its position as a major defence
buyer, and so would Russia as a supplier.

In the 21st century geopolitical scenario has totally changed. India’s ties
with Russia will continue to be driven by not only common strategic and
geopolitical interests but also shared interest in the defence sector. They would,
however, need to adjust policies wherever necessary for enhancing mutual
gains in this vital sector if they want to sustain a robust relationship in the new
global environment.